

Youth Leadership for Changing Attitudes towards People with Disabilities: Changing Attitudes and Self Esteem¹

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Society's approach to people with disabilities is considered to be negative. There is a general non-acceptance of people with disabilities in society and they are considered a minority group. Attitudes towards individuals with a disability tend to be influenced by prejudice, stigma and negative attitudes. The literature indicates that change is possible only through comprehensive intervention that includes both imparting knowledge about disabilities and meeting people with disabilities. This study evaluated a program of intervention that sought to bring about change in attitudes towards people with disabilities among a group of youth leaders, and assessed its influence on the members of the group. The study encompassed 164 young people: students in ninth grade in a number of junior high schools in Israel; half of them took part in the intervention program and the other half constituted the control group. The study examined whether there was an association between participation in the program (and, if so, to what extent) and changing attitudes towards people with disabilities, as well as the impact of the program on self esteem. The methodology was based on measuring attitudes towards people with disabilities and levels of self esteem before the intervention, while it was in progress, and at the end of the program, and comparison with a control group. The findings showed significant positive associations with a change in attitudes toward people with disabilities among the research group compared to the control group, but no difference was found in self esteem within the research group or in comparison with the control group.

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