

# What Do We Mean by #AuthenticInclusion



**May 1, 2024**

As we kick off another Community Living Month, we at Community Living Ontario want to talk about “authentic inclusion”. It’s easy to include people if they’re only being included with everyone else who has a disability. We have terms for that sort of so-called “inclusion”: congregation and segregation.

So what do we mean by authentic inclusion? Authentic inclusion is about being part of the action. It’s about showing up regularly and frequently in ordinary places and doing typical things, like grocery shopping, meeting a friend for coffee, or volunteering at the community picnic. It’s also about being missed if you don’t show up in those typical places, doing those typical things. Finally, it’s about holding a valued place in the eyes, minds, and hearts of friends, family, neighbours, and community members, such as being the score keeper for a local baseball team or a cashier at the local grocery store.

I think that’s what we all want — to be seen, heard, and valued for who we are and what we have to offer. It seems obvious, and yet, unfortunately, we have a lot of history to say it’s not.

At Community Living Ontario, we certainly don’t have all the answers. But we know authentic inclusion when we see it, and we also know when it’s not authentic, such as planning an outing that’s only for people with a disability, or a dance where only people with intellectual disabilities are invited — and conversely, not inviting people with disabilities to the local dance or group outing.

So, let’s keep talking about it. Let us challenge ourselves with questions like “How might we?”, or “What would it take?”. And, because none of us have it all figured out, “What might we do in the meantime as we strive for authentic inclusion?”

It takes a village, and Community Living Ontario is that village — a village of families, support organizations, allies, and the all-important first voice of people with lived experience, all moving towards a day when everyone is authentically included.

None of us is anything alone, but we’re everything together.

Thanks for being a part of my village.

**Chris Beesley**

Mitchell and Erin’s Dad & CEO, Community Living Ontario

