

## Social Role Valorization: An Important Framework for Understanding and Responding to Societal Dynamics

The theory of Social Role Valorization (SRV) and its predecessor idea, the Principle of Normalization, was first brought to North America and developed in the early 1970s by Dr. Wolf Wolfensberger. At the time, inhuman conditions prevailed in North American institutions, where many thousands of people with disabilities were segregated, congregated, abused and imprisoned. Normalization, and later Social Role Valorization, informed and impassioned a generation of architects of the community system as they envisioned a community in which people with disabilities could experience freedom, dignity and the opportunity to experience "the good things in life."

SRV is a social theory that examines and helps us understand the process of social devaluation – how do people come to be at the bottom of the social ladder, and what are the predictable "bad things" likely to come their way once they lose value within the society? These "bad things" have been descriptively called the "wounds" of social devaluation and are inflicted on devalued people relentlessly, systematically and often unconsciously. They include such experiences as being profoundly rejected, being thrust into negatives roles such as "eternal child" or "menace" or "object of pity," being stigmatized by the attachment of devastating imagery, being distanced and segregated from society, and many other hurtful and damaging experiences. Because this process of wounding is at odds with the professed social and religious values of our society, there is very low awareness and consciousness about it and it is often even perpetrated by human services intended to help people.

Social Role Valorization then poses the question, "If we want good things to happen in the lives of marginalized people, what can be done?" SRV states that the good things in life that we all strive to have, such as freely-given relationships, belonging, a good reputation, contribution and personal growth, tend to come to people who have many positively valued social roles, such as neighbor, student, citizen, family member, etc. If we can assist people to move into valued roles, we increase the likelihood that people will have access to these good things. The framework of Social Role Valorization is taught through the elaboration of ten themes, which include such potent topics as the Power of Unconsciousness, Imagery, Positive Compensation for Disadvantage, Role Circularity, the Developmental Model, Service Model Coherency, Social Integration, Identification, Imitation and Mindsets.

Today, Social Role Valorization remains highly relevant and useful within all fields working to make things better for marginalized and oppressed people. Understanding the societal forces of devaluation and how to effectively work towards a full, rich meaningful life alongside affected people equips us to work for real change in the world.