



UTSS POSITION PAPER ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:

OUR POSITION:

We Dream of Global Inclusion - People with albinism (PWA) worldwide seek a day when what we contribute is not limited because of how we are perceived. We dream of a day when PWA will take their rightful place in every level of every society, everywhere, at all times. Under The Same Sun (UTSS) will always place the students with albinism in our Education Program (EP) into safe, socially inclusive schools with above average academic standards, insisting they be educated, socialized and included in mainstream society where they belong. PWA only “fail to succeed” in societies where families and communities neglect the responsibility of inclusive living.

OUR REASONING:

Inclusion will accelerate understanding and reduce stigma - The students in our Education Program are future models within their own society of what PWA can be when given an opportunity. They are the strongest voice against discrimination and the most powerful message educating their culture towards social change. Worldwide PWA suffer from exclusion and social isolation due to stigma within their own families, communities, schools, workplaces, the social media and society at large. This tragic misfortune is due to the historic fact that very few people in the general population have a healthy and accurate understanding of albinism and thus operate from erroneous and often harmful beliefs and myths (see “What Is Albinism” - <http://www.underthesamesun.com/resources>). An integrated society will normalize interactions between PWA and non-PWA, enhancing understanding while dispelling myths and stigma.

We do not support segregation of PWA - UTSS has frequently received suggestions by well-intended but tragically misinformed people which, if implemented, would reinforce and institutionalize social isolation for PWA.

Examples:

- Put PWA into schools for the blind or disabled to accommodate their low vision needs.
- Buy an island and send all Tanzanian PWA there to protect them from attacks.
- Build PWA schools in order to accommodate understanding, safety and low vision needs.
- Build a village for PWA children who are at risk of attacks.

Segregation does not guarantee safety and advancement - Specialized segregated environments will only serve to isolate PWA further from the very society they know, love, depend on and belong in. While safety is a vital consideration for PWA in countries where they are being hunted for their body parts, there is no certainty that they will be safer in a segregated



community or school. Although PWA may feel safer there, ironically they may become easier to locate. Segregation also inadvertently contributes to stigma since society tends to view these segregated settings as confirmation that PWA are not normal people. Many children with albinism (CWA) in Tanzania have been confined to government boarding schools for blind or disabled children in the name of providing a safer environment that can also address their low vision needs. All of these schools have sub-standard conditions, and in some the CWA are forced to learn braille. This is highly unfortunate since CWA are partially sighted and able to read and write and participate as full functioning members of mainstream schools. Such settings obstruct academic development as well as normal social skills development, stunting their integrative capacities. CWA require these developmental experiences in order to be high functioning participants in mainstream society when they leave school. In the name of “help”, their academic and social development is decreased and social isolation is increased.

PWA are just like everyone else except for 2 simple differences - PWA suffer from (1) low vision and (2) little or no pigment or colour in their skin, hair and eyes. This means that their skin is very sensitive to the sun and vulnerable to skin cancer. It also means that their eyes are highly sensitive to bright light, making it difficult to see on sunny days and in brightly lit rooms. As well, PWA need to be very close to an object to see what fully sighted people can see at a distance. *In every other way, we are all the same.*

Equal opportunity means equal success for PWA - Just like anyone else, PWA can achieve almost any goal they set their mind to. They can succeed in life, education, employment and love. They are perfectly able to make meaningful contributions to their society providing they are empowered with the same resources offered to their fellow citizens without albinism. Since low vision and sun sensitivity are the only 2 differences and can be easily accommodated, there is no need to exclude PWA by sending them to special needs centers or schools. In many cases, PWA who experience social inclusion and equal opportunity thrive and often surpass the performance of non-PWA in academic and employment settings.

“Sometimes equality means treating people the same, despite their differences, and sometimes it means treating them as equals by accommodating their differences.”

(Judge Rosalie Abella, Report of the Commission on Equality in Employment, Canada).

"The worst kind of loneliness in the world is the isolation that comes from being misunderstood."

(Dan Brown – Inferno)