

develop a strategy for reaching and discipling Adults with Learning Disabilities

1. Pray. Nothing is effective unless surrounded by prayer. Ask others in your church who are effective prayers to pray for this need.

2. Talk with your church leadership. Bring information you have collected about the need for this ministry in your area.

3. Create a task force with five to seven members. If at all possible, the person selected as leader of this task force should have training in special education or have experience with persons with disabilities. The entire task force needs to receive some type of training so they can think beyond their own experience.

Suggestions for persons to serve on this task force are:

- persons with disabilities.
- a family member of a person with disabilities. (Family members can help the task force understand the needs of the families of persons with disabilities.)
- a professional person who deals with persons with disabilities.
- a member of the church who is concerned about persons with disabilities but is not a disabilities professional.

4. Conduct a survey to assess the need. Identify potential adults with disabilities who might be a part of your ministry. Also list persons who might be resources for your ministry. Consult local agencies in your community to discover potential needs. Some groups to consider are:

- The ARC
- Autism Society
- Rehabilitation Center
- Multiple Sclerosis Society
- Muscular Dystrophy Association
- Transportation System
- United Cerebral Palsy Association
- Spina Bifida Association
- Epilepsy Association
- City Government—number of disabled parking permits
- School District—number of children in special education
- City Hall—programs and services in your city and how many use them.

5. Do an accessibility inventory. Examine the facilities used by your church, looking for barriers that could be an issue for people with physical disabilities. You may even want to make a flowchart that shows how a person with different kinds of disabilities would get from the parking lot to various locations in the facilities. Propose ways your church can make its facilities more accessible.

6. Visit persons with disabilities and their families. The task force for ministry with persons with disabilities should make personal visits. Don't just assume you know their needs. Ask the person with a disability, as well as the family, what they need from your church. Ask the person with a disability how she would like to be involved in the life of the church and then see if you can make that happen with reasonable accommodations.

7. Determine which ministries you will begin first. The needs and resources discovered from your survey should be the basis for determining where you begin. After your ministry gets under way, you may discover other needs your task force wants to address. Start out with a manageable number of ministries. As the work grows and more people get involved, more can be done.

8. Recruit volunteers. You will want to make sure that you adequately staff anything you do. Depending upon the type of actions you take on, you may need to include background checks on recruits.

9. Provide training. Do not assume that people know what to do. Make sure volunteers are ready and can be successful.

10. Focus on culture. Persons with disabilities will not continue coming to a church where they do not feel welcome. The congregation needs to learn how to act around persons with disabilities and how to make them feel a part of the church. Suggestions include:

- Write a series of articles in your church newsletter or church website.
- Provide a series of vignettes during the worship service depicting persons with disabilities both being ministered to and ministering.
- Ask someone with a disability to give a testimony during worship.
- Ask a family member of a person with a disability to give a testimony during a service.

11. Promote the ministry. Two or three months before your ministry is to begin, let your church and community know what you are doing. Ideas for promotion include:

- Send letters to persons with disabilities and their families whom you discovered your survey.
- Ask some of the local agencies you contacted if you can have a few minutes on their next program to explain what your church is trying to do. Also ask if you can advertise in their communication pieces or provide a brochure.
- Advertise in your local newspaper.

12. Begin the ministry.

13. Evaluate the ministry regularly. Part of your evaluation needs to include asking the people involved in the ministry what they think. How has the ministry impacted their lives and how can it be improved?