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Human Rights in Adventure Therapy - A White Paper

Human rights are inherent to our work in adventure therapy (AT) (Harper & Fernee, 2022), yet AT practices persist, or practices upon which AT should comment, that reduce or negate participants' human rights across the world (Pringle, 2022).

Complex trauma has become understood as not only a reaction to life threatening events but an 'epidemic' of grinding daily dismissals and attacks on a child's sense of Self and their developing autonomy (Wamser-Nanney, 2016). Dissociation is a common reaction by the child who cannot escape the too strict or boundaryless home, church, school, or group (Kezelman & Stavropoulos, 2020). This neglect for adequate developmental experiences and relentless micro-aggressions are human rights violations and reductions (Gallagher & Perlin, 2017).

When last assessed, Australia's adherence to the Rights of the Child fell well short of the minimum standard (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2019). A human rights perspective elevates mental distress beyond the bio-medical and patriarchal bounds of the prevailing diagnostic system (Daya, 2022). AT seems well positioned to provide a human rights-based experience to people who have suffered the complex trauma of such daily human rights diminishing and violating experiences.

Although generally considered to be a humanistic approach to mental health, AT practices can, and do, transgress human rights, generally with the best of intentions (Harper & Fernee, 2022). Often, these AT practices are slight and seem to be the product of cultural norms. The extreme ends of this paradigmatic conflict was illustrated in a conference presentation at the 9th International Adventure Therapy Conference (Pringle, 2022), the summary of which is reproduced in Figure 1.

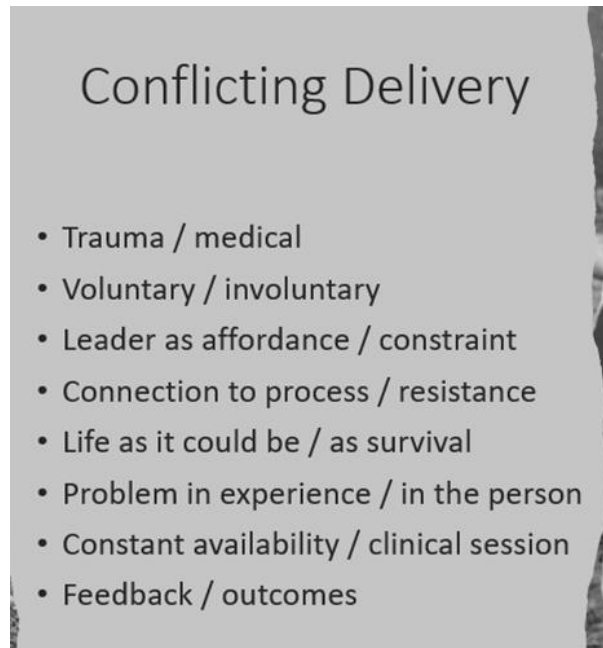
One approach that most in the AT 'family' reject is 'boot camp' style yelling at participants and forcing compliance to an authority figure. Unfortunately, that remains a practice in such programs wherever they exist (including in my nation; Australia). Further, these programs sometimes reference AT literature (often the Wilderness Therapy literature).

A less egregious example might be the failure to provide future information about the day's destination or events that may happen later in the day. This is meant to help the participant stay 'in the now' and not be distracted, which most AT practitioners would promote as useful and possibly beneficial as a means to promote mindfulness outdoors. Refusal to provide information asked by a participant is, however, a coercive use/abuse of power and therefore a form of human rights reduction/abuse. Another slide from the previously mentioned presentation, listing a collection of similar accusations gathered from self-declared 'survivors' is shown at Figure 2 (Pringle, 2022).

An extreme example of human rights reduction/abuse was recently covered in an exchange of articles regarding involuntary admission into wilderness therapy (WT) programs in the USA (Gass et al., 2021; Magnuson et al., 2022). Approximately 5000 young people annually attend WT involuntarily and so both the scale and degree of the likely human rights reduction is considerable.

Figure 1

Extreme opposites in adventure therapy practice approaches



Note: Text from a portion of a slide shown during presentation, illustrating an extreme opposites perspective, frequently described by 'survivors' (their preferred term).

To resolve these conflicts within our field and to respond to the criticism from survivors, we suggest human rights as a minimum standard for AT internationally. This should build our consistency and credibility as a field of practice. A minimum universally accepted standard would also separate AT practice from the egregious human rights reducing practices of which our field is accused.

What are human rights?

Human rights are described by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as (headings removed):

Human rights are standards that recognize and protect the dignity of all human beings. Human rights govern how individual human beings live in society and with each other, as well as their relationship with the State and the obligations that the State have towards them.

Human rights law obliges governments to do some things and prevents them from doing others. Individuals also have responsibilities: in using their human rights, they must respect the rights of others. No government, group or individual person has the right to do anything that violates another's rights.

...Human rights are universal and inalienable. All people everywhere in the world are entitled to them. No one can voluntarily give them up. Nor can others take them away from him or her.

...Human rights are indivisible. Whether civil, political, economic, social or cultural in nature, they are all inherent to the dignity of every human person. Consequently, they all have equal status as rights. There is no such thing as a 'small' right. There is no hierarchy of human rights.

Figure 2*Accusations of human rights reducing practices*

- constantly calling your name/number while toileting out of sight so guides know you have not run away,
- mixed gender groups (sometimes one or two girls in all male groups) and close living (no walls when toileting/sleeping),
- rare access to full hygiene standards
 - three underwear per week or less),
 - showers available weekly to once in three months,
 - fresh clothes weekly to monthly,
- removal of all personal items (includes strip search with squat and cough),
 - issuing badly fitting bra's, shoes, clothes,
- using sticks-sage-rocks in lieu of toilet paper,
- reading to group a letter of accountability from parents on arrival,
- peers forced to criticise stories and daily behaviour,
- denying access to peers until confessing to a problem,
- isolation from group for first few days (within sight but not allowed to participate with peers),
- non-binary gender preferences (him/her) ignored,
- guides bringing special food items & eating in front of young people,
- some items retained by guides who must be asked for access (eg toothpaste, torch),
- weekly inspection of skin for infection (ie butt inspection)

Purpose of White Paper

This white paper has recommendations for AT practitioners and organisations internationally and builds on discussion at the 9th International Adventure Therapy Conference (IATC) in Norway in June 2022. This paper is neither the view of the Adventure Therapy International Committee (ATIC) nor exhaustive, but rather is for practical use by individuals and organisations. Following this proposal does not require permission from anybody. It is a call to action by any (and all) individual AT practitioners, providers, and/or programs.

Providers of AT should recognise and adhere to human rights international minimum standards.

These rights are universal and apply everywhere and to all people regardless of where they are, what legal system applies or what beliefs people hold. They exist beyond nationality, religion, politics or domestic laws and customs. They apply at the micro level in AT and at the macro, as described in detail by Natynczuk and Dobud (2021).

There are a number of human rights conventions which may be relevant to AT practitioners. Listed below are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Rights of the Child and the Rights of People with Disabilities. Other potentially relevant rights include those for Women, Refugees and Indigenous People. These rights have upwards of 30 individual articles each and, although some only pertain to governments, each article should be carefully

considered and not simply co-opted with an assumption that an organisation's practices are already human rights compliant. No organisation or practitioner can assume they comply with human rights without a detailed client-centred audit. Engaging clients in such a review, although time consuming, would be the gold standard, and organisations such as Youth Flourish Outdoors and True North Expeditions are committed to such a practice.

Training in understanding and complying with restraints and converting away from involuntary participation is available here:

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241516754>.

Below are the recommendations made at 9IATC, during a presentation visible here: https://video.uia.no/media/t/0_4kd0ctgk.

Recommendations

1. Each practitioner and program should review the rights that apply to the people with whom they work and ensure their practices comply.
2. Each practitioner or program should state (e.g. on web sites) what human rights apply in their work and provide a means of complaint/feedback.
3. Any complaint should be forwarded immediately to an external organisation one level above the practitioner or program as a general principle of transparency and accountability. That organisation should require a summary of the program's response within 3 to 6 months. Failure or insufficient responses should be forwarded one level above that organisation. The final notification would stop at ATIC who can then refer to the original national government and/or to the United Nations.
4. Organisations and individuals which receive complaints are advised to provide reparations, as shown in Table 1, borrowed from Gómez et al. (2016).

See [Youth Flourish Outdoors](#) screenshot example of implementing these recommendations at Figure 3. Emails sent to the link will be forwarded to the Australian Association for Bush Adventure Therapy.

Figure 3

Example of a program/organisations human rights public position statement



Table 1

Suggested Reparations

Institutional reparation	Example	Verifiable outcome(s)
Operate with transparency 4,6,12	Disseminating honest and complete information regarding changes APA is making	Number of press releases, articles, e-mails, and other forms of mass communication that include complete and accurate information
Conduct self-assessments: general 1,2,6,11,12	Using the Institutional Betrayal Questionnaire and other measures to conduct anonymous surveys that assess the harm experienced by APA members (including Middle Eastern, North African, and Muslim psychologists and students)	Studies completed, with data informing the creation and/or adaptation of policies
Conduct self-assessments: measurable progress 5,9	Engaging in thorough and honest appraisals of what progress APA has made since releasing public statements	Publicly promoted changes to ethics policy are enforceable; when psychologists violate the ethics code, they are held accountable
Conduct self-assessments: priorities 3	Creating a document that includes the specific actions that APA takes to meet the goals of its mission, identifying goals that are missing or deprioritized at various levels of leadership, revising the document accordingly, creating an action plan to implement changes, making said changes	Documents created, actions taken
Conduct self-assessments: potential for additional institutional betrayals 2,3	Assessing discrimination, retaliation, groupthink, and institutional betrayal throughout APA (e.g., in the leadership, divisions, journals, conferences)	Studies completed, with data informing the creation and/or adaptation of policies
Bear witness to victims harms 2,7,10	Creating accessible opportunities for diverse victims of APA's institutional betrayals to have their pain be heard	Accessible meetings (can include teleconferences, community events) at which deidentified notes are taken that document the harm reported
Acknowledge wrongdoing 2	Publicly acknowledging all institutional betrayals committed without minimizing or denying key actions or inactions	Public communications

Apologize 2,6,10	Publicly apologizing to persons whose professional identities were degraded as a result of voicing concerns over APA's actions, publicly apologizing to victims of torture and their communities	Documentation and dissemination of these apologies
Cherish the whistle blower 2,6,8,12	Publicly thanking individuals who spoke out about APA's wrongdoings, publicly encouraging diverse perspectives and reports of wrongdoing	Documented communications that support individuals who identified problems within APA, clear processes for communicating potential wrongdoing, transparent structures that indicate how information from whistle blowers will inform actions and policies
Correct and/or retract false statements 9	Publicly correcting statements that dismissed or discredited reports of wrongdoing in at least the same avenues of original publications, if not broader venues	Publications
Comply with laws 6	Complying with international law that prohibits torture, complying with international law dictating that governmental demands do not supersede one's professional ethical code	Change ethics codes to match the Nuremberg Ethic
Educate individuals about betrayal and betrayal blindness 2	Disseminating information to APA members, psychologists, and the general public about institutional betrayal, including how to combat betrayal blindness through empowerment	Publications for professional and lay audiences, conference talks, community events
Incorporate social justice 6	Soliciting and incorporating minority viewpoints in all endeavors	Content of self-assessments, publications, apologies, etc.

Notes: APA = American Psychological Association.

APA changed its ethics code to match the Nuremberg Ethic in 2010 (APA, 2010a).

1 Freyd (2014). 2 Freyd and Birrell (2013). 3 Gómez (2015d). 4 Gómez (2015c). 5 Gómez and Freyd (2014). 6 Gómez, Smith, et al. (2014). 7 Platt et al. (2009). 8 Pope (2015). 9 Pope (2016b). 10 Smith et al. (2014). 11 Smith and Freyd (2013). 12 Smith and Freyd (2014b).

Summaries of Declarations

The below summaries are easy to read lists copied from various sources. Web links to more detailed information are included. Note also that most rights have simple posters that make them easy to understand and which may be shared to prospective clients.

Organisational leaders are encouraged to audit their practices against each article of applicable human rights declarations. The appendices may assist organisational leaders to quickly assess the effort and probable benefit of such an audit.

I, and the organisation for which I work, welcome inquiries and sharing with organisations wishing to adopt a human rights-based minimum standard of practice.

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Appendix A**Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/universal-declaration-human-rights-UDHR>

Article 1: We are all born free. We all have our own thoughts and ideas and we should all be treated the same way.

Article 2: The rights in the UDHR belong to everyone, no matter who we are, where we're from, or whatever we believe.

Article 3: We all have the right to life, and to live in freedom and safety.

Article 4: No one should be held as a slave, and no one has the right to treat anyone else as their slave.

Article 5: No one has the right to inflict torture, or to subject anyone else to cruel or inhuman treatment.

Article 6: We should all have the same level of legal protection whoever we are, and wherever in the world we are.

Article 7: The law is the same for everyone, and must treat us all equally.

Article 8: We should all have the right to legal support if we are treated unfairly.

Article 9: Nobody should be arrested, put in prison, or sent away from our country unless there is good reason to do so.

Article 10: Everyone accused of a crime has the right to a fair and public trial, and those that try us should be independent and not influenced by others.

Article 11: Everyone accused of a crime has the right to be considered innocent until they have fairly been proven to be guilty.

Article 12: Nobody has the right to enter our home, open our mail, or intrude on our families without good reason. We also have the right to be protected if someone tries to unfairly damage our reputation.

Article 13: We all have the right to move freely within our country, and to visit and leave other countries when we wish.

Article 14: If we are at risk of harm we have the right to go to another country to seek protection.

Article 15: We all have the right to be a citizen of a country and nobody should prevent us, without good reason, from being a citizen of another country if we wish.

Article 16: We should have the right to marry and have a family as soon as we're legally old enough. Our ethnicity, nationality and religion should not stop us from being able to do this. Men and women have the same rights when they are married and also when they're separated. We should never be forced to marry. The government has a responsibility to protect us and our family.

Article 17: Everyone has the right to own property, and no one has the right to take this away from us without a fair reason.

Article 18: Everyone has the freedom to think or believe what they want, including the right to religious belief. We have the right to change our beliefs or religion at any time, and the right to publicly or privately practise our chosen religion, alone or with others.

Article 19: Everyone has the right to their own opinions, and to be able to express them freely. We should have the right to share our ideas with who we want, and in whichever way we choose.

Article 20: We should all have the right to form groups and organise peaceful meetings. Nobody should be forced to belong to a group if they don't want to.

Article 21: We all have the right to take part in our country's political affairs either by freely choosing politicians to represent us, or by belonging to the government ourselves. Governments should be voted for by the public on a regular basis, and every person's individual vote should be secret. Every individual vote should be worth the same.

Article 22: The society we live in should help every person develop to their best ability through access to work, involvement in cultural activity, and the right to social welfare. Every person in society should have the freedom to develop their personality with the support of the resources available in that country.

Article 23: We all have the right to employment, to be free to choose our work, and to be paid a fair salary that allows us to live and support our family. Everyone who does the same work should have the right to equal pay, without discrimination. We have the right to come together and form trade union groups to defend our interests as workers.

Article 24: Everyone has the right to rest and leisure time. There should be limits on working hours, and people should be able to take holidays with pay.

Article 25: We all have the right to enough food, clothing, housing and healthcare for ourselves and our families. We should have access to support if we are out of work, ill, elderly, disabled, widowed, or can't earn a living for reasons outside of our control. An expectant mother and her baby should both receive extra care and support. All children should have the same rights when they are born.

Article 26: Everyone has the right to education. Primary schooling should be free. We should all be able to continue our studies as far as we wish. At school we should be helped to develop our talents, and be taught an understanding and respect for everyone's human rights. We should also be taught to get on with others whatever their ethnicity, religion, or country they come from. Our parents have the right to choose what kind of school we go to.

Article 27: We all have the right to get involved in our community's arts, music, literature and sciences, and the benefits they bring. If we are an artist, a musician, a writer or a scientist, our works should be protected and we should be able to benefit from them.

Article 28: We all have the right to live in a peaceful and orderly society so that these rights and freedoms can be protected, and these rights can be enjoyed in all other countries around the world.

Article 29: We have duties to the community we live in that should allow us to develop as fully as possible. The law should guarantee human rights and should allow everyone to enjoy the same mutual respect.

Article 30: No government, group or individual should act in a way that would destroy the rights and freedoms of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Appendix B**Convention on the Rights of the Child**

<https://www.unicef.org/media/60981/file/convention-rights-child-text-child-friendly-version.pdf>

Article 1: (definition of the child) Everyone under the age of 18 has all the rights in the Convention.

Article 2; (non-discrimination) The Convention applies to every child without discrimination, whatever their ethnicity, gender, religion, language, abilities or any other status, whatever they think or say, whatever their family background.

Article 3: (best interests of the child) The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children.

Article 4: (implementation of the Convention) Governments must do all they can to make sure every child can enjoy their rights by creating systems and passing laws that promote and protect children's rights.

Article 5: (parental guidance and a child's evolving capacities) Governments must respect the rights and responsibilities of parents and carers to provide guidance and direction to their child as they grow up, so that they fully enjoy their rights. This must be done in a way that recognises the child's increasing capacity to make their own choices.

Article 6: (life, survival and development) Every child has the right to life. Governments must do all they can to ensure that children survive and develop to their full potential.

Article 7: (birth registration, name, nationality, care) Every child has the right to be registered at birth, to have a name and nationality, and, as far as possible, to know and be cared for by their parents.

Article 8: (protection and preservation of identity) Every child has the right to an identity. Governments must respect and protect that right, and prevent the child's name, nationality or family relationships from being changed unlawfully.

Article 9: (separation from parents) Children must not be separated from their parents against their will unless it is in their best interests (for example, if a parent is hurting or neglecting a child). Children whose parents have separated have the right to stay in contact with both parents, unless this could cause them harm.

Article 10: (family reunification) Governments must respond quickly and sympathetically if a child or their parents apply to live together in the same country. If a child's parents live apart in different countries, the child has the right to visit and keep in contact with both of them.

Article 11: (abduction and non-return of children) Governments must do everything they can to stop children being taken out of their own country illegally by their parents or other relatives, or being prevented from returning home.

Article 12: (respect for the views of the child) Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This right applies at all times, for example during immigration proceedings, housing decisions or the child's day-to-day home life.

Article 13: (freedom of expression) Every child must be free to express their thoughts and opinions and to access all kinds of information, as long as it is within the law.

Article 14: (freedom of thought, belief and religion) Every child has the right to think and believe what they choose and also to practise their religion, as long as they are not stopping other

people from enjoying their rights. Governments must respect the rights and responsibilities of parents to guide their child as they grow up.

Article 15: (freedom of association) Every child has the right to meet with other children and to join groups and organisations, as long as this does not stop other people from enjoying their rights.

Article 16: (right to privacy) Every child has the right to privacy. The law should protect the child's private, family and home life, including protecting children from unlawful attacks that harm their reputation.

Article 17: (access to information from the media) Every child has the right to reliable information from a variety of sources, and governments should encourage the media to provide information that children can understand. Governments must help protect children from materials that could harm them.

Article 18: (parental responsibilities and state assistance) Both parents share responsibility for bringing up their child and should always consider what is best for the child. Governments must support parents by creating support services for children and giving parents the help they need to raise their children.

Article 19: (protection from violence, abuse and neglect) Governments must do all they can to ensure that children are protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and bad treatment by their parents or anyone else who looks after them.

Article 20: (children unable to live with their family) If a child cannot be looked after by their immediate family, the government must give them special protection and assistance. This includes making sure the child is provided with alternative care that is continuous and respects the child's culture, language and religion.

Article 21: (adoption) Governments must oversee the process of adoption to make sure it is safe, lawful and that it prioritises children's best interests. Children should only be adopted outside of their country if they cannot be placed with a family in their own country.

Article 22: (refugee children) If a child is seeking refuge or has refugee status, governments must provide them with appropriate protection and assistance to help them enjoy all the rights in the Convention. Governments must help refugee children who are separated from their parents to be reunited with them.

Article 23: (children with a disability) A child with a disability has the right to live a full and decent life with dignity and, as far as possible, independence and to play an active part in the community. Governments must do all they can to support disabled children and their families.

Article 24: (health and health services) Every child has the right to the best possible health. Governments must provide good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food, and a clean environment and education on health and well-being so that children can stay healthy. Richer countries must help poorer countries achieve this.

Article 25: (review of treatment in care) If a child has been placed away from home for the purpose of care or protection (for example, with a foster family or in hospital), they have the right to a regular review of their treatment, the way they are cared for and their wider circumstances.

Article 26: (social security) Every child has the right to benefit from social security. Governments must provide social security, including financial support and other benefits, to families in need of assistance.

Article 27: (adequate standard of living) Every child has the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and social needs and support their development. Governments must help families who cannot afford to provide this.

Article 28: (right to education) Every child has the right to an education. Primary education must be free and different forms of secondary education must be available to every child. Discipline in schools must respect children's dignity and their rights. Richer countries must help poorer countries achieve this.

Article 29: (goals of education) Education must develop every child's personality, talents and abilities to the full. It must encourage the child's respect for human rights, as well as respect for their parents, their own and other cultures, and the environment.

Article 30: (children from minority or indigenous groups) Every child has the right to learn and use the language, customs and religion of their family, whether or not these are shared by the majority of the people in the country where they live.

Article 31: (leisure, play and culture) Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.

Article 32: (child labour) Governments must protect children from economic exploitation and work that is dangerous or might harm their health, development or education. Governments must set a minimum age for children to work and ensure that work conditions are safe and appropriate.

Article 33: (drug abuse) Governments must protect children from the illegal use of drugs and from being involved in the production or distribution of drugs.

Article 34: (sexual exploitation) Governments must protect children from all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation.

Article 35: (abduction, sale and trafficking) Governments must protect children from being abducted, sold or moved illegally to a different place in or outside their country for the purpose of exploitation.

Article 36: (other forms of exploitation) Governments must protect children from all other forms of exploitation, for example the exploitation of children for political activities, by the media or for medical research.

Article 37: (inhumane treatment and detention) Children must not be tortured, sentenced to the death penalty or suffer other cruel or degrading treatment or punishment. Children should be arrested, detained or imprisoned only as a last resort and for the shortest time possible. They must be treated with respect and care, and be able to keep in contact with their family. Children must not be put in prison with adults.

Article 38: (war and armed conflicts) Governments must not allow children under the age of 15 to take part in war or join the armed forces. Governments must do everything they can to protect and care for children affected by war and armed conflicts.

Article 39: (recovery from trauma and reintegration) Children who have experienced neglect, abuse, exploitation, torture or who are victims of war must receive special support to help them recover their health, dignity, self-respect and social life.

Article 40: (juvenile justice) A child accused or guilty of breaking the law must be treated with dignity and respect. They have the right to legal assistance and a fair trial that takes account of their age. Governments must set a minimum age for children to be tried in a criminal court and manage a justice system that enables children who have been in conflict with the law to reintegrate into society.

Article 41: (respect for higher national standards) If a country has laws and standards that go further than the present Convention, then the country must keep these laws.

Article 42: (knowledge of rights) Governments must actively work to make sure children and adults know about the Convention.

Appendix C**Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities**

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-2.html>

Article 5: Equality and non-discrimination

Article 6: Women with disabilities

Article 7: Children with disabilities

Article 8: Awareness-raising

Article 9: Accessibility

Article 10: Right to life

Article 11: Situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies

Article 12: Equal recognition before the law

Article 13: Access to justice

Article 14: Liberty and security of person

Article 15: Freedom of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

Article 16: Freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse

Article 17: Protecting the integrity of the person

Article 18: Liberty of movement and nationality

Article 19: Living independently and being included in the community

Article 20: Personal mobility

Article 21: Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information

Article 22: Respect for privacy

Article 23: Respect for home and the family

Article 24: Education

Article 25: Health

Article 26: Habilitation and rehabilitation

Article 27: Work and employment

Article 28: Adequate standard of living and social protection

Article 29: Participation in political and public life

Article 30: Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport

Simple descriptions and examples of each of the articles that apply to organisations are one pages 7-11 here: <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-08/implementing-the-convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.pdf>