

# **South Carolina Statewide Independent Living Council's Position: Disability Simulations**

## **Introduction**

Disability simulations are exercises in which participants without disabilities use a wheelchair, wear a blindfold, wear headphones or impose other limits that prevent participants from completing tasks how they normally would. While the use of disability simulations are often well-intentioned, their impact is harmful and directly opposed to the intended outcomes of compassion, awareness, and understanding.

## **Disability Simulation's Negative Impacts**

Disability Simulations do not take into account how people learn to adapt over time or any other personal experiences or skill sets each individual has. As a result, these events often lead to the promotion of stereotypes that living with a disability is just too hard or complicated.

People with disabilities not only naturally adapt, but also use tools, skills, and technologies that support independence. Using those tools to teach limitation or restricting one's abilities and denying access to these accommodations as a simulation is damaging to the way these technologies are valued and accepted in the community.

Additionally, disability simulation exercises are not representational of the diversity that disability brings across and within disability categories. No two people are alike with or without a disability. Simulations give a false sense of understanding of disability in universal terms. This creates an exclusive mindset, preventing meaningful awareness.

Therefore, despite the goal of empathy and awareness, simulations fuel pity toward people with disabilities with negative impacts on expectations; contributing to lower than average disability employment and academic achievement.

## **Alternative Approaches**

While disability simulations are problematic, there are alternative approaches and activities that can help build compassion, awareness, and understanding. Hearing from real people with disabilities, demonstrations on the tools that empower their independence and experiencing community barriers alongside them can much better meet these goals. Teaching about prominent members of society with disabilities and of the history of the disability rights movement also illustrate progress. These activities can instill mutual respect and compassion between those with and without disabilities, raise awareness about the physical and attitudinal barriers that exist in the community, and understanding of the value of diversity.

## **SC South Carolina Statewide Independent Living Council Disability Simulation Position Statement**

For the above-mentioned reasons, the position of the SC Statewide Independent Living Council (SCSILC) is that these disability simulation exercises are not helpful and are in fact damaging. Instead, the SCSILC promotes genuine interaction with real people with disabilities. This approach is more effective at building disability pride and cultivating awareness, inclusion, and true understanding.