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– Who Decides What a Disability Means? –

Throughout history, one large group of people has been stymied by physical barriers, discriminated against, segregated according to labels, and devalued by negative attitudes. These actions have been grounded in a variety of belief systems. Many doctors see any differences in the "norm" as problems that need to be fixed, and cured would be even better! Therapists may view a different way of communicating, writing, or moving as "deficits" that need to be rehabilitated. A number of charities showcase individuals as being helpless, pitiful victims, requiring care by others.

Perceptions of disability change as society changes. For decades in the early 20th century, institutions were the automatic and recommended "placement" for children with Down syndrome, who were labeled "trainable"—incapable of being educated. When I was in college in the 1970s, I was taught that students with Down syndrome reached a plateau when they were young adolescents. As future teachers, we were cautioned not to expect these students to learn or grow after a certain point in their lives. Fast-forward a few decades and my son, Dylan, is a successful college student, and he continues to learn and thrive on campus, at work, and with friends. He happens to have Down syndrome. Dylan has the same extra chromosome that children in institutions had, the same extra chromosome as children in the 1970s. Why are expectations different today? Over time, our society has redefined what a cognitive disability means and also what's possible! What will the future bring? Hopefully, disability will be viewed as one of many natural characteristics of being human—a "difference" that will no longer make a difference!

Identify your vision: **What can be done to ensure everyone has choices and control of their own lives?**

Use your voice: **Speak out against the "cure or care" model and speak up for a change in thinking.**

Work together: **Recommit to the ADA's mission—full inclusion of people with disabilities into American life.**

Read previous issues of my newsletter at <http://www.visionsandvoicestogether.com>. Please let me know if you're interested in one of my presentations and/or customized consulting and coaching.

What we anticipate, determines what we find!
Charmaine Thaner