



Acknowledgements

The Employment Equity and Strategic Initiatives Division wishes to acknowledge the contributions made to this publication by the participants of the Opening Doors Program and their managers.

The Participants/The Managers	Sheena King/Jim McDonald
Kevin Chubbs/Jean Tilley	Eugene Pike/Darlene McCurdy
Howard Antle/Rex Goudie	Dawn Sullivan/Mark Brown
Helen Michelin/Agnes Rumbolt	Karl Boone/Rick Conway
Martin Cooney/Noreen Holden	Shirley Ryan/Bernie Howlett
Fern Jennings/Sgt. Derek Tilley	Brent Bussey/Barry MacKay
Paul Power/Marcia Porter	Pam Densmore/Cyril Colford

It is our hope that by sharing their experiences and their views, others will see the value of employment equity and hire persons with disabilities to work in their organizations.

We also wish to acknowledge the special contribution of Paul Power who volunteered his time and talent to act as an advisor on this project.

A Message from The Honourable Joan Marie Aylward, Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board



Minister Joan Marie Aylward

This government has been and continues to be committed to the employment of persons with disabilities in our public service. Nearly 15 years ago, the 1987 Task Force Report on Employment Equity stated, "... it is in the best interest of society and the Newfoundland Public Service to encourage all people to develop fully their skills, abilities and interests... Sensitivity and responsiveness are more likely to be achieved when the composition of the Public Service reflects the society it has been designed to serve."

More recently, our Strategic Social Plan document, People Partners and Prosperity has stated, "Employment is the chief concern of many people. People want to work, to be self-reliant, to regain their dignity and to stop worrying about their financial security. ... work and economic security are key to ensuring the long-term well-being of people, communities and the province."

Employing persons with disabilities is an investment in our people. It is an investment that is helping to create a Public Service that is representative of the public we serve and it is an investment that provides people with disabilities the opportunity to become fully productive and contributing members of our society.

In our last provincial budget, I was happy to announce that an additional \$600,000 was added to the budget of the Employment Equity and Strategic Initiatives Division over the next three years for the Opening Doors Program. This increases the total budget for the program to \$2.6 million and reaffirms government's commitment to the employment of persons with disabilities by increasing the number of permanent, full-time employment opportunities for members of this employment equity group in the public sector of our province.

As the Minister representing Government as the employer, I am very pleased to see the publication of "Opening Doors to Success". As you read through this magazine you will see how the Opening Doors Program has assisted people with disabilities to pursue their careers in the public service and how our departments have benefited from the skills and knowledge these employees have brought to the workplace. It is my hope this magazine will be an employment equity educational resource, bringing our public service one step closer to that time when the Opening Doors Program is no longer necessary - a time when departments follow the lead of government in recognizing the value of hiring persons with disabilities and include employment equity and the employment of persons with disabilities as part of their overall human resource plans.

**A Message
from Tom Hanlon,
President of NAPE**



President Tom Hanlon

In 1990, the Opening Doors Program was introduced to provide employment equity for persons with disabilities. NAPE, the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Public and Private Employees, is proud of our association with the Opening Doors Program. We believe the program is an important example for employers throughout the province of what can be accomplished by making a conscious effort to provide persons with disabilities with meaningful, respectful opportunities to participate fully in the labour force.

Unions are often misperceived as exclusionary - of caring only for our own members and their benefits when, in fact, unions have a long-standing history of fighting for the full participation and integration of all people in the labour force. When NAPE was approached about Opening Doors, it was immediately clear to us that there was a large group of people in our province who were being excluded from employment and the accompanying benefits of union membership because of disability. At that time, we realized that as a union we had a social responsibility not only to recognize that this was the case, but to help provide tangible redress.

We are delighted to have been given the opportunity to work with the provincial government and organizations representing persons with disabilities to help ensure the provincial public sector reflects the true diversity of our society.



**A Message
from Tom Parsons,
President of PSMA**



President Tom Parsons

The Newfoundland and Labrador Public Sector Managers' Association (PSMA) has wholeheartedly and fully supported the Opening Doors Program from its inception as a government initiative with the goal of increasing the representation of persons employed in the provincial public service.

In today's work environment, organizations are moving away from homogeneous cultures, where people were like-minded and of similar backgrounds, and moving towards a more diverse culture where people come from a variety of backgrounds, hold different views and have a range of skills. This new culture is one that is committed to the values of teamwork, creativity and innovation, improved communications, continuous improvement and workplace diversity. Such a culture requires competent, professional managers who support these values. It is for this reason that PSMA has supported the Opening Doors Program.

Supporting the employment of persons with disabilities supports diversity, thereby, allowing our organizations to look at old problems from different perspectives to come up with new solutions. As well, studies show that employees with disabilities rate average or above average in safety and attendance; and a 30-year study by Dupont in the United States revealed that job performance by workers with disabilities was equal to or better than their non-disabled peers.

The managers who, in this publication, have shared their experiences working with employees with disabilities through the Opening Doors Program are exemplary of the high standard of conduct and professional management PSMA promotes. They believe workers with disabilities are a valuable resource in our public service and that employing persons with disabilities at all levels of our public service is a sensible business decision.

On behalf of all the members of the PSMA, it gives me great pleasure to bring to you this message of support for this unique, public sector employment equity program of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.



Recommendation 19
Report of the Task Force
on Employment Equity
January 1987

“Approval be granted for the development and implementation of the Training Placement Program and that adequate financial and human resources be expended to accomplish its objectives.”

This was the beginning of the Opening Doors Program. Government recognized that an effective public service had to be representative of the people it served. This meant that people with disabilities must comprise a significant portion of our public service. However, as the report noted, a number of barriers to employment existed in the system that made it very difficult for people with disabilities to successfully compete on public sector competitions. For this reason, Recommendation 19 was made.

Between 1989 and 1994 more than 50 permanent positions, to be filled only by persons with disabilities, were created throughout government departments across Newfoundland and Labrador. This magazine will introduce you to some of the people who were employed in these positions and give you some idea of the impact the Opening Doors Program had on their careers. It will also introduce you to their managers who will share with you their views on the value of these employees in the workplace. In today's corporate culture, “diversity” is seen as being one of the keys to success. Having a diverse workforce, employing people from different backgrounds gives an organization the competitive edge allowing it to tackle problems from a variety of perspectives and provide solutions. Diversity is viewed as one of the most significant elements in providing first rate customer service.

Employment equity for persons with disabilities supports the concept of diversity. By employing people with disabilities in our departments, you are helping to build a public service that represents the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and one that provides the best possible service to the people of this province.



Like most of us, **Kevin Chubbs** grew up having plans for his life. A fourth-generation Labradorian, Kevin really enjoyed the northern life. He never wanted to leave Labrador to become a city person performing a desk job indoors.

But Kevin discovered how one's life plans can be blown apart in an instant. One day, while working in L'Anse au Clair as a handyman for a construction company, something went terribly wrong. There was a gasoline explosion. Kevin survived, but he was severely burned.

During the next nearly 12 years of recuperation, Kevin had lots of time to think about the future. He knew he had to completely change both his career and general life plans. “Prior to the accident I had intended to work in the family business. That was no longer an option,” says Kevin.

While living at the Health Sciences Centre during his recuperation, Kevin decided to take some courses at MUN, “Just to keep busy.” To his surprise, Kevin loved university. He enrolled full-time and quickly found his calling - learning about and working with computers. Kevin smiles as he recalls his astonishment to this new discovery. “Before going to MUN as a full-time student, I had never even seen a computer. I didn't even know how to turn one on! But once I got involved with computers, I got hooked right away.”

He continued his studies while undergoing many surgeries and ongoing treatment for his injuries and, in 1994, received a Bachelor of Arts in Economics with a minor in Computer Science. It was time to get a job.

Even in a field where graduates are in very high demand, Kevin's job search was meeting with disappointing results. He was certain his disability was the reason no one wanted to hire him. The accident had left his face disfigured by scarring. “I would go to an interview and, as soon as they saw me, I knew, right away, I wouldn't be judged by my abilities, but by how I looked. I was worried I'd never get a job again. I had put in hundreds of applications and had many interviews, but didn't get any job offers.”

Kevin took a more direct approach and, with the support of Workers' Compensation, he approached the Director of IT of

the then Department of Social Services to work in the department on an internship. It was during this internship that Kevin learned of Opening Doors and registered with the program.

At the end of the eight-month internship, Kevin was interviewed through Opening Doors for a year-long contract with the Newfoundland and Labrador Public Service Commission providing network support. He got the position and, eventually, was promoted to Network Administrator. Today, Kevin is a Systems Analyst with the Department of Education.

Kevin still has dreams of returning to live in his native Labrador someday, but realizes his continued medical needs will likely not allow this to become a reality. In the meantime, he has made a life here in St. John's with his partner, Yvonne, and two children. And he really likes his work here. Says Kevin, “I feel really comfortable with the work and accepted by my co-workers. They're a great group!” As for the part Opening Doors played in his career, Kevin says, “Without Opening Doors, I wouldn't be where I am now. They found me excellent work where I could use my skills and restored my confidence in my abilities.”



Kevin Chubbs

“Kevin brings more than just funding for another staff person. He has a wonderful, positive attitude and fits into our division really well. He is highly qualified, participates fully in all aspects of the workplace and is very pleasant to be around. We're lucky to be able to have Kevin working here.”



I didn't actively approach Opening Doors prior to hiring Kevin. However, I would definitely contact the program to help fill any future needs in this division. Besides providing skilled, qualified people, Opening Doors gives my department funding for another position. We're always developing new systems and need trained people. Through Opening Doors, we've been able to create an extra position to do necessary work which probably would not get done otherwise.”

Jean Tilley
Director of Information Technology
Department of Education
Department of Youth Services and Post-Secondary Education

Howard Antle has been a volunteer for the Labrador Economic Development Board, chairing it for over a year. Howard has also taken his favourite hobby - computers - and turned it into a full-time career in the public service.

Born in Carbonear, Howard spent his early education at the Halifax School for the Blind. "My parents were convinced getting an education tailored to my needs as a person with a severe visual impairment would serve me well throughout my life," says Howard.

Howard went on to attend Queen Elizabeth High School in Halifax. After finishing his studies in Halifax, Howard moved back to Newfoundland. He worked for the town of Victoria for two years, returning to Nova Scotia in 1982. There he worked with the provincial government doing clerical and computer software work while also gaining experience as a computer consultant in the private sector.

During the next 10 years, Howard took several years off to earn a diploma in Food and Beverage Management and Business Management through Durham College in Oshawa, Ontario. According to Howard, "The computer courses in this program were the most interesting part of the course." After graduating with honours, Howard did private tutoring in computer software and contract work for the Nova Scotia government. But, the longer he stayed in Nova Scotia, the more Howard longed to come home to Newfoundland.

In June, 1992, Howard returned to Carbonear and, for the first time in many years, found himself unemployed. It was during this time he discovered the Opening Doors Program through the local Social Services office.

"Within one month of registering with Opening Doors, I had three job interviews. I was offered a job in Happy Valley - Goose Bay and decided to take it." Howard explains, "I spent the next seven years working in the accounting section at Social Services (now Human Resources and Employment)." Howard enjoyed the work with Social Services, but dreamed of the day when he would work solely in the computer field. In 1996, he decided to pursue this dream more seriously. Howard took a year's leave of absence to work with a computer company in Toronto so as to gain more experience in the field.

Howard returned to Labrador after his stint with the computer company and, in 1999, competed for a pilot position as Regional Computer Support Specialist with the Department of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs. Howard won the competition and, today, provides hardware and software support for all the provincial government departments in Happy Valley-Goose Bay and other communities on the Labrador coast.



Howard Antle

"Following a province-wide competition to fill the Regional Computer Support Specialist position, a pilot project initiated by the Regional Council in Labrador, Howard Antle won the competition hands down. He was by far the best candidate."



Rex Goudie
Assistant Deputy Minister
Department of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs

Only one minor adjustment had to be made in order to award Howard the job. The job description required the candidate to hold a valid driver's license, since the work would take place in all the provincial government departments here in Happy Valley - Goose Bay. Howard is legally blind. But the hiring committee agreed that Howard should still get the job - the job description was for a computer specialist, not a driver. Since Howard had the skills we needed for the computer support specialist, we didn't feel it was right to exclude him from the competition."

Initially, arrangements were made to provide transportation using taxis and coordinating trips with other staff members. However, Howard is a very resourceful and self-reliant person. He makes his own transportation plans and has never once had a problem getting to an appointment."

Based on the success of this experience I would be happy to hire more Opening Doors people. It's been a very positive experience! We've even received letters from Regional Council departments saying how pleased they are with Howard's work. That's something that doesn't happen very often."

Born and raised in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, **Helen Michelin** began working at the local hospital shortly after completing high school. A couple of years later she was accepted to nursing school in Corner Brook, but by this time she had met her husband. She married, had four children and stayed home to raise her family.

Helen decided to rejoin the workforce when her children were all in school and was hired by Canada Post on a contractual on-call basis. It was then that Helen began experiencing problems hearing. To make a long story short, Helen's hearing loss was the result of too many bouts of tonsillitis as a child. Having lived in an isolated area, a tonsillectomy was not available to her. Now, as an adult, she had lost all hearing in her left ear and much of the hearing in her right. She refused a job with Canada Post because of the impairment.

Helen spent the next few years adapting to her hearing impairment and upgrading her work skills. She concentrated on finding office work that did not require much public contact, ending up with a series of short-term positions punctuated by periods of unemployment. This situation did not fit with Helen's long term goal of permanent employment - a goal that was becoming more difficult to realize than she had anticipated. "I got the feeling that my disability was preventing me from getting work as a lot of jobs required minute taking, contact with the public, or

something in which my hearing loss seemed to interfere with," says Michelin. "I was uncertain as to whether or not I should write down my hearing problem on a job application, but I realized I had to disclose it - an employer would find out eventually."

Finally, Helen contacted a local organization to assist her with her job search; they told her about the Opening Doors Program. The rest is history. Helen was hired as an Accounting Clerk by the Department of Human Resources and Employment in 1999. Says Helen, "I really like my work here. I feel comfortable with what I do and I work with really great people who understand me. Without Opening Doors, I wouldn't be in this job. It was a key resource for my being hired."



Helen Michelin

"The role of this department is to encourage a diverse labour market with equal opportunities; to remove barriers so all workers have an opportunity to demonstrate their abilities and strengths. I've seen, first hand, the benefits of this approach."



Agnes Rumbolt
Regional Manager
Department of Human Resources and Employment
Happy Valley-Goose Bay

When Howard Antle transferred to his new job, there was a vacancy in the accounting section and Helen Michelin won the job competition."

She's been fabulous! Helen is an exceptional employee. She's very dedicated, supportive, eager to assist others and to take on extra tasks. I'd say she's the kind of employee every manager wants. Hiring people through Opening Doors is worth the effort - it's an investment in people! Working with people with disabilities is no different than working with any other staff member. People with disabilities are simply people with barriers. And, as managers, it's our role to help remove those barriers."

He's forty-six years old, married, owns two dogs, works full-time in his permanent position as Human Resources Assistant at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and, in his spare time, attends university classes.

A St. John's native, **Martin Cooney** attended Memorial University for several years back in the 1970's and until 1990 worked in a series of short-term contractual projects for non-profit organizations.

"Although the work was interesting," says Martin, "I wanted a permanent job - one I could build a career from. But, for years I couldn't seem to get a chance to show what I could do. Many employers just weren't open to hiring people with a visible disability."

Martin has cerebral palsy, a condition caused by damage to the brain, usually occurring before, during or shortly after birth. It is characterized by an inability to fully control motor functions. In Martin's case, it is his legs that are most affected by the condition requiring him to use crutches for walking.

Martin says his perceived disability shut him out of the job market. Because he went from contract to contract, he simply could not present a long-term work history to a prospective employer, which, he says, made employers wonder about his abilities.

However, in late 1989 Martin applied to the then newly introduced Opening Doors Program. He was interviewed for a position with the Department of

Finance and in January of 1990 got the call that he had won the competition.

Since then Martin has worked in the field of human resources. He moved on to the federal public service in 1997 and continues his university studies with the plan of finishing his Bachelor of Business Administration by 2003 - the next step in reaching his career goal of becoming a federal Human Resources Officer. But, Martin never forgets the "leg up" he got from Opening Doors. "Opening Doors gave me my first permanent job. A chance to prove myself and move on in my career. Opening Doors gives any disabled person the chance to go on an interview, compete for a job based on merit and show they can do the work."



Martin Cooney

"Martin Cooney joined my staff when the payroll responsibilities for the Department of Finance were transferred to Treasury Board back in the early nineties. Martin was well educated, well trained and always willing to go the extra mile. He was an excellent employee. I was sorry to lose Martin when he moved on to the Federal public service, but it was a career opportunity he couldn't pass up."



I have since worked with four other people hired through the Opening Doors Program. Each of these individuals had some kind of disability which created a barrier to their employment. But in each case, once hired, the individual was more than capable of doing the required work. In addition, no extraordinary accommodation had to be made. If I have one complaint about Opening Doors, it is the turnover rate of the staff members I have hired through the program. Quite simply, their education, work experience and skills are so high that they quickly move on to more challenging, better paying jobs just like Martin did. They are desirable employees who, once they get the experience they need to compete for positions in the public service, move on and up. My experience has been so positive!

Opening Doors provides a tremendous opportunity for someone with a disability to achieve their career goals and develop their potential. As managers, we benefit from their skills and knowledge. Everyone wins - the people employed and the employer."

Noreen Holden
Director
Strategic and Human Resource Policy Division, Treasury Board

For **Paul Power** persistence has paid off - big time.

The 27-year-old has been with the Department of Human Resources and Employment since 1998, moving easily up the ladder from Assistant to Acting Communications Director. But while Paul has managed to expand his resume in a pretty short period of time, the road to his current success has been anything but easy. "It's taken a lot for me to be where I am right now," says Paul. "Seven years of post-secondary school, along with job hunting and then proving myself on a professional level have all been hard work."

Not that Paul is afraid of hard work. In 1990, Paul began studies at Memorial University of Newfoundland in St. John's and spent five years completing his Bachelor of Arts Degree in English. In describing his years at MUN, Paul explains, "It was a real learning experience on an academic and social level. It took me a while to find my niche, which was English and writing. But it was also a time that placed me in a much larger environment and brought me in contact with so many different people and I made so many different friends. It really got me used to people meeting me for the first time and experiencing their reactions to my disability - not all good and not all bad."



Paul Power and Marcia Porter

Paul has had a disability since birth. Avoiding a long diagnostic description that even Paul cannot remember, he describes his disability as a series of physical disabilities since birth resulting in him requiring leg braces and crutches. In addition, he is short in stature.

"It is, I guess, an extra hurdle or barrier you have to deal with along with all the other challenges of being a young person going through university and all the other experiences of adulthood. But I've lived with a disability all my life so it really isn't anything extra to me," Paul philosophizes. "I mean, there are probably

things that I may find a little more physically demanding, but I would never let anyone determine if I could or could not do something. All through school I did whatever my able-bodied peers were doing - there should not be a difference."

This approach seems to have worked well for Paul. After completing his English Degree at MUN, Paul packed up and moved to Toronto to work on his second degree in journalism.

"Toronto was a great experience," Paul enthuses. "It was probably one of the best times of my life. It was great living in a big city, with a large circle of friends, getting professional experience on journalism assignments, running around the city, catching subways, pushing through the busy sidewalks and partying with my peers at all the spots. It was another world, a larger world opened up to me, and it really helped to build my self confidence."

Paul obtained his Bachelor of Applied Arts in Journalism and managed to get his first job in Toronto at TVOntario. There he worked as an Associate Producer doing everything from research and script writing to on-camera interviews and editing.

However, after a year working at TVOntario, Paul began to feel the need to come home. "I remember at the time I was working at TVOntario, my uncle, who was a great man and whom I really admired, passed away suddenly. I flew home to St. John's for the funeral, but I was here for only a couple of days and I had to get back to work in Toronto," Paul says quietly. "I began to realize that living away was keeping me at a distance with my family. It became really important to me to be back with them and have those family relationships on a day-to-day basis rather than seeing them a couple of times a year."

Shortly after returning to Toronto, a call came from Opening Doors offering Paul a job back home with the provincial government.

"I had submitted my resume to the Opening Doors Program a couple of years before," Paul remembers. "Despite the amount of time that had passed, they never forgot me. When this job came up in Communications with Human Resources and Employment, my skills and qualifications fit really well with the criteria for the job."

Paul was hired immediately after a brief telephone interview with the Communications Director at the time and returned home to St. John's two weeks later.

"I have to say, when I began the job I was quite nervous and like a fish out of water. I come from a creative writing and journalism background and government is quite different from what I had experienced professionally. All of a sudden I was writing formal speeches and news releases and the like, but I also had to go through the whole bureaucratic approval process and being told what I could write and what I couldn't write. At first, I have to say, I wasn't completely happy."

"At first there wasn't really much freedom or variety in the job, probably just because I was new and inexperienced. But the longer I stayed with the department the more I learned and the more I could do. I started off as a writer but now I do graphic design, communication plans, promotional materials, and a lot of other creative stuff. It's much more satisfying now to see a brochure or newsletter published and know that I did

that. Plus I've worked with a lot of great and talented people who have taught me a lot," smiles Paul.

Paul seems to know what he is talking about. After three and a half years with the Department of Human Resources and Employment, he has become a great asset. Former Communications Director for Human Resources and Employment, Marcia Porter, says she would not have been able to get along without Paul when she was with the department. "He's a really creative, intelligent, organized and talented guy," enthuses Porter. "I rely on him a lot and if we didn't have him here in the department I don't think we would have been able to do everything we have done in the way of communications for the department."

Marcia says Paul is not looked upon any differently because he came from Opening Doors. "That's not even an issue. Paul is here because of his capabilities and his talent. Actually, the department is very lucky and should be thanking Opening Doors for bringing Paul to their attention. It's very rare to find someone so young, but yet already so professionally experienced and diverse in skills."

And, for now, Paul is content in his position. "Right now I'm satisfied," says Paul, "but I'm always looking for the next opportunity or challenge. Right now I'm getting used to being in the role of Communications Director. The promotion recently happened so along with that comes more responsibilities. Although, I think I'm up for the challenge."



As an Identification Technician with the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary in Corner Brook, **Fern Jennings** is doing work usually reserved for police only. Since 1992, Fern has worked directly with RNC colleagues performing such duties as finger printing, taking mugshots, preparing photographic materials for court and database entry and searching.

"I liked the idea of going to work with the police force," says Fern. "I was probably influenced by stories I heard from my brother-in-law who was in the RCMP."

Fern brought a lifetime of work experience to her job with the RNC. Before she and her husband divorced, she had run her own motel and service station for 17 years. She sold the business after the break up and worked in several different jobs to support her three children. In 1983, Fern worked in the non-profit sector for a short time and then became Director of Volunteer Services at the Corner Brook hospital where she worked for six years.

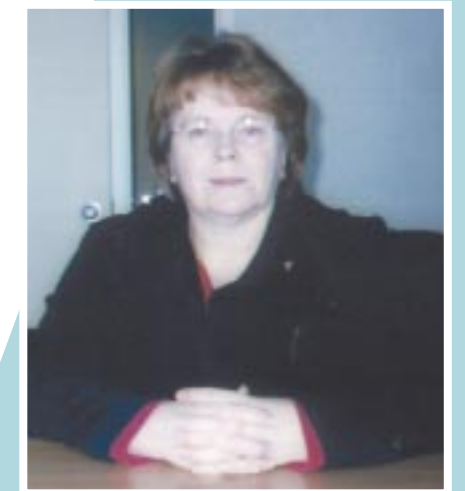
Then, in 1990, Fern's life took a difficult turn. "I got really sick with Multiple Sclerosis. Although I was first diagnosed with MS in 1976, I had been fairly symptom free." Fern explains. "This attack was really serious. I was bedridden and had to resign my position at the hospital."

But Multiple Sclerosis was not going to stop Fern from having the kind of life she wanted - one with a career. "I wasn't ready to give up; I still wanted to be working

and, preferably, in the public sector."

Fern registered with Opening Doors and shortly after got her current position as Identification Technician. She was thrilled to become a permanent employee with the Department of Justice.

Fern says Opening Doors gave her hope when she really needed it. "Opening Doors has given me a tremendous opportunity to get back into the workforce. I work with a wonderful organization and a great bunch of people. Without Opening Doors, I didn't feel I would ever work again in a good, secure job. I really believe I would never have gotten here without them."



Fern Jennings

"I recall working with Jim McDonald of the Opening Doors Program back in the early nineties to create the position of Identification Technician in the Corner Brook RNC office. Fern Jennings won that competition and, since, has been a very positive asset to this office. She brought a lot of common sense and lifetime experience to the job. I can rely on her as a sounding board. We just don't look at Fern as a person with a disability. Yes, she has a medical condition, but she does her job very well. Besides, we all get sick sometimes. She also has an upbeat attitude and nothing gets her down, including her disability."



Sergeant Derek Tilley
Royal Newfoundland Constabulary
Corner Brook Detachment

“Correctional Service of Canada. Sheena King speaking.” That is what you get when you call **Sheena King** at work these days. Sheena is a Case Documentation Clerk with the Federal department. When Sheena is not using the computer at work, she is usually on it at home. That is when she is not reading a book, gone to a movie with her husband or busy with her two cats.

Sheena, born in Forteau, Labrador, is albino. People with albinism have little or no pigment in their eyes, skin, or hair because they have inherited genes that do not make the usual amounts of a pigment called melanin. As well, they always have problems with vision; many, like Sheena, are “legally blind.”

Sheena first heard about Opening Doors while working with a summer program for people with visual disabilities in Ontario in 1994. Says Sheena, “It’s hard enough to find work when you have a disability. It’s even harder when you come to a city from a small community and don’t know anyone. At that time I had no post secondary training - just high school. Jim McDonald told me I would have a better chance competing for a job in the public service if I had some kind of college program.”

Sheena saw the opportunity to pursue her studies when she moved to St. John’s in 1996 to spend more time with her future husband. She completed one year at Keyin College and went on to CompuCollege where she earned a Computer Support Specialist

Diploma. Sheena was on her way to a career in the public service.

Sheena’s first job was a short-term receptionist position at the Y Enterprise Centre. Just as that was winding down, she was successful in a competition for a similar position with the Employment Equity and Strategic Initiatives Division, the home of Opening Doors. Fifteen months in that position gave her the experience she needed to win the competition for her current position with Correctional Service. Says Sheena, “I now have a job I love and hope to stay in for many years!”



Sheena King

“I have a program to deliver and an office to run. So like any other manager, the skills, abilities and performance of my staff are important.”



I remember my first meeting with Sheena. I told her she needed to get more education if she was going to be competitive in public service competitions. Little did I realize that only a few years later she would win a competition to work as a Word Processing Equipment Operator for this office.

I was impressed by the change I saw in Sheena. She fit in with our office really well and worked very hard at her job here which included everything from reception to decorating the office Christmas tree. As well, she did just about everything without accommodation. The only thing we had to provide her with was a simple magnifier to assist her reading. I think we got it at the CNIB for about fifty dollars. Not a big investment, as is the case with most accommodations for people with disabilities. We were sorry to see Sheena go, but that’s what Opening Doors is all about - helping people with disabilities get their foot in the door so they can progress in their careers just like everyone else.”

Jim McDonald
Manager
Employment Equity and Strategic Initiatives Division
Treasury Board

Eugene Pike does not consider himself to be disabled in any way even though others may. “I’m not prevented from doing anything I want to do. But initially, when someone first meets me, they perceive that I can’t do certain things. I think many people just don’t realize there are other ways of doing things.”

Because the lack of a left hand has been with him since birth, Eugene has naturally adapted how he does everything from playing hockey, to using the computer keyboard, to driving a car and has not required any kind of special accommodation in the workplace.

A native of Curling on the West Coast of the province, Eugene received his Bachelor of Science degree at Memorial University in St. John’s in 1991. After graduation, he was hired on as an instructional assistant in the chemistry lab, but his goal was return to the Corner Brook area.

Later that year, Eugene saw an ad for Opening Doors. He submitted his resume to the program. Opening Doors offered opportunities in many different fields throughout the province - maybe he could land a job near home. In 1992 Eugene was interviewed for a position as an Environmental Assistant with the Department of Environment in Corner Brook. He was offered the position and returned home.

Eugene eventually became an Environmental Specialist and has since moved on to new challenges. In 1998, after working with the province for six years he moved to Gander to take his present job with the Department of National Defence as Wing Environment Officer. When speaking of Opening Doors, Eugene makes his views very clear. “I don’t see hiring Opening Doors people as only a one-sided thing. It is beneficial for both the employer and the individual. It’s important to see the abilities of people who have disabilities. People with disabilities can get the job done.”



Eugene Pike

“If a qualified person is hired for the job and you get the right match, it should not matter if they are disabled. I was Eugene Pike’s manager when he worked with the Department of Environment in Corner Brook. Although he was born without his lower left arm and hand, he could drive and use the computer system at least as well as anyone else in the office. But since Gene was the first visibly “disabled” person on staff, his co-workers initially were a little uncomfortable.”



At first, people were shy about mentioning his arm. They often didn’t ask him to help move boxes, or whatever because of it. That stopped one day when someone asked him to “give me a hand”. Gene’s prompt reply was, “B’y, the last time I did that, I didn’t get it back!” Peels of laughter burst from Gene and the rest of the guys. From then on, he was treated no differently than the rest of the staff.

Most importantly, Eugene came to the position with the knowledge, skills and training to do the job he was hired for. In fact, Eugene quickly showed that he was being underutilized. I gave him additional responsibilities which he had no difficulty handling and he was soon doing all the duties of an Environmental Specialist and was reclassified as such.

I recommend to other managers that they at least try the Opening Doors Program. They may be surprised at the caliber of people in that group that can assist them in getting the work of their department done.”

Darlene McCurdy
Manager, Western Region
Occupational Health and Safety Inspections
Department of Labour

In her spare time, **Dawn Sullivan** enjoys crafts such as tole painting and cross stitch, is an avid table tennis player and a bowler. But Dawn's first love is computers. She smiles as she recalls getting her first computer. "I was 15 years old. I just fell in love with the technology and became interested in both hardware and software."

Dawn grew up in Long Pond and attended the Newfoundland School for the Deaf in St. John's. After graduating in 1993, she pursued her passion for computers and attended Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., a university exclusively for deaf students, where she earned her Bachelor of Science in Information Systems.

Dawn returned to Newfoundland for an internship with the Department of Forest Resources and Agrifoods. When a permanent Opening Doors position was created in place of the internship position, Dawn applied and won the job competition.

As the only deaf employee in her workplace, Dawn required some minor accommodations such as a TTY, a specially designed telephone-style device for the deaf. As well, the smoke detector was fitted with a strobe light since she would not hear a fire alarm.

Other accommodations were more personal. When Dawn first started with the department, she communicated with co-workers through writing notes. However, since then, many of Dawn's colleagues have

taken a basic course in American Sign Language held once a week at the office. "Having my colleagues sign has made a real difference in communicating effectively in the work place," says Dawn. "It's wonderful they were so willing to learn ASL."

Dawn describes herself as a "self-learner" who continues to take courses to stay current with the rapid changes in technology. She really enjoys her work in programming and plans to further develop her skills in that area as her long-term career goals include becoming a systems analyst or a computer consultant.



Dawn Sullivan

"I've never hesitated considering people from Opening Doors for my staff. I'm just concerned about hiring creative, competent people who can do the work."



Mark Brown
Director of Information Technology
Departments of Fisheries and Aquaculture,
Forest Resources and Agrifoods and Mines and Energy

Initially, I hired Dawn Sullivan for a student internship. But, I was so impressed with her technical skills and dedication to the job that I contacted Opening Doors about hiring her full time as a junior programmer after she graduated from Gallaudet.

Having a deaf employee presented some communication challenges in the office. In my view, however, it was like having someone, who could not speak English, joining the division. So, before Dawn began work, we hired an American Sign Language (ASL) instructor to come to the work place and teach interested staff. Everyone was encouraged to participate in the sign language training and, as a result, a number of her co-workers now have ASL skills ranging from the basic level to fluent. The entire experience has been positive, with no negatives at all. We all face different barriers in our lives. I had a heart attack last year and have had to completely re-organize my lifestyle and my father, who was always very involved in the community, taught me, by his example, the importance of inclusion. I believe that by hiring Dawn, I was able to put into practice some of my personal values and, as a result, ended up with a very qualified, hard working employee."

Like many rural Newfoundlanders, **Karl Boone** loves the outdoors. He is an avid hunter, snowmobiler and scuba diver and, when he is not spending time with his wife and two sons at the cabin he built at New Bay Lake, he works with the Department of Government Services and Lands in Grand Falls-Windsor as an Environmental Health Officer II.

Prior to his career in the public service, Karl considered taking over the family store, gas bar and taxi business in Cottrell's Cove in Notre Dame Bay. However, preferring to live in a bigger place, Karl decided to look for employment elsewhere.

It was while he was organizing his job search that Karl found out about the Opening Doors Program. Eugene Hickey, a Social Worker at the then Department of Social Services, was helping Karl get new prosthetic limbs for his arms and right foot. He told Karl that Opening Doors may be able to help him find work in the public service. Karl applied to the program and, with two years of a pre-engineering program from Memorial University, specific job-related training and computer courses, he quickly found the right opportunity.

Karl explained how the Opening Doors program helped him. "I was really fortunate because I didn't have to go out and knock on doors. By eliminating the need to compete with people without visible disabilities, Opening Doors made the task of finding a job much easier. Opening Doors gives people with disabilities a chance to prove themselves. It gave me a chance to prove myself on the job."

He continued, "I can understand why people might have been hesitant to hire me, even though I knew I could do the work. Having grown up working in my parents' business, I

understand how an employer feels. They look at me, having hooks and no hands, and wonder how I could do the job. What they don't realize is since I have always lived with my situation, I have learned to manage. In fact, I really didn't realize I had a disability until I went to take my driver's test and saw the reaction of the examiner.

Karl emphasized that he does not require any special equipment to do his work. He simply knows how to adapt his abilities to use the wide range of equipment required to do his job. As for the future, Karl's goal is to continue his work with the public service.



Karl Boone

"Today Karl Boone is one of the senior Environmental Health Officer II's in the province. He's a remarkable fella. It's amazing what he can do. He hasn't required any special accommodation in the workplace."



Rick Conway
Manager of Operations
Government Service Centre
Department of Government Services and Lands, Grand Falls-Windsor

We don't see Karl as being disabled. He's the same as everyone else. I think he has found a niche here and he honestly loves his work. He loves being outdoors and doing all kinds of things.

Creating a position funded through Opening Doors was a win-win proposition for both the organization and the individual hired for the job. This was a chance for us to get work done that needed to be done. Our budget couldn't support the new position, but Opening Doors was able to help us. I recommend that anyone hiring to fill a vacancy should at least get involved in interviewing Opening Doors candidates. It's worth trying someone out on a temporary basis to see how things work out. If they would be lucky enough to have an individual like Karl come along, that would be great."

Shirley Ryan has an office overlooking St. John's Harbour from the South Side Road. She works with the Department of National Defence as a Records Clerk, a job she was appointed to permanently in the fall of 2000.

Shirley is a mother of two who, following a successful career in office administration, decided to pursue a career in information technology. She enrolled in the Computer Specialist Program with the College of the North Atlantic, graduating with top honours. Shirley also received the Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer and the Compton's A+ Industry Standard designations. Around this time she was also faced with one of the major challenges of her life - a diagnosis of Multiple Sclerosis.

Being a realist, Shirley knew her lack of relevant work experience in the field of computer support, coupled with her disability and a high local unemployment rate, would make it tough to be hired. She decided to register with the Opening Doors Program.

Within only a few months, Shirley was employed in a temporary Opening Doors position as a Payroll Clerk with Treasury Board. She then moved on to the Department of Finance as a temporary Accounting Clerk and, in the fall of 2000, her name was referred by Opening Doors to the Department of National Defence for consideration in a competition for a permanent position with the Newfoundland Cadet Detachment.

Shirley had the necessary education, experience and, as a bonus, an extensive history with the cadets from her teenage years. In November, she was advised she had placed first in the competition and was offered the job.

Shirley enjoys her work with National Defence. "It (the job) utilizes many of my skills in administration, computer and network management and, also, computer instruction."

As for her disability, Shirley says it does present some challenges, but does not prevent her from getting the job done. Says Shirley, "I perform really well some days, but other days are harder. So, I do my best to really maximize the good days. I won't let my disability stop me from doing anything!"



Shirley Ryan

"I was impressed with Shirley Ryan's background in accounting and her attention to detail - qualities that meet this division's needs. She functioned as a valuable member of the division. And, most importantly, at least from a manager's perspective, her multiple sclerosis did not negatively impact her ability to perform the duties of the position."



Bernie Howlett
Manager of Client and Support Services
Tax Administration Division
Department of Finance

Over the years, I have had the pleasure of working with several people from Opening Doors. They have always exhibited a strong work ethic and a conscientious attitude, which are some of the more important attributes an employee can possess. Today, with the enhancements in computer and communications technologies that can help overcome many workplace barriers, having a disability is almost irrelevant. It's the quality of the worker that is the important factor."

Brent Bussey is a man who is always up for a challenge. As a Computer Support Specialist for Treasury Board, Brent spends his days troubleshooting problems with hardware and software. He is a man in heavy demand throughout the West Block of the Confederation Building. However, having a busy schedule and solving challenges is nothing new to Brent.

Born with a visual impairment, Brent grew up in the Conception Bay area. After high school, he completed a program in computers and accounting at Keyin Technical College. He went to work with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) in St. John's as Co-ordinator of Technical Services, but in 1994 was up to new challenges. Brent contacted the Opening Doors Program.

"Opening Doors was a great asset for helping me achieve my career goals. The program worked for me. It helped get me in the door and establish myself. Opening Doors plays a role as a recruiter and provides support on two levels, both for management and the clients. It educates managers on what to expect if they hire someone with a disability. This helps take away their uncertainty. Opening Doors also provides clients with whatever they need to do their work." Regarding his latter statement, Brent is especially

enthusiastic about a new piece of accommodation equipment he recently started using - the Jordy. This goggle-like device, worn over Brent's eyes whenever he works on a computer, magnifies objects and detects movement. "This device lets me do my work just as well as someone without a sight problem," explains Brent.

When outside the office, Brent also keeps busy. Like many others in his field, Brent continues to upgrade his skills and has just completed his A-Plus Certification. As well, he spends a lot of time on his favourite hobby, amateur radio, and, as a newlywed and first time homeowner, Brent and his wife are busy settling into their recently built home in Conception Bay South.



Brent Bussey

"My division provides network support for seven government departments. My staff are very busy keeping all the 1000-plus desktops functioning, while ensuring the network itself is "up" and I, personally supervise 14 staff. One of them is Brent Bussey. I wasn't sure how his disability would work out since vision is used so much in computer work. I had no idea how Brent coped with his disability in this work setting. But Brent has demonstrated he belongs here. His visual impairment has never affected his work. If someone can do the work, I'm happy. As a manager I believe, all other things being equal, attitude and work ethic should be the prime factors considered for selecting employees."



Barry MacKay
Manager of Network Support, Information Technology Division
Executive Council

Pam Densmore loves to shop and is, truly, a tennis fanatic. In fact, she does her best to plan her vacations around major tennis tournaments. But, from eight to four, Monday through Friday, Pam Densmore works as an Information Officer in the Policy and Planning Division of the Department of Labour.

After completing high school, this St. John's native earned a B.A. in political science and history from Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) in 1989.

Pam worked in the non-profit sector for a while, following graduation, but believed that moving ahead in her career could be difficult. By this time, both private and public sector employers were in downsizing mode and the job market was becoming more competitive than ever due to high unemployment. Also, Pam has a disability, cerebral palsy, that affected her physical mobility.

To help her realize a career in the public service, Pam decided to register with the Opening Doors Program. "I have no problem being part of a program that helps people with disabilities compete for jobs. The philosophy of employing people by merit and based on accommodation is fair. Opening Doors targets one group, but what makes it worthwhile is you still have to compete on merit. Merit is based on your own knowledge and work experience."

In 1992 Pam began her public service career with the Human Resources Division of the then Department of

Forestry and Agriculture. She also returned to MUN to earn a Certificate in Public Administration. Pam moved to her current position in 1996.

Pam likes her job. "I've always been interested in government and politics, especially international politics, an area I studied in university. In this job I get to focus on topics related to international affairs." As for Pam's future in the Public Service, she makes it very clear, "I have no interest in becoming a politician. I like the policy end of government and would like to continue working in this area." Pam is continuing her studies and recently completed a university course online.



Pam Densmore



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**Opening Doors is a
program of the Employment
Equity and Strategic
Initiatives Division of
Treasury Board.**

"In my view, when recruiting, the key is to assess a person's skills and training. We have a job to do. Disability does not affect merit. As long as someone can do it, the disability doesn't matter. In Pam's case, she works well and I have no complaints."

We've had to make sure that, in the event of a building evacuation, there is someone to assist Pam in getting out of the office. But this is not a problem. Anyone can have mobility difficulties. You just have to make allowances. My experience with hiring people with disabilities, generally, is that major changes in the workplace are not required. The Opening Doors Program has worked out well for me."

Cyril Colford
Director of Labour Relations
Department of Labour