
'My Opportunities, My Choices' – Enjoying Full and Equal Rights and the Role of Families

People with Down syndrome, on an equal basis with other people, must be able to enjoy full and equal rights, both as **children and adults with 'opportunities' and 'choices'**.

People with Down syndrome face many challenges as children and adults which can include:

- being abandoned, subjected to abuse and segregated from their communities;
- being discriminated against and treated unequally in education systems;
- being discriminated against and having health conditions misdiagnosed by health systems;
- limited opportunities to live independently, work and be fully included in the community;
- a lack of control over the right to marry and have relationships and families;
- limited opportunities to vote, participate in public advocacy or be elected to public office.

These challenges prevent many people with Down syndrome from enjoying their basic human rights. Those directly or indirectly responsible for this may be families, education, health and social professionals, authorities or the general public and the primary reason for this is a failure to understand that people with Down syndrome are **people first**, who may require additional support, but should be recognised by society on an equal basis with others, without discrimination on the basis of disability.

Preamble (X) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) confirms that “persons with disabilities and their family members should receive the necessary protection and assistance to enable families to contribute towards the full and equal enjoyment of the rights of persons with disabilities.”

In order for people with Down syndrome to enjoy full and equal rights, their families, who have a deep personal interest in their well-being, must be informed and empowered to promote the equal status of their family members in society, so that they can provide support, advocate for opportunities and choices in all aspects of life and crucially so that they can empower people with Down syndrome to express their own views freely on all matters affecting them and make their own decisions, as well as advocate for themselves.

Society can assist families to support children with Down syndrome to be protected from harm, to be heard, to have access to education and healthcare and to be fully included in their communities, with opportunities to participate, on an equal basis with others.

Adults with Down syndrome, on an equal basis with others, must have choices, be able to make decisions and have control in their lives. Society can assist families to ensure that people with Down syndrome have access to support they may require in exercising their legal capacity, to empower them to lead independent lives and be accepted and included as valued, equal and participating members of their communities.

On 21 March 2015, the 10th anniversary of World Down Syndrome Day and in the '21st anniversary year of the 'International Year of the Family', Down Syndrome International will focus on the role of families and the positive contribution that they can make towards the enjoyment of full and equal rights for people with Down syndrome.