

TASH

Equity, Opportunity and Inclusion for People with Disabilities Since 1975

Washington, D.C.

<http://tash.org>



NCRP: Many people mistakenly believe that government programs fully provide the services that disabled people need. What does TASH do and how do you build awareness about the scope of the need for philanthropic support?

TASH: It is true that a lot of public money is directed to supporting people with disabilities. However, most people don't realize the programs that administer this funding are decades old and in need of major modernization to achieve results of empowerment and employment. By and large, this funding is spent on programs of care, maintenance and isolation and, as a result, more than 40 percent of adults with developmental disabilities live in or near poverty and in segregated environments without meaningful opportunities to connect with their communities. To address these issues, TASH works on systems change, advocacy and educational initiatives that emphasize:

- The importance of students with the most significant disabilities attending neighborhood schools with their peers in regular classrooms.
- Integrated employment, rather than segregated work that isolates and pays pennies per day.
- Personalized supports for life in the community surrounded by friends and neighbors, rather than life in a group home, residential facility or institution where social contact is limited to people paid to care and supervise.

If priorities changed and funding was redirected, public funding could be meaning-



Photo courtesy of TASH.

fully invested to support the training and education necessary so that people with the most significant disabilities and support needs can graduate from school, get a good job and become contributing citizens. However, spending money on paternalistic programs and segregated systems is a poor investment and leads to high poverty, isolation and other poor life outcomes.

NCRP: What is it like working in a field that is not often a priority issue for foundations?

TASH: It can be daunting! We conduct and publish research, mount national campaigns, educate decision-makers and provide family and professional training – but we are hampered by a lack of funding. Most of our work matches up well with other equity campaigns, so many of the education equity, economic development and anti-poverty issues are the same – but we have a very difficult time gaining attention for our priorities.

Support for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities is expensive for governments and the current quality of life results are not good. The foundation community could help by funding programs that advance systems

change so that people with disabilities can become contributors and taxpayers, rather than be relegated to a life of poverty, segregation, loneliness and public funding dependency.

NCRP: What should the philanthropic community expect from your 2014 Annual Conference in Washington, D.C., on December 3–5?

TASH: TASH was founded by researchers, and the TASH conference features cutting-edge research on exciting innovations that are making a real difference in education, employment and long-term supports. Many of the solutions that TASH members develop for people with significant support needs result in whole-system approaches, such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) and Customized Employment (CE). These approaches improve life outcomes for the disability community and beyond. TASH Talks, new this year, will feature short insights on puzzling topics and new ideas from family members, advocates and researchers.

The TASH Conference is fundamentally different from other conferences because of its inclusive nature. People with disabilities, family members, professionals and researchers work together as colleagues and are caught up with excitement and engagement generated from the social justice atmosphere. Attendees are like-minded and believe in TASH's social justice values. The "shot-in-the-arm" that attendees receive from the conference energizes them for another year of advocacy. ■