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DDC Community Living Position Statement

A group of advocates came together to develop a definition of “community” for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). Their goal was to include what self-advocates think are the most important things about community life. This information was taken from their report, “Keeping the Promise: Self Advocates Defining the Meaning of Community Life.” Participants were leaders from the Autistic Self Advocacy Network, the National Youth Leadership Network, Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered, and people that support their advocacy.

What is a genuine community?

- “Genuine community” means having a real choice about:
 - who helps you and how they do that,
 - who your friends and people you love are,
 - what supports you get, and
 - where you live and who you live with.
- Genuine community happens in neighborhoods with different kinds of people, including people with and without disabilities.
- Living in the community means making your own decisions, being independent, and taking care of yourself, with support if you need and want it.
- Living in the community is enjoying all the same rights, privileges, and responsibilities of everyone else.
 - Rights are what laws and rules say people are allowed to do and what is owed to them. Respecting peoples’ rights helps to make sure people are treated equally. Rights should not be taken away.
 - Privileges are things people want or need, but do not have a right to.

- Responsibilities are things people are supposed to do.
- In genuine communities, people:
 - have names not labels,
 - live in neighborhoods not on campuses,
 - make their own choices,
 - have privacy (they are left alone when they want), and
 - have relationships where everyone is equal.
- Self-advocates demand that they and others have a community that treats them the same as their neighbors.
- Self-advocates say no to the old models of “care” and “charity.” Instead, they want a world where everyone’s rights are respected.

Community living is:

- **Choice and Control** - we can do what we want when we want to do it, instead of having to decide as a big group of people and move together. This does not mean being alone in our independence. It means being in control of our own lives (having self-determination).
- **Full Citizenship** - We should be able to contribute fully in the community. This should include voting and participating in community organizations.
- **Making a contribution** - We believe in two-way relationships. For example, if friends drive us somewhere, we might watch their kids in return. We should have the opportunity to volunteer and participate in community life like everyone else.
- **Knowing what is going on in the community** - We want to know what events and activities are happening. We want support to understand information about important community issues to make good decisions and have opinions.
- **Access to community resources** - If we have a problem, we want to know where to go in the community to help us. Libraries, services, governments, and churches should be sources of information and support that are easy for us to find and use.
- **Being a part of a neighborhood** - We should live in a neighborhood where we can connect with community members who live next door. We would like to be

treated like neighbors, and have the opportunity to work to make the neighborhood a better place.

This is the link to the full report: <https://autisticadvocacy.org/policy/briefs/keeping-the-promise-self-advocates-defining-the-meaning-of-community-living/>

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