

**What difference does it make?
Citizenship and community
participation in the lives of adults with
intellectual disability**

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- **What is active citizenship?**
- **What is community participation?**
- **How do these impact on a person's ability to be a successful parent?**

What is citizenship?

“Citizenship is not just a person’s formal right to be a resident or to vote in an election - it is about a person’s capacity to fully participate in all dimensions of social, political and community life.” (Ryan, 1997)

What is active citizenship?

- **Participating in decisions that affect our lives**
- **Receiving and understanding information**
- **Making decisions of our own choosing**

What is community?

- **“A geographical place which includes the normal and varied activities of other citizens.” (Milner & Bray, 2003)**
- **In the field of disability community is typically presented as the opposite of segregation or isolation.**

- **Community has been defined as place, people, and a sense of belonging.**
- **People with disabilities need to be involved in a variety of social networks and feel a sense of connection to where they live.**

What is community participation?

- **A personal sense of belonging**
- **Support**
- **Having control over decisions**
- **Taking part in the social life of a community**
- **Having a network of personal relationships**
- **Being involved in community places and activities**
- **Being free from discrimination and abuse**

Do parents with an intellectual disability experience citizenship and community participation?

- **Only sometimes!**

Nicky's Story

- **Full information**
- **Support**
- **Choices**
- **Family**
- **Social relationships**
- **Involvement in regular community activities**
- **(Relatively) free from discrimination and abuse**

Suzanne's Story

- **Dysfunctional family life**
- **Abuse and discrimination**
- **Little access to education or information**
- **Lack of control over decisions**
- **Few personal relationships**
- **No involvement in general community activities**
- **Little formal support**

- **Does the presence or absence of citizenship and community participation impact on parenting?**
- **Yes**

- **Both Nicky and Suzanne exercised their right to have a child.**
- **Nicky engaged in active citizenship and experienced a high level of community participation.**
- **Suzanne did not experience active citizenship or community participation.**

Nicky

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- **Is successfully parenting her 3 year old child.**
- **Has no involvement with child protection.**
- **Uses local community resources to support her parenting.**
- **Has a long term plan to start working, and to live alone with her child.**

Suzanne

- **Has lost custody of her 9 year old child.**
- **Has a long-term involvement with child protection.**
- **Has few supportive personal relationships.**
- **Is isolated within her local community.**
- **Every year her goal of getting her child “home” becomes harder to reach.**

From theory to practice: What does this mean for support for parents with an intellectual disability?

- **Parenting competence can be linked to the extent to which parents experience active citizenship and community participation(?)**
- **Efforts to support parents should focus on increasing their ability to exercise their rights as active citizens and to enjoy a high degree of community participation.**
- **Efforts to improve adults experience of citizenship and community participation need to occur at both an individual and a societal level.**

Some suggestions for practice

- **Young adults may need support to both understand and to exercise their rights. Transition programmes are an obvious context for this work.**
- **Exploration of individual life history as part of planning support.**
- **Opportunity to develop self-advocacy skills.**
- **Addressing social isolation by supporting parents to create positive, meaningful and self-sustaining relationships within local communities.**