

## To Be Seen as Having a Disability

*By Nancy Ward*

To be seen as having a disability in society's eyes is to be stigmatized, isolated and patronized.

We feel we are more alike than different. We want to be able to work with society to do this.

To be seen as having a disability is to have everyone controlling your life but you. You're told what to do by staff, your family and society because you're not supposed to know how to speak for yourself.

We are learning how to speak for ourselves. Who better knows what we want than us.

To be seen as having a disability is to be pitied and seen as not being able to do something.

When all we want is to be given a chance to contribute to society rather than society supporting us.

To be seen as having a disability is to have to go through a system that teaches you things you already know.

When all we want is for the system to see us as an individual and to help us with the things we need help with, not what the system thinks we need.

To be seen as different is hard to understand.

When all we want is the chance to make friends, to go to school or have a competitive job and have a home just like everybody else.

To be seen as having a disability is not to be given the chance to get a job, because people can't see past our disability.

We're going to be more conscientious about having a job because it's going to mean more.

To be seen as having a disability is to see people not understanding us.

When what we want is to be given the chance to educate people so they can learn that we're not all that different from them.

To be seen as having a disability is not to be taken seriously.

When what we want to do is to show people that we know how to vote, and not only do we vote, and not only do we vote, we know how to vote. We feel more competent that we know the issues because we're taught what the issues are.

To be seen as having a disability is to be shut away in an institution away from the real world.

When what we want is to be given the same chance to make mistakes and to learn and grow from them, just like everybody else.

To be seen as having a disability is to be a statistic because we aren't asked what supports we need to live a normal life.

Who better than us will know what we need and want.

To be seen as being handicapped is to be seen as going around begging because the word handicap means cap in hand.

What we want is to be seen as people first, our disability second.

To be seen as having a disability is to be in a service system and have everyone telling you what's wrong with you and what you need.

When what we really need is to be shown how to do things for ourselves.

To be seen as having a disability is to be seen as being diagnosed with whatever evaluation people come up with.

When we could have told them what the evaluation said, if given the chance to.

To be seen as having a disability is to have a strong cover so people can't see how much they hurt you by their labels.

When what we want is for society to see that we're more alike than we are different. We want the opportunity to show people this.

To be seen as having a disability is to have to go through each step of a program to progress to the next step when you already know steps one to five.

When what we want is to be shown how to do things we don't know.

How are people going to know what we want if they don't ask.

In the words of another: "To be seen as having a disability is not to get discouraged even if you want to and not to cry, and not to hurt, and not to be scared, and not to be angry, and not to be vulnerable, and not to laugh too loud, because if you do you only prove you have a disability even if you don't want to be treated that way. And so you become a nothing in a no-world and you are not."



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