

## *Memo #3 to Hamilton: What Does Inclusion Look Like?*

Imagine that you have just put on a pair of sunglasses. Every object in your view becomes tinted – not just the road on which you are driving, the buildings beside the street on which you are walking or the flowers blooming in the park. Virtually everything in your view is shaded.

Now imagine that you replace your sunglasses with a pair of rose-coloured specs. Rather than a dark hue, all items in sight are now pink. The world may not be a better place but it looks a lot brighter.

Third task: You don an inclusion lens. This set of glasses also affects everything you see. But in this case, the glasses determine not so much the colour of the objects in sight but rather your awareness of the world. Three things, in particular, come into sharp view.

The inclusion lens sees all citizens having a say in the decisions that affect them. Typically the most vulnerable citizens, including those who are homeless, persons with disabilities and households living on low income, rarely have occasion to contribute their ideas about the programs, services and supports that are designed, ironically, to help them.

The inclusion lens also sees opportunities for all residents to participate in the economic life of the community. Some individuals are unable to work fully or even partially in the paid labour market because of disability, child care or elder care responsibilities. But many others are excluded – not by preference but by prejudice.

Finally, the inclusion lens sees active participation in culture, recreation and the social life of the community. Information on amenities, programs and places is made available in multiple languages and formats. These amenities, programs and places are accessible in design and cost. Paying and playing are no longer the same word.

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The lens of inclusion is a robust vision. It sees a world in which every person is a full citizen. Every individual – regardless of colour, creed, gender identity or ability – can partake in and contribute to community life. The role of the community is to help make that happen.

*Sherri Torjman*  
*Vice-President*

*The Caledon Institute of Social Policy has been asked by the Community Services Department of the City of Hamilton to prepare a Social Inclusion Vision for the 2015 Pan-Am and ParaPan Games.*

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1390 Prince of Wales Drive, Suite 401, Ottawa, ON K2C 3N6 CANADA  
E-mail: [caledon@caledoninst.org](mailto:caledon@caledoninst.org) Website: [www.caledoninst.org](http://www.caledoninst.org)  
Tel/Fax: (613) 729-3340