**TIME TO GET RID OF "SPECIAL"?**

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"Special education," "special needs," and the "Special
Olympics" -- isn't it about time we got rid of them? If we can
dispense with the word "handicapped" then it's past time to stop
being "special."

"Special" implies differentness and apartness. "Special" is
the label on segregated programs: "special education" and "Special
Olympics." "Special" is a euphemism, a word introduced by do-
gooders to sugar-coat their control of our lives. After all,
disabled citizens have "special needs" not "special rights."

"Special" is a dangerous one to let go by, because it has an
aura that attracts the media. Everybody loves the "special kids"
because, gosh darn it, they're so loveable up there on that poster.
A hundred major corporations support the "Special Olympics,"
"Special Scouting" and "Very Special Arts." No right-thinking
person would dare criticize a "Special" organization. Maybe ADAPT
needs to change its name to "Very Special Activists."

A "television special" is an unusual treat. A "Special Agent
of the FBI" has extra powers. The "daily special" is an extra
value. A "special guest star" is someone considered attractive and
important. Do these qualities describe your life?

"Special" infantilizes and trivializes the identity of a
disabled person. If you are disabled, you are not "special"; you
are disadvantaged and oppressed.

When it is used to refer to disabled people, "special" isn't
at all descriptive. If you didn't know "special education" means
teaching kids with disabilities, you couldn't figure it out.

Recently, some folks with developmentally disabilities in
started a Jaycees chapter here in Tallahassee. They didn't call it
the "Special Jaycees." They called it the "Action Jaycees of
Tallahassee." Now they're a nationally-accredited Jaycee chapter,
with all the rights and responsibilities that go with
accreditation. They didn't need "special" because they didn't have
a lot of do-gooders running things for them.

Can you imagine a day when the sponsors will let the "special
kids" run the "Special Olympics"? What would they call it -- "The
Empowerment Games"?

We need to become as militant about "special" as we are about
"handicapped" and the Jerry Lewis Telethon. Let reporters and
managers of charitable organizations know that we feel "special" is
inappropriate. If you confront them often enough, they'll get the
message.

We need to deny that there's anything "special" about being
disabled, so we can stop getting "special treatment" instead of
justice.

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