Opening Doors to Success

Employment Equity and Strategic Initiatives Division

Laurie Has Arrived

Flying High in Gander

Experience on the Job

He’s My Brother
# Table of Contents

- Message from the Premier: 2
- Message from the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board: 3
- Message from the Clerk of the Executive Council: 4
- Message from the President of NAPE: 5
- Opening Doors: Leveling the Playing Field: 6
  - An overview of the Opening Doors Program
- Ross Reid Thinks Globally About Local Issues: 8
  - The Deputy Minister of the Premier’s Office shares his views on local issues
- Public Service: Committed to Diversity: 9
  - An interview with Public Service Commissioner Sheila Devine
- A Healthy Economy Not Necessarily the Richest: 10
  - Dr. Doug House, Deputy Minister of the Department of Innovation, Trade and Rural Development, focuses on economic and social development issues
- Barriers to Employment: 11
- Andrew Budgell Makes His Mark in Labrador: 14
- Bart Parrill: A Flare With Computers: 16
- Sherry Styles Puts Ability First: 17
- Corrine Flynn: Flying High in Gander: 18
- Brad George: Opening His Own Doors: 20
- Laurie Mooney Has Arrived: 22
- Kelly Sheppard: Working to Make a Difference: 23
- Education is Fundamental But Experience Counts: 24
- He’s My Brother: Terry and Tony Cull: 26
- Roger Head: What Lies Beneath: 28
Cover to cover, Opening Doors to Success is a pleasure to read. The pages are filled with stories about Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who have overcome real challenges in their lives and are making valuable contributions to the social and economic life of the province. Most of the people featured in this magazine have at least two things in common: they have found meaningful, lasting employment through the Opening Doors Program, and they all have disabilities that, in many cases, have created significant employment barriers for them.

Opening Doors is a widely recognized program that aims to create a more diverse public service by hiring qualified persons with disabilities to work in our provincial government. The program is unique in Canada and is considered a ‘best practices’ model by policy and program designers across this country.

Since its launch over a decade ago, several hundred people with disabilities have found employment in provincial government offices all across this province, from St. John’s to Port aux Basques to Happy Valley-Goose Bay. As well, Opening Doors has created federal government partnerships that have opened up opportunities for qualified persons with disabilities to enter the federal public service.

The story of Opening Doors is a good news story, not only for those who are working, but for the entire public service; the creation of a workplace environment that welcomes and respects all our citizens is an initiative that is in the best interest of all.

As a government, we believe everyone deserves the opportunity to gain meaningful employment. The more diverse our workforce, the more perspectives we bring to public service. People with disabilities bring a unique, necessary and sometimes overlooked perspective to the workplace.

Our communities are better and more vibrant when we all have an equal opportunity to take part in our collective well-being and to make a difference in the lives of all our citizens. We create a richer, more tolerant society when all of us are able to contribute to building a better Newfoundland and Labrador.

I, with my colleagues, applaud Opening Doors for the diversity and new opportunities this program has brought, and continues to bring, to our public service and indeed to the people of this province.
Message from the Honourable Loyola Sullivan

Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board

As the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, it is my pleasure to introduce you to a magazine that highlights the progress of our public service in addressing employment barriers for persons with disabilities.

This magazine highlights the professional accomplishments of persons with disabilities who are current or former employees of the public service. Since its inception in 1990, the Opening Doors Program has assisted hundreds of persons with disabilities in finding employment. These positions have enabled talented, educated and qualified workers to demonstrate that having a disability has nothing to do with an individual's professional ability. In turn, many of our offices across the province have gained valuable workers who have helped to improve the quality of service we provide to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

My government colleagues and I recognize that persons with disabilities continue to encounter daily professional barriers. Therefore, we know that efforts to eliminate those barriers within the public service - from providing employment opportunities to addressing physical barriers in the workplace - must continue also.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador will pursue the objectives and priorities of the Opening Doors Program. The public service should be as diverse as the public it serves. While government recognizes there are still many barriers to address, Opening Doors has been instrumental in establishing a cultural change within the public service based on diversity and inclusion.
Message from Robert Thompson

Clerk of the Executive Council

As a modern, progressive and dynamic public service, we must reflect the diversity and profile of the public we serve. In this way we build trust with all our citizens.

Opening Doors is a successful program with an excellent track record. Since 1990, it has helped us build a public service that meets the needs of all people throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. Positions are filled based on merit, education and abilities, and candidates build on those credentials through meaningful work opportunities. The benefits are not simply for Opening Doors employees; we all gain through our day-to-day interactions with program participants.

There is nothing that changes an organization’s attitude and culture like personal experience. Working side by side with Opening Doors employees, we see the ability and talent rather than the disability. Integrating people with disabilities into the workplace creates a sense of openness, fair play and equity that, surely, benefits us all.

I believe we have come a long way in building a civil service that mirrors the public we serve, and changing the way we think about diversity and disability issues. Opening Doors has certainly played a fundamental role in creating this kind of open environment. Of course, the work is never finished. We must continue to strive for excellence and equity in our public service, so as to reflect these values to all our citizens as we work to make a difference for Newfoundland and Labrador.
Message from Leo Puddister

*President of NAPE*

In 1987 this province convened a task force on employment equity for persons with disabilities. Far too few people with disabilities were participating in the paid labour force. Clearly, something had to be done. NAPE, the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Public and Private Employees, had the privilege of sitting on the advisory committee that led to the creation of the Opening Doors Program, which exists to ensure that people with disabilities have an opportunity to become part of the provincial government workforce.

NAPE represents many unionized provincial government workers, and most entry-level provincial government jobs are unionized. The provincial government of the day was willing to create additional entry-level jobs to be filled by persons with disabilities, but it couldn’t do so without NAPE’s cooperation - something NAPE was proud to give.

As a union, NAPE constantly struggles to help bring about equity in the workplace, so we knew this was the right thing to do. All people have the right to contribute through paid employment, and all people have the right to benefit from paid employment. In 1990 the first people were hired through the Opening Doors process. For many people with disabilities, Opening Doors gave them their crucial first job.

The workers who have entered the provincial government workforce as a result of the Opening Doors Program have also brought something special to their jobs. They add to the diversity within their workplaces, helping to make the people who deliver public services more reflective of society as a whole. It is also fair to say that by adding their unique perspectives to the workplace, they help to shape government policies and programs to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

NAPE looks forward to the day when there is no need for an Opening Doors Program, for the day when the provincial government’s human resource policies and practices have evolved to the point where equitable hiring is a matter of course. Until that time, we are proud to support Opening Doors.
When many long-time government employees began their careers, it was rare to meet someone with a visible disability working in any provincial government office throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

That began to change in 1990, with the launch of the Opening Doors Program. Created to increase the number of persons with disabilities working in the public service, several hundred people have found employment through the program. They include social workers, accountants, receptionists, computer specialists, statistics officers and environmental specialists, to name a few. They’ve helped build a civil service that is more representative of the people it serves.

Opening Doors positions are filled only by persons with disabilities who are registered with the Employment Equity and Strategic Initiatives Division. The salaries of employees are fully funded by the Opening Doors Program to increase the number of persons with disabilities working in government. Positions are filled based on merit. However, with Opening Doors positions, more emphasis is placed on education and abilities rather than work experience.

"Opening Doors has become a great asset for both clients and the public service," says Joan Burke, Minister of Human Resources, Labour and Employment. "As Minister, I take a keen interest in programs and incentives that help create a more diverse labour market. Opening Doors has played a major role in furthering diversity within the public service."

Minister Burke has a number of current and former Opening Doors clients within her department. She believes the program is a win-win situation for both employees and employers. "First, the program has provided opportunities for individuals with disabilities to get their foot in the door and demonstrate their professional capabilities. Second, departments across the province have had the privilege of gaining strong employees."
Other Programs and Services

Opening Doors is the Division’s foundation program, but there are a number of other programs and services offered that aim to increase the number of persons with disabilities working in the public service.

**The Targeted Wage Subsidy Initiative** provides wage subsidies to provincial government departments and agencies that hire persons with disabilities into contractual work experience opportunities related to their training. To be eligible, persons with disabilities must be registered with the Employment Equity and Strategic Initiatives Division and be either receiving, or eligible to receive, Employment Insurance or Income Support.

**The Student Summer Employment Program** offers post-secondary students with disabilities career-related work experience, providing practical skills and knowledge to prepare them for future entry into the labour market. To be eligible for these 12-14 week summer placements, students must be attending a post-secondary educational institution, returning to school in September and registered with the Division.

**The Enabling Resource Centre** provides practical job search assistance and career counselling to registered clients. The centre features computer workstations with adaptive equipment and software, including, but not limited to, wide screen monitors and enhanced keyboards, vision enhancement and voice activated software, as well as a comprehensive print and video resource library to aid in career building and job search.

**Federal Government Referrals** are also provided to departments through an arrangement with the Public Service Commission of Canada, using the Division’s client registry.

**Persons with a disability** who wish to access any of the programs and services of the Employment Equity and Strategic Initiatives Division must be registered in our client registry. Interested individuals are asked to complete an application form and forward it to the Division with a detailed resume and proof of education. Application forms are available by either contacting the Division or visiting our website.

**Government managers** who would like more information on the programs and services available are invited to contact our Division. Please call us, visit in person, or view our website to gain further insight into our programs and services and to learn how we can work together to incorporate diversity in the workplace.

**Contact Information:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Telephone:</th>
<th>709-729-5881</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toll free:</td>
<td>1-800-950-4414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTY:</td>
<td>709-729-5441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fax:</td>
<td>709-729-5446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:openingdoors@gov.nl.ca">openingdoors@gov.nl.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website:</td>
<td><a href="http://www.gov.nl.ca/openingdoors">www.gov.nl.ca/openingdoors</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Or visit us in person at:**

- Employment Equity and Strategic Initiatives Division
- 5th Floor, West Block
- Confederation Building
- St. John’s, NL
- A1B 4J6
Ross Reid Thinks Globally About Local Issues

In recent years, Ross Reid has worked in some of the world's hot spots. While that might mean the beaches of Florida and Mexico to some, to Mr. Reid it has meant a passport stamped with country names that conjure up different images.

"I've worked in some really amazing places: the West Bank, Gaza, Kosovo, Ukraine, Yemen, Afghanistan," says Reid, his voice full of energy and drive. Spending time in these countries has helped reaffirm his belief that a society's strength lies in the participation of all its citizens.

A former Member of Parliament and Cabinet Minister representing Newfoundland and Labrador in the Government of Canada, Mr. Reid has been involved in Canadian politics since 1975. In recent years, though, he has worked with the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, helping to build political and civic organizations, safeguard elections and promote citizen participation.

He brings a global perspective to his role as Deputy Minister for the Premier's Office. "We are stronger when more of us are participating, when all of us are able to contribute," he says. "The Opening Doors Program performs a valuable role, because the public service has an obligation to be reflective of our society. This is also true for the private and charitable sectors. We have an obligation to minimize challenges; it's worth making the extra effort."

During his time in difficult places like Kosovo, Reid says he rarely saw people with visible disabilities on the streets, in the shops, in many public venues. Even though land mine accidents were frequent and there were many amputees, they had little presence. The same was true for children with conditions such as Down's Syndrome.

And though our experiences are quite different in this province, Mr. Reid believes many people are still excluded from full participation in our society. That's in spite of programs such as Opening Doors. "Unfortunately, we have allowed too many barriers to stand between people and success. Religion, gender, disability and age can still create barriers, even now. We cannot afford to lose what so many people have to offer - a brilliant mind, a creative perspective."

"We have a responsibility to level the playing field," says Reid. "I'm a big believer that the value of a society is based on what we do collectively to make things better for all our citizens."
Public Service
Committed to Diversity

Walk through the doors of the Public Service Commission (PSC) and you will likely notice a colourful plaque on display near the entrance. It is in support of Opening Doors, the program that helps people with disabilities find employment in the public service.

Public Service Commissioner Sheila Devine is proud of the Commission's role in the creation of the program. Back in the late 1980s, a broad province-wide consultation identified the need to make government more representative of the people it served. People with disabilities were under-represented, mostly due to lack of job experience.

So, 14 years ago the PSC launched Opening Doors, hiring 17 persons with disabilities in the first year. By 2004, several hundred persons with disabilities have gained employment through the program. Opening Doors has expanded to include such initiatives as the Targeted Wage Subsidy Initiative, Student Summer Employment Program and other employment-related partnerships with the federal government.

It has also become a model for other provincial initiatives such as the Public Service Internship Program.

"Opening Doors has changed the culture of our organization," says Ms. Devine, over a cup of tea in her office. "It's made the public service a better place to work, and there is a recognition that our employees with disabilities are competent civil servants trying to do a good job. It makes us see the competence and not the disability."

It is this cultural change that Ms. Devine says is probably the single most important benefit of the program.

When she first began her career in government, it was rare to see people with visible disabilities working in the public service. Since then, and especially with the introduction of Opening Doors, that has changed. "We've made exceptional progress in terms of providing an avenue for people with disabilities to enter the public service, particularly in these times of financial restraint."

"These days it's difficult to gain access to the public service, and I think we need special initiatives to keep the door open. We've had several (Opening Doors) candidates here in the Public Service Commission. What characterized all of them was their enthusiasm, their desire to do good work and their ability to fit into our environment."

Lean times have also meant fewer promotions across the civil service, and this is certainly true for persons hired through Opening Doors. Though the program has expanded in recent years, government hopes the introduction of a management development component will broaden its scope. This would give employees more opportunities to build their skills and further enhance their own careers.

"Among government employees and senior managers, there is much more awareness about the program, and the many talents of Opening Doors employees," she says. "There's nothing more beneficial than participating in the program. You're not just talking rhetoric, you're speaking from personal experience."
A Healthy Economy Not Neccessarily the Richest

Dr. Doug House has focused on economic and social development for much of his career.

The Deputy Minister of the Department of Innovation, Trade and Rural Development has an extensive resume that includes experiences as Chair of the Economic Recovery Commission (1989-96), Chair of Enterprise Newfoundland and Labrador (1989-93) and provincial Co-Chair of the Task Force on Community Economic Development (1994-95).

"You can't separate social from economic," says Dr. House, who is on secondment from his position as Professor of Sociology at Memorial University. "In order to have a strong economy, you have to have a strong society where there is a strong sense of people caring for people."

But this kind of society doesn't evolve on its own. It's got to be nurtured or, as Dr. House says, there needs to be an active group of people pushing the envelope. "You need someone around to bring these issues to our attention, because you get caught up in the hurly-bury of things."

Government must also show leadership in this area. "There's no doubt that this has a reverberating effect on the culture of the whole organization."

Targeted programs and services such as Opening Doors are necessary to build an inclusive society, says the deputy minister. At the same time it's also necessary to build awareness and educate people about disability.

"In our department we have a person who is visually impaired working with computers," says Dr. House, referring to computer support specialist, Brent Bussey. "He's probably one of the best people we have, and he's really good at what he does. He makes a very important contribution to our department."

"That's true for all of us. We all have certain things that we're good at and certain things that we're not. It's all about finding the right niche."

While financial restraints present challenges to any government, Dr. House says creativity, innovation and progressive thinking should not be sacrificed during the tough times. "A healthy economy is not necessarily the richest economy. It's a values issue, and it comes to a value judgment that we've got to make collectively."

"You never just do it and it's done once and for all. It's a process that is continually evolving. You do make progress, and that's the good thing. You've got to have faith in that and build on it."
Barriers to Employment

Despite the age of political correctness, persons with disabilities still find it a challenge entering the labour market

It's a sunny afternoon in Grand Falls-Windsor, and Nadine Hale sits in her office in the Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment. As an office administrator, Nadine is responsible for a number of administrative and support services for the central region.

The confidence Nadine exudes is quite a transformation from when she first left high school and was deciding on her future career path. She was met, on that path, with personal and professional obstacles, mostly due to her hearing impairment.

“I do rely on amplifying devices for the phone, as well as hearing aids, lip reading, and of course there are certain situations where I don’t get what is being said,” says Nadine.

Upon graduation in 1989, Nadine's first job was at a gas station on the main highway near Grand Falls-Windsor. Realizing she wanted to move beyond that position in her professional life, in the fall of 1989 she decided to enroll in a two-year Information Processing Program at the former Fisher Institute in Corner Brook.

While Nadine had good marks, she struggled with the dicta-typing component and lost the confidence to continue. In 1992 she returned to school again this time at the College of the North Atlantic, where she completed a Business Administration Accounting/Finance Program.

While she now had solid academic credentials, Nadine still found barriers when it came to the job interview process.

“I grew up knowing I was missing out on things, and I was always shy and reserved. So when it came to trying to present myself in interviews I found it really hard,” Nadine reflects softly. When it comes to the background and education, I know I can do it, but when I go into an interview and can't present myself right and I'm nervous because of my hearing impairment. That's where I fail.”

Despite this obstacle, Nadine was finally successful in 1994, obtaining an administration position through the Opening Doors Program with the former Department of Social Services. Over the next several years, thanks to getting her foot in the door, Nadine was able to build on her skills and her self-confidence and move through several positions in the department and other provincial and federal departments.

Today, Nadine’s new-found confidence has propelled her to her current position as an Office Administrator, but she is always looking to develop her career further. She continues to compete for future opportunities both in the public and private sector.

As a member of the disabled population, Nadine is not alone in her experiences of having difficulty making the transition from education to the labour market.

continued on next page
The 1991 Statistics Canada study Health and Limitations Survey (HALS), cited that approximately 26,000 people in Newfoundland and Labrador had a disabling condition. Of this population, only 7,100 or 27 per cent were employed; the remainder were under-employed or not in the labour market.

It’s a situation John Ottenheimer, Minister of Education, recognizes and believes should continue to be addressed. “Post-secondary education can be an important step in securing successful employment,” says Minister Ottenheimer, “but that is only one piece of the puzzle. Support and pro-active initiatives are needed as follow-up to education, to enable students to make the transition from the educational institution to the labour market. Opening Doors provides that link for persons with disabilities. However, we need to continue moving in the right direction. This program provides a model that could be utilized more widely within the public service and could also be supported by private sector employers. This program can help us continue to develop inclusive working communities where we can all learn and grow together.”

For Paul Vincent, who obtained a job through the Opening Doors Program as a Database Administrator for the Department of Justice, barriers to employment were more about physical limitations than self-confidence. Due to a motor vehicle accident when he was 15, Paul is a lower-level paraplegic who uses a wheelchair.

“The biggest limitation was the accessibility of buildings,” Paul recalls, of the time when he was looking for a job. “I went to many places to drop off resumes, and I would go up a ramp to go into a building, take the elevator up, get off the elevator and the first thing I’m met with are steps into an office. In a wheelchair one step might as well have been five flights of stairs.”

Compounding the difficulty of inadequate accessibility, Paul also believes there is still a negative stigma from the general public when it comes to viewing the capabilities of someone with a disability.

“The biggest problem I’ve had to one extent is other people’s opinions,” says Paul. “Other people’s misconceptions of what a person with a disability or a person in a wheelchair can do…I think it's ignorant on their part not to know already.”

While Paul thinks society has improved in attitude, he also believes there is still a lot of work to do to bring about a change in attitude and equal treatment of persons with disabilities. In Paul’s opinion, moving that cultural change forward in the public service is a good starting point.

“In the private sector, I think it's a fear of the unknown. Private businesses are afraid it's not going to work because they haven’t been around people in wheelchairs or other persons with disabilities to know what they can do. In the private sector, if it doesn’t work out, that's a financial loss that they have to justify. The public sector is more willing to take a chance.”

Taking a chance in the public service is an approach Paul says can have positive effects on the labour market as a whole.

“I think you have to get persons with disabilities in there first to show employers, private or public, that yes, they can do the job once they are given the opportunity,” Paul explains. “Business members are going to see these people who are working as productive members of the public service and hopefully have the attitude that if they can do it in the public sector they should be able to do it in the private sector.”
Sean Dawe is the Acting Director of Legal Information Management for the Department of Justice. His division has employed three Opening Doors participants over the past four years, including Paul Vincent.

“If I were asked to pass along advice to other managers not experienced with working with a person with a disability, I would have to say that you need to look past the disability and see the person. If the individual is qualified to do the work, look upon their skills and abilities as assets and not upon their disability as a liability,” Sean advises.

While the Opening Doors Program has assisted a number of individuals with disabilities in identifying and overcoming both personal and societal barriers to employment, the work in addressing barriers is ongoing.

“Many persons with disabilities are still experiencing a general inability to enter the labour market,” says Jim McDonald, Manager of the Employment Equity and Strategic Initiatives Division. “One of our biggest challenges in government is to ensure job applicants are evaluated fairly, instead of employers making certain assumptions on what a person is capable, or incapable, of doing.”

“Yes, we have made progress in the representation of persons with disabilities who are employed in the public service,” continues McDonald. “However, we will not have complete inclusion until diversity is a standard practice enforced in all hiring, not just through initiatives such as Opening Doors.”

**Overcoming Barriers**

*These clients of Opening Doors explain how the program has helped them overcome employment barriers.*

**Brent Bussey (Computer Support Specialist, Department of Innovation, Trade and Rural Development)**

“Many people are a little skeptical or nervous about taking a chance when hiring. Over time I hope a program like this will give enough people with disabilities the opportunity to prove their abilities and to change some of the attitudes.”

**Dawn Sullivan (Computer Programmer, Department of Natural Resources)**

“Opening Doors is an important program in providing persons with disabilities a job in the public service. Through the program, clients have a great opportunity to enhance their skills.”

**Pam Densmore (Information Officer, Labour Relations Agency)**

“I think the fact that the provincial government has this program is very important. Some departments may have never considered having a person with a disability within their organization, except for the fact that Opening Doors does exist.”

**Paul Power (Communications Specialist, Department of Health and Community Services)**

“Opening Doors creates an opportunity for people with disabilities to prove themselves professionally, while also diversifying the overall makeup of the public service. It takes what is sometimes perceived as a disadvantage and makes it an advantage in getting your foot in the door.”

**Eugene Pike (Wing Environment Officer, Canadian Forces Base)**

“This program is crucial. It enhances the integration of persons with disabilities into the work force. It provides meaningful employment and opportunity. A person's capabilities cannot be judged by appearance. Everyone deserves a chance to prove themselves.”
Andrew Budgell Makes His Mark in Labrador

It was a gray, rainy Friday when Andrew Budgell arrived in Labrador City driving his blue Chevrolet Corsica, stuffed with some bedding, dishes and a 14-inch TV. He didn't know a soul, or even much about the town - except that it was famous for iron ore. He felt so lonely.

To make matters worse, he could not get into his apartment. "It was not a good start," remembers Andrew, who works for the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary as an identification technician. "I felt like turning around and going home."

But 13 years later, he calls Labrador City home. It's where he met his wife, where he bought his house, where he has a large network of friends.

"Labrador has been very good for me," says the Grand Falls-Windsor native. "I like my work here, like the people. In bigger centres, many people have just one job. But here in a smaller centre I work with a support staff of civilians and police officers, doing fingerprinting, mug shots, administrative work; I do dispatch in the communication center, answer phones and data entry. I like to be busy, and there's a broad range of work."

"It a pleasure to work with Andrew," says Inspector Bob Garland, Divisional Commander of the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary's detachment in Labrador West. "He is all that anyone can hope for in a co-worker: positive, competent, capable and conscientious. Once seized with a task, Andrew takes the term seized in the literal sense...the task is his until it is complete."

“He adds to the harmony of the work environment, and he accomplishes a considerable quantity of work with superior quality.”

As a young man, Andrew says he wasn't particularly ambitious or career oriented, and even quit school. Labrador wasn't on his career map.

Then at age 21 something unexpected happened that forced him to change his outlook, make him seriously think about his future.

He slipped and fell; it seemed like an ordinary mishap at first. But the resulting pain never went away. It only grew worse. At first his doctor thought it was arthritis, then a calcium deficiency.

But another physician thought it was something more. He booked Andrew for a biopsy in St. John’s, and two weeks later the test confirmed it was cancer. Shortly after that diagnosis, he had his leg amputated.

"I remember going into surgery, and I had a good attitude, I still do. I remember telling the doctor to please take the RIGHT leg. It's the RIGHT. The RIGHT leg is the RIGHT leg to take."
A keen sense of humour is something you notice right away about Andrew - that, and his love of conversation.

"Looking back many years later, I can say that was the best and the worst year," he says. "The disability gave me a life. I was 21, still a young man, and I still hadn't made my mark. I had to do something for myself, something so I would be able to provide for myself. After I got better, I decided to go to school in St. John's, to the Career Academy. I did a lot of computer courses, accounting, some oral communications."

Following graduation, he worked in the Human Resources Department at Canadian National Railway. Then a call from Opening Doors offered him a chance to try something new in a brand new location.

The Royal Newfoundland Constabulary was looking for two identification technicians, one for St. John's, one for Labrador. Andrew asked to be considered for the Labrador position if he was successful, because he wanted a change of location and a chance to live somewhere new.

He won the competition and after a visit with his family in Grand Falls-Windsor, headed to Labrador.

"I never thought I'd be here this long," says Andrew. "Opening Doors has helped me find good employment, fun employment. I'm grateful for the income, for the security. It's helped me to have a long-term goal, and given me the opportunity to do more. I've done courses with the RNC and the RCMP."

"I think it's important to have a program like Opening Doors, but I think government can do more. It would be great to have more people with disabilities working."

"I believe that the public service should indeed mirror the public as a whole," says Inspector Garland. "As long as we see disabilities, Opening Doors or a like project will be required. The good news is, with more people like Andrew in the public service, we may indeed change our perspective and see the real abilities that will aid our individual workplaces, the public service and society as a whole."

Andrew's friendly, outgoing personality has won the admiration of the officers with whom he works. They can't believe he is so well known. When Andrew walks through the streets of Labrador City, he talks to everyone.

It's a skill he puts to use in his work for the RNC. "Over the years I've fingerprinted quite a number of people, the youngest being 12-years-old. It hurts me to see anyone being charged. I say to them, 'This is the only time I want to see you here, unless you're reporting a stolen bike.' Some of the kids come in here and their attitude stinks, but I still try and help."

For Inspector Garland, Andrew's natural spirit and drive makes him a valuable employee; you don't see his disability.

Says Andrew, "I don't expect people to open doors for me, I open doors for them."
Bart Parrill comes from a small town on the Northern Peninsula called Eddies Cove East. Like other small towns, it’s a place where employment opportunities are limited, particularly to someone with a disability.

“The unemployment rate is high,” says Bart, who became a paraplegic when he was injured in a car accident at age 17, just as he was finishing high school. "People with disabilities have a tough time finding jobs, especially in rural areas.”

Employed in office administration for the Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment (HRLE), Western Region, Bart has worked with the department for over a year. He helps process travel claims, orders supplies, maintains a computer inventory for the region and handles correspondence and office duties.

"Opening Doors is a great program," he says. "As the name implies, Opening Doors gets you into the system. You can have the education, but if you don't have the experience behind it, you're at a disadvantage. I used to go into the public service website and see job postings that I couldn't apply for because they were internal. Now I can."

Though Bart has post-secondary education in computer operations and computer networking, along with other specialized training, it has taken him a while to find good employment. He thinks that is because of his disability, because some employers were concerned about his ability to do physical tasks.

On the job with HRLE, his skills are in demand. "Bart has a great knowledge of computer applications, which is what we were looking for," says Bart’s supervisor Doreen Hann, Manager of Corporate Services. "He's created some good work for us. He's great at designing spreadsheets."

Since joining the department in 1990, Doreen has watched the growth of the Opening Doors Program. She says it's been good for the public service, good for morale and for the expertise and talent candidates bring to the workplace. The office has two Opening Doors employees.

"It's an excellent program," she says. "We've gained good, conscientious employees and they, in turn, add so much to the workplace."

Bart feels welcomed and appreciated at HRLE. "The staff are great. They're a really fun bunch, and I enjoy my work."
Sherry Styles was a history major studying at Memorial University in 2002 when she first heard about the Opening Doors Program. She read about it on a poster that had contact information and a website address.

Excited about the job and resource information she found online, she registered with Opening Doors. Just a few months after graduation, program staff called about a position for a library technician with the Department of Innovation, Trade and Rural Development (INTRD), Western Region.

"It was a research-based position," says Sherry, who applied and won the competition. "With a history degree I did a lot of research so it played right into my training and background. It's nice to apply my skills in the real world."

A native of Stephenville, it was also nice to move back to the West Coast to be near family.

Born with mild cerebral palsy that affects the left side of her body, Sherry has no problem getting around. On the job, she takes care of the department's business library, helps co-workers prepare for presentations and seminars, researches different business ideas and maintains the business information centre.

She works at the INTRD office in downtown Corner Brook, in a space that's shared with other provincial and federal government departments. It makes for a rich collegial atmosphere that Sherry appreciates. She likes her workplace and is quick to compliment her colleagues. "I can't say enough good things about them," says Sherry. "With all the talent they have, what they have taught me over the past year has been terrific. I would like to thank all the Western Region staff for their kindness, support and guidance."

The department's regional director, Rita Malone, is equally gracious about Sherry's contribution to the workplace. "She's a ball of energy and has a really great work ethic," says Rita. "She's young and bright and brings a lot of fun to the office environment."

Opening Doors is more than just an employment program to Sherry. It's about building new skills and learning new things. "It provides an equal opportunity for people with disabilities to demonstrate their talents and abilities," she says. "And it makes for an interesting and diverse workplace."

Rita agrees. "Individuals hired through Opening Doors bring a lot of skills, personal experiences and a different perspective. Sometimes the challenges they face and overcome help other staff members to overcome their own challenges. It broadens their way of thinking. I encourage other managers across government to look at Opening Doors as a really viable option for staffing."

Sherry has this piece of advice for young people in school and thinking about their career futures: "Always take advantage of the opportunities out there in programs like Opening Doors. Ability and talents come in all different forms. Put ability first and show what you can do."
Corrine Flynn: Flying High in Gander

Corrine Flynn has spent most of her life on the move. Over the years she has changed residences a number of times, along with taking on a slew of short-term jobs. This personal history of changing locations is probably why she currently feels quite at home in Gander, a town known for its rich history in aviation travel.

Corrine grew up in Musgrave Harbour, a small community in central Newfoundland with a population of just over 1,000. In 1989 Corrine left the familiarity of her small town behind to attend Memorial University in the province's capital.

“I graduated from Memorial in 1993 with a Bachelor of Arts, with a major in Folklore and a minor in English,” says Corinne.

Like most new graduates, Corrine quickly learned obtaining a degree was just the start of her professional challenges. Still living in St. John’s, Corrine spent the next few years trying unsuccessfully to find a permanent job related to her field of study.

“A lot of the times in trying to get a job I got the same response of not having enough experience. Some jobs came up but nothing that lasted very long,” Corrine recalls. “I had one job digitizing maps with a company, but that didn’t even last a year because the company went under. I tried part-time jobs in the mall and tried getting work in a number of places.”

Adding to the job search challenges of a new graduate, Corrine also encountered negative responses to her disability from potential employers. Corrine has cerebral palsy.

“I don't know if people who are hiring or conducting interviews mean it, but sometimes there is this moment of questioning if they, meaning people who are disabled, can do it,” Corrine describes. “There's that moment of indecision by employers of whether or not someone with a disability can do the work.”

While Corrine continued her search for a full-time job, she was made aware of a new employment equity program in the provincial government called Opening Doors. She submitted her resume in hopes of finding employment within the public service.

Unfortunately, no position was immediately available matching Corinne's background.

After four years of job searching and settling for temporary positions in St. John's, Corrine decided that perhaps there would be more opportunity in a smaller location with less professional competition.

“I moved to Gander in 1997 with my roommate. I had been having trouble getting work in St. John's, and thought maybe if I moved to Gander I would be able to get something to beef up my resume.”

Corrine also advised Opening Doors officials of her move to ensure she could be reached if a position became available through the program.

The decision to relocate to Gander paid off.
Shortly after her move, Corinne applied her educational experience in English Literature to a job opportunity working in the town's local bookstore, The Book Worm. Experience and contacts made while working at the bookstore, along with her newfound fascination with the history of the town she now called home, led to a further opportunity. Sponsored by the Canadian Paraplegic Association (CPA), Corinne was asked to write a book to be used in adult literacy classes. The result was “I Remember When…Early Stories of Gander.”

After the book was printed, Corinne decided the time was right to once again change her life course. The time she had spent working in the local bookstore and the CPA writing project gave her the financial resources to return to school. Corrine enrolled in a computer program at the College of the North Atlantic in Gander and graduated with a diploma in 2002.

 Shortly after, Corinne received a call from Opening Doors. Thanks to her new academic credentials Corinne was advised she would be an excellent candidate for an administrative position with the Department of Natural Resources, Gander office.

“Opening Doors I would have never known anything about the job. Craig Hall, Regional Supervisor of Administration for Natural Resources, remembers being impressed by Corinne's interview. “She gave me the impression that this was her job,” remembers Craig. “Her academic background, especially in the area of computers and her knowledge of the areas tested, all assisted in her obtaining the position. I also feel that Corinne's Arts degree from Memorial gave her the confidence needed to present herself well at the interview.”

“When I got the call that I got the job, I was just flabbergasted,” Corinne says with genuine excitement.

“I told them I could start right away, and then I hung up the phone and headed out to go buy some new business clothes because I didn't have any,” Corinne laughs. “The rest of the day I just walked around in a daze repeating 'I got the job, I got the job'.

When asked if her new co-workers' initial reaction to her disability resembled the doubt about capability she encountered during her multiple job interviews in St. John's, Corinne replies with a definite, “no”.

“When I started, everyone was so welcoming, it wasn't even an issue. And people are willing to help when I need it. There's a woman here who will assist with the filing since part of my disability is that I can't stand for long periods of time, but other than that I'm just the same.”

While Corinne’s experience in competing for her current job was positive, she does recognize a disability carries a stigma for some prospective employers.

“You have to look beyond the physical and realize that persons with disabilities are just as qualified. When you are interviewing someone for a position, each person that comes in and sits down next to you is just like any other person and should be judged on their professional qualifications, not their physicality.”
Brad George:  
Opening His Own Doors

The Provincial Director for the Canadian Federation of Business believes hard work and dedication is the key to success in the Opening Doors Program

“I'm no different than anyone else, and I want to take my chances like anyone else.”

Brad George lives by this statement, and one look at the approximately six-foot, dark-haired man, with a confident stride leaves one with the impression that Brad George means what he says. Growing up in Mount Pearl, Brad George was diagnosed with epilepsy during his final year of high school.

“I have what's known as partial simple epilepsy, the milder form of epilepsy,” explains Brad. “I don't actually lose consciousness, but I sort of space out and need a couple of minutes to recuperate, and I may have short memory losses.”

The diagnosis back in high school was one Brad took in stride. He made it his ambition to ensure the diagnosis had no influence on his independence. “I fought it throughout university and high school. I remember in high school, I couldn't drive anymore because of it and I didn't like getting drives from anyone else, so I would take the bus,” Brad says.

After graduating from Memorial University in 1992 with a Bachelor of Commerce, Brad, like most new graduates, had difficulty finding that first full-time job. Recognizing the difficulty their son was having and the additional challenges he might encounter as an individual with epilepsy, Brad's parents informed him of the Opening Doors Program and an application was made. Shortly after, he received a call asking him if he would like to compete for a position.

Despite his apprehension about participating in a program that acknowledged his disability in the professional world, Brad competed and won a position with the Department of Justice as an auditor.

Identifying the need to continue his education and develop his professional skills in order to move from his initial Opening Doors position to other areas and levels of government, Brad took advantage of opportunities within government as well as outside.

While still working with the provincial government, Brad returned to Memorial University and completed his MBA in 2000. He also enrolled in government's French Services Program and did a managerial skills development course called the Frontline Leadership Program. While working as an auditor, Brad also took on additional responsibilities and projects in policy work. This continued development proved to be beneficial, as Brad went after other positions within government beyond his Opening Doors permanent position.
Brad thought his efforts developing his skills and qualifications had finally paid off when he won a position with the federal government as a human resource officer, an area that was his specialty with his commerce degree. However, through a mutual decision, Brad decided to return to his former position with the provincial government. Brad thought once again he had managed to further his career when he was seconded to Treasury Board. However, due to cutbacks of the day, he ended up going back to his previous department and his Opening Doors position. Undaunted by a few setbacks, Brad finally reached his goal of furthering his career in 2000.

“I moved beyond the program two years before I left government. I was working as an auditor for many of those years. A senior, supervisory position came up; I got that position and another person moved into my Opening Doors position,” Brad smiles. “Instead of holding on to the Opening Doors position because I was only temporary in the new position, I did something that many people wouldn’t do, and I turned over the Opening Doors position and decided to take my chances.”

“I wanted to move forward professionally, that was always my goal. I had a B.Comm, I had a MBA, I was bilingual. I managed to become overqualified for my Opening Doors position…” Brad explains. “I was reclassified from a senior auditor to a policy analyst and doing policy work for my division, so I was working on legislation. At least I wasn’t doing auditing because auditing wasn’t where I wanted to be.”

Later in 2002, his background in government, provincial contacts and knowledge of the cabinet process, made him the perfect candidate for Director of Provincial Affairs for the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB).

In this position, Brad represents approximately 1,500 small businesses in the province. “I advocate and lobby government on their behalf; I am their voice,” Brad explains. “So I’m no longer on the inside of government looking out, I’m on the outside looking in.”

As for the future, Brad has not changed in his ambition to continue developing himself professionally. Currently, he continues his French studies and, thanks to the importance CFIB puts on its employee's educational development, is also pursuing other educational interests.

Brad is quick to attribute his success to hard work and professional development. However, he does recognize that the Opening Doors Program was very important in helping him make his initial move from post-secondary education to employment. His approach to the program seems to be the perfect recipe for professional success.

“The Opening Doors Program - the name fits the program exactly,” says Brad. “It opens doors, but once you get in the door it’s up to you to move around the room.”
Laurie Mooney
Has Arrived

You would be hard pressed to meet anyone happier with her job than Laurie Mooney. A financial administrative assistant with the Department of National Defense, she sits comfortably at her desk at Canadian Forces Station (CFS) St. John's in Pleasantville, in the accounts office she shares with her supervisor, Petty Officer Maxwell Barrett.

"For as long as I can remember, since I was young, I have wanted to work with numbers. I love numbers, and I love the computer, I loved it in college…now I'm doing both."

"I am exactly where I want to be in my career," she says. "I really appreciate what I have. After I got the job I had a constant smile on my face."

Laurie records and distributes civilian pay cheques and travel duty cheques for military personnel, manages databases, serves as the American Express coordinator, files travel claims, orders supplies and takes care of mail for the office. Listening to her, you might think she has been on the job for ages, instead of just a couple of months.

Before this job, she worked in the Orderly Office of CFS St. John's. Nearing the end of her term, Laurie wondered if the unemployment line was next. Just two weeks before she was scheduled to finish up, she was offered her current position. "I have arrived", Laurie jokes. "I'm so glad I got to stay."

Laurie is visually impaired and has some impressive looking gadgets to help her on the job: a closed circuit television that enlarges print; a computer with zoom text that not only makes reading easier but has a voice feature as well; a hand-held, battery-operated magnifier she grabs for smaller tasks.

Her workplace is spacious, her job is just what she wanted, and her colleagues are friendly and welcoming.

Laurie spent two and a half years at university, but it wasn't exactly her cup of tea. She left and worked for a while in an Opening Doors position with the provincial government. It was just a temporary stop for Laurie, who realized without more post-secondary education, her career future and her income would be limited. Opening Doors employment counsellors encouraged her to return to school.

She enrolled in the Office Administration (Executive) program at the College of the North Atlantic in St. John's, putting her skill with numbers and her organizational talents to good use. After her first year, she found work through the Opening Doors Student Summer Employment Program.

Laurie's summer job was with the Department of Finance where she worked on various databases, did internal job postings and answered the phone.

After Laurie's final year in college, she had a call from Opening Doors. There was a temporary position at the Department of National Defense, a year-long maternity replacement. Did she want to interview for it? "Absolutely," she said. A week later she was on the job. "I was ecstatic," recalls Laurie. Her colleagues are also delighted to have her as part of their team. "She's very personable and easy-going. There's nothing she can't do," says Petty Officer Barrett.

"We're very happy to have her," says Judy Voisey, Public Affairs Officer for CFS St. John's, who adds that programs such as Opening Doors have really helped meet the department's employment equity goals. "We use these programs simply because we've gotten really excellent recruits, really suitable candidates."
Kelly Sheppard - Working to Make a Difference

One week before Christmas 2003, just a couple of months after graduating from Memorial University's School of Social Work, Kelly Sheppard was offered her first full time job.

"I felt quite lucky to find employment in just a couple of months," she says from her office in Harbour Grace, where she works as a mentoring coordinator for Big Brothers Big Sisters in Conception Bay North. "I'm really interested in helping people in my area. I like the idea of getting involved in the community."

Kelly spends much of her time in service delivery, fundraising and marketing. She's responsible for recruiting volunteers and children into Big Brothers Big Sisters programs, enrolling interested and potential applicants through interviews and screening, providing training for successful applicants and matching children with responsible adults. Kelly also supervises the successful matches.

She has cystic fibrosis, a hereditary condition that affects mainly the lungs and digestive system, causing severe respiratory problems and extreme difficulty digesting and absorbing adequate nutrition. She must take large quantities of medicines and follow a strict regime of chest physiotherapy to maintain good health.

It is a routine that prevented her from securing employment (as many students do) while attending classes. "It wasn't always easy for me to go to work and go to school at the same time. The only way I could get work was in the summer," she says. Kelly worried that her lack of on-the-job experience would prevent her from finding employment as a social worker post graduation.

She credits the Opening Doors Student Summer Employment Program with helping her land good summer jobs in her field of study. In her first position with the Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment, she worked with career development specialists, assessing clients for employment and training opportunities.

In her second placement, with the Carbonar Hospital, she assisted the hospital social worker to ready patients for discharge, then monitor and do follow up. She also helped assess senior citizens for admission into long-term care homes and assisted with visits.

"They were great learning experiences, and I was quite lucky they were both in social work," says Kelly.

Happy to be working in her field, Kelly says having a disability presents more life challenges and obstacles. But rather than hold her back, she has developed tenacity and determination. She says young people with disabilities need to keep their options open and be aware of where to access support.

"It was kind of hard coming out of school in April and then looking for work," she says. "Knowing that positions are available and there is someone to help is important."
Social worker Danny Barrett sums up the Opening Doors Program in just a single word - empowering.

“A lot of people with disabilities feel quite marginalized,” says Danny, who works with the Department of Health and Community Services, Division of Child, Youth and Family Services in St. John’s. "When they have an opportunity to get into the workplace and show what they can do, and let other people see what they can do, it’s just very empowering. The work experience is crucial. Without it you’re probably going to get overlooked.”

The 35-year-old credits Opening Doors with giving him the chance to put his education to work, so that he’s able to develop the skills and talents necessary for building a solid resume.

“I don't think there's any way I would have found employment at the provincial office otherwise,” says Danny, who registered with the program as a fourth year student at Memorial University. "And this opens up so many opportunities. You get to apply for internal job postings. There's all kinds of educational sessions that I can attend, and also I get to work with a variety of professionals in the department."

Danny was born with a degenerative eye condition. Though visually impaired, he does not require any special equipment or accommodation at work. But he’s not able to drive a car. It’s the kind of disability that can make job hunting tough if you live in rural areas where access to taxi cabs, bussing or other modes of transportation can be limited.

Much of Danny’s workday is spent at the provincial office, where he handles requests for file information from people formerly in the care of the Director of Child, Youth and Family Services.

There are massive volumes of information to sift through, information that is sensitive, that can have a powerful impact on people trying to find medical records, locate biological parents or learn about their early lives.

"I just enjoy working with people, helping people wherever possible," says Danny, who says he has found his calling. "I think once people realize they can help themselves things change for the best in their lives."

Once shy about his academic skills, he begins his Masters in Social Work this fall, hoping to specialize in clinical counselling.

A few floors above Danny, in the Department of Environment and Conservation, Joan Hann works on a report about the transportation of hazardous waste in the province. It’s her field of specialty and she’s happy to dive in to the pages of tables and graphs.

"I love what I do," says Joan who has a degree in Environmental Technology. "I grew up in a beautiful area, so I've always had respect for the environment. At school I loved the study of the earth, geology, geography and chemistry."
Joan graduated from the University College of Cape Breton in 1994, and spent a couple of years working in Halifax. She found out about Opening Doors at this time and registered with the program, hoping eventually to return to Newfoundland and Labrador.

Staff contacted her about a one-year position with Environment Canada in St. John's, and before she knew it she was home. But after that, a couple of years passed before she landed her current position as a Statistical Officer with the Department of Environment and Conservation.

These days, she writes about transportation of hazardous waste and hazardous waste management. She also handles the province's contaminated site registry. Passionate about the environment, she's eager to take on more challenging and varied work for her division.

Like Danny Barrett, Joan is visually impaired but doesn't need any special accommodation on the job. She sits close to her computer and reads text in a larger font.

Joan is thrilled to be working in her field, but is concerned that some people think she won her position because of her disability, rather than her talent. "Opening Doors is an excellent program, but I think there's a perception that employees don't get hired on merit," she says. "Some people associate physical disability with a learning problem."

She continues to build on her academic experience and says Opening Doors has given her the chance to work with people who are highly-skilled and knowledgeable about environmental issues.

Patrick Shea, a Fisheries Planning Analyst with the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture in St. John's, says his work experiences have all been educational.

"Most learning takes place on the job," says the 27-year-old, who holds a Masters in Applied Science from Memorial University. Patrick heard about the Opening Doors Program when he was completing his Masters program.

He registered with Opening Doors and a couple of months after graduation was invited to interview for a position with the Department of Environment and Conservation. He started with the provincial government in September 2001, moving to the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture a year later.

Patrick has cystic fibrosis, a hereditary condition that affects mainly the lungs and digestive system. Large quantities of medicine and a strict regime of chest physiotherapy help him stay healthy and active.

"If I'm not involved in physical activity, I'm not as well," he says. Having CF has never held him back. Growing up in Stephenville Crossing, he played most sports and is still an avid golfer.

On the job, Patrick sits on various environmental advisory committees that examine potential impacts on the province's fisheries and aquaculture industry. It's work that puts his educational background to good use.

"I don't get a lighter workload. I wouldn't want that. I have an excellent relationship with my supervisor and director. We've got a really good network of people here, and they are just fantastic."

Patrick offers this advice to young graduates who face challenges in their lives: "Take what you learn and make the most of it. Persistence is definitely the key, and you have to be positive. There's always more good going on than bad. Make the most of your opportunities."
Twin brothers Terry and Tony Cull stick together through work and play...

Tony and Terry Cull are identical twins and do almost everything together. They drive to work together, own a house together, and even vacation together.

"Where I go, Terry goes," jokes Tony from his office at Human Resources and Skills Development Canada in Harbour Grace. "We have the same buddies, a cabin in Western Bay, we hit dances whenever we can, watch hockey games and go moose hunting.

It has always been this way for the brothers, who were born and raised in the small community of Broad Cove. We are well known all up and down the shore, and well treated. We were never kept from anything, and that's because of our parents."

Born with mild cerebral palsy, the Cull brothers spent a lot of time away from home in rehabilitation therapy when they were young. That meant weeks in hospital in St. John's, but the time away never isolated them from community life.

The brothers graduated from Jackson-Walsh High School and then enrolled in a Clerk Accounting program at the Avalon Community College in Carbonear. "We knew we needed our education, we knew that we had to look at all avenues, to open all doors available to us," says Tony.

After finishing their college program, they both went to work as library technicians at St. Francis High School in Harbour Grace. Six months later, when the jobs ended, Tony and Terry wound up collecting unemployment.

Terry's next job was a temporary position with his current employer, the Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment (HRLE) in Carbonear. "I did general office duties, and they treated me really well. I really hated to leave," he remembers.

Luckily, he didn't have to stay away for long. As a candidate in the Opening Doors Program, he was called back to HRLE for a job interview and won the competition. That was over 12 years ago.

Terry juggles lots of on-the-job duties at HRLE, including data entry for all long-term and short-term cheques, money orders and cash receipts. He also covers the front desk and interacts with clients. Keeping daily attendance records up to date and tracking overtime in other district offices means he has plenty to keep him busy. He is also involved in planning office social activities.

His years at HRLE, working with clients and staff, have helped build his confidence. Once considered the shy brother, Terry decided to run for council in 1997. He's now deputy mayor of Small Point to Adams Cove, the municipal body that serves four small communities.

Though both brothers were registered as candidates for Opening Doors positions, Tony's road to full-time employment was bumpier; his resume filled with more short-term jobs.

He worked at a bank, a computer company and a large telephone call centre in St. John's. Most of the positions ended when funding for the work programs ran out.

He collected Employment Insurance and went some months without any income at all.
"Over the years, it seemed like all I had was bad luck," he recalls. "Things weren't good. I was sitting home and wasn't getting to socialize or work."

Then in 1998 his luck changed, when HRSDC Regional Manager Wayne McCarthy called him about a job opening in the Harbour Grace office. The federal government, through a referral arrangement with the Public Service Commission of Canada, uses Opening Doors to fill positions in the federal public service.

"I jumped at the chance," Tony recalls. "I finished first in the competition, and I've been here ever since."

He started in data entry, processing EI claims, as a claims preparation clerk. But since then, Tony has covered almost every program area. He worked as a TAGS inquiries clerk back in the days of the Fisheries Adjustment Program; as an employment and insurance officer, his responsibilities included negotiating financial contracts with students who qualified for sponsorship under the Skills Development Employment Benefits Program.

"Now I'm a Service Delivery Assistant, assessing claims, taking information to determine eligibility and rates of pay," says Tony. "It's never boring, and it's made a big difference in my life. It makes me feel a whole lot better, and it's rewarding that you're helping other people."

Besides his regular duties, Tony likes to promote the Opening Doors Program to clients with disabilities. Many aren't aware of these opportunities.

"Now that I'm here interacting with the public, I've got to say that I am more confident. I meet all kinds of people, and I get the job done."

Besides giving them a sense of purpose and boosting their confidence, full-time employment has given the brothers more tangible benefits. Tony and Terry count support from family, friends and co-workers as the keys to their success.

**Benefits Go Beyond Creating Employment**

Over the years, Opening Doors has helped many people with disabilities find good jobs in the public service, but senior government officials say the benefits of the program go far beyond creating employment.

"Opening Doors is really conducive to the line of work we're in," says Bob Wheadon, District Manager of Human Resources, Labour and Employment. "We've got four people with disabilities working in these few offices out here, all marvelous workers. We certainly support the program."

Bob remembers the department's early days, when the primary focus was delivering financial assistance. These days, reducing barriers to employment and helping people access the training and support they need to find work is an important part of HRLE's mandate.

"The single largest benefit of Opening Doors has been for our staff and clients," says Wayne McCarthy, who has known the Cull boys since they were in high school. "It has opened our eyes to help create a new culture in our organization. Tony has helped us see that we have to look beyond the disability to see the ability."
Roger Head: What Lies Beneath

Don’t let first impressions of Roger Head fool you.

Roger’s cerebral palsy causes him to speak and move somewhat slowly. In your first conversation, he may seem soft-spoken, preferring to answer questions with a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’. But after you spend a little time with the 40-year-old, you learn that underneath lies an enthusiastic man who will periodically reveal his true personality by means of a devilish grin.

Roger graduated from Memorial University in 1989 with a BSC in Mathematics. “After graduation I got an administrative position with the provincial government in Gander. I spent five years in Gander, but felt I was overqualified and underpaid,” Roger laughs. “I would get the jobs that no one wanted to do, because everyone thought the worst of my abilities. After five years I bit the bullet and went back to school.”

Recognizing the need to further his skills to coincide with better employment opportunities, Roger attended Keyin College earning a Diploma in Computer Studies.

“It took me about three or four months to find a job after graduation from Keyin,” Roger recalls. “They [potential employers] didn’t know how to react to a person with a disability. Of course, no one would say that. But the minute you walk into an interview you know, you know it’s not going to go anywhere.”

After four months of looking for employment Roger was given an opportunity by the Opening Doors Program to compete for a computer programmer position with the Department of Education. This interview went much better than those over the previous four months.

“You know from feedback that they are interested. Where they knew it was an Opening Doors position, the directors had a better attitude and were aware of my disability before I came up,” Roger explains. “Opening Doors gives people with a disability a chance to prove themselves.”

“I’m with a team now, a team of programmers working on different projects. You have your own work you need to get done, but people come to me for input on projects which makes me feel good,” Roger explains. “One of my first projects was developing a correspondence tracking system, and people still call me for advice and direction on that.”

Roger’s contribution to the department’s IT division is echoed by Director Craig Slaney. “Work ethic, attitude, commitment, dedication and willingness to work to improve himself are a reflection of Roger’s character, which was displayed during the recruitment process and continues to be demonstrated in his day-to-day performance of his job.”

Not that Roger is all about the professional world. He volunteers as a coach for the Special Olympics Program and is a vocal member of the Coalition for Persons with Disabilities. As if that wasn’t enough, Roger finds time to cheer on the SeaHawks, Memorial’s basketball team. One thing is clear: Roger Head is a man who likes to keep busy.

As for the future, Roger doesn’t limit himself to the notion that this is the highest level he will reach in his professional career. When asked where he sees himself a few years down the road he pauses, gives one of his devilish grins and calmly points towards the top floor of the Confederation Building.
Magazine Contributors

Creative Design and Layout

Total Marketing Communications

Interviewers / Writers

Marcia Porter
Paul Power
Building a Public Service representative of persons with disabilities

“Everyone deserves the opportunity to gain meaningful employment.”
Premier Danny Williams

“There is nothing that changes an organization’s attitude and culture like personal experience.”
Robert Thompson
Clerk of the Executive Council

“We are proud to support Opening Doors.”
Leo Puddister
President of NAPE

“There is always more good going on than bad. Make the most of your opportunities.”
Patrick Shea
Opening Doors Client

Employment Equity and Strategic Initiatives Division
5th Floor, West Block, Confederation Building
P.O. Box 8700, St. John’s, NL A1B 4J6

Tel: 709.729.5881 Fax: 709.729.5446
TTY: 709.729.5441
Toll Free: 1.800.950.4414
e-mail: openingdoors@gov.nl.ca
www.gov.nl.ca/openingdoors