# The Belonging Forum

# 2027 Samuel Fellows in Belonging Program

## Partner Organization:

Harvard Law School Project on Disability

## Project Title:

Self-Advocacy & Community Living in Nova Scotia

# 2027 Samuel Fellows in Belonging:

# Project Proposal

**Partner Organization:** Harvard Law School Project on Disability

Founded in 2004, HPOD is a global disability law and policy center based at Harvard Law School. HPOD seeks to use our learning in comparative and international law to advance understanding regarding disability law, policy, and education around the world. HPOD is committed to enabling civil society, and especially persons with disabilities and their representative organizations to undertake informed human rights advocacy. To this end, HPOD provides human rights training and education, facilitates the development of international law and policy, encourages inclusive development practices, shares technical assistance on strategic litigation, and stimulates new thinking about the abilities of persons with disabilities and their human rights.

Despite the path-breaking international treaty, the 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), many persons with disabilities lack critical knowledge about their rights and strategies for turning them into local realities. To help address these gaps, HPOD has leveraged its expertise to undertake inclusive research projects where persons with disabilities design and carry out research on issues that matter to them, translate legal and technical information into easy-to-understand trainings materials, and collaborate with local groups to ensure that persons with disabilities receive the high-quality training and technical assistance they need to advance their advocacy efforts.

Learn more at: https://hpod.law.harvard.edu

**Location of the Project:** Nova Scotia, Canada

# PROJECT INFORMATION

## Section 1: Description of the Project

For much of history, persons with disabilities, and especially persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities, have been forced to live or receive services in institutions and deprived of opportunities to be part of their communities. In the 1999 decision *Olmstead v. L.C.*, the Supreme Court of the United States famously recognized that institutionalization perpetuates unwarranted assumptions that persons with disabilities are incapable or unworthy of participating in community life, while also severely diminishing persons with disabilities' everyday life activities. Internationally, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities issued guidance in 2017 on the right of persons with disabilities to live independently and be included in the community calling on governments to replace all institutions with community-based support services.

More recently, in Nova Scotia, advocacy by persons with disabilities has brought about legal developments that are helping to create more pathways to community life. A 2021 Appeal Court decision faulted Nova Scotia for systemic discrimination against persons with disabilities seeking community-based housing and services. A human rights board of inquiry subsequently created a list of reforms required to address the province's shortcomings. Now, the government must close all large institutions for persons with disabilities and transition them into community housing of their choice. The government must also work with individuals to create support plans tailored to their specific needs.

HPOD is seeking **two self-advocates** with a strong track record of advocacy in favor of community-based support services and strong ties to the Nova Scotia disability community to undertake a **community-action project** that uses **creative methods** to help advance ongoing structural

changes to **foster greater belonging and social connectedness for Nova Scotians with disabilities** who are either at risk of institutionalization and/or face significant barriers to community living.

## Section 2: Goals of the Project

This project will **build on past inclusive research projects** undertaken by self-advocate Samuel Fellows together with HPOD. HPOD's support for self-advocates to undertake research projects about issues that matter to them helps to strengthen self-advocacy efforts. Since the beginning of the self-advocacy movement, self-advocate leaders have focused on community living as a key goal. Indeed, as HPOD's Self-Advocacy Associate, Anne Fracht, puts it: *"Self-advocacy is about more than claiming rights; it's about making sure we truly belong wherever we go."*

Thus, past HPOD-supported self-advocate Fellows have explored various barriers to and facilitators of belonging and social connectedness, including:

- Chester Finn's research on self-advocate-led supported decision-making work in Massachusetts,
- Tony Phillips and Diana Mairose's research on group home residents' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic,
- Chaqueta Stuckey and David Taylor's research on the experiences of persons with intellectual disabilities who get community-based services, and
- Fionn Crombie Angus and Caroline Naluwemba's research on self-advocates' participation in shadow reporting to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

This project will also build on the experiences of many self-advocacy groups around the world that, like traditional forms of research, the creative arts can used as effective advocacy tools. By interweaving

research, advocacy, and creative methods, these Fellows will develop a final output that helps to tell the stories of Nova Scotians with disabilities affected by the province's ongoing structural changes, so as to raise awareness of the human impact of these changes and to help ensure that these reforms remain when political tides may change. In this way, the Fellows' project will promote persons with disabilities' belonging and social connectedness by shoring up the underlying policy and legal frameworks aimed at guaranteeing their fundamental human right to live independently and be included in the community.

## Section 3: Guiding Questions

The Samuel Fellows will address the following key guiding questions:

- How can the creative arts be used to promote greater awareness of the human impact of structural reforms?
- How can the voices of self-advocates be incorporated effectively into advocacy and awareness-raising tools?
- How can the voices of multiply marginalized groups and subgroups within the larger group of persons with disabilities be effectively lifted up and represented?
- How does persons with disabilities' human right to independent living and being included in the community foster greater belonging and social connectedness for this historically marginalized group?
- Who are the key stakeholders in ensuring that laws and policies written on paper make tangible differences in the lives of people with disabilities receiving services?
- How can the disability community prevent service delivery systems designed to promote community living from nevertheless

contributing to established patterns of exclusion and isolation or creating new ones?

## Section 4: Research Methods & Dissemination Approach: The 3 Streams

The Belonging Forum propose **three research streams**:

- **Creative**
- **Advocacy**
- **Academic**

The tracks are designed to articulate the possibilities of diverse Fellowship on belonging. The program recognizes that creative methods, advocacy-focused research, and academic research are all Fellowly. All three tracks have the potential to address similar topics. The key difference is the outputs and methodologies. The beauty of the tracks is that they all overlap and interweave, only strengthening each other and the Belonging Forum's impact. The streams instill belonging in process and product.

We encourage Samuel Fellows and Partners to explore different ways of asking questions and sharing knowledge that instills belonging for the researcher and participants. Partners do not need to choose a stream, but they are welcome to consider how the streams might shape methods or outputs.

### HPOD Methods for this Project

Across the world, different groups have worked to tell the stories of persons with disabilities who have been affected by either of the twin phenomena of institutionalization and deinstitutionalization. For example, the U.S. Department of Justice maintained a "Faces of *Olmstead*" online compilation that profiled individuals who were positively affected by their transition to community-based settings throughout the country. Temple

University curates a multimedia collection ("File/Life Stories") that explores the lives of persons with disabilities who resided at the former Pennhurst institution in Pennsylvania; the project is intentionally staffed with persons with disabilities. High school students conducted archival research to create an online memorial for 296 former residents of the former Fernald institution in Massachusetts who were buried in unmarked graves.

While committed to co-designing this project, HPOD expects the methods and final output to draw inspiration from these and similar efforts to visibilize persons with disabilities' diverse experiences seeking to access their communities. The above-mentioned projects used **varying methods, including interviews, oral histories, archival research, and digital storytelling.** Thus, the Fellows might, for instance, curate materials that might include original artwork, historical artifacts, and stories of individuals' personal experiences as part of an in-person exhibition for the community that can help to raise awareness of the effects of either institutionalization or deinstitutionalization on Nova Scotians with disabilities, while also encouraging affected individuals to share their stories and reflect on how their experiences can be understood in terms of subjective and objective measures of belonging and social connectedness.

Whatever the method or methods chosen, Fellows should seek to follow processes that contribute to a greater sense of belonging and social connectedness among the individuals whose stories and lives are being explored and that respond to the needs of the broader community affected by patterns of institutionalization in Nova Scotia.

## Section 5: Key Deliverables

- **Work plan** to serve as a preliminary blueprint for the project, including a budget plan which predicts and plans potential research costs to ensure responsible allocation of bursary funds.

- **1 Opinion Piece** (500 – 1,000 words) related to the project the Fellows are working on, posted to the Belonging Forum's website. Partners are welcome/encouraged to post the article as well.
- **A Final Output** based on the research approach chosen, to be agreed at the beginning of the program. The outcome may also be influenced by who the Fellow is and their lived experience.

  The academic stream's output is a formal, academic research report (20-35 pages) that can be accompanied by other outputs. The advocacy and creative outputs can take many different shapes. Examples are listed below. The output must be accompanied by a written component (5-15 pages) to outline the research process and findings.

**Potential Examples:**

- **Academic Stream**
- Research Report: 20 – 35-page research report supported by primary or secondary source data.
- Potential for a published academic paper

- **Advocacy Stream**
- Policy recommendations
- White paper
- Advocacy toolkit
- Advocacy Campaign

- **Creative Stream**
- Curated exhibition
- Community art festival
- A series of webinars
- Short documentary
- A photo journal, etc.

- **A Final Presentation with the Cohort**

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## APPLICANT INFORMATION

### About the Program/What the Program Offers

The Samuel Fellows in Belonging Program empowers young people, recent graduates, and people with lived experience to engage in meaningful research and community action. At the Belonging Forum, our mission is to build connectedness within and between communities through partnerships, research, programming, learning initiatives, and advocacy. At the Belonging Forum, fostering belonging is central to our work. The Belonging Forum approaches the definition of belonging as connection to the 4 Ps: people, place, power, and purpose. This is to say that belonging comes through our relationships with other people as well as through our rootedness in nature, our ability to influence social, political and economic decision-making, and our capacity to find shared meaning and purpose in our lives. The program offers a unique opportunity to apply the lens of belonging to issues that matter, to think intersectionally, and holistically about the problems of the 21st century – while working alongside experts and community leaders.

This is a paid opportunity from February 8th – October 29th 2027. Fellows will carry out the research part-time on a schedule agreed between the Fellow, the partner, and the Belonging Forum. The Fellow will receive a bursary to support their work.

The Program offers:

- A flexible, part-time research opportunity.
- A bursary to support your research calculated based on cost of living where the Fellow is based and number of hours committed.

- Work with national and international community partners.
- Capacity building, skills development, & mentorship.
- Network and team building opportunities.
- All works produced by the Fellows are published on the Belonging Forum website and promoted on our social media channels.

## Equity Statement:

We encourage all equity-seeking groups such as immigrants, Black and Indigenous communities, people of color, women, young and older people, 2SLGBTQ+ community members, and people with disabilities to apply. Please let us know if you need any accommodation throughout the application and interview process and we will be happy to support you.

## Key Attributes and Skills in the Applicant:

**Both Fellows should:**

- identify as self-advocates and have strong self-advocacy leadership experience,
- have strong connections to Nova Scotia and disability rights groups working there,
- have strong connections and a leadership role in an organization of persons with disabilities (this includes self-advocacy organizations),
- be familiar with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD),
- be willing to work in a remote environment, including reading and replying to emails and joining Zoom meetings,
- be comfortable reading and speaking in English,
- have some experience making reports on activities (written or in other formats),

- have some experience reading and writing reports on disability topics in plain language and traditional formats,
- be capable of working both in a team and independently, with appropriate supports, including communicating support needs, and
- have access to a reliable internet connection and appropriate technology (such as a computer or tablet connected to a webcam).

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Thank you for your interest in the Samuel Fellows in Belonging Program. Due to a high volume of applications, only those selected for an interview will be contacted.