



National Core Indicators™ DATA BRIEF HIGHLIGHTS

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By Elizabeth Pell

Friendships
enrich the
lives of people
with
intellectual
and
developmental
disabilities
(I/DD) just as
they enrich
the lives of
people
without
disabilities.

Research has shown friendships are good for us! Having friends improves our health, sense of well-being, and our quality of life. But in terms of the impact on our health, all friendships are not the same. In the general population, friendships with a more positive impact on health are those with people beyond our family members.

In a new National Core Indicators™ (NCI™) data brief, we found adults with I/DD also have some very different life experiences depending on who their friends are. The data brief is titled, *What Do NCI Data Show About Friendship and Life Outcomes for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities?*

This short summary shares highlights from the data brief -- the main findings. To find out all about the NCI data, comparison groups, statistical differences, research about friendships and well-being, and resources, please see the full report at:

http://www.nationalcoreindicators.org/upload/core-indicators/NCI_DataBrief_Friendship_FINAL.pdf.

These highlights and resources are useful for self-advocacy organizations, quality councils, family members, and direct support professionals and managers to learn about NCI evidence that friendship, particularly friendships with general community members, is associated with better life experiences.

The NCI team compared 2 groups of adults with I/DD receiving services. Group 1 had adults whose friends are family or staff. We called Group 1 the **limited friendships** group. The limited friendships group also included those without friends. Group 2 had adults whose friends included family and staff, plus other people with disabilities, and general community members. We called Group 2 the **expanded friendships** group.

Some important differences between these friendship groups were found across NCI outcomes. (Outcomes include many life experiences of adults with I/DD.) Different life experiences between limited and expanded friendship groups were found in these outcome areas:

- Community Integration
- Relationships
- Rights and Respect
- Work and Volunteer Activity

Personal Characteristics

We found differences in the personal characteristics between friendship groups. Those with **expanded friendships** more often:

- Were Female
- Used speech to communicate
- Moved around independently (without a wheelchair or mobility aid)
- Lived in their own home or apartment, and
- Did not have a diagnosed mental health condition or behavioral challenge label.

Most of these findings on personal characteristics and friendships are not surprising, except for living in one's own apartment or home. You may have thought living in your own home might mean you'd be lonelier. But adults who had expanded friendships were more likely to live in their own homes or apartments. News you can use!

People with
expanded
friendships
are more
likely to live
in their own
home or
apartment!

People with wider friendship networks are more likely to have paid community jobs!

A paid, integrated community job means paid activity in a place where people with and without disabilities work together.

Community Inclusion

Adults with expanded friendships more frequently engaged in these integrated activities in their communities:

- Shopping (for food or clothes)
- Running errands
- Going out for entertainment
- Eating out at a restaurant
- Attending a religious center or spiritual practice
- Exercising

Work & Volunteer

Adults with expanded friendships were more likely to be employed in a paid community job and to volunteer in their communities.

Relationships

Adults with expanded friendships more frequently:

- Had someone to talk to if they felt afraid
- Saw friends when they wanted to
- Were able to date without restrictions
- Participated in a self-advocacy group, meeting, or event, or had the opportunity to participate and decided not to.
- And people with expanded friendships were less likely to feel lonely.

Rights & Respect

Adults with expanded friendship networks more frequently:

- Retained their legal rights to make decisions about their lives (e.g., did not have a legal guardian or conservator)
- Reported that other people let them know before entering their home
- Reported that other people let them know before entering their bedroom
- Had enough privacy at home
- Used the telephone or internet when they wanted to
- Reported that their mail/email was never opened or read without their permission
- Could be alone with visitors at home

Now That You Know.... What can you do?

We hope this information helps you understand the different life experiences found for adults with expanded friendship networks.

You can use this NCI data to open a dialogue with provider agency or state agency staff to explore policies and practices that impact expanded social networks for people with I/DD.

The resources on the following page can be helpful as people with I/DD expand their relationships and friendships to include general community members.



CAUTION!

While it's tempting to think expanded friendships CAUSED these better life outcomes, we cannot make that claim!

NCI shows that the differences are real and not due to chance, but not that expanded friendships **caused** better life outcomes. Proving that would require another kind of analysis. Thanks for keeping this in mind!

Free Friendship Resources!

Friends, Connecting People with Disabilities and Community Members, by Angela Novak Amado, PhD.

This free resource and activity workbook is an easy to understand how-to guide for direct care professionals, managers, and others to assist people with disabilities to form relationships with people in their communities. Available at: <http://rtc.umn.edu/friends/>

State Friendship Initiative and Toolkit for Building Friendships

at Work: The Massachusetts Department of Developmental Disabilities recognized the important role that friendships play in quality of life and launched an initiative called “Widening the Circle” to educate all people about the benefits of relationships between people with disabilities and people without disabilities. Widening the Circle has resources to help people engage in and sustain relationships. One resource is a toolkit for supporting friendships at work. It can be used by employment specialists, job developers and job coaches. The free toolkit includes suggestions on how to maximize the chances of meaningful relationships between people with I/DD and their co-workers at key stages of the employment process. Available at: <http://thearcofmass.org/building-friendships-at-work-toolkit/>

Questions? Comments? Please Contact Us!

We welcome your feedback and questions. If you want to discuss this report or have questions about the NCI project, please contact: Dorothy Hiersteiner, NCI Project Coordinator, at dhiersteiner@hsri.org.

Again, these are highlights from the larger data brief titled, *What Do NCI Data Show About Friendship and Life Outcomes for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities?* The full data brief is free and available at: http://www.nationalcoreindicators.org/upload/core-indicators/NCI_DataBrief_Friendship_FINAL.pdf.

For additional information on the National Core Indicators (NCI) initiative, public reports, and past data briefs, please visit: www.nationalcoreindicators.org.