

Our Mission

It is our wish:

- 1. That our congregation will become engaged, educated and informed advocates for members and their families and for others within our county living with disabilities.**
- 2. That our congregation will continue to support and be more sensitive to issues of inclusiveness and hospitality toward our members and their families who are living with disabilities.**
- 3. That our efforts will build upon UU principles, to be carried out over a long time. It will take time to create a change in attitude, assimilate these changes and provide hands-on experiences that will enrich the lives of congregants and help them to understand and appreciate the needs of people living with disabilities.**

In our congregational words of promise, “Together we covenant to care for this religious community. We will minister to one another, encourage each other in our spiritual growth, and work together towards a vision of a just and sustainable earth.” Let it be so.

Grounding

This issue is core to our UU principle of valuing the worth and dignity of every individual and it links to the current identity and theology/philosophy of UUs.

The UUA promotes congregational advocacy on local and national levels in regard to the lives of people living with disabilities as stated in the UUA Board of Trustees meeting minutes of April 2007:

From the UUA Board of Trustees
Charge adopted: **April 21-22, 2007 Page 12**

The Accessibilities Committee is a committee of the UUA Board that provides information helpful to the Board in a continued assessment and evaluation of how current policies (or lack thereof) impact the ability of our congregations to meet the need of people living with disabilities. Meeting the needs of people living with disabilities in this context includes:

- The removal of barriers to participation or involvement in congregational life, including, but not limited to, leadership, fellowship, social action, religious education and worship.**
- Congregational advocacy on local and national levels in regard to issues concerning the lives of people living with disabilities.**

Accountability:

Our work will be most effective over time, systematically making small changes. We will work for change within five parameters: education, service, witness, advocacy and community organization.

Fit:

We have informed and Inspiring leaders who could represent a UU perspective on the subject. We have:

1. UUs active in the field's various professions, (Case management, social service, special education, etc.)
2. Church volunteers active in organizations serving Disabled individuals. An internal inventory of our congregation will help us determine other individuals' agency and organizational connections.
3. Individuals in the congregation with special needs and disabilities whom we can better serve.
4. We have people with advocacy experience.
5. We have made our building accessible because our space was exclusionary to members and visitors. We have addressed some of the needs of people with disabilities in the past, and, now though educational awareness and advocacy, we can build a greater understanding of the evolving needs of individuals and families within and beyond our walls.
6. We have a unique opportunity to actively contribute to a scholarship fund created through PossAbilities that honors the lifelong work of one of our congregants within the special needs community. It is the "Kathe Yoss Youth Scholarship Fund," which provides financial assistance to youth with disabilities to participate in recreational opportunities within the community of Rochester. It would be fitting for our congregation to consider this for a donation in the future.

Opportunity

There has never been a congregational stand on disability issues, other than our building's accessibility. Creating educational awareness, much less taking a collective stand legislatively, takes time, consistency and patience. To make real and significant changes that improve the lives of individuals and their families takes time and effort. To change our cultural values takes time and deep reflection. To acknowledge the existing needs takes our awareness. To change the mindset of a community takes all of us. However, these are issues of social justice worthy of our Congregation's attention and support. The opportunity is there to tap into the following:

1. We have organizations in the community with which we can partner and make volunteer opportunities known to our members.
2. We have members in the congregation willing to take the lead.
3. We have legislators in our congregation who can send the message.
4. We have families/individuals within our congregation who need our support.

5. We have educational opportunities through Life Span Faith Development working closely with the DRE.
6. We have needs within our community that are not being met For example, in Olmsted County we have more than 180 families on a waiting list without hope of receiving waived services. We can be a voice for this silent, vulnerable population and advocate through letter writing, testimony, etc.
7. We can broaden our congregation's understanding and awareness of these issues through our ministry to each other and through our opportunities to share, to listen to each other's stories and to take action for change.