



THE DIGNITY PROJECT

Citizenship and dignity in times of austerity

Kelsey Chapman | Research and Ethics Officer | The Hopkins Centre

“EVERY HUMAN BEING IS CONSIDERED A MEMBER OF THE HUMAN FAMILY”

Waldschmidt and Sepulchre (2019)

In times of global insecurity and economic austerity, rampant individualisation grows, and with it, increased disparities and inequality (Goodley, 2017). For the over a billion people who are estimated to live with disability globally, about 15% of the world's population (WHO, 2011) times of austerity escalate inequality and instability, while the struggle for a fairer and more inclusive global society becomes more difficult (Barnes, 2020).

Indeed, disability and economy are closely linked in a relationship that is exacerbated by economic recession (Flynn, 2017). Public expenditures on social services and new policies that reterritorialise what it means to have a disability, serve to decrease service provisions for people with disability at a time when they may most need it (Flynn, 2017).

In order to ensure that all members of our global society have access to equal human rights based on human dignity, it is essential that we embrace this moment as an opportunity to examine relational ethics (Turner, 2006; Waldschmidt and Sepulchre, 2019).

We urge members of the global commonwealth of humanity, the citizens of the world, to think about how “we are all made through our connections with others” in an interdependent community (Pothier and Devlin, 2006). The drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights established dignity as the underpinning tenant on which they built their articles. Dignity, rather than liberty or freedom, was chosen, because of its ability to recognise and respond to human vulnerability (Series, 2020) and its ability to accommodate universal and personal aspects.

On a universal level, all people have an inherent dignity which cannot be eroded or taken away. However, on a personal level, dignity is greatly affected by context, relationships with others, and our human vulnerabilities. At a time when all members of our global community are feeling vulnerable, people with disability may experience a further heightened vulnerability, particularly

if they require support workers for their daily living arrangements (Kevin Cocks, 2020).

People with disability may also be subjected to the traditional views of the medical model in times of health crisis, in which they are given less access to life saving or even basic treatment, in favour of people who are “fully abled”. Although most health practitioners would not want to ration healthcare on the basis of disability, this becomes a necessary evil when the health system is overloaded.

In order to preserve the personal dignity and inherent human rights granted to all global citizens, particularly people who may be more vulnerable due to their disability, we must come together as citizens of the world and hold each other accountable at an individual, local, state, national, and global level. In this current global context of pandemic, self-isolation, economic austerity, and vulnerability, the importance of our Dignity Project is magnified.

The Dignity Project is a research platform designed by The Hopkins Centre to provide people with disability an opportunity to share experiences and concerns.



Our **Dignity Hub** will be officially launched next month, in order to address the physical, systemic, and attitudinal barriers that lead to exclusion, marginalisation, and undignified treatment for people with disability.

Now more than ever, it is important to uncover the experiences and stories of people with disability in order to illuminate future possibilities, pathways that should never again be travelled, and methods through which policymakers, practitioners, and citizens can enact meaningful change.

References

Barnes, Colin (2020). *Human Rights*. In *Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies*, 2nd edition (Eds.) S. Vehmas & N Watson. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group: London.

Flynn, Susan (2017). Perspectives on austerity: the impact of the economic recession on intellectually disabled children. *Disability & Society* 32(5). Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2017.1310086>

Prior to our launch, we ask that you ensure that your local, state, and national governments are providing proactive, virtual programs to check on the wellbeing of people with disability and respond to their ongoing service needs.

Access to essential health services and continuity of care will require physically and technologically accessible environments. Furthermore, there must be clear plans to build the support networks of people with disability who may not have access to school environments or other natural networks.

Goodley, Dan. (2017). *Disability Studies: An Interdisciplinary Introduction*. SAGE Publications: Melbourne.

Pothier, Dianne & Richard Devlin (2006). *Critical Disability Theory: Essays in Philosophy, Politics, Policy, & Law*. UCB Press: Vancouver.

Series, Lucy. (2020). *Disability & Human Rights*. In. *Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies*, 2nd edition (Ed.) S. Vehmas & N Watson.

As we come together as a global community, isolating to protect each other, it is an important time to consider all citizens of humanity. We need to give particular consideration to the vulnerabilities that already exist for people with disabilities and those that will be created by this pandemic.

The impact will extend well beyond COVID-19, including the economic and social barriers that will further limit their access to services and ongoing participation as citizens. [The Dignity Project](#) will be telling these stories and finding solutions.

Waldschmidt, Anne & Marie, Sepulchre. (2019). Citizenship: reflections on a relevant but ambivalent concept for persons with disabilities. *Disability & Society* 34(3). Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2018.1543580>

World Health Organisation (2011). *World Report on Disability*. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report.pdf

Visit our website at: www.hopkinscentre.edu.au/the-dignity-project