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Opinion

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Pandemic hits people with intellectual disabilities



BY MIMI ROGERS
Progress Guest Writer

COVID-19 poses extreme obstacles for people who have intellectual disabilities and thrive on routine, familiar activities and people, such as family and friends.

So how do we support one of our most vulnerable populations through all of the sudden and dramatic changes?

People with intellectual disabilities and their advocates have fought for generations against social marginalization, segregated education, inad-

quate healthcare and lack of access to opportunities that many of us take for granted.

The recent pandemic has added a whole new list of challenges for this vulnerable population.

A person who has an intellectual disability may not understand why they need to wear a mask in public or why they are unable to meet with and hug their friends.

People who have intellectual or developmental disabilities are more likely to die from COVID-19. This pandemic is a continual crisis for them.

As the mother of a beautiful adult

daughter who has intellectual disabilities, I have a front row seat to her daily struggles for independence, equality and acceptance.

As the founder of a nonprofit organization that provides comprehensive programs that empower adults with intellectual disabilities, I have the privilege of connecting these special individuals to dynamic learning experiences that will help them thrive.

Our main focus is on positively changing their lives.

While the pandemic has changed aspects of all our lives, vulnerable populations like those with intellectual disabilities have been affected most by not being able to attend their regularly scheduled programs in person.

These individuals largely rely on routine, so the change in delivery of programming can be immobilizing.

Continuing to offer programs that educate, support and break down barriers is vital to the overall health and well-being of our members.

While offering virtual programming has had its challenges, there have also been unexpected wins.

Virtual classes have provided the opportunity for our participants to engage

with friends and staff they miss so much.

Guest speakers stepped up and volunteered their time to personally engage via video conferencing, offering a new way for our members to socialize and network with influential citizens. They share their stories and offer tips and encouragement for the future.

As a nonprofit leader, I am committed to providing care and opportunities so members can turn their dreams into reality.

We thank everyone for their continued support.

We do not know the long-term effects that quarantine poses or how these changes will affect the gains they have made toward personal goals.

If one thing is certain, it is that people who have disabilities are at a disadvantage when it comes to COVID-19. As a community we need to continue to fight for their independence, growth and access to community resources.

-Mimi Rogers is founder and CEO of One Step Beyond, Inc., which provides educational, vocational, recreation and performing arts programs for adults (18+) who have intellectual disabilities. Information: mimirogers@osbi.org or osbi.org

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