

Genia: Well. Hello. Hello. Thank you for joining me today. I'm excited that you're here to participate in this conversation with Bruce Uditsky. Now, Bruce is the, has a Masters of Education and he's the CEO Emeritus of Inclusion Alberta and its former CEO for over 25 years. Bruce is internationally recognized for his leadership and advocacy and social justice and inclusion for individuals with intellectual disabilities in their families. He served in an advisory capacity to governments on many issues contributing to the development of legislation and policies that advanced inclusion. He was instrumental in the development of significant disability related legislation and standards in Alberta, including the Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act, Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Act, and Alberta's education standards on the inclusion of students with disabilities. Bruce is the principal founder of Inclusive Post-Secondary Education and co-founder of the Rotary Employment Partnerships, both of which have been formally recognized as world-leading innovations.

Genia: He has consulted and taught in many countries and is the author and coauthor of books, chapters and articles on inclusion. He's the parent of two sons, one of whom has disabilities. Bruce is also the recipient of Alberta's Centennial Medal, the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal, multiple Communicator of the Year awards, A Paul Harris Fellowship, and the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities Gary McPherson Leadership award, among other acknowledgements. I mean, what's the takeaway here? The takeaway is that Bruce knows an awful lot about inclusion and he also knows an awful lot about segregation. And that's why we were able to have this really interesting conversation about the lies of segregation. Let's get started.

Genia: Bruce, thank you so much for joining me today. I'm really, really excited that you are here and that you've agreed to be on the Good Things in Life Podcast. I wonder if you would start by talking a little bit about who you are and what your background is and what your relationship is to people with disabilities and their families.

Bruce: Okay, well, I'll try to do that and I'll be, I'm not brief enough, Genia. You can, feel free to interrupt me and say, "Okay, that's enough."

Genia: Okay, fair enough.

Bruce: I'm close to celebrating, I guess you could say that. Next year will be my 50th year of working actually in this field. So, 49 years as of this year. And I started like many did, given my age and generation, working in the facilities for people with intellectual disability and challenging behaviors. Children and adults was introduced to a Wolf Wolfensberger at a relatively early point in my career, which basically moved me in the direction if you want a really both attempting to liberate people from those facilities. And then I'm working to enable people to have good lives in community. Probably, my affinity if you want or calling has really been to work with families a period of time now. So, quite conceivably, I've worked personally with thousands of families over these decades and held a variety of different positions in the field.

Bruce: And probably, most recently I've just left after a little over 25 years of being the CEO of Inclusion Alberta. I'm now the CEO ex-officiate which means I work less. But it's sort of a way of saying that, you know, sort of old but can't quite get rid of me yet. So, still hanging around, giving advice, doing training, trying to do a little more writing. It was about 15 years, I think, in the field. And I met Donna, my wife, when we worked together in the early seventies. And in, I think it was about 1985, we'd already had a son actually and wanted to always, you know, have more children. But we had been committed to actually at least next adopting a child with special needs.

Bruce: And that had just been something that was important to us as a couple. And so, in 1985, we actually adopted Todd, my older son is Jared. Todd was somebody I met because I had the practicum students I was teaching at college for a number of years. I had practicum students, different placements that included early intervention or childhood programs. In this instance, they were actually segregated programs where I had students and I would ask around as I went to that pro, those practicum placements, to supervise students if anyone knew a child that needed a family. Someone said to me, "The head of that program, he needs a family. You can't see me pointing, but he needs a family. He's the most difficult child we've ever worked with." And I said, "Okay. We'll see if it's possible to adopt them."

Bruce: Todd was someone who was not up for adoption actually. He'd been in the child welfare at that point in time, six years. He had been apprehended along with his brothers and sisters. He was apprehended at the age of two. He was the youngest, brothers were placed in one foster homes, sisters and another and he, and a third. So, you know loss of totality if he wants totality of his family. And the brothers were, this is what we learned later, were adopted and the sisters were adopted as well. But Todd was considered unadoptable because of the challenges that difficult behaviors and disabilities that he had. And so, he moved then, by the time we adopted him, he had moved seven times. So, he lived in seven different foster homes between the ages of two and seven actually. You know, you can only try to imagine was I don't that does to a child who have no stability in their lives to not know the meaning of family.

Bruce: He acquired a host of labels, reactive attachment disorder, oppositional defiance disorder. We didn't learn till later that he had fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and also probably post traumatic stress disorder. And when I talk about of Todd, he's done presentations with me as well. And you, they don't know that he's yet, you know, don't know the story about being adopted and so on. And you ask people, "What is his life look like today?" Do you think as an adult, people would often say things like, "Well, he could be on the streets. It could be in jail. He could be dead. He could be on drugs. He could be in a facility, a place for people with behavioral difficulties, etc." And no one would be in effect surprised by that. The trajectory of his life was already in many ways set.

Bruce: And there would be no one responsible. No one knew him. The only time a worker showed up was to move them essentially. And so, Todd came to live with us

actually, be a part of our struggle. In spite of the fact that both of us had worked with people with behavioral difficulties, it's a little different living with somebody actually than that. And because we didn't know yet FASD till later in life, we didn't, weren't aware of the different strategies we should be using that would promote more success for him. But we were deeply committed to inclusion already and our older son without disabilities, since childhood actually, to be an inclusive context. So, our view was inclusion was as important to him even though he doesn't have any disability as it would be to a child with disabilities.

Genia: Right.

Bruce: This was part of our value as a family. This is part of how honored people to live their lives, we wanted to live our life that way. And so, our son was in inclusive childhood settings if you want an inclusive school setting. And then of course he wanted the same thing for Todd. Part of what I think is an important part of the story. So, Todd was never included in anything until we adopted him actually. He was initially, besides the segregated early childhood programs, he was in a special ed class for students with intellectual or developmental disabilities. And because of his behavioral difficulties, he's then moved to the behavior class where you could then share and learn more behaviors obviously.

Genia: Right. Yeah.

Bruce: So, once he came to live with us, we then went to our neighborhood school where our son was already being educated. And I can still remember that today because it's one of the first times as a parent I was experiencing, you know, what it meant when somebody else might potentially have some degree of control over my child's life. No one would have questioned our choices with respect to our older son, Jared. But whether or not they would accommodate Todd would be a different understanding. And the principal was welcoming and warm. He, you know, Todd lives in our community, etc. He's welcome. And that was Todd's beginning of inclusive education. So, he's had a fully inclusive education right through elementary and middle school, if you want a high school, inclusive post secondary education as well at the University of Alberta. And that, so whatever we did as a family, Todd was included. He was included in sports and downhill skiing, traveled to Europe, traveled to Disney land, all the typical things. And if he had a moment of rage or a temper tantrum, we'd just do what clever parents do everywhere is turn to each other and say, "Wonder whose kid that is" or "Where are those parents."

Bruce: So, the important point for us is that Todd didn't have to change, you know, and no longer have difficulties in order to be included. Inclusion was in fact for us, the only thing that could potentially and there was no guarantee of course, could literally and heal to the greatest degree possible. Never completely. Those early life wounding experiences, those scars would remain forever. And you can't undo what was done. You know, completely and totally and thought was a very challenging behavioral into a adulthood. And then whether it was our efforts or maturity or who knows,

etc, that's no longer a part of who he is today. He's just turned 41, actually. And people that have only known him in his adult years essentially, and most of his adult years cannot connect that this, the child in terms of his aggression and destructiveness and challenges to the person that he is. Today, it's as if it's two totally different people. He's employed, he works, manages two jobs actually at the moment that works four days a week, pretty much full time of both those jobs. I think that's pretty impressive to manage two different job responsibilities, etc. And just a few days ago, he celebrated his sixth wedding anniversary.

Genia: Oh, wow!

Bruce: So, he fell in love or they both fell in love a few years ago now. And we knew something was going on when we would drive them around and they'd be in the back seat. And Colleen is then was future wife was talking and Todd was perfectly well behaved, quiet listening, you know, the ideal sort of potential husband.

Genia: Yes.

Bruce: They fell in love and with the steaks, two families and we both have a bit of individualized funding and they live in their own plot, babysit our grandchildren. I'm still today who are, I forget 10 and 11, I think. And so, if you tried to neck what his life looks like today, if you want or over the last so many years to his early history, the only way there's no straight line, right? The only thing I think is that he was deeply embedded to the greatest degree possible with struggle and challenge, right? We were at our wit's end at time. We always couldn't make it. We couldn't always make it work perfectly, but having a fully inclusive life trays all those opportunities for him that would never have been there otherwise. So, part of my commitment to inclusive education, which is part of having an inclusive life actually comes to some degree not exclusively from our experiences as parents.

Genia: So, I didn't know any of that story, so thank you for sharing that with me. And for everybody who's listening. And when you talk about a fully inclusive life and fully inclusive school experience, specifically around school, what do you mean by inclusive education or a fully inclusive school experience?

Bruce: Well, listen, really even more important question today than it was many years ago because the term inclusive education is law has been co-opted. Everybody uses it. It's very hard to hit today to have people stand up and say, "I'm an art and segregationist."

Genia: Right.

Bruce: You have a very popular way of positioning it.

Genia: Yeah.

Bruce: And so, we get everything called inclusion and a number of people have much more articulate than I have written extensively about this, such as Roger Slee for example. So, the, we've sort of lost the essence of what that's meant. And now when I have a conversation with people, I need to be able to clarify with them what we mean by an inclusive education. And actually, I published a chapter on this I think in '92. That's how far back this goes, actually. And that is your in a the regular classroom or regular environment if you want, in which they're basically your same age peers without disabilities. And that's typically how most schools, at least in North America are still constructed today. Unless you're in some alternative school set and you're with other kids the same age as you typically and wherever the learning is taking place, whether it's a regular classroom or the gym or outdoors, etc. Or art classes or a learning lab or an open area, you are an integral part of that context and the teacher is responsible for your learning in, although there's no Canadian legislation with respect to education in every jurisdiction, the teacher actually is the only one that has the legal responsibility.

Bruce: If you want for teaching a student, there may be other supports needed, but those are supports that really I'm there to assist the entirety of the class if you want. And you have only one curriculum. So, whatever the curriculum of the day is that people argue about that and change that, etc. But there are six curriculums if you want lots of different ways of teaching. The curriculum, whatever that curriculum is, that's your curriculum. You don't have a separate curriculum. You are, the curriculum is modified and adapted, the instruction is modified, adapted. And so, you participate in the regular curriculum to the maximum degree possible. You participate in every aspect of school life that everybody else participates in. If there are school clubs for example, or a yearbook or a school ambassadors or crossing guards, depending on your age and interest, those will be open to you as well.

Bruce: And to be supported to participate field trips, whether they're to Europe or to the ski hill or wherever they might be right. And so, that's a quick snapshot of what an inclusive education might look like. And it may be that we cannot figure that out all the time. Students, there are sometimes complexities that challenge us. That's our responsibility as educators and allies to figure that out. And we may have a student not in a class full time and they may be doing something else with a smaller group of students. They may be in the resource center or the library, but there's nothing about not being an irregular classroom full time when you're not there, you should be segregated and congregated. You're still in the vigil. And so, the question then would be for that time period where we're not sure how to maximally have you participate in the regular classroom or it's too disruptive, let's go do something else but tailored to you as an individual student, maybe with a couple of other kids. And then when you're ready, we moved back to the regular classroom and see, we're always trying to minimize the time away if you want to maximize the opportunity to be included. But we don't retreat if you want because there's a challenge to saying, well, therefore being segregated and congregated is a value that's in there in the logic,

Genia: Right. I was that, that is exactly where my mind was going was that the fact that we can't always figure out how to make it work today or in this particular situation or perhaps because there might be some, somebody might have some needs that can't be met in the classroom. So, for example, maybe some people need a little bit of time by themselves, you know, that's kind of mutually exclusive, that doesn't actually undermine, excuse me, your definition of what inclusion means that those things are not mutually exclusive. And also, you know, I think that when people, I do hold the ideal and the value of inclusion and they can't figure it out, there's almost like an ego about it, you know, instead of just saying, well, we don't have the answer to that question yet. We're still working it out or we haven't, you know, we just have failed to find the right solution or, you know, we don't have the resources that there's then therefore it doesn't work as opposed to therefore, we just haven't, we haven't sorted it out. And I think that sort of it's a, human fallibility and a lack of perfection doesn't undermine the actual ideal of inclusion as being something that should, that, you know, should be a work towards. And that is a valid and a best practice way of approaching education.

Bruce: Yeah, I think that's absolutely true though. I mean children's should be a mystery in a wonder to us. And so, we're not always going to be able to figure them out if you like, whether or not they have a disability, but, you know, when life goes wrong for someone without a disability, you don't typically hear people say, well, it's inclusion that failed.

Genia: That's right. That's exactly, yeah.

Bruce: If it's anything else, people in effect draw people further in, pull people in. You have to some degree they're finding themselves marginalized or ostracized or on the sidelines. We know that they will feel better about themselves, have a better sense of self and do better in life if we create and draw them in to create belonging and draw them in actually. And the part of the idea of inclusion is that the rest of our lives are somewhat unpredictable. So, I'm not sure this was part of your individual personal plan to be here doing a podcast at the moment when you were growing up. But life takes different directions. Yep. And if, you know, go back to Todd's story, if you didn't have that inclusive life, we could predicted what his life looked like actually. So, we create opportunity and possibility through inclusion and it's just as it's true for those of us without disabilities, we live those of us without disabilities, inclusive lives pretty much. We don't talk about it that way. We don't describe it that way until it's threatened actually. Then suddenly you find people talking about inclusion if you want, when they're feeling marginalized and isolated or not wanted or valued. So, all we're essentially seeking because regardless of someone's disability, they're no differently. Human is the same human experience. Those of us who are, you know, don't disabilities expect for ourselves and society creates for us.

Genia: Why do you think it is that the response to challenging situations or times in people's lives is so different for specifically students that don't have an identified disability versus students that do?

Bruce: Oh, that's a complicated question actually. I'm not sure how briefly I can answer it. The essence of it, which will, you know, not serve very well to podcasts maybe, is that it is, seems more challenging for people in to identify with people with significant intellectual disabilities as fully and completely inherently human as anyone else with the same desire for a meaningful life, with the same desire for friendships and relationships and purpose and meaning in life. And there's lots of evidence to that effect. Other social movements have made more progress in shorter periods of time because it seems easier for people to identify with other, you know, historically devalued conditions if you want. Then it has been to see the essence of humanness in somebody with a significant or multiple disabilities. And unfortunately, school systems have a history by enlarge, and actually from their very beginning in filtering people out.

Bruce: They were never designed from their beginning era as if you want to be fully inclusive, you know, and so, and they continue to have that culture. And so, those who have, and we all know them, you know, they're across our country have amazing examples of long term quality inclusive education. But you'll happen to have to be lucky enough as a parent for example, to live where that leader is, that teacher is that school principal, is that school district is and if you move or change religion for example, I have a different religion rather, you can find yourself in fact without inclusion and what that essentially illustrates that, you know, quality, inclusive education is not tied to resources at all. Actually it's clearly tied to leadership and values because in the same province you could live in one community and have access to quality inclusive education, move across the street being another system's boundaries and not have access to inclusion.

Bruce: You could have it one year and then the principal changes and it's not there or you didn't have it and that it is there. The funding didn't change. The people really haven't changed. The training of the educators really hasn't changed the same neighborhood. Kids are still there. Whoever's going to that school, what you have really is exemplified if you want what it means to have a values based leadership that's committed to inclusion. There will never be enough money for education. It's going to be a challenge. And if we value each child equally, then the ethic we're going to apply to our resource, distribute distribution is one of equity. If there isn't enough for everybody, then everybody's shares equitably in what there isn't enough of, as opposed to saying, as a child with a disability, now we don't have enough money, therefore you wait, you go to the sidelines, you know, you get segregated and segregation doesn't cost less than inclusion does. In fact, there's some evidence that suggested like costs more than inclusion. So, you're really making a choice as a school division if you want, or a school as to how to allocate the resources that you have, and you clearly, you know, New Brunswick is not our richest province. I hope that's okay to say. I think that's the reality. Yeah. That's a, you know, have in fact the most extensive access to inclusive education for students with intellectual disabilities because they've chosen to value every student equally and distribute their resources equitably.

Genia: Yeah, it's my personal example of that is that my son attends a school that is geographically isolated from the rest of the schools in that board. And that means that all of the experts that board has onboard are not as easily available and accessible to my son's school as they are to the schools that are clustered together. And yet, maybe despite, or perhaps I actually think because of that the school has been able to figure out much the school has been wildly successful in providing my son with a quality education without a good bulk of the resources that are available from the board. And that I'm not suggesting that the board is not invested in my son's school or in my son. That's not what I mean at all. But certainly the specialized services in the segregated programs and the most of the resources that would fall under the category of like a budget line of special education. That stuff doesn't show up in my son's school very often, right? Yeah.

Bruce: Segregation that actually produced inclusive lives and good lives. We would have an over abundance of evidence today. Yes. Because we've been doing it for a very long time, right? Very extensively. And therefore we ought to be able to look around our communities and our neighborhoods and our workplaces and we would see people with different disabilities if you want, or abilities of being well included and no such thing exists actually So, if you want a continuing segregated life, segregated special education provides that for you. But if you actually want a life where you are a part of the life of everybody else, that vacation helps to contribute to that.

Genia: So, one of the phrases that you used when we were talking about this podcast episode was the lies of segregation. And I just wanted to put it out there kind of as a topic heading because I love it and I think it's so on point because the, we there is still, which I find in credibly frustrating, still an awful lot of conversation and I think confusion about the capacity of segregation to support people with disabilities to have good lives. And this is in the absence of evidence to that effect and actually in contradiction to a great, great, very large body of evidence that says that say life is segregation actually doesn't lead to a particularly good life for people with disabilities. So, without being, you know, I don't have a series of very specific questions about the lies of segregation, but I just wanted to kind of open the floor to that topic for you and let you kind of take it away and see where we end up.

Bruce: Let me try. Let's back up for a second, a little bit in to say you're, you're right about the fact that the, in terms of research or evidence, which has existed since the 60s, that we can find the first publish studies comparing segregated education to theater inclusive education. So, the overwhelming body of evidence by far in terms of research is that students with disabilities, intellectual disabilities do better inclusive settings and they're doing segregated settings. In fact, they will lose abilities in segregated settings. Part of the challenge though is research doesn't necessarily change people's belief sets and, right. Right. And so, it's a value to have that on your side. When that happen, inclusive education for example, or inclusion in life are likely to live a longer lives are likely to be healthier. For example, we know that if you have, if you're segregated, you're a greater abuse and violence in your lives. So,

the rate of abuse of violence in the lives, people with disabilities, particularly girls and women is higher than it is for girls and women without disabilities.

Bruce: So, we already know that to be a fact if you want. What we do also know is the greater degree one is included, one minimizes or lessens the risk of abuse and violence in people's lives. So, if we were saying to parents, you have an opportunity to have your child receiving an inclusive education and therefore reduce or minimize the risk of abusive of violence in your life, or you have an opportunity to have them segregated and increase their vulnerability to abuse and violence, people might make different choices than the way it's presented to them today actually. So, that isn't necessarily well shared or even understood in fact by practitioners of segregated, um, uh, education. Whatever could be done for a student in terms of modifying or adapting curriculum or particular instructional strategies can be done in a regular classroom.

Bruce: There's nothing about segregating people, right? That provides for an opportunity for a particular approach to an educational strategy, right? It's just four walls of a classroom, you could do it elsewhere. But what you lose in the segregating, the opportunity to learn, for example, from peers. And in many ways kids learn more and better from their peer if they want whether it's good or bad things, right? So that's what they learn from teachers. So there's no, you know, you're in a classroom where all the kids have difficulty with language or interpreting the world or being understood for example, so you don't have, instead of a language rich environment and in which other kids could more better interpret your non verbal communication, you're more restricted than when you're in the segregated context, right? In terms of a learning opportunity and modeling.

Bruce: And what, at least some research data shows, in fact, is you get less instruction time in a special ed segregated classroom that you get in a regular classroom. So, this notion that it's a smaller class with more staff, right? Somehow you're going to get more attention, that's not born out actually by research data. People spend more time managing the complexity of all those different disabilities together and they focus on disability than they do when they're actually included. You don't have the resource if you want of peers actually. By natural supports to provide examples of positive learning to come up with innovative ways of helping somebody learn something. So, you're actually are spending more time than just physically managing the environment. In addition to that, because the kids in a surrogate classroom may even share a common label, the diversity in the classroom can actually be greater than it is in a regular classroom. Just because you have a common label, there's actually little about you that's really common.

Genia: Right. Absolutely.

Bruce: Unique individuals then you have additional complexities. And so, now we've created a highly complex environment that actually gets reduced in terms of understanding that complexity, right? So, you get actually far less individualization in

a segregated special ed class by in large than you do in a regular inclusive education classrooms. And you can have excellent, wonderful teachers in a special education classroom, but they will still be limited by the environment and the context. They cannot escape that. Take that same teacher and place them in an inclusive class, then they have every opportunity if you want to capitalize to a greater degree on the talent they bring to the classroom.

Genia: Right.

Bruce: So, the classroom doesn't make for poor teachers actually. It makes for poor opportunities for real learning to progress to the degree possible. And so, the expectation is if you'd been segregated, well then you ought to go on maybe to a group home or a day program or a workshop or some training program. It's not onto life.

Genia: What's the difference, Bruce?

Bruce: Sorry?

Genia: What's the difference?

Bruce: Well, if you're an inclusive classroom and have family of course,

Genia: Sorry. I just want to clarify what I mean, sorry. I should've been more specific. What's the difference between a segregated workshop and a group home and life? You said that there are sort of you diverge there, you fork to there. I'm interested in the difference.

Bruce: Well, let me try if I can. Throughout human history and today if you look across every culture, a home is in a, if he wanted essential human need. Okay. So, typically we have that as family when we're growing up, then we create our home as we get older. What those homes and houses look like would be vastly different over time of human history or from culture to culture. But we can decide what it means to us, okay. You know, in the deepest sense of the word. It's not just the physical structure, it's a sense of belonging, of sanctuary, of a place that reflects who I am. It's part of my identity, right? It's part of my longing as they move into adulthood, whatever the construction of that housing actually looks like. Okay. And so, if you're living an inclusive life, the idea is as you move into adulthood eventually, right?

Bruce: You'll be in a place that's truly of you have a home the way all of the rest of us without disabilities aspire to and need and create for ourselves, right? A particular over time as we moved through adults in a group home isn't the home, it's somebody else's facility. That's operated. Okay. Where you may not live with anybody you necessarily know or have chosen to live with in fact, and where your life is often regulated actually by systems if you want. And so, and then you are in fact governed if you want typically by the nature of the supports that are provided

to you. So, how many, you know, how many people have less life? If you, life, if you want less friendships, less inclusion in life, they're less likely to have people without disabilities over for dinner, for example.

Bruce: That's likely to have a rich social network. And if you look at social networks for a moment, look at people without disabilities, the evidence is very clear as been for a long time. If you have a social network, which is true for most of us without disabilities, you're healthier, you live longer, you're more likely to be employed, have better jobs, be successful in life, etc. And if those of us without intellectual disabilities require others in our lives and a multiplicity of relationships to succeed and be safe and secure and healthy, then probably it's even true to a degrader degree for those with vulnerabilities,

Genia: Right. Yup.

Bruce: So, we don't enable people then. Look at how many people, any one of us without disabilities has met over the course of RSA schooling years to end up with a few good friends. It's in the thousands, typically lots of tens of thousands. And when you remove people from that and they've only been associated with a small group of other people actually who can't easily make a way through life on their own, they don't have an opportunity for what is essential to being a, having a good life because they've been robbed of the opportunity as have we without disabilities to form relationships with them. It's a loss for all of us.

Genia: Right. Absolutely. I did, well Al Condeluci did a live presentation actually, which was then transformed into a podcast episode on the topic of social capital and social networks and the impacts in our lives. So, I'll put the link to that episode in the show notes. That certainly directly relevant to what you were just talking about. So, I do want to get back to the lies of segregation. And I'm going to loop it around though and ask you a question. What about safety? So, you know, I hear you that teachers in segregated classes are not, you know, poor teachers necessarily, but that's an opportunity. It's a lost opportunity for good teaching, but you know, people who are working in segregated programs have chosen to do that. They care about people with disabilities and many, many parents believe that having their child in a segregated program with people, other people who are kind of air quotes "like them", which is an extremely problematic idea, which you've alluded to, but you know, and with people who are trained to be with them and train to keep them safe and supported is a safer option than an inclusive classroom.

Bruce: Yeah, that's an interesting belief people have because of course there's no evidence to that. Actually. It says some interesting things then about what you're saying about if you have other children without disabilities, that they're vicious, malicious monsters. And you certainly want to, want your child with disabilities being associated with. The children with that you have without disabilities who are associated with those other children if you want. The other is of course what we know part of it, what we know if you want. So, there's nothing about, we know that

community has the capacity that with dark side. Right? We know that. But nevertheless all of us without disabilities actually do everything we can to have the possibility of good communities actually. We don't abandon community and relationships because bad things happen actually. And we don't blame, you know, those overall ideas of a sense of belonging with others and participating with others, you know, as at fault for that.

Bruce: So, in recognizing the fact that there are dark sides to the community if you want. Okay. What we've done actually in removing people from that community is put them in less safe positions. So, if you're a child unable to speak, for example, can easily and readily communicate and you're in a place where you're congregated and segregated, we've actually increased the likelihood that something bad will happen to you. So, just looking at institutions for a moment. Okay. You can't find an institution anywhere for any devalued population that hasn't in time being exposed in terms of abuse and violence. And you can't just say somehow the people that work there were evil.

Genia: Right.

Bruce: It's the context. So, we know children with disabilities for example, are far more likely to be secluded actually and to be denied if you want, things in a classroom or to be marginalized, and there's no way of knowing.

Genia: Right.

Bruce: So, how can your child be less safe when you actually, no one can tell you what happened that day?

Genia: Right. Yeah.

Bruce: Something I have difficulty given the way I've framed it is comprehending, if my child is in irregular setting, I know other that's in the light of day, if you want. It's far more difficult for bad things to happen. There are too many other people around. There are kids that'll form relationships that will stand up for that child, that will protect that child, that will report, that will tell other people that's wrong. If you belittle that child, etc. And you have no knowledge of what's going on in that segregated classroom because it's not basically in the light of day. And we sort of have too many stories actually now of people sharing what happened to them, those who are able to, when they have been congregated and segregated. Now, neither is a guarantee either way, right?

Bruce: You can't guarantee people without disabilities won't encounter or something difficult or abuse in their lives. But we know that where we work on those challenges in the context of community. So, if we're trying to continue to reduce the, still the rate of domestic violence in people's lives, right? We haven't said to people, in fact, what you need to do to stop living in community.

Genia: Right.

Bruce: We haven't said what you need to do to stop forming relationships with others.

Genia: Yup.

Bruce: Right? And people that relied in fact in their relationship and others if you want to give them some degree of security and safety. So, this is a belief that people have that is not logical. And because it's a belief, it becomes very difficult to address. But, it is, I think, interesting perspective to say, well, what are you saying then about those kids in that classroom who don't have disabilities? Who are they going to grow up to be? Actually if you don't think they can accommodate, welcome and protect. Right. And who do you think those teachers are in those regular classrooms that you've put your other kids in with?

Genia: Yeah.

Bruce: So, it's an odd phenomenon to say somehow they're going to be safer in a place where I really can't have any way of knowing what really happened. Day, after day, year after year for a long period of time. I don't feel safe doing that myself.

Genia: Right. Yeah. One of the things that I have a vague idea about but I haven't been able to get really articulate about in my own mind is there seems to also be a sense that every, that now we're modern and so all the atrocities that we can look back over history, even 10 years ago, no longer are relevant now when thinking about segregated and congregated services. So, you know, we're more modern, we're more advanced. You know, we have better services, controls, better laws, better policies and better oversight. And so, there's a thought that some of the safety concerns that you're bringing up and citing historical examples of that, that's not like that anymore. Like our new systems are going to be better and therefore protective. And kind of related to this, although maybe this is not a safety issue. Maybe this is something else. There seems to be in my mind sort of at an attractiveness for some people around the specialist focus.

Genia: Kind of like that, like it's kind of an elite service. And if you want your child with a disability to have, you know, to grow to their potential and to meet their potential, you want all the services and the best services and the most focused targeted services, you know, even right down to teaching children with Angelman Syndrome, how to read versus teaching somebody with Down syndrome, how to read or you know, whatever the ... And I guess those are two different things, like the kind of coveting of or the belief in sort of science and technology and focused service implementation. And then this other idea that bad things don't happen anymore because we've somehow evolved as a species.

Bruce: Well, I don't know that we've evolved as a species, so that's a problem. Wouldn't that say that we've changed human nature and I think you could read the look of the news any day and you'd come to a different conclusion actually.

Genia: Right.

Bruce: In terms of human nature.

Genia: Yeah.

Bruce: I think we have to, it requires a lot of effort and work as a person, in fact, to try to be a good person.

Genia: So true. Every day I struggle every day.

Bruce: So, I don't see that human nature has evolved differently. So, that would be my personal perspective if you want. The other is that if you think your safety as a person or a child with disabilities is going to be secured on the basis of systems, I think that's very dangerous actually. Systems don't actually protect people. They, if you, so, I rely far more and while I think the evidence is there, it's still a personal perspective on the fact that my son with disabilities is far safer in life because he's connected, because he has relationships, because he has people that know him, because the pharmacist cares about him and make sure he takes his medications for example, because the person that cuts his hair knows him and his wife and so on and so forth, that he has his, in his case his brother and sister-in-law in his life and his wife has her sister's in her life and the people that her job that really care about her as well and look out for her and so on and so forth.

Bruce: That to me is what creates a sense of safety. I would feel less safe if you want, if Todd's life was totally dependent, if you want or not totally, but largely dependent. For example, on a human service system, we're in fact staff turnover at a tremendous rate where we're at a stage of development of human service system where jobs until are never completely filled. That is, there's always you can hire literally anybody because you're always looking for people. And so, the idea that you get, you would be safer with the rotating group of strangers coming through your life who really never get to know you. I have difficulty understanding why people feel they're then safe because the agency has rules actually when in fact safety really would come all of the relationship of the person, right? Where you're connected on the basis that you actually care about the person, not simply because you're paid to be there.

Bruce: It doesn't mean people are paid to be there, can't be caring. They obviously should be, but they're going to be limited because it's a job still, no matter how caring they are. And you need somebody with in people's lives that's there with a greater degree of continuity and personal connection and relationship to create safety in people's lives. So, I think of fearing inclusion because the world is made up of people

like you and I either it says something very trembling about you and I, for example, or it says something about people's perceptions of ordinary life, that is highly problematic because they get every day to go and live that life. So, while there arguing or viewing somebody's life with a disability, better off being in a segregated context, they actually get to continue to live their inclusive life.

Genia: Right.

Bruce: The staff that are paid to support people get to go and live an inclusive life when they're not at work. The families that are choosing segregate services, and some families clearly do, still get to live in inclusive life as individuals and families or with their other sons and daughters. So, that distinction between who is deserving of an inclusive life or who can benefit and value from one I think is based on very problematic perceptions of people with disabilities that somehow they're differently human in many ways than less than fully and completely human.

Genia: Right. And I think, I say this with utmost compassion and understanding for where parents are coming from in their fear to protect their children. But I think it also when people believe that their children are going to be safer in segregated classrooms with people who are, you know, self-selected to be there, although the self-selection is questionable, but, you know, special places for special people served by, you know, specialists. But it also says something about how, what people believe to be true about how lovable the person is. You know, like the idea that only when you put somebody in a place where people are, you know, specialized to be with them or who have chosen to be with them, it kind of implies that if they're just kind of in a regular classroom, that they're unlikely to be liked and form relationships and that's also a troubling, troubling idea.

Bruce: Yeah. I think that having the, you know, possibility of being liked and friends and relationships doesn't happen magically.

Genia: Yes. Yeah.

Bruce: So, it is, it takes work and effort and facilitation and skill and knowledge to create those possibilities.

Genia: Absolutely.

Bruce: And they don't always emerge.

Genia: Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely.

Bruce: And that could be hard for a parent in particular. So, when you're choosing an inclusive life, you're actually choosing the harder road because you are imagining and envisioning and wanting possibilities that may not actually always emerge. Using segregation is actually easier actually, because you're not, you're, the prize

you've set your eyes on for the future. Okay. Is not that of what might come from an inclusive life. You can say they'll be well looked after in this place or that place, etc. And you know, that might be possible. So, you're not expecting friendships, you're not going to be disappointed,

Genia: Right. Yeah. If you lower your expectations.

Bruce: So, you're not going to be disappointed, okay? You're not expecting friends to call, invite you to birthday party so you're not disappointed. So, it's not that families love any differently actually their kids with disabilities between them.

Genia: Yeah. No, that is certainly not what I meant to imply. Yeah.

Bruce: Their love is as deep and profound and equal. But their perceptions if you want, of what life can and should look like do. And that, what creates that difference if you want, is actually a perception of I first and foremost see my son or daughter as no different than my other kids without disabilities or the other kids down the street or the other kids on the playground in terms of the essence of their humanness. Okay. That they have, they know regardless of their means to be able to communicate or not, whether they belong, whether they're wanted, whether they're loved, right? And that they have as much need to that experience, even if they can't articulate that or have an even a nonverbal way of expressing it as anyone else does because it's really dangerous to perceive otherwise. So, if we don't know, and we're not certain, the only safe assumption is to presume, in fact, this person feels no differently than anyone else wants to belong, wants to be included. I mean, we have without disabilities, momentary rejections are alive sometimes more serious than that.

Genia: Yep.

Bruce: So, we know what the hurt is. But typically that's just a part of our life.

Genia: Yup.

Bruce: Not the totality of our life.

Genia: Right.

Bruce: So, we're actually relegating people then to the margins.

Genia: Yeah.

Bruce: Continuing experience rejection in the way that they're getting to watch life go by for others.

Genia: Right. Yeah. And that's, that's partially what I mean about the parents having a troublesome, or families having a troublesome question about how lovable their child is, is that it's born out by the deep devaluation and profound rejection that people with disabilities experience in community. But, so I'm in no way implying the parents don't love their kids or that they, you know, that's not what I mean. But it is sort of an interesting twist that you can either marginalize someone as a pretty profound act of rejection from the heart of community in order to prevent somebody from experiencing rejection ...

Bruce: Yes. That's right.

Genia: ... in the community. Yeah.

Bruce: Yeah. I think that when you're choosing an inclusive life and inclusive education, etc, you are then in the struggle of trying to change the culture and society. We are not a fully inclusive culture in society actually. And you have to make that decision if you want, initially as a parent and then more so as the person ages for themselves to tackle that. And the more families see that will to share, for example, hundreds of stories over decades of people living inclusive lives. Okay. Even though the path is never been smooth or easy, even though there have been setbacks and challenges, etc. What that means is parents of preschoolers, for example, okay, get to learn about inclusion, full inclusion in university college or technical institutes, what that looks like and what's possible and achievable. And so, you can recognize them as a parent of a very young child. That even though you're deeply loved this precious child, right? And want them to be safe and secure in life, you've actually unconsciously begun to limit what the possibilities are for them with your child without disabilities, if you have another child, life looks expensive. And we know that all of our dreams never get realized.

Genia: Right. Yup.

Bruce: How expensive they are. But at the same time, there's not an opportunity for those possibilities if you don't have an expensive vision in a means of trying to achieve them. So, when you begin to limit the possibilities for your child at the age of two or three, your moment of diagnosis, actually we know they will let these actually. So, it's not that in seeing and understanding what happens when people with even severe, multiple insignificant disabilities are included in university, that your child may choose to go onto university or college or you want them to.

Bruce: It's that it's to be open to possibilities. And so, families need to be connected to each other to have seen the experiences and possibilities to realize by others before them. And then you create a larger and larger group of families if you want, that are pursuing an inclusive life. Because still for any of us, it's quite likely we would grow up without experience. Those of us without disabilities wouldn't be in inclusive classrooms, wouldn't be in inclusive workplaces, wouldn't be in inclusive recreation. And so, inclusion would still remain something that seems less likely than achievable

or possible. So, without families coming together over now decades of seeing what an inclusive life looks like over time, it's hard to do it on your own.

Genia: Right.

Bruce: Right? It's a, looks much riskier. On your own cause there will be challenges and setbacks ...

Genia: Absolutely.

Bruce: ... and barriers to overcome. So, the more we can draw hesitant families in, the more that whatever degree of an inclusive life they're choosing, we can support them in and they may move forward to a greater degree from there. And it's never too late actually. To start wherever you are in life, granted when we talk about inclusive education, we're talking about children. But of course I've been around long enough actually to have worked with and have friends and families, friendships that never had inclusive education, whose sons and daughters today live pretty much fully inclusive lives because of that understanding of commitment came later.

Genia: Right.

Bruce: Now if you ask them, they would prefer to have had inclusive education. But if you're going back decades, there aren't that many places where it was readily available to them. And their fight might've been to get out of a special school into a special class.

Genia: Right.

Bruce: And regular school.

Genia: Right.

Bruce: Might have been their leadership of the day.

Genia: Yeah.

Bruce: And then when they're 20 years later, when their children are adults, they may now have a different vision and possibility.

Genia: Bruce, are there any lies about segregation that you are or have been thinking about that we haven't covered?

Bruce: That's a tough question. Well I think one of them is that, this is a difficult and challenging one and maybe difficult to articulate as the notion of happiness. So, if you ask any family or individual, everybody wants to be happy, whatever that means. Okay. And if you look at those of us without disabilities, for example,

happiness is not a continuous property in our lives. It comes and goes. Depends on the time of day maybe. It depends on what just happened in our argument with a partner or a spouse or didn't happen. It depends on whether a child just said to us, "So, I hate you. You're the worst parents ever" or not, you know. It depends what our bosses or colleagues have said to us that day or the next day and so on. So, when, and yet in that variation in happiness, if you want, and if we said to people, we could give you total and complete happiness by not having you work, not having really meaningful activity in your life, only being with other people like yourself.

Bruce: In my case, I'd have to be short fat involved actually. I'll put only with people like yourself, okay? And who I've oppositional defiance disorder because I probably have that as well. Right? And you would be happy. We would know that's not true.

Genia: Right.

Bruce: Right. It just rings hollow. The moment that we described it that way actually. So, people may look happy in a fully segregated context and content. But if that was truly the case, we would be accessing it far sooner and faster than they are and they'd be waiting to get in. So, if group homes were really the way to live, we'd have access to them without disabilities sooner and faster. And that would be our vision and dream while we were growing up actually. Okay. And so, the reality is actually the other way. And that is if you want a full happy, complete luck, you need the same miserable life. The rest of us without disabilities are participating in whole heart with our struggles and our challenges, etc, because we wouldn't give that up if we were offered the alternative.

Genia: Yeah. Yeah. Very well said. So, you mentioned the timid parent and I think that the timid or the intimidated parent is a sort of state of being that most of us parents of kids with disabilities can identify with at least at some points along our parenting journey. But if you imagine the timid or intimidated parent who is trying to make a placement, a school placement decision, and maybe the inclusive classroom or school is, or the regular community school and classroom exists. But so does a segregated placement. And maybe you're being encouraged to place your child in the segregated placement. Maybe you're being told about all of the services that your child can receive in the segregated placement, but not in the inclusive classroom or you know, any of the number of, I don't have to list them for you.

Genia: I'm sure you've heard them all and listeners will have their own version of why segregation versus inclusion as through the lens, or communication from schools or school boards. What advice or encouragement, or even just sort of a statement of factor opinion, might you offer the timid or intimidated parent about why they should put themselves out there, take the less you know, the more difficult or challenging path and be confident that that choice of an inclusive classroom and an inclusive life is worth it and the right thing to do?

Bruce: It's kind of fascinating in a way that I worked with, have worked with families or parents if you want, that are incredibly the way we measure success if you want in society, successful in life. Okay. Right. They are in very complex jobs if you want. They're negotiating and managing life and complex businesses are operating on people or whatever. Right. And they couldn't be completely overwhelmed and flummoxed if you want by a school actually. So, you don't have to be a timid parent, you just have to be a parent.

Genia: Yes, very fair.

Bruce: And so, if you don't live in a, where there's a school or a school district that's deeply committed to inclusion and and you have to actually ask and it could be potentially a challenge. One of our recommendations is you want to bring someone to the meeting actually to ask for inclusion, always have somebody with you actually. That is, that's just the reality that if there's somebody else observing or taking notes or being there, people behave differently actually. And you may need that person to give you a little bit of, you know, moral strength by simply being there and comfort, being able, when it's your child, you're emotional, you can't not be. It's you're child's life actually.

Genia: Yeah. That's certainly my experience. Yeah.

Bruce: Right. To a teacher or an educator or a principal, it's a moment in time. The stakes are not the same actually. This is their, it's not their child's life at this moment in time. And so, having prep beforehand, what can you expect to hear, right? What could be your responses to those? Knowing something about how things actually work has helpful. The most important things we tell families is be a parent. This is what I want for my child. You don't judge everybody else's decision when they come here and ask for the kids to be great three. The expectation is at that age they're going to be in grade three. Okay. So, don't judge. Okay. All right. Except the either way you accept every other parent that's here for grade three or grade four or whatever it is, you're not sure how to do about inclusion. Right. You can learn to do. You can learn that. Okay. It's not, you know, science. If you want you or not even science, you could learn to do it. If you want to teach a child with Angelman Syndrome is something else to read. You need a good teacher who knows how the teach kids to read. Actually that's what you really need more than anything else. And if they need a little expert advice that can be added to it as a complimentary thing.

Genia: Yeah.

Bruce: Not having to be done in a separate way. And ideally to be connected to other families so you're secure in what you're asking. And lastly, it's to, it's not fair or right, but it's what happens to be able to describe what you want for their future. I want an inclusive education because they're going to have an inclusive life afterschool before school, outside of school. They're living inclusively in our family. That's the

core of it actually. If I thought there was a better place for them to live other than inclusively in our family, then that probably place them somewhere else. Nobody hardly thinks that's correct today. So, the best place for a child with disabilities is to be included in family and have a sense of belonging within that family and parents that love them.

Bruce: Then I want them to be included in education, which is where every other child is going, for example, or on the playground, etc. And when they complete their schooling, I'm going to look at whether or not they continue their education. And is this possible and so forth and what it is. I want them to be thinking about their career and their identity all the way through school because they're going to go on to work. We know from the data actually at least a very good study by Erik Carter, that if you really truly believe in employment for your child with disabilities or intellectual disabilities, you increase the likelihood of their employment about six times. That's pretty powerful. Right. To do that. So, they're my expectations, I want you to help, help to fulfill them. And we do know families that are deeply committed to inclusive lives actually, who have been challenging moments in times and they have to go to education.

Bruce: It could be, I know one of my friends who works with me. Stories is about when her son wanted to play football and deeply committed to inclusion. But you know, there are limits.

Genia: Yeah.

Bruce: Cause it's gonna get killed and so on. Well these, you know, testosterone driven young guys made it all work and football opened up all kinds of doors to him later in life that may not have been there otherwise. But the fact that there was a responsive community, there were other families to talk to, etc. You know, and their own son's passion in this case, you know, help them in a sense to see a bit beyond their limitations, even though they're deeply committed to inclusion. So, being apprehensive, being for fearful, not being uncertain, all of that is natural, but it's, what should actually drive the decision making. Then it's a question of how do I address that? How do I feel less fearful, more successful? How do I provide some safeguards, etc.

Genia: Yeah. And sometimes that means, and you've referenced this, that means finding a group of people that can support you in that so that feel quite, you know, you don't feel like you feel like you have some ...

Bruce: Sorry.

Genia: That's okay. You feel like you have some strength to borrow from somebody else or at least a safe place to land when you come home from the meeting. I think that's a really powerful, really powerful message that all of those feelings and thoughts, you know, that's really natural. And even the most fervent advocate just as you said, as a

parent is going to have moments where they're not feeling like they can bring it forward on their own or they're feeling flummoxed. I totally relate to the surgeon parent who, you know, holds somebody's heart in their hand, you know, and yet walks into a school and feels, you know, feels intimidated and completely flummoxed. I totally get that. And I do really love that message that the fact that you are feeling uncomfortable is not, it's not wise to interpret that as a rationale for not doing it anyway. Yeah.

Bruce: I think too, if I could add something. We do have families or I do know families if you want to really, are troubled by sometimes the persistent struggle they may have to get inclusive education. And just feel overwhelmed by it, tired of fighting, etc, when they happen to live in a place where it's not readily available actually to them. When a principal or teacher or superintendent, whatever has rejected their child and they give up on inclusive education. And, but we don't give up on the family or the students. So, it doesn't mean that inclusion still can't occur everywhere else in life actually.

Genia: Right. Yup.

Bruce: And currently we find where there are still resistant to schools or teachers or districts that they're far more resistant if you want, than any other sector of community. So, we have less resistance in terms of employment in the business community. Far less resistance in the post secondary institutions, overall, far less resistance in recreation and leisure activities and providers, for example. And there is a history if you want of schooling, if you want that the structure of the organization and others have written about this that make it difficult for schools, certainly some schools or districts to change.

Genia: Yeah.

Bruce: And we have parents who move change religion because the inclusive district or school is in another community or offered by you know, in a different district depending on language or religion, depending on what province or territory you happen to live in. And not to see that resistance, if that's what you encounter as a reflection of the totality of society.

Genia: Yes. Yeah. That's really an important message. Yeah. And I think, you know, it's really important to note that there may be some situations in which the people or the system is so against welcoming somebody with a disability into their educational program that it may be impenetrable or at least impenetrable right now or completely unsafe right now. And that ,not when I'm saying things like feel the fear and do it anyway, it's not, it's, it's, I wouldn't want to be so foolish as to propose that any regular school is better than any segregated class or school because I think you can, there are places and people have experienced such firm rejection in their neighborhood school that it's either completely not an option. They can't break through the rules and the policies during the years that their child is school age.

Genia: Or that it just feels completely unsafe. The con, there going to be consequences for the person of having a segregated education. But you know, we know those situations exist. And I think the, one of the things that I see sometimes is people saying, well, just because of situations like that where there's a positive segregation experience where at least people are polite and nice to you and your child, that that means that inclusion doesn't work. And it's a little bit like saying just because inclusion in school is hard, the rest of society is going to be just as hard and resistant in those extremes are not necessarily true.

Bruce: Yeah. There's a saying inclusion doesn't work as saying something like life doesn't work.

Genia: Right.

Bruce: So, you may have a difficult situation. Actually that doesn't mean it's actually about inclusion not working, it's about people not working together to make it.

Genia: That's right.

Bruce: Actually, actually possible. We do see families who are in a position to do so when they run into that kind of resistance, actually homeschooling rather than segregated. But not everybody can leave a job or be at home and teach their child.

Genia: Yeah.

Bruce: So, there are instances where families retreat the segregation for a period of time if you want, because they've been so in their view, beaten upon.

Genia: Yeah.

Bruce: In their efforts to have inclusion or where their child has been in a regular classroom, but then not being taught. Or in the regular school, and they thought they were in the regular classroom only to find out that's not necessarily the case.

Genia: Right.

Bruce: Breaking, I think that we have so many great examples and long ones of people doing high quality inclusive education, right. And the field itself of those educators has not done enough to push the envelope further actually. So, I think the profession itself has a challenge because I know as I'm sure you do and so forth and seeing, you know, people the entirety of their careers who've been deeply devoted to quality, inclusive education, but somehow their voice in the education world doesn't seem to have enough place. And so, they go about their work and they do it in their district or their school or their classroom. But we need to see, I think a greater degree of organized efforts by those practitioners to challenge their very own profession.

Genia: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. What a difference that would be.

Bruce: Is there anyone we haven't provoked?

Genia: I'm, I'm not sure. Probably. There's probably, we could probably keep going. Bruce, thank you so much. I really, really am grateful for your time and your insight. If people wanted to contact you to find out more information or find out more about you or Inclusion, Alberta, where would they find you?

Bruce: So, they could go to the Inclusion Alberta website, the usual www.inclusionalberta.org I guess would be the website. And I'm not hard to find. Actually if you just search it or go to the website. And I do have lots of parents and a few in particular particular that call or write and one just have a conversation or discuss things, how things are unfolding for them and their kids.

Genia: Wonderful. And I will make sure that that all ends up in the show notes as well. Thank you so, so much.

Bruce: Thanks, Genia, talk soon!

Genia: Okay. Bye. Bye.

Genia: Well, what do you think? It continues to blow my mind that the evidence, the research around the best way to include all kids regardless of the severity or significance of their disability or non-disability or whatever, that that's well known. The, you know, inclusion versus segregation debate should have died a long time ago because we know that there really is no reasonable justification for a segregated education programs. They're not as effective and they're not as good for kids with disabilities and they're not as good for the kids that don't have disabilities in our community. So, let's put this to rest and just move forward towards actually figuring out how we can work together with school teams to make inclusion work really well. Let's raise the bar. If you're interested in inclusive education, you can check out the upcoming course *Belonging in School: The What, Why and How of Inclusive Education*. You can get on the wait list for that. You'll get more information and early bird pricing and you can find that at goodthingsinlife.org/bis for belonging in school. Until next week. I hope you are well and I look forward to seeing you in the next episode. Take care.