



Included. Supported. Empowered. 2020

Transforming Vision into Action for Disability Inclusion

America is at a crossroads. Not a day goes by when you don't hear about the challenges we face as a society. Our nation is grappling with significant issues, and our discourse can feel divisive.

In so many ways, we're in the midst of a national conversation about what we want our country to look like. Do we want to batten down the hatches to preserve the status quo, or do we want to challenge the systems and structures that have defined life in America for so long? Do we want mainstream ideas to prevail, or do we want to invite a diversity of voices and abilities to shape the American experience? If we are to embrace change, we need to **ensure that our new national narrative is, at its core, a narrative of inclusion.**

For individuals with disabilities—especially those with intellectual and developmental disabilities—inclusion has for too long been an abstract concept rather than a concrete reality. The limitations of an environment designed around the needs of the majority have inhibited individuals with disabilities from having the support needed to live, work and thrive.

As a community of providers, we demand more.

ANCOR brings together more than 1,600 private providers of long-term supports and services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). Our vibrant community provides just about every kind of service imaginable in nearly every corner of this country, all with the aim of empowering people with I/DD to live their lives. As a community of providers, we want nothing more than for people of all abilities to lead independent, successful, happy lives.

But all too often, the road we walk is a winding one, barricaded at every turn with limited housing options, a dearth of employment opportunities, a shrinking provider workforce suffocated by gaps in funding and high turnover, and a distorted image of individuals with I/DD and the Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) who make success possible.

The good news is that people with disabilities are demanding—and achieving—increased visibility in mainstream culture. From [adaptive fashion](#) to [original Netflix series](#), awareness is growing. Perhaps most promising, it's not just the *challenges* facing people with disabilities that are gaining visibility. **People with disabilities are being seen for their strengths. They're being seen for their advocacy, for their tenacity. They're being seen for the contributions they make to our society.**

The ANCOR Foundation launched *Included. Supported. Empowered.* to highlight the myriad ways in which I/DD providers are propelling the individuals they support to succeed. In short, *Included. Supported. Empowered.* exists to celebrate the successes of individuals with I/DD, to highlight the role providers play in making success possible, and to demonstrate what works and what doesn't when it comes to inclusive, effective supports.

To date, we've reached millions of Americans with [story after story after story](#) highlighting the hard work, challenges and successes of providers and the individuals they support. We've captured the attention of some of the nation's leading philanthropists, and top-ranking government officials at the local, state and federal levels who are positioned to make real change in our country.

And yet, much more work remains to be done if we are to achieve our vision of inclusion. In 2019, *Included. Supported. Empowered.* released the *Case for Inclusion*, a comprehensive set of data that assesses how well state programs are serving individuals with I/DD. This data confirmed what individuals with I/DD, their family members and their service providers have long known: that a lack of investment in I/DD supports and services is causing progress to stall or slide backwards in nearly every state in the nation. Add in a significant shortage of DSPs and we're left with a system in which individuals and their family members often have no way to access the critical supports and services they need.

As we prepare for the coming election year—which could set the course of our country in a new direction—*Included. Supported. Empowered.* has articulated our vision of what the future should look like for people with I/DD and the workforce that is integral to their success:

- 1. We believe that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities should have access to the supports and services they need, when and where they need them.** That would mean taking steps to shorten or eliminate waiting lists by offering services to all in need, as well as ensuring that people have choices to make about the types of supports they receive. However, [424,000 individuals are on states' waiting lists to receive Medicaid-funded services](#) that enable them to live in the community. While these individuals wait, they're left with few or no options.
- 2. We believe that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities should have the opportunity to live in and be fully included within the community.** That would mean working proactively with individuals living in large, state-run institutions to transition into home- and community-based settings, as well as investing in programs that prioritize the ability of individuals to participate in civic life. However, [there are still 36 states in which large, state-run institutions isolate individuals with I/DD](#) from the opportunity to build a sense of community.

3. **We believe that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities should have opportunities to work alongside peers without disabilities and earn competitive wages.** That would mean employers embracing the Americans with Disabilities Act and unleashing an untapped wellspring of productivity—by providing accessible work environments, making reasonable accommodations and promoting inclusion initiatives within the workplace. However, despite historically low unemployment rates, less than 1 in 5 individuals with I/DD (19%) works in competitive employment.
4. **We believe that the workforce of more than a half-million professionals who provide direct support services to individuals with I/DD are essential to the success, safety and happiness of individuals with I/DD—and they should earn a living wage to do the best possible job.** That would mean elevating the public’s respect for the valuable work provided—and ultimately compensating that labor fairly. However, low wages, limited professional development opportunities and understaffed working environments have translated into a national turnover rate among DSPs of 45%, meaning that nearly one half of all DSPs leave their posts within their first year on the job.

Through *Included. Supported. Empowered.*, the ANCOR Foundation pledges to be a key part of solutions to some of the most pressing challenges we face. This bold initiative will continue to raise awareness of the impressive work being done throughout ANCOR’s vibrant community of providers and beyond, as well as about the challenges that continue to confront providers in their quest to deliver the quality of supports people with I/DD need and deserve.

As we head into the campaign’s capstone year, *Included. Supported. Empowered.* is putting a stake in the ground for a future aligned with our values and the challenges—and successes—we’re seeing across the country. In the coming months and through the culmination of this effort in 2020, we will:

- Lift up the real-life experiences of individuals with I/DD and those who provide them with critical support.
- Engage those with the most influence to drive a national conversation about disability supports. Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and the professionals who support them must have seats at the table.
- Educate emerging leaders at all levels of government—including candidates for the highest U.S. office—about the tightrope providers are forced to walk every day.
- Leverage our human, financial and technological capital to help build the future we all envision by sharing knowledge, resources and best practices.

Transformative change is needed to bring the world we envision—the world we demand—to fruition, and there is no better time than now.