CAC Corner: Real Disabilities vs Perceived Disabilities

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CAC CORNER: REAL DISABILITIES VS PERCEIVED DISABILITIES

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This CAC Corner blog is written by Matthew Bone, a family representative member of the CPD’s Consumer Advisory Council.

We are a visually oriented people. We take what we see as the truth, even though that is often not the case. Recently I have had the opportunity to ponder this a bit.

I met a young man who appears very energetic, and he has a disability.

He wears hearing aids, but with them he hears pretty well. Yet, when people go up to talk to him, I bet that, because they can see his hearing aids, they talk louder to him than they would if they did not see them. The visual perception is, he cannot hear. In reality his hearing is a controlled disability. (Yes, controlled disability is a term I am using that may not be a real term...)

This young man has bigger health issues that affect every aspect of his life. These health issues are not readily apparent, and so people are unaware of these disabilities.

I know another young man who appears to be a normal young man. Thanks to medications, many of his issues are also controlled, but he has some cognitive issues that are not. Most of these come from having been born to a mother who drank heavily. Outwardly, there is no sign of this disability, and it is something that is not controlled. Most people are unaware of this disability.

Sometimes, the things that present the biggest disabilities are environmental and have nothing to do with our physical or mental state of being. The lack of transportation, or accessibility to a building, or the inability to access information are all, in their own ways, things that cause disabilities for the people affected by them.

What we need to do as individuals and as communities is to look at things which hinder the ability of a person or groups of people, and try to identify our perception of what the problem is. Then try to go beyond what we understand, and learn what the person with the disability sees as the problem.

I do like the term differently-able, because we are all differently-able in different parts of our lives. Given the proper chances and assistance when needed, many people we perceive to have insurmountable problems can excel, and by helping them, we can only succeed in helping ourselves and everyone around us.