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## Making a Storm for Special Needs

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# Making a Storm for Special Needs

Brianna Castano

LDR3215 - Leadership Through Service: An Advanced Leadership Experience  
University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL

## Abstract

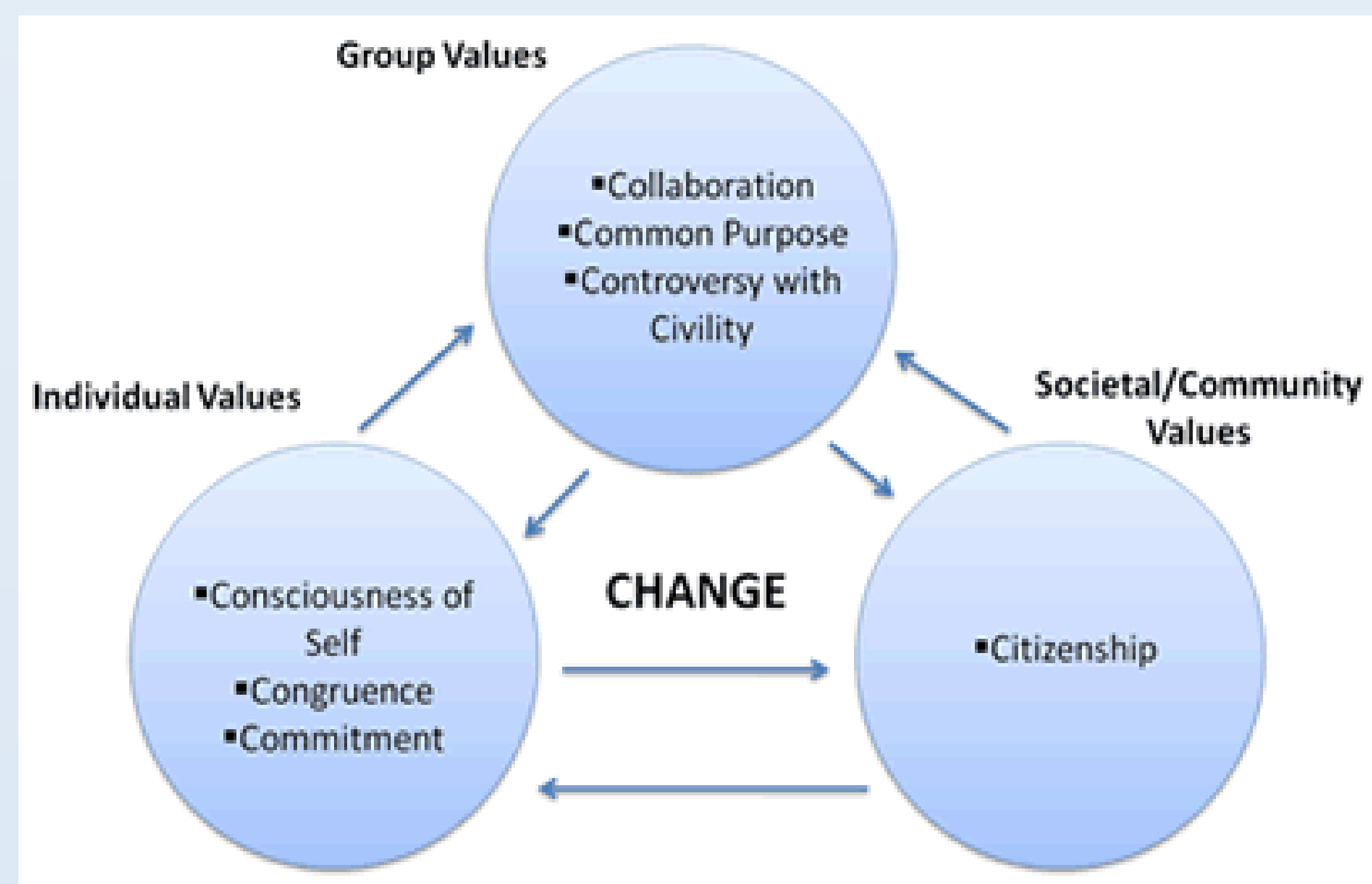
- Unified sports bring together people with and without intellectual disabilities to play in sports
- This was my third season with the organization, but first time playing with the masters age bracket
- Through my time getting to know my teammates, I learned about life and what happens to people with intellectual disabilities after their finish school

## History

- The Kennedys founded and funded a lot of firsts when it comes to the intellectual disabled
- As president, John F. Kennedy made it a priority in his agenda later revealing his sister has an intellectual disability
- In 1962, Camp Shiver, a summer camp for kids with intellectual disabilities started by Eunice Kennedy Shiver in her own backyard, is widely considered the origin of the Special Olympics
- In 1988, the Special Olympics Unified Sports initiative is launched in Nevada and California

## Course Connection

- Social Change Model of Leadership Development encompassed "Seven C's" that individual, group, and societal values
- Congruence – people don't always know how to act around individuals with intellectual disabilities
- It was a different and wider age range than I've previously worked with so learning that being myself was the best route
- FiSH – being present and having fun



## Community Impact

- The need for unified partners was greater than the supply
- Being present allowed the team to have enough unified partners to compete and qualify to be considered for tournament advancement – something that did not happen the year prior
- I was a team member no different than anyone else – disability or not
- Counting out during stretches, catching, playing outfield, batting in the run-up
- Interacting with them as an equal, not an aid
- Being able to be there and cheer them on
- Allowed them to interact outside of the intellectual disabled bubble they are kept in
- Tina is reserved and was quiet when she joined
- Once I was able to connect with her over Stitch, she was happy and talking

**82%** of family members in the United States report that athletes improved their self esteem after participating in Unified Sports



## Reflection

- When I think of what intellectually disabled people can do, I think of my cousin
- My cousin is in her early 30s, living at home with my aunt and uncle in rural Louisiana
- She stays at home besides when a worker takes her out a couple times a week to go to the movies, eat out, and shop
- Devin works in a hotel 8am to 4pm three days a week
- He takes the bus and crosses a busy intersection to go to and from work
- They have the capacity to be more independent than I realized
- Coach Emily is UCF alum, legal studies, now works helping individuals with intellectual disabilities find employment
- As someone with a non-profit background, but could not see a financially stable future staying in that sector, there are other paths than the one I think I have to take



## Civic Responsibility

- Students from lower-income households are more likely to be identified as intellectually disabled
- Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), students may remain in school until they are 22 years of age, often in classrooms separated from their non-intellectually disabled peers
- The goal of education is to serve the job market by helping students develop job skills and train them for employment
- After aging out of school, there is limited support for students who are intellectually disabled
- They lack social interaction and engagement otherwise stuck at home as their parents are at work
- Any social interaction they had before was likely only with family and others with intellectual disabilities
- No one should be kept on the fringes of society
- We have a responsibility to treat everyone with equity giving them opportunity
- Everyone has a right to go out there and make something of themselves



**Special  
Olympics**

## References

- Special Olympics. (2018, July 31). *Out of the Shadows: Events Leading to the Founding of Special Olympics*. SpecialOlympics.org. <https://www.specialolympics.org/about/history/out-of-the-shadows-events-leading-to-the-founding-of-special-olympics>
- Schifter, L. A., Grindal, T., Schwartz, G., & Hehir, T. (2019, January 17). Students from Low-Income Families and Special Education. The Century Foundation. <https://tcf.org/content/report/students-low-income-families-special-education/>

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