

Down Syndrome and The Value in Disabilities

The term “disability” has hundreds of definitions. There are two main types of disabilities, physical and intellectual. Within each category there are numerous types of disabilities. Therefore, it seems nearly impossible to discuss every disability and how society has treated people with all of these individual disabilities throughout our nation's history. Down Syndrome is a well-known intellectual disability in America and people with Down Syndrome have greatly contributed to the effort for the equal treatment of disabled people in America. There are numerous facets to the movement for equal treatment for individuals with Down Syndrome. The movement requires knowledge of the disability, a passion for creating an atmosphere that gives equal opportunity to those with Down Syndrome, and an understanding of the steps that our country has taken toward equality, and the steps that America still needs to take. These aspects are all vital in creating a country that is free from discrimination and mistreatment toward people with disabilities.

For a very long time, Down Syndrome was not recognized by the public as a disability. In fact, John Langdon Down only discovered this disability in 1866 in the United Kingdom, and the condition was later named after him (Girod 11). French geneticist Professor Jerome Lejeune discovered the actual cause almost a century later in 1959. He discovered that the cause of Down Syndrome is an extra chromosome 21, which makes 47 chromosomes in all rather than the usual 46 chromosomes in the human body (Girod 15). Since then, researchers have discovered new aspects of the disability and many scientists have made ground-breaking discoveries.

The extra chromosome 21 forms in either the sperm or the egg and when they unite and the embryo starts to grow and develop, the extra chromosome is repeated in every cell. When the extra chromosome is found in all of an individual's cells, the condition is called trisomy 21 (Health and Human Development Landing Page).

In addition to the chromosomal attributes of Down Syndrome, there are also specific physical characteristics associated with the disability. Some of these conditions that can be recognized by a doctor at birth are flat facial features, a short neck, oddly-shaped ears, white spots in the iris or an upward slant to the eye, or even a deep crease in the palm of the hand. However, a baby with Down Syndrome many not have all of these symptoms, and some of these attributes are not specific to people with Down Syndrome and can be found in someone who is perfectly healthy (Health and Human Development Landing Page).

Also, there is no definite cause for Down Syndrome, as it is a random event that occurs in the chromosomes before birth. This means that there are no behavioral aspects or environmental factors generated by the parents of the child that cause Down Syndrome. However, it has been proven that the risk of a mother having a child with Down Syndrome is directly related to the mother's age. As the woman gets older, her risk for having a child with Down Syndrome increases dramatically and pregnant women over thirty-five are always screened for Down Syndrome in the early states of their pregnancy (Health and Human Development Landing Page). There are other health risks associated with newborns and children with Down Syndrome.

There are many health risks associated with Down Syndrome. These risks decrease as the individual gets older but there are fairly substantial risks for babies and small children with Down Syndrome. For example, an infant with Down Syndrome is at high risk of being diagnosed

with other severe conditions such as a reduced metabolism and a swelling of the thyroid gland. Newborns with Down Syndrome are always tested for hypothyroidism, as it is more common in people with Down Syndrome. There are also some diseases and conditions that children with Down Syndrome are at high risk for such as epilepsy, congenital heart disease, leukemia, and a loss of hearing or vision. A child with Down Syndrome has an average of 15 to 20 decibels greater hearing loss in each ear, because the external bones of the ear have a different arrangement than people without Down Syndrome. Also, about half of all children with Down Syndrome are diagnosed with congenital heart disease (Health and Human Development Landing Page). Research has worked favorably in treating these “side-effects,” and treatment can correct most of them. However, no one had found a cure for Down Syndrome.

These are a few of the misunderstandings about Down Syndrome. First, Down Syndrome is not as rare as people may believe, as it occurs in one in about seven hundred births (National Down Syndrome Society), out of about one in thirty-five babies who is born with some sort of mental disability. Also, the life expectancy of people with Down Syndrome is now over fifty years old, and a majority of adults with Down Syndrome can live independent lives and eventually even get married and hold a steady job. These facts contradict many of the perceptions of how people with the “extremely rare” disability of Down Syndrome live.

Another adversity that people with Down Syndrome are plagued with is that it is often very difficult for them to interact with others who are not like them because these individuals grow up to believe that they cannot necessarily interact with others. There are certain things that individuals with Down Syndrome cannot do, but most things that society claims these people cannot accomplish are things that they can do, they just do them differently. It is often claimed that people with Down Syndrome are

slower in everything, and there are certain behavioral traits that are characterized with Down Syndrome.

Children with Down Syndrome may be slower to sit, walk, or talk and this is often the reason children with Down Syndrome are slower to start school than children without the disability. In Michael Bérubé's book *Life As We Know It*, he confronts these challenges as a parent of a child with Down Syndrome. At one point in the book he even describes the challenges of his son's normal childhood developments in comparison with their other child's developments. He says, "Even as we were trying to 'rush' him, knowing that our efforts had nothing to do with status, reflected glory, or the college of his choice, we felt torn" (Bérubé 140). This reveals the true challenges that parents of perfectly healthy children take for granted. Even with these challenges, however, parents of children with Down Syndrome are still encouraged to send these children to school. It is even encouraged that parents take early action by sending their child to professionals like speech therapists and social workers. Bérubé explains Jamie's experience at school by saying, "Jamie's classmates saw to it that he was always part of the gang, they encouraged him to walk and talk and interact" (Bérubé 174).

This is only one of the accounts of parents of disabled children that have seen their child's developmental skills dramatically increase because of interactions with other children. It is important to understand that children, teenagers, and adults with Down Syndrome may have differences in their behavior, but they are really no different than someone without Down Syndrome in their hopes and desires. People with Down Syndrome can be fully functioning, active citizens (Health and Human Development Landing Page).

Many sources like these touch on the gift of these people, who touch numerous people's lives. Despite the many harsh statements and criticisms of these fully functioning humans, there are still people who find value in their existence in our society. There are numerous texts written by parents and family members of those with Down Syndrome, and these works often depict the social challenges of having a child or other relative with Down Syndrome, but they also praise the character and positivity of their relative. These relatives often explain the way that their family member is judged unfairly by others in society, and this leads to a correction of many of the misconceptions associated with Down Syndrome.

Many people's accounts of life with someone with Down Syndrome explain the incredible joy that this individual has brought into their lives. For example, in Kathryn Soper's Gifts, there are many accounts of mothers with children with Down Syndrome, and each one shares a specific anecdote of a time when she realized how lucky she was to be the mother of her special child. Specifically, one mother tells the story of her son going to a school dance, and the overwhelming amount of acceptance and pride she felt for him that night. The mother felt like all of the struggles and adversities that he had faced were well worth it in that moment and she reflected on the moment she was told that her child had Down Syndrome. The mother even says, "I worried that I was not doing enough for him day after day. But I never worried about my choice to bring him into this world" (Soper 217). This quotation echoes the sentiments of many other mothers who have children with Down Syndrome. Many mothers feel blessed to have their special child in their lives, and claim that their lives have been enriched by the presence of this child.

Another text that is very beneficial in revealing the incredible joy that children with Down Syndrome bring into the lives of their family and friends is Michael Bérubé's *Life As We Know It*, mentioned above. This is a text that not only employs personal anecdotes but also factual evidence to reveal the

incredible joy that having a child with Down Syndrome can bring to a parent's life. Bérubé makes numerous claims about the different ways that children with Down Syndrome are treated, all in context with stories about his personal experiences with his son. He tells stories of his son, Jamie, at school, where he was given the nickname “Jamie B” (Bérubé 174). This interaction, Bérubé claims, was vital in Jamie's developmental advancements.

Bérubé discusses many topics related to Down Syndrome and disability rights, but he never questions the value that his son has brought into his life. “Occasionally it will occur to Janet or to me that Jamie will always be 'disabled,' that his adult and adolescent years will undoubtedly be more difficult emotionally-for him and for us”(Bérubé xi). This statement represents the undeniable hesitance the a parent of a child with Down Syndrome has, but Bérubé goes on to say, “as long as I'm with him I can't think of him as anything but Jamie”(Bérubé xi). This is true of many parents of disabled children. They understand their son or daughter's disability, but they do not see their child as “disabled,” they see them as their children. It is easy to see the love and devotion that accompanies parenting a child with a disability, and Bérubé represents the sentiments of numerous adults in his book.

In Count Us In: Growing Up with Down Syndrome, two men with Down Syndrome express their gratitude toward their parents for giving them the chance to be functioning citizens and to lead normal, productive lives. This book is unique because it expresses opinions on the treatment of people with Down Syndrome from people who actually live with it daily and have experiences of being mistreated by their peers. In addition to their experiences of being mistreated, these men also describe instances of incredible gratitude and opportunity that they would not have experienced without the support of their family and each other. In one example, the men are talking, and Mitchell says to Jason, “I think we should end this by saying that we should never call us Down Syndrome. We should call each other Up

syndrome because Up syndrome would help each other out, being involved in communities because it's part of being Up syndrome” (Kingsley 40). This statement provides important insight into the thoughts of people with Down Syndrome.

Their desires are similar to anyone else's, to be part of a community, to lead a healthy and productive life, and to have friends that they can rely on. Mitchell even says, “I wish I didn't have Down Syndrome because I would be a regular person, a regular mainstream normal person” (Kingsley 35). Jason, on the other hand, states that, “I'm glad to have Down Syndrome. I think it's a good thing to have for all people that are born with it. I don't think it's a handicap” (Kingsley 35). These men obviously have two contrasting opinions on their disability, but no matter their feelings about it, they both feel that they should not be treated differently or harshly because of it.

The men discuss many topics in the book, and they often speak with their families about their desires and they explain the types of relationships that they have with their family members. In one instance, Mitchell is talking with his Grandpa about his career, and Mitchell's Grandpa says to him, “So you're participating in what's going on in your community and trying to make things better so that the next generation – which is you, Mitchell – will have a better place to live... Now you were talking about becoming an advocate for people with disabilities...” (Kingsley 109). To which Mitchell responds, “That's to help people's causes because there are many causes around today” (Kingsley 110). This conversation reveals a family dynamic in which Mitchell is comfortable talking with his family members about his desires, which are desires similar to many people who live without disabilities. It is important to show that relationships between family members are not strange or different just because one of them has Down Syndrome.

The parents and relatives of these children affected by Down Syndrome are very open about their opinion on the condition. Most of the parents discuss the issues that accompany having a child with Down Syndrome, like mistreatment by peers at school and trouble finding a group to fit in, but more often than not these parents have touching stories of their child finding his or her place and affecting the lives of the people around them in a positive way. Dave Kerchner, the CEO of the Special Olympics of Kentucky, states that, “some of the most beautiful children in the world are born with disabilities” (Kerchner). This man does not have any children or family members with the disability; he is a complete outsider who sees the value in these people. There are many people who have stories of how their lives were touched by someone with Down Syndrome, and it is apparent from these stories that children, and adults, with the disability can live a full, healthy life.

This example leads to one of the key arguments against the separation of people with Down Syndrome from other members of society, which emphasizes the disability as a means of discrediting people with Down Syndrome's function in society. There are numerous sentimental stories from people who have had interactions with people with Down Syndrome. These are not uncommon sentiments, and parents do not often feel any differently about their child whether he or she has a disability or not. This is one of the reasons that people with Down Syndrome should not be separated from our society.

Also, as people interact with someone with Down Syndrome, they often find this individual to be particularly open and positive. There seems to be no harm in being around someone who is positive and optimistic. In fact, in many accounts, spending time with someone who has Down Syndrome completely changed someone's perspective on these individuals. These are a few of the positive aspects in keeping people with Down Syndrome main-streamed into society.

There are numerous accounts of how the positivity of someone with Down Syndrome can change the lives of the people around them. Specifically, in Count Us In, Jason Kingsley and Mitchell Levitz managed to change the lives of not only their family members, but many more with their positive outlook on life and belief that they are capable of doing anything they set their minds to. Mitchell tells a story about a speech given about him by former governor of New York George Pataki, and the governor says, “I would appreciate it if you could welcome to the chamber this afternoon an extraordinary young man from my district. He was born with Down Syndrome and often that is something that results in that child being placed away from the mainstream and not involved academically and socially in the usual activities of childhood... I wish you would recognize his courage and dedication” (Kingsley 18). This reveals how people with Down Syndrome can be very prominent in the community and touch the life of nearly anyone they come in contact with because of their positive and persevering attitude, even the governor of New York.

However, there is an argument on the other end of the spectrum that accounts for the medical issues associated with Down Syndrome as well as the importance of society to advance and become more selective. One of the key “fixes” that this argument suggests is eugenics, which is defined as “the study of methods of improving genetic qualities by selective breeding” (hyper dictionary). The way to eliminate a fetus that is screened for Down Syndrome early on in the pregnancy is abortion.

Eugenics is a principle that was formed based on the principle that society should advance through its people, and without the advancement of its people, society will not produce anything new and positive. This statement implies that anyone who is disabled in any way, or needs help from anyone in their daily life, then he or she is not contributing to society and should therefore be eliminated. The origins of modern eugenics can be traced back to World War II and have since been toned down extremely, but it

is important to understand the severity of the background behind eugenics.

Special Olympics of Kentucky CEO Dave Kerchner expressed his opinion that there is a “natural resistance” to people with disabilities. There is no better example of this natural resistance than the Sterilization Acts and beliefs of the government about people with disabilities during World War II and immediately following. Sterilization in America began on a simple principle; create a superior society. This society would be one without psychological, physical, or intellectual disabilities. Sterilization was a widely circulated topic in the early to mid-1900s, and it is even estimated that about 60,000 people who were “deemed 'feebleminded' and 'defective' were sterilized in the US” (Sterilization). People who had been put in institutions, convicted criminals, and other people with disabilities were prevented from having children. Eugenicists of the time period assisted in spreading involuntary sterilization to 21 states by 1924 (Sterilization). Eventually, sterilization laws were repealed. However, it is important to note the past cruelty of our nation in dealing with people with disabilities and especially people with Down Syndrome so the country knows which steps to take in order to gain equality for those with disabilities.

Obviously, there are two extreme sides of the argument of how society should treat people with Down Syndrome. Although it is important to understand both arguments and the motivations behind each, ultimately the first argument is more moral. There is no moral reason a life should be ended simply because he or she will be born with a disability. Society is currently compromised somewhere between these two arguments, and this is where the need for change lies. Society has ultimately determined that sterilization and elimination are not the correct way to advance society, but the government's role in the battle for equal treatment is vital and as Bérubé says in his book, “The danger for children like Jamie does not lie in women's freedom to choose abortion; nor does it lie in prenatal testing. The danger lies

in the creation of a society that combines eugenics with enforced fiscal austerity.” (Bérubé 52) In order to create a more equal environment for people with Down Syndrome, social and political reforms need to be prominent.

It has become more and more apparent that children born with Down Syndrome have special gifts and can be extremely important in the people's lives they touch, therefore toning down eugenics as a valid theory for advancing society. However, the elimination of eugenics does not mean that society does not still have advances to make. In Count Us In, Joan Cooney explains in her foreword that, “We are exceedingly careless in this country about wasting potential; we are persistently reluctant to invest in people at the front end of life in order to achieve a multiplicity of benefits in the long term” (Kingsley x). This statement implies that our country does not provide enough educational support for those with Down Syndrome so that they can be productive, working citizens when they are older.

The two major modern issues for people with Down Syndrome are discrimination in the workplace and lack of interaction with the public sector in education. The most major shift, and the most difficult one, will occur in the education of children with Down Syndrome. While there are numerous programs and special schools offered for children with disabilities, these programs do not assist in the movement for mainstreaming people with Down Syndrome in society. There have been dramatic shifts in society toward equality, such as seeing people with Down Syndrome in public establishments. However, the open-minded attitude about mainstreaming has often not transferred over to education.

There are a range of people who all have their input on mainstreaming education. Many of them point out that the first step in reforming the attitude of parents of children with no disabilities as well as the attitude of parents of children with Down Syndrome is to make school systems more conducive to

intellectually disabled children. The main argument against mainstreaming is an important point, and Dave Kerchner states that “there is not enough support in our current system”. Therefore, the change will have to occur through education reform at the state and national levels.

The federal government has taken some critical steps toward equal education for children with Down Syndrome. Children with disabilities were not guaranteed rights to equal education until the 1970s. In 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act guaranteed “free and appropriate public education” to be available to children with all types of disabilities, including Down Syndrome. However, this act only accounted for “equal” education, but it did not include children with Down Syndrome and other disabilities being accepted in classrooms with the other kids (National Down Syndrome Society). More recently, the idea of mainstreaming has come to the forefront of the disability movement, and this idea has already begun being put into practice.

There are already some school systems in place that have been successful with mainstreaming, or inclusion, as it is often worded. Inclusion is said to be even more in depth than mainstreaming. Inclusion means that the children with Down Syndrome are included in the majority of classes throughout the school day (National Down Syndrome Society). Inclusion is more difficult than mainstreaming, and it is harder to find a school system that has begun the process of inclusion. Mainstreaming, however, is more prominent. In Hampshire, United Kingdom, for example, a study was done comparing children with Down Syndrome being educated in special schools to kids with Down Syndrome who were mainstreamed. The results proved that spoken language skills, social skills, and overall academic skills were significantly better in the mainstreamed children (A Comparison of Mainstreaming). Therefore, it has been shown that mainstreaming can be successful for the kids with Down Syndrome who participate in it and it helps them to become more productive citizens, in the

classroom and out.

Though this change is beneficial to the Down Syndrome students as well as the normal students and it must occur, it will not come about without challenges. Mainstreaming all Down Syndrome children into the public school system will open up more intense social challenges, but it is a challenge that the country must face in order to gain full equality for individuals with Down Syndrome. There has been a history of bullying and other social issues that arise with mainstreaming that must be confronted in order to create a healthy, beneficial teaching environment for kids with Down Syndrome. Social reform must be prominent in coordination with education reform, and steps are already being made in both areas.

Past experiences reveal positive outcomes when children with Down Syndrome are mainstreamed into the public educational system, and there are many personal stories of these positive experiences. In Count Us In, both of the men received their education from public school. One of the authors, Jason Kingsley, describes an experience that he had at school and says, “Most of my classmates don't know that I have Down Syndrome because they told me that I'm not going to learn this year. But when my parents came for Parents' Night, my classmates realized that Jason can do it and he has Down Syndrome. So, they gave me a chance to do it. And I did pretty well. I got the highest mark in history in the whole class. They didn't think I could make it, but I did. I got 89 in my history test.... I made the honor roll because I got an 88 average” (Kingsley 45) This passage truly reveals the potential that people with Down Syndrome have in education, and the intense pride that they feel when they are successful. Mainstreaming is necessary because it will give every child, Down Syndrome or not, the chance to succeed and to prove what he or she is capable of.

The first step in creating a more equal environment for people with Down Syndrome is necessary social reform. The movement for social rights for people with Down Syndrome has been relatively quiet and gradual. The movement to end the prejudice against people with Down Syndrome has not been active for an extensive amount of time. In fact, many people do not even know about the movement because reforms have not been in the form of loud, active protests, but more in the form of appeals to legislation. There are also many organizations founded to support people with Down Syndrome and these organizations are active in making changes to the prejudice against people with this disability. The changes that these organizations have striven for have helped tremendously in the fight for equal treatment, and there are many more changes that each organization will help to make in the future.

One such organization that started the movement is the National Association for Down Syndrome. This organization was founded in 1961 to assist families who made the tough decision to raise a child with Down Syndrome. The NADS has since then made it their mission to assist people with Down Syndrome and to make sure that each person has the opportunity to stand out in his or her community. For this reason, the NADS, like many other organizations, has a Public Awareness Program. This program includes campaigns that help the public become more informed about the disability. This organization wants to ensure that the public is not ignorant about the disability, and they even make it a point to go out into their community and educate people, because that is the first step. The reforms that are being made by not only this organization, but many others, have had a positive impact on the way that society treats people with Down Syndrome (National Association for Down Syndrome).

Another organization that has helped not only those with Down Syndrome, but also many other people with intellectual disabilities, is the Special Olympics. The Special Olympics is a very important organization because not only have they helped in the mainstreaming of people with intellectual disabilities into American society, but this organization also has helped to build the confidence of many special people and has helped them realize that they can do things that they never thought were possible. The Special Olympics has been key in “bridging the gap” between people with disabilities and society.

The Special Olympics were founded by Eunice Kennedy Shriver in 1962. She started a summer camp for people with special needs, and it quickly grew. Mrs. Shriver gained her inspiration for starting the Special Olympics from her personal experience of growing up with a sister who had a mental disability and a family that hid her in shame. Eunice saw value in not only her sister, but also everyone with mental disabilities, and she started the Special Olympics to help these people and the people around them realize their value (Smith). By 1968, the first international Summer Special Olympics took place in Chicago, IL (Special Olympics). Since the first Summer Games, the organization has not ceased growing and is now a household name all over the world. The scope of the Special Olympics has grown immensely since its founding in 1962, and they are not simply an organization for sports anymore.

The Special Olympics began similar to many other non-profit organizations, a grassroots campaign with the goal of getting people with disabilities involved in physical activity. The organization started out as one national level, with one office that organized all Special Olympics events across the country, and most of the volunteers being college athletes and other people with relatives with disabilities. This is certainly not the case any more. The organization has since branched out to state-level organizations,

as well as national and international branches.

The Special Olympics has become a trusted organization and there have been numerous sports teams and celebrities involved in the organization. One of the biggest successes of the Special Olympics, according to Dave Kerchner, is the involvement of “traditional athletes working with Special Olympics athletes.” The athletes that participate in Special Olympics events have various disabilities, but of the total number of athletes around the world, about fifteen percent of the participants have Down Syndrome (Kerchner). Therefore, this organization has become very valuable in educating people about the disability and connecting others with Down Syndrome. These are just a few of the many ways that the Special Olympics has grown and become an important part of our society and particularly the movement for equal treatment for those with Down Syndrome.

Although the Special Olympics are most well-known for its provision of athletic activities for people with intellectual disabilities, they have also launched many public awareness campaigns in order to improve the social treatment of people with special needs. One of the most recent campaigns was called “Spread the Word to End the Word,” which encouraged people to stop using the word “retarded” in everyday conversation (The R-Word). There are many people who do not realize that the word is offensive, and the Special Olympics, in partnership with over two hundred other organizations, felt that it was necessary to educate the public on the offensive connotations that go along with using the word “retard” or “retarded” to describe someone or something as stupid.

As Dave Kerchner said, this word demeans people with disabilities and it is “tremendously hurtful to use slang like that.” The use of inappropriate slang has become a major concern in society today, especially amongst young people. Mr. Kerchner also described that this word “hurts those desperately

trying to be accepted.” He further explained that the elimination of this word would only help if it was done by a “conscious effort” and that the danger lies in the “connotation of the word.” In addition to Mr. Kerchner, in Life as We Know It: A Father, A Family, and An Exceptional Child, Bérubé touches on the role of language in the way children with Down Syndrome are perceived. He implies that the constant debates on the meanings of words like “retarded” takes away from who these are children actually are and it stereotypes them. (Bérubé 264). It is a big undertaking to try to eliminate this form of prejudice in society, but this is simply one example of the work that Special Olympics has done to reform the public's attitude toward intellectually disabled people, and it can be assured that there will be many more efforts like this in the future.

By government definition, a disability is a “physical or mental impairment that 'significantly limits one or more major life activities’” (Colker 105). This definition sets the premise for all laws relating to the treatment of intellectually disabled citizens. The government has utilized this definition to form laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act in order to make strides towards equality for people with Down Syndrome, as well as citizens with numerous other handicaps. These acts have sought to improve the treatment of people with intellectual disabilities in the workplace.

First, the Rehabilitation Act was established in order to eliminate discrimination based on disability in the government. This Act was created in 1973 in response to the growing demand of lobbyists and other organizations to end the unfair discrimination of people with disabilities in the workplace. The act is an important facet of the disability movement because it was one of the first public displays of unrest about mistreatment of people with disabilities (Brill 35). Before the Rehabilitation Act, the disability movement was not strong at the national level, and most of the supporters were people with family members who had a disability. The Rehabilitation Act changed everything and got people involved in

the disability movement who would have never been involved otherwise. This act brought people with all types of disabilities into the public eye, including people with Down Syndrome.

The most prominent way that the Rehabilitation Act affected the movement for equal treatment of people with Down Syndrome was through education. More specifically, the Rehabilitation Act addresses equal education for children with disabilities. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act guaranteed all children equal access to education and claims that any school that discriminates because of disability will be denied money given to them by the government (Brill 35). This Act was a contributing factor in the movement for the equal treatment of people with Down Syndrome, but it was not the only factor.

Second, the Americans with Disabilities Act was established in 1990 and is by far the most influential law in the effort to eliminate discrimination based on disability in America. The ADA established that employees could not discriminate based on disability in government agencies of all levels as well as in private organizations. The Americans with Disabilities Act was founded in an effort to reduce discrimination of people with handicaps not only in the government, but it also had the goal of eliminating job discrimination to qualified candidates in the private sector as well. The ADA covers a wide scope of disabilities including anything from mobility impairment to someone with an intellectual disability such as Down Syndrome.

In relation to mental impairments like Down Syndrome, the ADA is very clear in its requirements. The Act states that any employer cannot classify prospective employees by their disability enter into a contract that discriminates based on disability, fail to accommodate an employee with a disability, or

screen for or administer employment tests that are intended to measure an employee's disability. This is only a brief outline of the ADA and there are many more aspects of discrimination that the ADA protects against, such as public transportation and even education; however, the Americans with Disabilities Act was founded on the premise of ending discrimination in the workplace specifically (ada.gov).

Government steps towards equality have been very recent and there are many more steps to take in order for there to be full equality for all intellectually disabled people in America. These Acts were specifically established with the intention of ending discrimination specifically in the business sector of society. Since the establishment of these laws, there has been a great improvement in removing discrimination in the workplace. These Acts have been very effective in business and each law has benefited not only the individuals who had previously faced discrimination, but also the employer as it has opened new demographics for these businesses.

Unfortunately, the workplace is not the only aspect of American society in which discrimination exists. There is extensive social discrimination that exists among people with disabilities in the workplace, in schools, and even in public places and there is much more work that needs to be done in not only the government, but also in people's attitudes toward disabilities, in order for discrimination against people with Down Syndrome to be eliminated in our society. Organizations and campaigns have been established all over the world to stop bullying against anyone who is different, including people with Down Syndrome. Campaigns such as the "R-Word" have been specifically targeted on people with intellectual disabilities, and hopefully this movement and the many others in place will have a significant effect on society's perception of people with Down Syndrome, and open up their eyes to the hurt that bullying and hateful words bring to others who desire to fit in with their peers and lead a

normal, productive life.

In conclusion, Down Syndrome is an extremely well-known disability. There are hundreds of thousands of people living with Down Syndrome in America, and it is not uncommon to know or be close to someone who has Down Syndrome. It is important to understand that while a parent can test for the disability before birth, there is no cure for Down Syndrome. There are many health risks and physical impairments that can be associated with Down Syndrome, but most babies who are born with the disability live a productive, healthy life. People with Down Syndrome are often portrayed as special gifts to their family members and friends, and the joy that they bring into the lives of the people around them is astounding. Parents of children with Down Syndrome agree that the gift of heir child was well worth some of the inconveniences that they have had to face. This is one of the reasons why eugenics and sterilization have been overpowered and silenced as a means to advance our society. Also, people with the disability have expressed their passion for life and their drive to succeed. Therefore, we must reform are educational system to give these children the opportunity to reach their full potential. Mainstreaming is an important issue and although it may bring about some social challenges, the gain is well worth it.

There are many organizations that have taken a huge part in the movement for equal rights for those with Down Syndrome, including the National Association for Down Syndrome and the Special Olympics, which have both become important organizations in the disability movement an ave contributed to important Acts, like the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act, that have revolutionized the treatment of people with Down Syndrome in America. To sum up, the movement for equal treatment for people with Down Syndrome is not yet over, but with education about the disability and an understanding of the desires of people with Down Syndrome, our society

can become a place in which people with Down Syndrome are not looked upon differently than anyone else.

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