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Chapter 10

The Inclusive City through the lens of Quality of Life

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In the city of Almere in the Netherlands, social policies are directed towards creating an inclusive society in which all citizens have the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social, and cultural activities that are considered the societal norm. Active citizenship, empowerment of persons with disabilities and partnerships between disability and mainstream organizations are the most important criteria for local practices in pursuit of this inclusive society. Social inclusion simultaneously incorporates multiple dimensions of the quality of life framework. In this chapter we discuss several inclusive policies and practices as they relate to employment, education, welfare and leisure in the city of Almere. We will study these practices through the lens of the quality of life framework and will describe how they lead to a coherent program that contributes to valuable outcomes for persons with intellectual disabilities. Throughout the course of this chapter the involvement of Almere's citizens with and without disabilities and the partnerships needed in realizing inclusion will be of particular interest.

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Alex

In this chapter we will refer to the story of Alex. Alex is a 27 year old performing artist and dancer. He was also born with Down syndrome. Alex is creative and philosophical of nature, and is full of ideas and aspirations. He has the ambition to become a famous citizen, and is well on his way towards reaching his goal based on his many art exhibitions and performances. He was for example one of the actors in a popular Dutch soap series, called 'Downisty'. Alex lives in his own apartment in a building for young adults with disabilities and travels independently within the city limits. He uses a personal support budget to pay for his formal sources of support. He is informally supported by his single mother and his brother. His mother refers to raising Alex as a life-changing event. She states as follows: 'Society thinks that people with disabilities cost money. That is true, but they also have a lot to offer. Alex enriched my life. Of course I also worry, because what will happen when I pass away? He is lucky to have a fantastic brother, who will hopefully take over my role.' (1).

1. Introduction

Inclusive policies and practices

Like in several Western countries, recent Dutch disability policies and practices are directed towards realizing inclusion. Citizens with and without disabilities are entitled to fully participate in the community and to be included in employment, education, living arrangements and leisure time activities. With the signing of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (2) and its upcoming ratification, the Dutch government reinforces the rights of people with disabilities. Recent legislation reflects this commitment. An example is the Participation Law (*Participatiewet*) that will come into force in 2014 and promotes participation of people with disabilities in regular employment (3).

The term inclusion is commonly used in the field of disability policy, practice and research but has many different interpretations. In our opinion the regular and often nonchalant use of the term inclusion without enough attention to its meaning and implications for individuals fails to incorporate and reflect diversity. Generalizations do not necessarily adequately represent the individual preferences of people with and without disabilities.

Alex prefers to spend his leisure time in an inclusive manner. His dance partner does not have a disability. However, he chooses to live together with other people with intellectual disabilities (1).

The concept of inclusion was first used and applied in the Nordic countries in the 1970s, referred to as 'normalization'. Normalization aimed at the integration of services for persons with disabilities within the general service system (4). In the Netherlands normalization started after the Second World War with the establishing of group homes located within local communities. This was a step forward from housing persons with disabilities in large segregated institutions. However, little attention was paid to the promotion of social interactions between people with and without disabilities within the local communities (5).

Since the 1980s more inclusive reforms have taken place. Segregated residential settings, special education and sheltered employment were increasingly questioned. Social policy has since focused more on the realization of respite and short term supports as well as integrated living arrangements within local communities (5). Foreign experts have criticized the Dutch deinstitutionalization process for not keeping up with the developments in other Western countries (6). The Netherlands is one of the few countries in which the number of people with intellectual disabilities living in institutional settings has grown since 1980 (6, 7).

Since the 1980s sheltered workshops have had to compete on the mainstream market. The demands on employees increased and vulnerable groups started to be excluded from this type of employment, leading to the establishment of new segregated day activity centres. From 2011, policy reforms stipulated that sheltered employment will only be available for people who can under no circumstances be competitively employed (5). The Participation Law (*Participatiewet*) (3) also reflects these reforms. In the field of education, inclusion of children with disabilities in primary education currently forms the core of social policy.

A concern is that the development of social interactions of persons with intellectual disabilities has been largely neglected. The social relations of persons with disabilities are often restricted to family members and professionals (5, 8). Family relationships of people with intellectual disabilities are less complemented by stable and close friendships than in the general population (9-11). For adults with intellectual disabilities, interaction with the community is often regulated and controlled by professionals (12). Often the social relations at work in the

sheltered workshop or the group home are not the ones that promote autonomy and self-esteem (13). Many persons with intellectual disabilities are in a ‘double-bind’ of marginalization, experiencing exclusion from and rejection and discrimination within the very social spaces that are the key markers of social inclusion policy (14). Merely providing services in community-based settings is insufficient to ensure people’s social inclusion within those communities. True social inclusion requires connection to others (15). The UNCRPD refers to full participation and inclusion as a general principle (art. 3), a general obligation (art. 4) and a right (art. 29 and 30). This is an ultimate challenge within the Dutch context.

For the purpose of this chapter the definition of social inclusion by Martin and Cobigo (16) will be used. These authors define the individual experience of social inclusion as ‘complex interactions between personal and environmental factors, including social and cultural factors’ (p. 277). Martin and Cobigo (16) state that discrimination, marginalization, and a sense of belonging to a community add to this understanding of inclusion. The authors include the six domains formulated by Hall (17) that are important to a person’s social inclusion: (a) being accepted as an individual beyond the disability; (b) having significant and reciprocal personal relationships; (c) being involved in activities; (d) having employment; (e) having appropriate living accommodations; and (f) receiving formal and informal supports. Martin and Cobigo conclude that an understanding of what social inclusion means is needed for decision-makers and service providers to define the nature of their responsibilities, set actions, and assess their effectiveness in achieving inclusion. The goal to simply increase or promote social inclusion is not enough. Without an understanding of what social inclusion means, it is not clear what services and supports are aiming to achieve. These authors found that a person’s perception of social support is important in their experience of social inclusion (16). In this chapter inclusion will be referred to as a concept that focuses on the perception of the person with a disability as well as on the opportunities granted by and within society.

(Family) Quality of Life

Inclusion and inclusive practices are important dimensions of individual and family quality of life in the field of intellectual and developmental disabilities, as referred to by Brown and Faragher in this book. Individual quality of life has been studied for 30 years and can be understood on a personal level as well-being experienced when a person’s basic needs are met and when he or she has the opportunity to pursue and achieve goals in major life settings. Quality of life also refers to social well-being enjoyed by communities and society (18). More recently the concept of family quality of life has been developed. Family quality of life consists of interactions among family members, parenting, emotional well-being, physical and material well-being and disability related support (19, 20). Quality of life is achieved when the needs of the family are satisfied and when the family has the ability to do what it values. Another important aspect of family quality of life is integration into the community so that family members can live, work, play, and have friends in the community. Family quality of life also values that family members appreciate how individuals with disabilities make positive contribution to their communities. It seeks to have individuals with disabilities recognize their contributions to families and communities. This can help individuals with disabilities commit to the action of transforming their reality because empowerment must be forged *with, not for* people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (21).

Families are the main care providers for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities throughout their lives (22). In supporting persons with intellectual and developmental

disabilities in their quality of life it is therefore important to support the family system as well (23). Additionally, many adults with intellectual disabilities are involved in the professional service system. In combination with the increased emphasis on support in and by the community this means a wide range of stakeholders is involved in the lives of persons with intellectual disabilities. In the Dutch context it was found that opportunities for social inclusion can be created by developing sustainable partnerships among these different stakeholders who share responsibility for providing support. This is important because practice indicates that families with a member with disability often are unable to independently improve their quality of life (24).

An integrating framework

This chapter will demonstrate that the related concepts of individual and family quality of life as developed in the field of intellectual and developmental disabilities are also of value in enabling the wider community. This notion will be illustrated while describing practices in the city of Almere. Ever since the concept of quality of life was introduced in the field of intellectual and developmental disabilities, it has been applied at multiple levels. A framework recently developed by Schalock and Verdugo (25) has been adapted by Schippers, Zuna and Brown to identify applications of quality of life concepts at the macro, meso and micro level (26). At the macro or system level societal values and attitudes as well as laws and policies have been addressed. The UNCRPD (2) is an example of the application of the concept of quality of life at the macro level. At the meso or organizational level services and support systems have been evaluated against quality of life outcomes. At the micro level, tools have been developed to assess a variety of aspects of the quality of life of individuals as well as families. Essential in achieving the ultimate goal of improving individual and family quality of life is for applications at these three levels to be interrelated. Connectedness between policies and practices on the system, organizational and individual levels can lead to more productive and effective outcomes for individuals and families (26).

The section below will discuss policies and practices in the city Almere by applying the framework by Schippers, Zuna and Brown (26). At the macro or system level local policies will be addressed and at the meso or organizational level local practices. Additionally, the impact of these policies and practices on the micro or individual and family level will be described as found in a recent evaluation study by van Heumen and Schippers (27).

2. Policies and practices regarding social inclusion in the city of Almere

Almere study

The city of Almere is an average-sized and relatively new municipality in the Netherlands near Amsterdam. The city currently has 195.000 inhabitants, and this number is growing. In addition to being a recently established city, the inhabitants of Almere are also younger in comparison to the population of other Dutch cities. Currently, one-third of the population of Almere is under the age of 25 years and only nine percent of the population is 65 years of age or older (28). Local authorities and initiatives in the city of Almere are taking the lead nationally in implementing recently enacted legislation affecting social inclusion and participation of people with disabilities.

In the period of 2004 to 2006, nine families including a young adult with an intellectual disability were followed in the city of Almere, the Netherlands. The families were individually

supported by an intermediary in the realization of personal future plans. The main aim of this study by Schippers and van Boheemen (26) was to explore and describe positive practices by partners in supporting young adults with intellectual disabilities and their families in the development of quality of life. Two types of partnerships were the focus of the study: partnerships between families and service providers and partnerships within the health and community system. Results indicated the importance of these different partnerships. The partnerships developed to support the nine families added to their experience of quality of life and their competence in self-determination.

Six years after the end of the study by Schippers and van Boheemen (26), a follow up study by van Heumen and Schippers (27) evaluated the presence and nature of long term effects of the original project on the quality of life of the adults with intellectual disabilities and their families as well as the sustainability of the established partnerships. In doing so, it focused on the perspectives of different stakeholders. The stakeholders in the evaluation study were the adults with intellectual disabilities and their family members, support professionals, stakeholders in the wider social network of the families as well as other stakeholders in the local community. The discussed topics related to inclusion and participation are relevant to both people with and without disabilities. The approach in this study enabled persons without disabilities in the wider community to be involved and participate in the discussions as well.

System level in the city of Almere: values and views within policies

In 2007 the Social Support Act (*Wet Maatschappelijke Ondersteuning*) came into force in the Netherlands (29). This Act requires the inclusion of all citizens in Dutch society and the mainstreaming of services. In particular, it aims to improve accessibility of and access to services for all citizens. For example, it legally obligates municipalities to provide support services for older persons and people with disabilities such as transportation, wheelchairs and in-home modifications. The adoption of the Social Support Act has therefore resulted in an important shift in the level of responsibility for inclusion from national government towards local authorities (26). The city of Almere has drafted several policies in order to comply with the Social Support Act. These policies are related to the life domains of employment, education and welfare. For the effective implementation of these policies partnerships in the community between the system, organizational and individual levels become increasingly important.

Employment related policies have been formulated for persons with and without disabilities who have difficulties in the labor market. The association of local business owners, welfare partners as well as the local government anticipate a future shortage of employees and drafted a manifest called 'Using talents' (*Talenten benutten*) (30). In this manifest the different partners promise to play an active role in securing appropriate employment for people. The partners aim to bring their corporate social responsibility into action by hiring people with a so called 'work related disability', which includes people with physical, psychiatric, intellectual and/or other disabilities.

Additionally the local partners strive for students in secondary education to collaborate with local entrepreneurs in small projects. The term 'co-makerships' is used to describe these internships. These projects aim to promote social interactions, a diverse culture and a sense of social safety. Furthermore, the co-makerships aim to stimulate the development of local youth to become independent, self-directed and contributing citizens of the community (30). The aims of the co-makerships reflect important aspects of the concept of quality of life, namely the value of

self-direction as well as community involvement and social relationships for both people with and without disabilities.

Welfare policies are reflected in the concept of ‘vital neighborhoods’, in which the city together with local housing companies integrates social, cultural and safety projects (30). Examples of these initiatives are daily maintenance of public spaces to contribute to safety and the availability of sports facilities and after school programs in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

To bring policies into action, the local government in the city of Almere initiated the application of the ‘Own Power Tool’ (*Eigen Kracht Wijzer*) (31). With this digital tool a person can direct him- or herself in finding needed formal support or funding to supplement his or her own natural and informal resources, including those to be mobilized by the social network. The ‘Own Power Tool’ covers all important life domains, including employment, education and living arrangements. Over 65% of the users of this instrument rated its use and recommendations as positive (32). Additionally the tool proved to promote cost effective solutions, as it facilitates the support of a larger number of people with the same level of available resources (33).

Recently the local Welfare and Education department (*Dienst Maatschappelijke Ondersteuning*) together with the local Windesheim University of Applied Sciences in Almere and Disability Studies in the Netherlands (DSiN) established a project called ‘The Inclusive City’ (*De Inclusieve Stad*). The aim of this project is to integrate local inclusive initiatives relating to employment, education, support services and living arrangements in order to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities within an inclusive neighborhood (34). The earlier introduced co-makerships and evaluation study by van Heumen and Schippers (27) are both part of the project ‘The Inclusive City’.

Since 2009 Alex has been part of the so-called G-force panel (G-kracht panel, ‘G’ refers to Disability in Dutch) (35). The G-force panel has ten members with different disabilities and aims to positively influence local politics. The panel was installed by the Mayor of the city of Almere. Each year it formulates ten action points, which are then discussed with city council members. The action points influence local policies regarding issues related to safety and participation. These action points also have an impact on local activities and have for example resulted in the creation of a meeting forum for persons with autism.

The organizational level in the city of Almere: policies put into practice

Several support service agencies in Almere aim to include people with disabilities in activities in the areas of employment, education and living arrangements. An example of such an initiative is the Creative Motor (*De Creatieve Motor*), a cooperative of self-employed support workers. This cooperative with the slogan ‘Nobody needs to stand aside’ (*Niemand hoeft aan de kant te staan*), aims at developing a new social infrastructure and empowering the capacities of all involved. This view aligns with national and local policies on mainstreaming employment for people with disabilities. The Creative Motor provides trajectories in which people with disabilities are trained and gain experience in mainstream work situations for instance in the furniture industry. These trajectories then lead to internships or paid employment (36). Next to this initiative other, less integrated, work situations are provided. An example is ‘Aunt Truus’ (*Tante Truus*), a well-known pub in Almere where people with disabilities are supported in

employment. Despite its popularity, the pub does not make a profit and is unable to pay regular wages to its personnel.

In the educational field, Almere's citizens took the initiative to establish a local 'Academy for Independency' (*Academie voor Zelfstandigheid*) (37), providing learning opportunities to people with disabilities to enable them to develop to their full potential as well as to support them in their citizenship. Mainstream higher education often does not admit people with intellectual and developmental and other disabilities. This situation has led to the recent establishment of segregated initiatives, for instance 'The White Elephant' (De Witte Olifant), an arts academy for people with disabilities.

Several housing and support agencies provide services in Almere based on the principles of social inclusion. These agencies constructed apartment buildings where people with and without disabilities live together. Furthermore, they applied the principles of universal design (38).

People with disabilities and older people were very much involved in designing the neighborhood where Alex lives. Their involvement in the planning process resulted for instance in the placement of a bus stop close to Alex's apartment building. His older neighbors are also very pleased with this practical solution.

Inclusive leisure time activities are coordinated by an active interest group for persons with intellectual disabilities, the Abri Foundation (*Stichting Abri*). One of the foundation's numerous activities is a biweekly party for young adults with and without disabilities, aiming at promoting mutual understanding and respect (1). This initiative has the potential to contribute to the quality of life of individuals with and without disabilities by promoting social well-being and reciprocal relationships.

The individual and family level in the city of Almere: impact on quality of life

a. Inclusive methods

The evaluation study by van Heumen & Schippers (27) of the project in the city of Almere in which nine families each including a young adult with an intellectual disability were individually supported by an intermediary in the realization of personal future plans will be described below in further detail. Fourth generation evaluation principles were used in this study (39). This approach to evaluation argues that all stakeholders, all people who are affected by the evaluation, have a right to place their claims, concerns and issues on the negotiating table. A claim is any assertion that a stakeholder may introduce that is favorable. A concern is any assertion that a stakeholder may introduce that is unfavorable about a situation. An issue is a state of affairs about which reasonable persons may disagree. The evaluator acts as a facilitator of the evaluation and negotiation process (40). This fourth generation evaluation method aims to be both educative and empowering and participation and collaboration are essential elements (41). It has been argued that Guba and Lincoln's fourth generation evaluation is an appropriate methodology for supporting participation (40, 42). This type of evaluation is co-operative, it is 'with' people rather than 'on' people (40).

Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews with family members and adults with intellectual disabilities as well as of focus groups with both groups. During these interviews and focus groups claims, issues and concerns related to the transition of the person with intellectual disabilities into adulthood, the quality of life of this person and the family, as well as

partnerships and community support were explored and negotiated (27). In addition, photo voice was used as an accessible strategy to actively engage the participants with intellectual disabilities in the research process. The last stage of the data collection consisted of a presentation of the photo voice project by the young adults with a disability at a public town hall meeting (43).

Photo voice provides a way to offer voice and gain the perspectives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities on their own lives and has been found to be an interesting and enjoyable method to this population. Our goals using this methodology have been to enable the recording of and reflecting on problems of a group or community, promote critical discussion of these problems, generate collective knowledge of the problems through discussion of the photographs, and finally to take action to change the problems by reaching out to those who influence or make policy. Other than problems, positive experiences as well as desires can be captured using this methodology. An important element in the quality of life framework is the attention for positive experiences in addition to issues of concern. The photo stories can be a compelling argument to fuel the power of collective empowerment both for people with intellectual disabilities and for their families.

Three students of the Windesheim University of Applied Sciences assisted in the data collection for the photo voice portion of the study to fulfill the requirements of their co-makerships. Over the course of several weeks the students supported the young adults with taking pictures. Before the town hall meeting the young adults with disabilities were supported by the researchers and students in selecting the five pictures most meaningful to them in order to give them control over the way they would be represented. The young adults were asked to describe each picture. Furthermore they chose the color of the poster their pictures would be placed on and gave their poster a title that reflected what this product meant to them. The posters were presented by the young adults with intellectual disabilities at a public town hall meeting in the city of Almere. During this meeting different stakeholders including individuals with disabilities, families, policy makers, (self-)advocates, journalists, students, researchers, support professionals and other interested persons were enabled to share and negotiate their claims, concerns and issues regarding the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the city (27).

This evaluation study can be seen as an inclusive practice in itself as it aimed to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities and their families, to assist in their empowerment and to enable their active participation in society (27).

b. perspectives of individuals, families and the community

During the evaluation study six adults with intellectual disabilities were individually interviewed and four of them were willing to participate in the focus group and the photo voice project. The four adults who participated in the entire project described each other as friends. All young adults currently live in the same residential setting in Almere where they live with support in their own apartments. They evaluated the project and their quality of life as mostly positive. They enjoyed working with the intermediary and described their working relationship as pleasant and effective. They were able to indicate in which plans for the future they had been successful and which dreams they had been able to realize. They also shared additional goals for the future. They were positive about their home, free time, friendships and work, and indicated they had changed certain activities as they did not meet their needs. The young adults also shared some less positive experiences. They are concerned about their safety in the city and experience inaccessibility and exclusion. For example, they indicated it is difficult for them to use the public transportation system as recent changes in ticketing have made the process of travelling more

complicated for them. In the photo voice project the young adults chose to share the elements of their life most important to them, such as work, hobbies and positive experiences with others in the community (27).

Alex took pictures of his home, while going out to dance and while at work at the arts academy 'The White Elephant (De Witte Olifant). His favorite photo featured on his poster 'Journey around the world' was one of his private restroom. Having his own restroom is meaningful to him. Alex took pride in sharing his experiences with the community. He enthusiastically and actively contributed to the discussions at the town hall meeting (27).



Alex's favorite photo

Eight family members were interviewed and seven of them participated in the focus group. The majority of the family members of the young adults with intellectual disabilities evaluated the project as having a positive impact on their quality of life. Family members were enabled to better advocate for the young adult with a disability as it supported them to think outside the box. They learned not to be discouraged by imposed restrictions and exclusion of their family member with a disability but to pursue unexplored pathways. Hence, positive effects on self-determination of these families could still be observed six years after the project. The family members also learned to incorporate the individual preferences of the person with a disability and to provide him or her opportunities to explore their own preferences instead of

making decisions for him or her (27). This confirms the observation in the literature that they play an essential role in supporting the choice and decision-making of these youth (44). Additionally, family members indicated that the young adults with intellectual disabilities had become more independent throughout the transition process (27).

Family members also indicated that the limited timespan of the project was a concern to them. After the work with the intermediary discontinued, it was more difficult for them to receive the support needed to keep moving forward in breaking barriers and exploring options for their family member with a disability. Even though they made positive claims about the residential setting of their family members with a disability, they also voiced concern about the quality of the professional support at the residential setting. They were particularly concerned about the bureaucracy and lack of individual attention for their family member with a disability. Despite the transition of the young adults with intellectual disabilities to living in a residential setting and receiving professional support on a daily basis, family members stayed very involved in the lives of these young adults and continued to provide informal support (27).

The evaluation study had an impact on the community. The three students of the Windesheim University of Applied Sciences had very limited interaction with persons with intellectual disabilities or exposure to the disability community in the city of Almere before the start of their co-makerships. During the course of the photo voice process the students got to know the young adults with intellectual disabilities and collaborated with them on a basis of mutual respect, equality and equity. These experiences have the potential to contribute to a sense of psychological and emotional well-being as important elements of quality of life in both the disabled and non-disabled communities.

The use of photo voice and the town hall meeting started a dialogue between stakeholders, added to community building and empowerment and also impacted the views of the general public towards the young adults. At the end of the town hall meeting the general public wrote quotes on a white board with their dreams for the Inclusive City. Examples of these quotes were: 'Do not talk about them, but with them', 'To experience is to become aware' and 'Let's open our front doors more often'. The town hall meeting put the topic of an Inclusive City on the agenda within the community and asked for a commitment to realizing inclusion across the community. It was found at the town hall that connecting different independently operating initiatives aiming at inclusion and participation is of particular importance in the city of Almere in the future. Most of all, the promotion of interdependence and of social contact between individuals in the community was found to be crucial in promoting inclusion (27). Social inclusion and reciprocal relationships are of importance as domains within the quality of life framework.

3. Conclusion

In order to bring into force and comply with the Social Support Act (*Wet Maatschappelijke Ondersteuning*) the city of Almere is proactive in striving for optimal inclusion within its locality (29). The system level policies in the city of Almere reflect values based on the concept of inclusion. At the organizational level several practices that enable and support inclusion could be recognized as well. However, segregated practices as a 'next best' solution could also be identified. The interconnectedness of life domains at the system level supported by the Own Power Tool (*Eigen Kracht Wijzer*) (31) could not be identified effectively at the organizational level. This interconnectedness between life domains such as employment, education, welfare,

living arrangements and leisure time activities is important, because perceived concern in one life domain does have impact on the perceived overall quality of life, and combining support in more than one domain is likely to have greater impact on a family's overall quality of life (45). The evaluation study resulted in a similar conclusion. Families for instance voiced concern about the quality of the professional support in the residential setting of the young adult with disabilities. This specific finding is in line with international findings as support from disability services is one of the domains with the lowest satisfaction of families with a person with intellectual and or developmental disabilities (45).

Interconnectedness is not only necessary within the system and organizational levels but also between these levels. A fruitful template in achieving this interconnectedness can be found in the framework to guide policy development and systems change by Schalock and Verdugo (25). This framework is built on the concepts of vertical and horizontal alignment, system-level processes, and organization-level practices. Application of the framework can structure the thinking and analytic activities of systems and organization-level personnel and can help them identify significant disconnects between and among system-level processes and organization-level practices (25). The alignment of policies and practices at and between the system and organizational levels in the city of Almere is needed in order to improve inclusion and to contribute to the quality of life of persons with disabilities and their families. Additionally, it is of importance not only to establish a cross disability and diversity perspective in inclusive policies, but also in practices. A good example is the Own Power Tool (*Eigen Kracht Wijzer*), developed for use by all citizens regardless of their disability status to assess their needs for (in)formal support. This cross disability perspective could also be valuable in creating employment or educational opportunities, which still tend to be segregated solutions. Examples of these segregated initiatives in Almere are the pub Aunt Truus and the White Elephant Arts Academy. An example of the value of integrated solutions is that of students with intellectual and developmental disabilities taking part in mainstream education together with their non-disabled peers so they receive a meaningful high school diploma that better reflects their skills than an individualized education program (47).

At the individual and family level, the results of the evaluation study by van Heumen and Schippers (27) support personal future planning for young adults with intellectual disabilities and their families in the transition to adulthood. It enables them to better articulate the lifelong support they need with regards to different life domains. Also, supported personal future planning led to long term outcomes, illustrated by the claim that positive effects on self-determination of these families could still be observed six years after the project. Importantly, it was found that effective support needs to be family-oriented. A combination of supported personal future planning, family support and the application of the Own Power Tool (*Eigen Kracht Wijzer*) is recommended to strive for a long term positive impact on personal and family quality of life.

It was also found that using inclusive methods impacted social inclusion. During the photo voice project several requirements of social inclusion as mentioned by Martin and Cobigo (16) were met such as the active involvement of the adults with intellectual disabilities and their families and the reciprocal relationships they experienced. Working with the students in the photo voice project made the four adults with disabilities feel accepted as individuals beyond their disability. Photo voice emphasizes insider's perspectives on the lives of persons with disabilities. This perspective is important for tailoring policy and programs to improve the quality of life of people with intellectual disabilities. Furthermore, the self-representation of the

young adults with disabilities in the community at the town hall meeting empowered them and improved their self-esteem. It is important that community events and activities like this town hall meeting are made accessible to persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities by sharing information that is meaningful and understandable to them. In order to be successful in optimizing the quality of life of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families and to strive towards a society that is more inclusive, barriers to meaningful inclusion need to be removed. Enablers and facilitators in reaching these goals can be more powerful when they are interconnected within and between the systems', organizational and individual level.

4. Summary

In this chapter several inclusive policies and practices in the city of Almere were analyzed with the aim to create an inclusive society through the lens of quality of life. These policies and practices and their interconnectedness within and between the system, organizational and individual level were discussed. Furthermore, the impact of these inclusive initiatives on the lives of persons with intellectual disabilities, their families and stakeholders in the wider community were addressed.

Important elements in enabling an inclusive society while positively impacting the quality of life of all persons involved are:

- The implementation of proactive policies that enable and support inclusion.
- The aim to interconnect policies and practices supporting people in different life domains at the system, organizational and individual and family levels.
- The use of inclusive methods as a powerful tool to empower and promote positive self-representation of people with disabilities.
- The application and implementation of personal future planning while including multiple stakeholders.
- The availability of family oriented support.
- The attention for the perspectives of multiple stakeholders in creating active meeting spaces to promote mutual understanding, reciprocal friendships, equality and respect.

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