

INTEGRATION/ACTION GROUP

PROPOSAL

TO

LIDLAW FOUNDATION

ATTENTION: Mr. Nathan Gilbert

March 27, 1985

INTEGRATION ACTION GROUP

On November 22, 1984 over 250 people gathered in a crowded room at York University to hear David Baker speak about legal rights for children. Most of the audience were parents of children labelled as having "special needs." Everyone was there because clearly the issue of educational integration has become important to families all across Canada.

The current education act in Ontario still stipulates that an appropriate education for a child labelled "Trainable Mentally Retarded" is a "school or class for the trainable mentally retarded." This is no longer acceptable to large numbers of parents and is at the heart of a new parent group called the Integration Action Group. These are parents who want their children's needs met not through labelling but through quality integrated education.

Groups do not grow where the soil is not fertile. Movements don't pop up in the abstract. The Integration Action Group was born as a result of specific concerns. As more and more people with handicaps leave institutions, as more people in wheelchairs and with cerebral palsy are seen in our neighbourhoods, in our churches, synagogues and shopping centres, then it is logical to assume these people should also be in our neighbourhood schools alongside their friends.

Current research in education across Canada and the United States points to a need for special and regular education to "merge into one unified system structured to meet the unique needs of all students."¹

From Toronto to Vancouver to the Northwest Territories, the trend (although at times a slow one) is for "services to exceptional children [to] be provided within the normal home and school environment of the child. Children are entitled to a quality education in a location as near to their home as possible, among family and peers."²

The Integration Action Group set forth a statement of principles which incorporates the most current thinking and is simple and straightforward:

"All children have the right to a full education and to participate in society -- **to life in the community**. The practice of segregation, in education and in the workplace, tends to isolate and neglect those with special needs, whether these be physical or mental in nature. The best way to prepare children for life in the community is through education alongside their peers, typical children from the neighbourhood, in regular classroom settings."

- All children can learn and develop.
- All children need to live at home in a family.
- All children need to share normal educational experiences with others their own age.
- All children need neighbourhood friendships and relationships.
- All children need supports and services from time to time, and these should be provided in their neighbourhood school, in a regular classroom setting.
- All children need an education that will prepare them to live and work in the real world, rather than in artificial, sheltered environments.
- All children need to acquire the daily social and coping skills that develop through life in the community.
- All children need the chance to become 'just one of the kids'.
- Successful integration of children with special needs benefits not only the child, but also his or her friends and peers, the school system, and society as a whole.

The Integration Action Group is an action-oriented association of parents, educators, and concerned citizens whose goal is to help families achieve integration for the children, and to advocate for attitudes, practices, policies, and laws that promote integration in education and the community.

In short, there are not -- as implied by a dual system -- two distinctly different types of students, that is, those who are special and those who are regular. Rather, all students are unique individuals, each with his or her own set of physical, intellectual and psychological characteristics.

The rate of growth of the Integration Action Group has been fantastic. Seventeen people attended the first meeting on July 5, 1984. At the next meeting in August, 37 people arrived, and on September 20, 125 people crowded into the National Institute on Mental Retardation for a meeting that stunned everyone present. By then, regional groups had formed two lively "chapters" that were operating in Mississauga and in York Region. The National Institute on Mental Retardation, which has supported the group since its inception, supported Mrs. Rose Galati to attend the Canadian Association for the Mentally Retarded National Conference in New Brunswick (October 1984) where she presented the ideas and values of the group.

On November 6, the York Region Group held a meeting and 178 people showed up. At the official opening on November 22, when over 250 people arrived, everyone realized that a new and exciting parent advocacy movement was well under way.

The group is not only for parents with children labelled mentally handicapped but for all parents who want quality integrated education for their children. This includes "typical" children. The group is incorporating and is on its way to becoming fully independent. Anyone who supports the statement of principles can be a member.

The leadership core is made up of parents active in promoting integration not only for their own children but who are helping other parents in the same situation. This is a mutual aid society in the best sense of the word. The support is the key to the group's success. Parents come because they feel less isolated, alienated and alone. They are helping others prepare for meetings with school officials, etc. No one in the Integration Action Group acts alone.

The Integration Action Group believes that today's dual system of special and regular education is an "apartheid" system with injustice and inequality at its core. This current system builds a "them" versus "us" mentality. Dr. Stan Woronko, a York Region father of a 13-year old who has spent her life in segregated schools says,

"Segregated schools have outlived their purpose. In the past, parents were happy just to have a place for their kids to go. It was more shelter and protection than education. But that isn't sufficient any more. I would like my daughter to be a member of society in the fullest sense. I don't know what her limits are but sometimes she surprises us. I want her to be as independent as possible but school boards feel we are asking too much."

Her Honour, Judge Rosalie Abella has documented the crisis in employment for people with handicaps. Canada, amongst all industrialized nations, has the highest rate of unemployment in its disabled community, and is the only country not to have either a quota scheme or a mandatory affirmative action scheme for its disabled citizens. Judge Abella outlines a mechanism for ensuring equality in employment. She also spends a substantial portion of her report discussing education which fits in well with the goals of the Integration Action Group.³

"Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal," wrote Chief Justice Earl Warren in the United States nearly three decades ago. This inherent inequality stems from the stigma created by purposeful segregation which, in the words of Chief Justice Warren, "generates a feeling of inferiority as to the [children's] status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone."

Anyone who has seen true integration in action can never again be satisfied with anything less. It makes all our fancy and philosophical educational words about citizenship and respect for individual differences come to life.

The children will all benefit. We will all benefit for we have in the past created a generation unable to cope with people who are older or ill or not so pretty. We all went to segregated schools and learned that our brothers and sisters who were different were second class citizens who needed pity and charity and special places, not friendship, not an education along with us. They didn't need places, they needed and and do need people. We all do !

Groups like BOOST (Blind Organization of Ontario with Self-Help Tactics), People First and the Integration Action Group are leading the way. BOOST, for example, challenged the Canadian National Institute for the Blind for its paternalistic attitudes toward the blind citizens of Canada. People First is challenging the Canadian Association for the Mentally Retarded and its locals to change its name and thus its attitudes toward the people it purports to serve. The name change issue is symbolic of a deep underlying values change in the field of human service.

Peter Park is the President of People First in Ontario. He has been labelled mentally handicapped and has lived in an institution, a group home and now in his own apartment. He's one of the advisors to the Integration Action Group. Peter says, "What is the effect of sticking a label on a person? It makes us feel like ants, plus you feel robbed of human qualities, and human interests." 4

The Integration Action Group uses only the child's name as his or her label. Every parent who has been part of the group and has made demands on the educational system is a winner. Just the step of acting speaks volumes to the children, the school system and to society. It does, however, provide direction and support for increasing the probability that all children will live in society as valued members rather than as devalued dependents.

For more information contact:

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477-2046 (Alan Perks)

References:

1. Stainback, W. & Stainback, S. A rationale for the merger of special and regular education. Exceptional Children, 51, (2), 102-111.##
2. Public Hearing, Pine Point, Northwest Territories.##
3. Copies of the Abella report can be purchased for \$18.00 from the Canadian Government Publication Centre, Supply & Services Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0S9.##
4. Park, P. Labelling. The National Organizer 1984, 8.

ATTACHMENT I

1. Activities of the Integration Action Group

The Integration Action Group shares the desire of some other organizations for integrating people with handicaps into the life of the community. It is unique, however, in focussing on the need for changing the educational system to integrate children in their formative years.

The Integration Action Group promotes the establishment of integrated education by working with parents, educators, and legislators. It supports parents (and guardians) by informing them and helping them to represent the interests of their children in dealings with boards of education. It also helps parents to form supportive networks to solve individual problems.

The Integration Action Group also assists teachers with professional development seminars information on working models of integration and the rationale for integration. Members of the Integration Action Group regularly accept speaking engagements in southern Ontario, and occasionally in other regions of Canada whenever travel funds are available.

Another very important activity of the Integration Action Group is research concerning the need for integration and the practical ways of implementing integration. Briefs will be prepared to inform and educate governments and the public. These briefs will be the basis for meetings with government ministers and committees dealing with education legislation.

The Integration Action Group will soon begin publishing a newsletter for national distribution. This newsletter will be published four times a year and will contain informative articles to help educators and parents implement integration as well as news on the latest developments across the country. The newsletter will be vital to the coordination of effort across the country so that system-wide integration can be achieved successfully as soon as possible.

2. Evaluation

The success of the Integration Action Group projects will be assessed in the following ways:

- (a) tangible products - newsletter, research briefs, public meetings, professional development seminars.
- (b) membership is expected to grow continuously over the next two years as the Integration Action Group meets the needs of parents and educators.
- (c) on-going interaction will be established with school boards and individual educators interested in promoting integration.

- (d) cooperative links will be established with governments to study ways in which legislation will be improved; the Integration Action Group will make representations before committees dealing with legislation.
- (e) The bottom line - a growing number of successfully integrated students in many regions of Canada.

3. Board Members

Silvana Porto, President

Alan Perks, Vice President

Lynda Langdon, Secretary

Dr. Stan Woronko, Treasurer

Ruth Adams

Donna Bracewell

Dr. Marsha Forest

Rose Galati

Sylvia Jacobs

Joi Lunsky

Marthe Woronko

ATTACHMENT II

BUDGET 1985-1986

Capital

One computer and printer	\$ 6,000	
Software	1,500	
Slide Projectors (2)	<u>1,400</u>	
	\$ 8,900	\$8,900

Operating

Travel (12 times, average \$350)	4,200	
Stationery and supplies (brochures, letterhead, envelopes, audio visual supplies	3,000	
Newsletter - initially a loss leader for promotion 1500 copies x 4 times a year	4,800	
Postage - Newsletter Brochures, advertising	3,500	
Secretary (part-time)	8,000	
	<u>23,500</u>	
Total operating expenses 1985-86	\$ 23,500	

Income - Memberships	<u>2,000</u>	
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Net Operating Expense	\$ 21,500	<u>21,500</u>
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TOTAL: CAPITAL + NET OPERATING		<u>\$30,400</u>
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BUDGET 1986-1987

CAPITAL:

Software	\$ 1,000	
Slide Projector	<u>700</u>	
	1,700	1,700

OPERATING:

Projected increase of 20% in all items
to cover growth in scale and scope of
activities

\$23,500 + 20% = total operating 28,200

INCOME:

Income membership fees	4,000	
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Net Operating 1986-1987	24,200	<u>24,200</u>
 TOTAL CAPITAL + NET OPERATING 1986-1987		 \$ 25,900 <hr/>

Please note:

1. This is seed money for two years, after which we will generate our own money from memberships, book sales, benefits etc.
2. We are incorporated as a charity but do not as yet have our charitable organization number. Funds may be sent to the Canadian Association for the Mentally Retarded to be deposited for us.