Community Based Services

**CEC Policy Manual, 1997
Section Three, Professional Policies, Part 1 Chapter 6**

**Community-Based Services**

* Prerequisites
* Characteristics
* The Need for Flexibility and Development
* Prevention of Handicapping Conditions

**Prerequisites**
Significant nationwide trends, both to reduce the populations of institutions and to improve the services provided for those who are institutionalized, necessitate comprehensive public policies on community-based services. Numerous exceptional children and adults reside in institutions. The quantity and quality of educational and other service programs provided in these facilities vary greatly. Considerable evidence, however, has been collected demonstrating that many institutions for exceptional citizens have failed to meet the needs of their residents. Institutionalization, in many instances, has violated basic individual rights and fostered inhumane deprivation. Rights violated include the opportunity to live in a humane environment and be provided with individual programs of treatment designed to allow each person to develop to the greatest degree possible.

Despite public and professional awareness of deplorable institutional conditions, persons with exceptionalities who could not live in natural homes were routinely placed in institutions. Alternative service arrangements were usually not available and an implicit assumption was made that some persons with disabilities were incapable of growth. The lack of quality services and the stigma of negative attitudes must be changed.

The Council, recognizing the necessity for community-based services, maintains that the human services system must adhere to the principle of normalization to avoid destructive individual and societal consequences and adhere to the following prerequisites:

a.Central to a person's growth and dignity is a right to live within the community, with access to high quality and appropriate services.
b.A legal mandate with fixed responsibility must exist providing community services for all persons, including those now institutionalized.
c.The goal of community services is to assure the greatest developmental gains on the part of the individual through maximum flexibility in all services.
d.The ongoing process of normalizing the service system requires developing a continuum of community-based living environments and the selective use of the full range of services available to the entire community.
e.Multiple and diverse methods of safeguarding program quality are essential at every level of responsibility.
f.All programs provided to exceptional persons must include written standards governing service delivery.
g.When a state restricts an individual's fundamental liberty, it must adhere to the principle of least restrictive environment and, further, absolutely guarantee due process.

**Characteristics**
A comprehensive community-based service system for exceptional persons should reflect the following characteristics:

a.Services must meet the needs of persons of all ages, must accommodate the problems of individuals possessing all degrees of disabilities, and be available when needed and where needed by the individual.
b.Services must be appropriately located in populous neighborhoods and should be compatible with the surrounding community.
c.Services must be based upon a systematic plan for continuity which interrelates with other established services.
d.Services must have a legally vested authority which enables the fixing of responsibility and accountability with implementation power.
e.Services must be designed to permit the placement of exceptional persons in high quality programs in the least restrictive environment.
f.Services must be economically sound in meeting human development needs.

**The Need for Flexibility and Development**
Because of rapid changes and developments in the environmental factors that influence the characteristics of children and the conditions of their lives, special education should maintain a flexibility that permits it to adapt to changing requirements.

Some of the events and changes that have had major impact on special education in recent years are the following: a rubella epidemic, discovery of preventatives for retrolental fibroplasia, increasing numbers of premature births, increasing awareness of the deleterious effects of poverty and malnutrition, new techniques in surgical intervention, invention of individual electronic hearing aids, and adaptation of low-vision aids. Changes and developments in public health, medicine, technology, and social programs may have only a small total effect on school systems, but they frequently have major impacts on special education programs. Changes in one aspect of special education quickly are reflected in other aspects of the field as, for example, the rapid development of day school programs for children with exceptionalities which has been reflected in a more severely disabled population in residential schools.

Special educators must seek to be highly flexible in the provision of services and the use of technology and techniques to meet the changing needs of children with exceptionalities.

School administrators and special educators have particular responsibility for sustaining their professional awareness and development as a basis for changing programs to meet changing needs.

**Prevention of Handicapping Conditions**
Increasing knowledge of the biological and social causes of many handicapping conditions now makes some conditions preventable. The Council believes that appropriate prenatal counseling and care and intervention services could prevent or reduce the severity of many handicapping conditions. Therefore, The Council believes that there should be substantial governmental attention and resources devoted to prevention and the amelioration of the impact of handicapping conditions including:

a.Research and development
b.Public awareness
c.Prenatal services
d.Child- and family-centered early intervention services
e.Family and parenting education and support programs for teenagers and other high-risk populations
f.Reduction of social and environmental factors that cause handicapping conditions.

The Council for Exceptional Children.
(1997). CEC Policy Manual, Section Three (pp. 71--92)
Reston, VA: Author