

“It’s not what you know, it’s who you know.”

What is social capital?

One way to think about social capital is to think about all the benefits of making friends. Being connected to others, trust, shared resources, and collective action (working together to get something done) all create more social capital. Social capital creates a network when help is needed and just as important- the opportunity to help your friends when they need help (which is called reciprocity). Creating bonds or connections to others, through friendship or being acquainted through work or social groups can increase social capital. Inclusion is not the same as social capital. Social capital goes beyond integration and inclusion and is about using the connections that you have to others to advance your life and to build community.

Why is it important for people with disabilities?

Increased Social capital may increase job opportunities and wages for people with disabilities. Think about how people get jobs through friends and acquaintances. Having those positive connections can help you advance your career (get a better job that you like). Studies have shown that people with disabilities who are employed were helped by networking with friends and others. We also know that employers are almost 3 times as likely to hire people with disabilities if the company has relationships with disability related organizations.

Increasing social capital also may decrease social isolation. Social isolation is what happens when you do not have friends or family to engage with. Oftentimes, disability service providers focus on increasing integration or inclusion but not strategies to strengthen social capital. It is difficult in a service system to “create” friends and networks so new strategies are needed to examine how to increase social capital. This can include partnering with community-based organizations that are not focused on disability like clubs like Rotary or groups in your community like do things that you like to do. Providers can also think about supporting community events or activities rather than creating programs and other opportunities specifically for people with disabilities.

“What is good for you, is good for me” Alexis de Tocqueville

How do I get more Social capital?

Being active in your neighborhood, making friends that have similar interests, and connecting to your community by giving back can all lead to increased social capital. Connecting with disability self-advocacy groups can also enhance social capital. Social capital can also be indirect meaning that creating relationships with people or places can also create connections with the people and places they are connected with. Those connections by association have shown to possibly have more impact for people with disabilities. Social capital can also increase access to supports and services. Think about strong advocates and their access to supports and networks to accomplish things. Ask them about how they network and connect with key allies.

References

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