Opening Doors to Success

Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities
As a government, we believe everyone deserves the opportunity to gain meaningful employment. The more diverse our workforce, the more perspectives we bring to the public service. This is the raison d’être of the Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities and the Opening Doors program: to create a more diverse public service by hiring qualified persons with disabilities to work in our Provincial Government.

Opening Doors to Success features stories about Newfoundlanders and Labradorians with disabilities who have overcome significant employment barriers to find meaningful and lasting employment through the programs of this Office. They have overcome real challenges in their lives and enrich our workplace through their commitment to service, their personal experience, their tenacity and determination. Their stories will inspire and hopefully open your mind to issues you may not have considered before—important issues such as the link between poverty and disability, highlighted in our own Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Since its initial launch, the Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities has become widely recognized by policy and program designers across Canada as a best-practices model. It has assisted hundreds of people with disabilities find employment in Provincial Government offices all across this province, from St. John’s to Port aux Basques to Happy Valley-Goose Bay. Because of its success, we have expanded the program to include provincial crown corporations and agencies.

From all perspectives, the Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities is a good-news story. For those who have found employment through Opening Doors, the program has been the “door to success.” For the public service, the Office has been the change agent creating a workforce that welcomes respects and represents all our citizens by adding that unique, necessary and sometimes overlooked perspective of persons with disabilities.

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 and stronger Newfoundland and Labrador.

I, with my colleagues, applaud the Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities for its important contribution of diversity to our public service.
As Minister Responsible for Persons with Disabilities, it gives me great pleasure to read *Opening Doors to Success*. While the articles are informative and profile accomplishments, they also highlight serious issues that continue to prevent people with disabilities from taking a full and active role in our society. These systemic issues include barriers to employment created by societal attitudes towards ability. These attitudes are reflected in our acceptance of certain standards of norms which exclude persons with disabilities from full participation in the workplace.

The staff of the Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities has worked diligently through the delivery of its employment programs, such as Opening Doors, to help build a diverse public service representative of persons with disabilities. Thanks to their efforts, more people with disabilities are working in rewarding, meaningful and stable jobs that reflect their educational attainment and career goals.

I recognize the important work that has been done and note that as the Office strives towards employment equity for persons with disabilities across government, an important cultural shift is happening. We are building a public service that is becoming aware of disability issues. It is my goal to build on what has already been achieved.

This year, we will move forward with new agendas dedicated to persons with disabilities. We plan to establish a new division of disabilities within government and commission a comprehensive study to better understand the challenges that persons with disabilities encounter in their daily lives. People with disabilities still face significant and persistent barriers, as highlighted in Government’s Poverty Reduction Strategy. These are barriers associated with gaining access to public services, pursuing an education, and securing employment in their field of study.

There is still important work to do in order to ensure that our vision of a prosperous Newfoundland and Labrador is inclusive. Our government is committed to making life better for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians including people with disabilities. Consulting with the community and other stakeholders about issues that matter to people with disabilities is an important part of our work. It is work that will help ensure all government policy is developed to meet the needs of a diverse population. Our goal is not only to raise the public profile of disability issues but, more importantly, to ensure people with disabilities are able to reap the benefits of living in a prosperous and just society.
The launch of Opening Doors program in the late 1980s marked the beginning of a program that would prove to be both successful and innovative in increasing the representation of persons with disabilities within the province’s public service. Since its introduction, the Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities has reaped benefits both for the employees who have availed of career opportunities through the program and for the public service as a whole.

It is well recognized that individuals with disabilities experience barriers to employment that create significant difficulties in securing meaningful work opportunities. The Opening Doors program addresses this reality, while also acknowledging the tremendous value of developing a public service that truly reflects the clients it serves—the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The inclusion of persons with disabilities into the public service heightens our awareness of disability issues, and reveals the potential which exists once we look beyond a person’s disability and see his or her individuality and aptitudes. With its record of success, the programs and services of the Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities are considered to be unique employment initiatives that are held as a model for other jurisdictions. It reflects values of acceptance, openness and equity, which are at the core of a vibrant and diverse public service.

Our public service has been, and will continue to be, strengthened and enriched by the programs and services of the Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities as we work together for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.
The Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Public and Private Employees (NAPE) has a proud history of promoting equality in the workplace. NAPE has been a strategic partner and has supported the progressive nature of the programs and services of the Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities since its inception. In fact, NAPE was a member of the advisory committee that led to the creation of the program.

The Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities does more than pave the way for persons with disabilities to enter the job market. They dispel myths, promote diversity in the workplace, and help foster new relationships and respect. The Opening Doors program is an example for all employers in this province.

The labour movement advocates equality and equity in the workplace. NAPE has taken on that role with vigour and commitment. NAPE is proud of its role in pioneering a program that helps make employment opportunities more accessible.

NAPE will continue to work with the Provincial Government and other employers to eliminate barriers in the workplace and to strive for a workplace that is free of discrimination and treats all citizens as equals.
Assistant Deputy Minister Marilyn Field, of the Public Service Secretariat, is eager to talk about the Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities and how it has helped create a more inclusive workplace. She is keen to build on that work and further increase the profile of people with disabilities across government departments and agencies.

**Reflecting the People We Serve**

“Our public service needs to be much more reflective of the people we serve,” says Field, a human resource specialist charged with implementing the Provincial Government’s new Human Resource Strategy.

The strategy includes building on the Opening Doors program with a vision of creating a more diverse public service. “Employment equity is a priority issue for the Secretariat, and this government recognizes the importance of this work,” says Field. “Our job is to create the best workforce we possibly can, and the Opening Doors program is a source of talent we should be tapping into.”

**Creating More Diversity through Opening Doors**

According to Field, building on the success of Opening Doors is one piece of a far-reaching strategy that will involve greater dialogue and consultation with the various minority communities, including people with disabilities.

Under the Poverty Reduction Strategy, money has been allocated to expand the programs of the Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities to crown corporations and agencies. This move will increase employment for people with disabilities as it opens up new opportunities in crown corporations and government agencies.

“We want to move forward, and build on the momentum we already have,” says Field. “We want to create an environment where individuals entering through the Opening Doors program are integrated into the workforce.”

**Building Talent and Career Mobility in the Public Service**

Field does not want individuals coming into the public service through the Opening Doors program to get stuck in roles that do not reflect their skill level when they have the education and experience necessary to move into more challenging and higher-level positions. These positions would naturally come with additional responsibility and more income. The province’s own Poverty Reduction Strategy points out that people with disabilities are among the groups most at risk for living in poverty.

“We want to increase capacity so that people can move around within the public service, and they don’t get pigeon-holed,” says Field. “We want to make sure that people aren’t underemployed.”
The ultimate goals include building the skills and capacity of people with disabilities, so they are able to work at all levels of government, from front line service to management, and ensuring the program becomes part of everyday hiring practices within the public service.

**Being a Progressive Employer, Reflecting Diversity**

Reflecting the diversity of Newfoundland and Labrador citizens is a goal of the programs of the Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities, not only in the look of the public service, but in the way civil servants accept and include employees from minority groups in the workplace. “It is one thing to talk diversity; it is another to reflect diversity,” Field says.

“I think people are generally supportive of the Office’s programs, but I know we can do a better job,” she says. “We want to be seen as a progressive employer, an employer of choice and we are looking at ways of attracting minority groups from all our communities.”

As part of the Human Resources Strategy, the Public Service Secretariat will partner with the Public Service Commission on a recruitment strategy that focuses on developing better access to information about potential jobs and ensuring equity during the interview and hiring stages.

“Recruitment and retention are very important to us,” says Field. “And that includes making sure we are reflective of the populations we serve. We have to manage our workforce and that means tapping into all sources of talent.”

“We want to be seen as a progressive employer that helps people to build their capacity and reach their potential. We recognize that people from all walks of life have a lot to contribute.”
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In this, our third issue of *Opening Doors to Success*, we introduce you to some more talented men and women who work in our public service, we celebrate our successes and we look forward to the future.

The people profiled in this issue are succeeding in spite of barriers to employment that still exist for people with disabilities. They are succeeding because they have the right combination of skill and perseverance and because of managers who look beyond disabilities to see abilities and possibilities.

**Celebrating Successes**

At the Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities (OEEPD), we are proud of what we have accomplished, not only in addressing barriers, but in realizing potential—potential of the employer and the employee. We have placed over 500 people with disabilities in positions through government, and we have created permanent positions across departments. These positions are doing more than employing skilled candidates with disabilities; they are creating a vibrant and diverse workforce where understanding and acceptance of differences are fostered.

Newfoundland and Labrador's public service is the only one in the country to have a program such as Opening Doors, and other provinces contact us hoping to use ours as a model for their own programs.

The successes of the OEPPD have been achieved because of widespread support from elected officials, the public service, the public sector unions and the general public.

**Building on Progress Made**

Despite the success, we still have work to do. Occasionally we will encounter the fear that a public employee with a disability will require too much extra help getting around or even performing his/her job duties. Differences are not always tolerated or understood and people still fear that supports and accommodations for people with disabilities will be too expensive or cumbersome.

This means we have to step up our efforts to create a public service that is accepting and welcoming of differences, demonstrating that employers get qualified, competent and committed employees when they hire through OEEPD programs.

We also want to raise issues important to people with disabilities, ones that have an impact on the quality of their lives: the link between poverty and disability for example, and mental illness. These are matters that we must acknowledge and grapple with if we are to build on the progress we have made over the years.

**Diverse, Accessible Public Service—A Win-Win Situation**

We have not yet reached the point where hiring someone with a disability is simply a regular hiring practice like any other. We are still on a journey towards a more inclusive, representative public service that reflects our province’s growing diversity. Hiring someone with a disability is not about charity or being kind; it is about hiring a well-qualified, competent candidate. We invite managers to tap into a pool of well-qualified, competent and hard-working candidates and join us in opening doors, both for their organization and candidates they hire.
Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities (OEEPD): Programs and Services

Employment Programs:
The Opening Doors Program comprises a number of full-time, permanent positions throughout the provincial public service in various locations of the province. These positions represent a wide range of public sector careers in varying departments. Opening Doors positions are designated for persons with disabilities who have been accepted for inclusion on the Client Registry.

Opening Doors is our foundation program, but there are many other programs and services, offered through the Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities (OEEPD) 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 that hire persons with disabilities for contractual employment opportunities which are meaningful and related to their skill set. These positions are representative of the wide ranging careers options within the Provincial Public Service. To be eligible, persons with disabilities must be registered with the OEEPD and be either receiving, or eligible to receive, Employment Insurance or Income Support.

In cooperation with the Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment (HRLE), the Office is working on a pilot project under the Poverty Reduction Strategy to expand the Office’s employment programs to create opportunities for persons with disabilities within the provincial agencies, boards, and commissions.

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 8 to 10 week summer placements, students must be attending a post-secondary educational institution, returning to school in September and registered with the OEEPD.

Outreach Services:
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 widescreen monitors and enhanced keyboards, vision enhancement and voice activated software, as well as a comprehensive print and video resource library to aid in career development and job search. Career development counselling is available to assist clients in accessing and using the information provided by these resources.

Electronic Access through the OEEPD website makes it easier for current and potential clients province-wide to access information regarding Office programs and services. The website offers an e-counsellor feature where persons with disabilities, managers, or other interested parties can make inquiries to request information or referrals, on services in their area. Clients can also use our online employment status feature to maintain current contact and employment related information. Clients can also access Office publications electronically including the Career Lens newsletters and Opening Doors to Success magazines.

Clients outside the St. John's area can also access the Office via e-mail, TTY and/or toll free long distance services.

Accessing Our Programs and Services:
Persons with a disability who wish to access any of the programs and services of the OEEPD must be registered with our client registry. Interested individuals are asked to complete an application form and forward it to the OEEPD.
with a detailed resume and proof of education. Application forms are available by either contacting the office or visiting our website.

**Government managers** who would like more information on the programs and services available are invited to contact our office. 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 create a more diverse workplace.

As part of the Government’s Centre for Learning and Development’s approach to enhancing Leadership and Management Development, a **Resource Management Package (RMP)** has been created for all managers in the Provincial Public Service. Resource Management is defined as “the ability to effectively manage all resources to achieve organizational goals.” One of the sixteen mandatory modules of the RMP includes an overview of the programs and services of the OEEP which is offered in the form of a half-day training session. The purpose is that managers will be able to identify the challenges that persons with disabilities face in the workforce; have knowledge of the programs and services available for managers to hire and support persons with disabilities in the workplace, and see the value and benefits of hiring persons with disabilities.

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**Myths & Misconceptions**

**Certain jobs are more suited to persons with disabilities.** A common myth is the idea that “certain jobs are more suited to persons with disabilities.” Persons with disabilities are as different and diversified as members of any other minority group, or of society at large. We need to focus not on the disability, but on the ability of the person.

**It would be a good idea to hire a person with a disability to see what he or she can do.** Hiring decisions should be based on objective evaluation of a candidate’s qualifications and competencies. The only thing more ludicrous than not hiring someone because they have a disability is to hire someone just because they have a disability.

**Persons with disabilities are better workers than able bodied people.** Membership in any ethnic, racial, sexual, or religious group does not make an employee more or less competent. Our positive or negative stereotypes can interfere with making solid hiring and evaluation decisions and can build higher or unrealistic expectations of an employee. Make judgments on an individual basis. The unfair standard of the positive stereotype is hard to live up to – everybody should have the right to have a bad day.
As a Program Coordinator in hazardous waste management for the Department of Environment and Conservation, Joan Hann feels good about the advancements in her career. Joan graduated with a Bachelor of Technology in Environmental Studies from the University College of Cape Breton and was hired soon after for a contractual position through the Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities' Targeted Wage Subsidy Initiative where she gained experience in the field as an Environmental Officer. As the successful candidate of the Opening Doors competition five years ago, Joan began working with the Department of Environment and Conservation, and has been advancing ever since.

“I wake up everyday and I’m happy to come to work. I’m working in my field, I have a genuine interest in the environment and I feel that I’m making a contribution. Opening Doors is a good program and it’s working,” says Hann. “I believe I’m a good example of that. I’m advancing in my career.”

Though her visual impairment causes some minor job limitations, Hann is not one to take a back seat. “I asked for more responsibility, and said I was able to take on more tasks. I was eager to advance and I am advancing. My work is more specialized,” says Hann. “It’s fascinating work, never routine.”

She attributes her success not only to her perseverance, but also to the open-minded people with whom she works. “I am very grateful,” she says. “I have a wonderful director and manager. They are very supportive. There’s a lot of work to be done in this area and there are more opportunities than in the past.”

When Joan first completed her post secondary studies, many jobs advertised in her field listed a valid driver’s license as an essential qualification. For an individual with a visual or other disability who cannot access a driver’s license, this can create significant barriers to employment. Joan faced this obstacle as she sought work in private sector after graduation and had trouble securing a labour market attachment. The job advertisement is often the only information applicants have about a job prior to applying so the decisions to apply or not are often based solely on the content.

The Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities did not have this pre-requisite to employment through its programs. Often job advertisements can create systemic discrimination unknowingly through the language used to list job requirements which can exclude persons with disabilities from competition. For example, a request for “good oral skills” can immediately discourage an individual who is deaf and doesn’t speak from applying although their overall communication skills could be strong. The request for a driver’s license or availability to travel may be arbitrarily used without being essential to the fulfillment of the job duties.

The Canadian Human Rights Act entitles all individuals to equal employment opportunities without regard to “disability (either physical or mental or as the result of dependence on alcohol or drugs)”. Bona Fide Occupational Requirements (BFORs) which are specific skill sets and abilities necessary to fulfill the core functions of the job should be the only requirements listed.

Employers can benefit from reviewing their own recruitment policies and becoming aware that
non-essential job requirements can create significant challenges in meeting their human resource needs. For employers in the private and public sector who want to focus on being inclusive rather than exclusive, the job ad is a great way to start.

Take a look at the skill sets and qualifications you are looking for to see which are mandatory to the position, which are preferred, and which may be excluding potential candidates through the language used. State that qualified persons with disabilities are encouraged to apply or that you are an equal opportunity employer to create an atmosphere for persons with disabilities to know that their skill sets will be recognized on an equitable basis. The benefits will soon become evident for employers and employees.

### Inclusive Job Descriptions

Preparing job descriptions to include candidates and/or employees with disabilities is achieved by:

- Differentiating between essential and marginal requirements
- Focusing on what the job is to achieve not on how it is achieved
- Identifying what is actually required
- Promoting employment equity through expressed commitment
- Offering job descriptions in alternative, accessible formats
- Describing the work environment and workplace design
- Allowing for alternative ways of achieving the goals of the position
- Considering possible accommodations
- Including a description of the types of interactions that will occur, who the interactions are with and how they are accomplished.
- Assessing the strengths of the individual(s)

### Myths & Misconceptions

**We need special comprehensive training to work with persons with disabilities.** It’s true that experience working with people with disabilities is helpful, but what that experience usually gives is the knowledge that working with a person with a disability is no different from working with anyone else. People with disabilities need supervision and treatment from co-workers, not special supervision or treatment.

**Insurance rates go up when a person with a disability is hired.** Fears about increased insurance rates are often based on the false assumption that persons with disabilities have a higher rate of accidents and injuries. These rates are actually no higher than for any other employee. The same applies for worker’s compensation rates that are based on industry risk factors and the employer’s accident history.
When Patrick Shea, an analyst with the Department of Fisheries and Agriculture, was rushed to Toronto for a double lung transplant, his health was deteriorating. It was a pretty bleak time for 30-year-old Shea, who has lived with Cystic Fibrosis (CF) since birth.

At that time, Shea, who was hired through the Opening Doors program in 2001, had been with the public service for four years. Today—in good health and recently promoted to Senior Policy Analyst—Shea credits the support of family, friends and co-workers with helping him get through the rough days before and after his lung transplant.

The proactive and understanding nature of the departmental staff during that challenging time and since has been a great help to Patrick and their accommodating nature was a positive factor. Shea was provided the option to work from home for a period before the transplant and was offered alternatives based on his recovery including an ease back period where he worked flexible three day work weeks until he was ready to return to a full schedule. Patrick notes that his supervisor has also been proactive about approaching Patrick regarding environmental issues in the workplace which may impact his health. While most of the time Patrick does not run into any concerns, it is great to know they have a heightened awareness of environmental issues for all their staff.

His refusal to dwell on the negative also comes through as a driving force in his recovery. He talks about that time as “an amazing experience” and focuses on the support he received from people, some of whom he had not seen in years.

**Going Beyond Opening Doors**

Shea’s recent promotion to a job outside the Opening Doors program comes with additional responsibilities, and he welcomes the new challenge. “I want to keep advancing in my career,” says Shea, who has a Masters in Applied Science from Memorial University. However Shea notes that he gained a great deal of experience from his employment through the Opening Doors program and while he is facing new challenges, he is grateful for the opportunities facilitated through the Office.

The Opening Doors and other programs of the Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities are designed as a starting point for qualified persons with disabilities to gain meaningful work experience and further develop their skills. Career advancement is important for personal and professional development within the labour market and seeing people advance to positions beyond the program to new challenges is beneficial to everyone. Patrick points out the importance of advancement options in the workplace. “Some individuals may appreciate the importance of stability and routine in the workplace while others desire and should have the opportunity to access higher level positions based on their qualifications.” These preferences are no different for persons with disabilities than any other individual within the Provincial Public Service.

He has already built expertise in coastal zone development and sustainable fisheries management, a subject gaining higher local and national profile. “Patrick is a valuable member of our division; we’re lucky to have someone so
highly qualified," says the Director of the Sustainable Fisheries and Oceans Policy Division of the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture. “There’s no one with his educational background in our division and these days, issues around the environment and sustainable development are front and centre. We’re broadening our scope to include an oceans perspective.”

In fact, Shea is co-lead on development of a coastal and ocean strategy and policy framework for the province. “It is work that will contribute to the long-term planning and management of coastal and ocean resources, which have some challenges right now,” Shea says. “I can see a future in this area.”

“I’ve been lucky,” he says, “alot of my dreams have been accomplished: a good job, education, a great wife. I’d like to continue moving ahead in my career, and to keep doing the things that make life happy.” A supportive and understanding employer makes this possible.

When Pam Densmore, an Information Officer in the policy and planning section of the Labour Relations Agency, talks about her years at the agency, it is obvious she loves her job. “I enjoy my work, it’s never boring and it’s always different,” says Densmore, “It could range anywhere from working on employment policy to things like maternity leave and occupational health and safety.”

Pam is a graduate of Memorial University where she majored in Political Science and History. She began her public service career through the Opening Doors program in 1992, returned to Memorial to earn a Certificate in Public Administration, and since made the move to her present position.

Densmore’s main area of expertise is international labour policy; it is where she plays a key role for the agency. “International labour policy is where my niche has developed, though it’s not where I started,” she says. Recently, she has added another responsibility to her job description. She is the Agency’s Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (ATIPPA) Coordinator, which means she is responsible for handling information requests related to new access to information legislation introduced in 2006.

Managers Crucial to Diverse Workplace

“I’ve lucked out,” says Densmore, reflecting on her career. “The agency is really supportive of my work, and the people I work with are accepting and open-minded. I’ve not had a bad experience and I wish everyone could be so fortunate.” Densmore says managers in the public service play a crucial role in building a workplace that welcomes diversity. “They have to be open-minded and willing to make accommodations,” she says.

Executive and management within the Provincial Public Service have to be cognizant and sensitive to issues surrounding accommodation within the workplace for all employees. Pam has been fortunate to work with proactive, understanding individuals. She has been provided necessary supports when
Jonathan Cole (not his real name) was hired through the Opening Doors program last year, but you might never guess he has a disability. Cole has Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and stays healthy through a treatment regime that includes medication, therapy and strong interpersonal supports. He is one of a growing number of program participants through the Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities to self-identify as having a mental illness.

The majority of Opening Doors participants have physical disabilities; mental illness has remained somewhat invisible. But with greater societal awareness about mental health issues, times are changing.

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) says there is a one in five chance of people developing a mental illness in their lifetime. CMHA statistics also report that at any given time in our society, about 10 percent of the population is dealing with a mental illness.

**Treatment and Medication Lead to Recovery**

Mental health professionals are placing a growing emphasis on the importance of work as a crucial part of recovery. So, according to Geoff Chaulk, Executive Director of the CMHA, there is very good reason to think that people like Jonathan Cole will achieve their personal and professional goals.

“I think we’re on the cusp of some really exciting things in this area,” says Chaulk. “Medications and treatments have greatly improved since I started practicing social work, and there’s a focus on early intervention.”

“Recovery is part of the lexicon,” says Chaulk,
who was diagnosed with depression as a young man and knows what it means to struggle with a mental illness. “So for the individual being treated for a mental illness—if he was in school, he goes back to school, if he was working, he goes back to work. We can help to get people back on their feet. It’s not like some years ago when everything would fall apart once someone became ill.”

Recovery can have a different meaning in relation to mental illness: for many it means living with the ongoing vulnerability. As with an illness such as diabetes, there is no cure, but good treatment and supports mean that people can get on with living a full and productive life.

Recovery: People Taking Their Rightful Place in Society

“Focusing on recovery is about helping people so they can take their rightful place in society,” says Moyra Buchan from her office at Stella’s Circle in downtown St. John’s. “Some people may need lifelong supports, just like a person with a physical disability.”

Buchan is the former Executive Director of CMHA, and now heads up the Community Partnerships Initiative for Stella Burry Community Services. The project is funded by the Provincial Government to better coordinate community mental health services that focus on employment, education and social/recreational programs in the St. John’s area.

“A home, a job, a friend: these are what we all want and need, and are the basis of mental well-being for all of us. A job and a friend is the focus of this project,” says Buchan.

Tackling the Issue of Unemployment

Unemployment is still a major problem for many people with mental illnesses. For Geoff Chaulk, there is tragedy in numbers. While statistics show that over 75 percent of people with bi-polar disorders are working, either part time or full time, over 75 percent of those with serious illnesses such as schizophrenia are not. “And what’s really sad,” says Chaulk, “is that the majority really want to work.”

Part of the issue is public education. Even though more Canadians are talking about their mental health, they are still not comfortable when it comes to dealing with mental illness. Stigma remains high, and is one of the reasons why Jonathan Cole asked to be identified using an alias.

“I don’t think, as a society, people have gotten to the point where they can fully appreciate and understand what a mental disorder is,” says Cole. “It’s easier for them to relate to someone with a physical disability. It’s a work in progress and society needs to catch up.”

“Employment becomes a cornerstone, like the fight we had 10 or 15 years ago about good housing,” says Chaulk. “Where would we be without our work, in our productive years? Work tends to define us, it’s where we build relationships; it allows us to rent an apartment, own a house. It gives us options.”

More Workplace Programs Focus on Keeping People at Work

Jonathan Cole says his job is giving him the practical skills and confidence he needs to explore his career options. “The Opening Doors program is great to have because it gives the person with the extra challenge a chance, and everyone deserves a chance. Everyone needs some kind of accommodation.”

Jim McDonald, Manager of the Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities (OEEPD), hopes more people with mental illness will register with the OEEPD for consideration in programs such as Opening Doors. Unfortunately, in the past a lack of workplace supports meant not many stayed in their jobs. He hopes the situation is changing because of a growing awareness and understanding about mental illness within the public service and the support available through the OEEPD.

More programs and services are focusing on employee wellness and healthy workplace initiatives, and the demand has increased for assistance through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), the program that helps public
service workers deal with a range of issues including mental health issues. In 2006, the program helped about 1,000 employees—approximately 10 percent of the public service—access counseling to help them cope with mental health issues.

Community Initiatives Making a Difference
Jim McDonald believes that community initiatives spearheaded by organizations such as the CMHA and Stella Burry Community Services, will have a crucial impact on how people with mental illness are integrated into the civil service.

“That will do two things,” he says, “It will help us to open doors to a broader group of people, and internally it will encourage more comfort about accessing support. We need to start seeing mental illness like any other illness that requires medication and treatment.”

“When someone has a mental disability, you might not stare, but you wonder,” says Jonathan Cole. “But I’m living a completely normal life. I’m embracing everything.”

Poverty a Reality for Many People with Disabilities

As a Networking and Information Officer at the Independent Living Resource Centre (ILRC), a not-for-profit community based organization designed by and for people with disabilities, Lanie Woodfine helps consumers access the supports and resources they need. Many of the people she meets through the centre know what it means to live in poverty and though she works full-time in a job she enjoys, Lanie also struggles financially to make ends meet.

“What many probably don’t realize is that people with disabilities not only earn less money, but they can have higher medical expenses and that puts a squeeze on already tight budgets,” says Woodfine, who has cerebral palsy. Health insurance pays some expenses, but many items aren’t covered.

Woodfine’s employer provides health care and other benefits, which was a key factor in her decision to accept a position with the centre. These kinds of issues are critical ones for many people with disabilities, and can greatly influence whether or not they accept employment.

Statistics show that 51 percent of people with disabilities in Newfoundland and Labrador didn’t earn any money in 2004. And while that number is a decrease of 9 percent since 1999, people with disabilities in this province are the poorest in the country. In 2004, 60.3 percent of those who were employed earned $19,000 or less. Women with disabilities were even worse off, earning an average of $17,600 between 1999 and 2004.

A Social Worker by profession, Woodfine earned her degree from Memorial University’s Faculty of Social Work in 2005. As a single woman living with a disability Woodfine has two of the five most common indicators of poverty as noted in the province’s Poverty Reduction Strategy released in 2005. In Newfoundland and Labrador, and across the country, single people are more likely to be poor, as are people with disabilities.

The Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment (HRLE) is well acquainted with these statistics. There is awareness that many people with disabilities still face significant barriers to employment, barriers that can leave them worse off financially and discourage them from ever entering the workforce.
When representatives traveled the province in 2005 seeking input for the Strategy, they heard from many people with disabilities and organizations that advocate on their behalf.

Government recognizes there is a significant link between poverty and disability, and that persons with disabilities are often disadvantaged in the labour market. The foresight of programs within the Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities (OEEPD) is to reconnect individuals to employment by providing labour market opportunities, enabling educated and skilled workers to build their experience portfolio.

One component of the Poverty Reduction Strategy is to increase employment opportunities for persons with disabilities and to support labour market attachment in this demographic. OEEPD programming is slated to expand in this year to crown corporations and agencies, replicating some of the current programming operating within the Provincial Public Service.

The government has committed to tackling systemic disincentives associated with employment barriers experienced by persons with disabilities who are seeking employment in the Public Service.

Ivan King struggled to find work as a young man with a disability living in central Newfoundland. King is a Computer Programmer for the Department of Natural Resources in Corner Brook. He designs programs that, for example, help manage forestry resources. It’s challenging work, a far cry from the kind of low paying short term jobs that made social assistance look good.

As someone with high drug costs, going to work put more financial strain on King. Consideration of these challenges led to Ivan making the decision to return to school in his thirties. He dove into his Programmer Analyst studies at the College of the North Atlantic in Grand Falls-Windsor, working hard and graduating with top marks. King found out about the job with Natural Resources through the OEEPD and successfully competed for the position.

“I should have gone to college before I did, not just financially, but for my sense of self-worth,” he says. “I have a good quality of life and it just keeps getting better and better.”

What advice can he offer to other young people with disabilities? “Get your education and work hard,” he says emphatically. “Take pride in your work; don’t just aim to get by.” King says it’s essential that decision makers ensure students with disabilities have every opportunity to attend college or university.

Back in St. John’s, Woodfine encourages all governments to support people with disabilities as pursue their educational and employment goals.

“It's in everyone’s interest to create the kind of inclusive environment where we have the chance to live healthy, productive and independent lives,” she says. “We want to be part of the community just like everyone else, we want to work, we are just asking for a little bit of extra support.”

Postscript: Since this article was written, Lanie Woodfine has left her position with the ILRC to accept a position as a Social Worker with Eastern Health. Ivan King has moved to a new position within the Department of Natural Resources as a Computer Systems Analyst I (Geospatial Analyst).
When the Clerk of the Executive Council called Howard Antle in 2003, Antle assumed there were computer problems that needed fixing. “I asked him what kind of system he had and what kind of error message he was getting. He said, ‘No, no. I’m calling about the Public Service Awards.’ The Labrador-based Computer Support Specialist had won a public service Award of Excellence. Howard still laughs about the gaff, but the recognition from his peers means a lot.

"Howard Antle is well-respected and valued by his colleagues who depend on him for his expertise in the computer field," reads the citation that accompanied his award. Howard’s vision restriction has not interfered with his ability to provide computer support to 11 provincial government departments in Labrador. His talents and knowledge are much in demand.

Disability Does Not Diminish Passion for Job
Antle has a visual impairment caused by a rare hereditary condition known as Ocular Albinism. The pigment in his eyes never developed, leaving him with about 10 percent of his vision. “But it’s a very useful 10 percent,” he says. “I can see around a room, and I use a magnifying glass to read. My disability hasn’t hindered me too much; most people are amazed that I can do so much.”

Some individuals with vision challenges excel in the field of information technology with the assistance of low vision software such as a Jordy, a goggle-like device worn while working on a computer or in other environments such as watching TV. Jordy combines the abilities of a premium desktop reading machine with the ability to view distant or near objects anywhere. It magnifies objects and detects movement which can assist with troubleshooting work. Howard identifies areas where this software could be effective in his workplace such as reading a monitor that is a long distance from the front of a workers desk or to view Power Point presentations in a work related meeting. However, not everybody requires such software and Howard relies on a magnifying glass or assistance from a co-worker.

Howard’s work environment is distinctive due to the nature of the physical environment in Labrador. The climate, travel to coastal areas, and the distance in between, create unique opportunities and challenges. As a regional Computer Support Specialist in Labrador for the Office of the Chief Information Officer, he visits small communities in coastal Labrador once or twice a year. When word gets out that he is visiting a community, the phone starts ringing before he leaves his office in Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

"I’m a seasoned traveler now," he says. "I know what to bring and how to dress. I try to pick the best days, but still I’ve been fogged in, snowed in, stranded at an airport for hours. I don’t mind. It’s good to get out into the communities, to see what the needs are. We’ve taken the initiative to make sure their equipment meets certain standards."

Interest and Skill Coincide for Success
Antle grew up in Carbonear, attended the Nova Scotia School for the Blind, and later studied business at a college in Ontario, where he discovered his talent for computer technology. In fact, he was so good that he earned money tutoring fellow business students who were not
“Fixing computers is my job and my hobby,” he says. “I’m dogged about figuring out problems, and sometimes I don’t know when to quit,” says Howard. When he is not working on computers, he is likely reading about them.

Even though Howard had little knowledge about Labrador prior to his arrival in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, he’s developed strong relationships with colleagues and co-workers over the years. “It’s a small community where everyone knows you,” he says. “The way I look at it is, no matter where you live, you make it your home.”

Pauline Hall: “My disability works out to be an ability.”

Pauline Hall steps out of her office at the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary’s (RNC) annex building with a notebook and a few typed sheets of paper she has put together for this interview.

She is one of several people the RNC has hired over the years through the Opening Doors program and part of that organization’s ongoing success in building a more diverse workforce—one that benefits not only the person with a disability, but also the hiring organization.

Hall is organized and meticulous about paperwork and these qualities have made her an invaluable member of the RNC team. Her efficiency contradicts some of the ideas people might have about Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD); a condition she says helps her in her job.

“I can process information at hyper-speed and can do things in 30 minutes that may take people hours,” says Hall, who works in administrative support for the unit. “I can multi-task at will, and I have a high energy level. So here at the RNC my disability works out to be an ability, a quality needed to create order out of the chaos and constant changes in a police station.”

Working for the RNC’s criminal investigations unit feels like being on a movie set, she says, or like reading a novel full of twists and turns. It is actually the kind of environment in which she thrives because, with ADD, she needs a job that is stimulating and task oriented, with just enough structure to keep her on track.

Opening Doors Leads to RNC

Hall has a hefty and interesting resume. She has worked as an administrative assistant, funeral planner, financial planner, sea captain, real estate agent and collections officer.

Hall always knew there was something underpinning her restlessness but was diagnosed only six years ago with ADD. That began a quest to learn more about her disability, and it was then she found the Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities. She contacted them almost immediately, looking for a place where she could talk openly about her ADD and ask for help to find employment that would fit.

That is how she found out about the RNC. When
she competed for an administrative position there, her talent was recognized and the RNC was impressed. In fact, they were so impressed with Hall and other RNC employees hired through the Opening Doors program, the RNC recommends more public service employers use it to meet their staffing needs, both in the longer term and to fill immediate vacancies.

**OEEPD Helps RNC Achieve Its Goals**

“The main objective of the RNC has always been to get the best people for the positions we have,” says the former Manager of Employee Relations with the Department of Justice. “What strikes me every time we go to the Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities is the quality and the caliber of the candidates. I’ve never failed to be impressed by the quality of the screening they employ. We see it as a way we can identify highly skilled candidates who are available and ready for employment.”

The Chief of Police, a 24-year veteran of the force, says the RNC will continue looking to the OEEPD to meet its staffing needs. “We need diversity in all aspects of the RNC,” says the Chief. “We build public trust and confidence when we reflect the community in which we serve, and internally it promotes tolerance and understanding within the organization. You understand people better when you are interacting with them.”

“Even though I have a bit of a communications barrier, I thrive on communicating with people, internally and with the public,” says Ryan, adding that she’s fortunate to have great working relationships with her colleagues. “You just can’t help but blossom when you have the support of the people around you.”

Of her involvement with the Opening Doors program, she says it is great to have people who are aware of her disability, but also know her abilities. “I feel fortunate that I have been exposed to this program,” she says. “Even though I have a disability, part of my personality is to show people that I have a great attitude about my disability. I never take anything for granted.”

**Expensive Accommodations Not the Norm**

The former Manager of Employee Relations says organizations such as the RNC are doing their part to help break down barriers when they hire people with disabilities and other minority groups. “People who have disabilities are really no different than anyone else,” he says.

He says some employers may still believe that hiring a person who has a disability will require extensive, expensive workplace accommodations. This simply is not the norm.
For example, people with hearing impairments like Christine Ryan’s may simply need a telephone that comes with a volume adapter.

**Dan Hefferman: “Don’t let your disability stop you.”**

Most employees with disabilities require modest financial investment when it comes to making their work environment work for them, as is the case with Dan Hefferman, also hearing impaired, who started with the RNC during the early days of the OEEPD.

He works in the identification section, booking, fingerprinting, and recording information. It is sensitive work and Hefferman, friendly and outgoing, remembers how he felt booking his first client 13 years ago.

“I was pretty nervous,” he recalls. “Big time nervous and I was afraid of what they were going to say to me. But I’m past that now because the majority is fine, and I know how to read them. To them I’m just another civilian, and they want to tell their story. So I just listen.”

Hefferman says he meets such a variety of people—interesting and colourful people—who are not always being charged with criminal offences. Sometimes, they need fingerprints for work and travel reasons.

As a young man, Hefferman had an interest in law enforcement, and the military. He joined air cadets and did well. “But I was the shortest guy,” he says, “And because of my height and my hearing impairment, I knew I wouldn’t be able to do that kind of work.”

Serving the public as a civilian member of the RNC has a special appeal. Hefferman says it was likely his abilities as an artist, rather than his interest in law enforcement, that helped him land his job. He was interviewed back in the days when artist sketches of criminal suspects or missing persons were drawn by hand. Asked if he would be able to sketch on the job (his interviewer noted the artist reference in his resume), Hefferman said yes.

Friendly and personable, Hefferman says he is fortunate to have enjoyable work, a lovely wife and a bright son who’s in his first year of university. His advice to a young person with a disability: “Don’t be afraid to dream, and don’t let your disability stop you.” He’s grateful to the people at the OEEPD for helping to create opportunity, and break down barriers.

**Michelle Stuckless: “Don’t ever give up.”**

Working for the RNC on the west coast, Michelle Stuckless answers the phone with gusto. Her position is similar to Hefferman’s, and she enjoys the fast pace. “I love it here,” she says. “It’s always busy and there’s a nice variety of work.”

She processes fingerprinting and bookings, and collects DNA samples. Stuckless says over the years she has noticed that people with disabilities have become more visible in the workplace and the community.

Though most people would not notice Stuckless’ disability—a degenerative bone condition—doctors warned years ago she would be a wheelchair user by age 25. Now 29, she has a four-year-old daughter and periodically undergoes treatments to help build up lost bone tissue. She’s is determined to stay healthy and fit.

And she urges anyone with a disability to keep trying. “Don’t ever give up,” she says. “Someone will give you a chance.”

**Successful Partnership to Continue**

Stuckless, Hefferman, Ryan and Hall are making an impact on attitudes in their organization. Their competence, attitude and work ethic have made the RNC a strong supporter of both the Opening Doors program and its goal of creating diverse, accessible workplaces. “We completely support the Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities,” says the Chief from his St. John’s office. We plan to take advantage of every chance we get to hire through the Opening Doors program.”
Higher Education and Employment: 
Three Success Stories

Nicholas Nash Strength and Courage: High School Drop-out to Social Worker

Nicholas Nash was just 15-years-old in the mid-1970s when he dropped out of school to work in the local fish plant.

“I was making eight dollars an hour and thought I was on top of the world,” says Nash, who grew up in Branch on the southern Avalon Peninsula. Everything changed for Nash in 1981, when he sustained a spinal cord injury in a car accident.

After a period of rehabilitation in St. John’s, he returned to Branch for a couple of years. However, with limited education, limited income, and little contact with organizations that helped people with spinal cord injuries, times were tough. He woke up one morning determined to make some changes.

He contacted the Canadian Paraplegic Association (CPA) office in St. John’s and they helped him sign up for the Adult Basic Education program in the city. They also found him a place to live, and he moved to St. John’s with little more than the clothes on his back.

It was the beginning of a new chapter in his life, one that would lead him eventually to Memorial University. He graduated from Memorial’s Faculty of Social Work in 1999 and registered with the Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities (OEEPD). He was successful in securing contractual positions through the OEEPD where he gained valuable work experience working for the Department of Justice as an Adult Probation Officer, then with Health and Community Services as a Social Worker. These opportunities eventually led to him gaining positions outside the OEEPD such as with the CPA. In his position as Social Worker for the CPA in St. John’s, he counsells people with spinal cord injuries and other disabilities.

“Getting an education changed my life 100 percent for the better,” says Nash. “It’s even in the small things, like being able to go out to a restaurant and getting involved in sports.” I think it’s fair to say that if you have a disability and you don’t have an education, you’ll really be at a disadvantage because you might be physically limited in what you can do.” Nash has helped many young people with disabilities get the support they need to further their education. Some are now finishing post-secondary training and finding jobs within government and the private sector.

“In today’s economy, the more education you have, the more marketable you are,” says Nash, who has recently started a Masters in Social Work. Now in his mid-40s, he has a busy and fulfilling life while active in the community.

Myths & Misconceptions

We may not have any jobs that persons with disabilities can do. We cannot assume what would or would not present difficulty to another person. We can’t know limitations of someone else’s disability in advance, even if the disability is known. Since every person’s experience of a disability is unique, we can’t assume what people are capable or not capable of doing. We also can’t possibly know all of the many forms of accommodation that a person with a disability might be able to use related to their job duties.
Lisa Gushue—Focused on Achieving Goals

Lisa Gushue also knows about the importance of education. Growing up in Spaniard’s Bay on the Avalon Peninsula, she was encouraged from a very early age to reach for the top. “My father was always telling me, ‘your education is the most important thing.’ I knew that having a good education would help down the road,” says Gushue, while taking a break from putting together the Newfoundland and Labrador Exporter of the Year awards. “I kept focused and got good grades in high school and university.”

Now 24 years old, she works as a Trade Officer for the Trade and Investment Division of the Department of Innovation, Trade and Rural Development (INTRD), handling files related to export development, export and trade. Gushue graduated with a Bachelor of Commerce (honors) degree from Memorial University in May 2005, winning various awards for academic achievement along the way. During a co-op work term with the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), she developed a keen interest in economic development, and decided to pursue it as a career. She also gained work experience through the OEEPD’s Student Summer Employment Program, working in offices such as the Motor Vehicle Branch in Bay Roberts.

“I couldn’t work in an environment that required extensive use of both my hands,” says Gushue, a right arm amputee. “I was concerned that I’d be limited in the kind of work I could find, and I didn’t want to put myself in a situation where I’d be stressed out. “Not all employers understand what it’s like to have a disability.”

Her summer employment through the Student Summer Employment Program helped Gushue build confidence and experience. When the OEEPD contacted her and asked if she would like to compete for a contractual position as a Trade and Investment Officer with INTRD, she jumped at the chance. She had worried that after graduation she would have to leave the province to find employment in her field of study. However after securing the contractual position with INTRD, this opportunity led to a successful transition to a full time position outside the Office’s programs through an internal competition.

So what kind of advice does she have for young people with disabilities planning their careers? “It’s important to recognize that if you have a disability, it shouldn’t hold you back,” she says. “You can achieve anything if you put your mind to it. Some people think that if you have a disability your chance for success is limited. It’s not.” Lisa is receptive and open to sharing her experiences with students in the process of making the transition to the workplace. She has acted as an ambassador speaking to students participating in the OEEPD’s Student Summer Employment Program and the National Educational Association of Disabled Students Job Search Strategies Forum in 2007.

Gushue plans to continue her education and enroll in a Masters in Business Administration (MBA) or Certified General Accounting (CGA) program. “I’m taking things one step at a time,” she says. “I’d like to stay in the public sector and advance.”
**Trevor Mills—Success after Life-altering Stroke**

Trevor Mills is working in a position for which he is qualified and well-suited. As a Lands Officer for the provincial Department of Natural Resources in Gander, he combines his love of the outdoors with his talent for mapping and all things technical.

“This is a perfect fit for me, and I love it here,” says Mills, who grew up in Botwood. “We are always busy and no two situations are ever the same.”

For anyone interested in using crown land resources, whether it is for a cottage lot or for wood product, Mills is the first contact. And he knows his land. When he was a student at the College of the North Atlantic (CNA), he helped design the mapping system that shows every title in the province.

That was before, at the age of 22, he collapsed playing broomball at the Botwood Arena while on a break from his job in Halifax. Having the stroke and brain aneurysm forced him to re-think his career. “I had to slow down and look at things from a new perspective,” says Mills, who has a weaker left side and some mobility issues. “I no longer had the ability to go out in the field and walk for two miles carrying 40 pounds on my back.” Because of this restricted access, Trevor no longer could look to certain types of employment which could be physically demanding. This created barriers to securing opportunities in his field of study that often demand field work in wilderness settings walking significant distances over forested terrain or offshore opportunities on seismic vessels. Trevor had to be more selective regarding the best way to find employment related to his education and decided the best way to do that would be a return to the classroom.

He decided on a Bachelor of Technology, a program that would round out his skills acquired at CNA, and provide a more in-depth knowledge of business and office technologies.

“The first couple of courses were difficult but it was very therapeutic to get back in school,” he says. “I had a wide circle of very supportive friends who could never do enough. I wouldn’t be where I am now without that support.”

Not only did the technology degree give him a more impressive resume it boosted his confidence a great deal.

He registered with the OEEPD, and was soon contacted about the Lands Officer position in Gander through the Opening Doors program. His university degree gave him the confidence and the knowledge he needed to win the competition.

Now that he is in a job he loves, Mills plans to remain with the department and advance within the system.

**Postscript:** Since this article was written, Lisa Gushue has moved from INTRD to work as an Account Manager with the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) in St. John’s. Nick Nash has secured a permanent full-time Social Work position with Eastern Health at the Leonard A. Miller Centre’s In-PARP.

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**Myths & Misconceptions**

It is important not to place persons with disabilities in jobs where they might fail. People with disabilities are not the first minority group to face the challenge of proving their competency before being hired. They are, however, the first group for whom this is considered a favour. A patronizing attitude can significantly contribute to underemployment. Rather than protect people – and deny them the experience everyone needs to grow – allow them the dignity of being able to take risks, try new things, and learn through failure as well as success.
There are a variety of adaptive technologies used by persons with disabilities in the workplace and beyond. Although not all persons with disabilities will have the need to use adaptive equipment in the workplace, it is important to know what options are available. The following information will provide a general overview of options but is not an exhaustive list.

**Hardware:**

*Alternate Keyboards* – with large keys, keys which are arranged alphabetically, brightly colour-coded keys, or on-screen keyboards can be of assistance to persons with learning, visual or mobility issues to name a few. An example is the One Handed Keyboard - The WinMini Keyboard is a small alternative keyboard which enables all functions of a standard keyboard to be activated with one hand. A tutorial package called Five Finger Typist can teach you how to type with one hand.

*Alternative Mice* – can come in various designs to meet the needs of persons with mobility or other disabilities. For instance, the Track Ball Mouse comes in various designs but the large varieties can be operated using the hand or foot, requiring less fine motor skills. They allow persons with motor difficulties to maneuver around a computer screen with the greatest of ease.

*Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)* – is a video magnification system consisting of a video screen interfaced with a video camera. Video magnification is achieved in two ways: 1) the electronic conversion from the small camera image to the larger display screen, and 2) the optical effect of the camera’s zoom lens. The stand mounted CCTV can be configured with television receivers, video monitors, or computer monitors. The image magnified on the CCTV’s display may provide enhanced contrast and brightness, inverse video display, gray scale, false colours, and natural colours.

*Jordy* – is a goggle-like device worn while working on a computer or in other environments such as watching television. Jordy combines the abilities of a premium desktop reading machine with the ability to view distant or near objects anywhere. It magnifies objects and detects movement.

**Switches** – allow easier manipulation than the use of a keyboard or joystick. For example, those with a large button can act to provide the actions of a right or left click of a mouse.

**Web Cameras** – uses video to track head movement. These movements control the mouse cursor on-screen. Web cameras can work with HandiEye software to perform the functions of a mouse. HandiEye lets you use your head movements to move the mouse pointer around the screen.

**Software:**

*Optical Character Recognition (OCR)* – with the assistance of a scanner these programs are designed to translate images of handwritten or type written text. This software allows you to edit scanned material and often can read the text to you. Kurzweil Reader 1000 speaks aloud in a variety of natural-sounding voices that can be modified to suit an individual. It also provides document creation and editing features.

*Screen Magnifiers* – enlarge the information on-screen and are used by people with visual disabilities. A common version of this software is the Zoom Text Magnifier which enlarges and enhances everything on your computer screen making items easier to see and access. It provides magnification up to 16 times a regular screen size.

*Screen Readers* – programs which read aloud what is displayed on screen, as well as keyboard entries. An example is JAWS which will read aloud the content of an internet page or document, and help you navigate through your computer by using voice.

*Voice Recognition Systems* – some programs work by using voice commands. An example is Dragon Naturally Speaking which allows you to speak to your computer while your sentences appear typed on screen. This program allows you to dictate entire paragraphs for composition of e-mail messages, reports, letters and other documents.
John Hannaford has been working to make Newfoundland and Labrador more accessible for people with disabilities for almost 18 years. He was hired by the Provincial Government to work as an Accessibility Design Technician in 1990.

By then Rick Hansen had already successfully completed his Man in Motion tour across Canada and it seemed that change was in the air. Sports for people with disabilities were growing in popularity; the province’s building accessibility legislation had been in effect for several years; and children with disabilities were attending mainstream classes with their peers.

It was the era of integration—in schools, the workplace, in public settings. New buildings were designed to include wheelchair ramps and lifts, and wheelchair accessible washrooms. Some older buildings were retrofitted—good things were happening.

“It was an interesting time,” recalls Hannaford, who works for the Department of Government Services. “People began to realize that people with disabilities could do many things. Their minds began to open a little.”

In spite of a few negative experiences, he has also seen a lot of positive change over the past 20 years. “A lot of people have opened their minds and the world has evolved,” he says.

“The highlight for me is the awareness. You no longer get a sense that you are different. I can go any place in town and feel relatively comfortable. You can go anywhere, to a mall or a store, and it is hard not to see someone with a disability. We can go anywhere we want.”

Volunteer and Former Small Business Owner

Prior to working with the Provincial Government, Hannaford operated a wood working shop from his home. He was also active with the Canadian Paraplegic Association (CPA), helping carry out accessibility surveys, giving workshops about how to create an accessible environment, and meeting with clients about accessibility issues.

When he heard about the Opening Doors program, he immediately applied and competed for a position with what is now the Department of Government Services. He believes strongly in the value of the work.

A Natural Fit—Ensuring Accessibility

Hannaford’s role at the department is to make sure that public buildings comply with accessibility regulations. He meets with clients to review the information and building plans they submit, making sure that accessibility is integrated into building design.

“We go through drawings and specs that are provided,” says Hannaford. “We look at things like what type of door hardware they are planning to use. We look at toilets, sinks, turning radius around doors, clearances around doors, etc.”

“It’s a position I just seemed to naturally fit,” says Hannaford, who studied architectural Design Technology at the College of the North Atlantic (CNA) and later did two years of a degree in Vocational Education. He did not complete his degree because back in 1981, he couldn’t find an accessible college in which to do a teaching internship.

Accessibility, or the lack of it, has always been an important issue for Hannaford. Born with a form of spina bifida, he has been a wheelchair user.
from a young age. He is paraplegic and spent much of his formative years at home in the Goulds, during a time when very few places were wheelchair accessible.

**Accessibility the Foundation of Integration**

“I think my job is meaningful,” says Hannaford. “But I think it is meaningful also to the people I work with. Over the years many of them have become strong advocates for accessibility, and I wonder if they realize the importance of their work. I always say that accessibility is the very foundation of integration. It’s the key to building a community where everyone feels accepted.”

**Myths & Misconceptions**

It isn’t fair to my co-workers, employees, clients or customers to hire someone with a disability, since they may feel uncomfortable working with this person. Exposure breeds comfort. And we can’t ignore the exposure that already exists. Over 15% of the Canadian population has some form of disability. They are our employees, co-workers, clients, customers and family members. It is very rare to meet a person who does not have a close friend or family member who has a disability. People are usually more comfortable and willing to work with people with disabilities than many employers expect.

I just don’t know enough about disabilities to feel qualified to supervise or work with people who have them. There is far too much to know about disabilities than an employer, supervisor, or co-worker could possibly expect to learn. Even people knowledgeable in the field of disabilities can’t be familiar with all the hundreds of conditions that are considered disabling. The only truly effective way of learning about a disability that is relevant to your workplace is to learn from the applicant. Ask the employee/co-worker how the disability influences how they perform essential work functions. There is really only one expert for any specific disability – the person who has it.

The following are more common myths and assumptions that are sometimes made about employing persons with disabilities:

- Persons with disabilities can’t keep up with other co-workers
- A person with a disability is likely to miss a lot of work
- My staff wouldn’t want to work with a person with a disability
- A person with a disability cannot work in a position requiring physical labour
- Hiring a person with a disability will require changing my workplace
- A person with a disability will have more accidents on the job
- Accommodations make it too expensive to hire a person with a disability
- It would be hard to fire a person with a disability
- Persons with disabilities don’t really want to work
What does Duty to Accommodate mean?
The duty to accommodate refers to an employer’s obligation to take appropriate steps to eliminate discrimination against employees, prospective employees or clients resulting from a rule, practice, or barrier that has – or can have – an adverse impact on individuals with disabilities. The duty to accommodate is written into section 2 and section 15 of the Canadian Human Rights Act; it stipulates that accommodation is required, short of undue hardship.

What is Undue Hardship?
According to the Canadian Human Rights Commission, here are some guidelines which may be useful when determining what constitutes undue hardship. If a qualified individual could be unfairly disadvantaged by existing policies, procedures, or facilities, there is a duty to accommodate unless accommodation would cause undue hardship.

Undue hardship takes into account such factors as:

- The cost of the accommodation, examined in the context of the size and financial state of the employer
- Disruption of operations or collective agreements
- The interchangeability of workforce and facilities
- Safety risks
- Employee morale

The fact that hardship must be “undue” to remove the duty to accommodate means that some inconvenience and costs are acceptable. Employers should generally attempt to accommodate an individual before concluding that it would result in undue hardship. When accommodation is not provided, the employer must be prepared to demonstrate that it would, in fact, cause undue hardship and that no realistic alternative was available.

When assessing potential hardship, it is necessary to consider all possible accommodations along with various methods of reducing hardship, such as:

- Phasing-in major accommodations
- Making use of special budgets or external sources of funding
- Identifying alternative ways of completing job duties
- Shifting tasks between employees

What are the limits in the Duty to Accommodate?
There are limits to the employer’s duty to accommodate. An employer must balance the rights of the individual and the right of the employer to have a productive workplace. An employer is not required to:

- create an unproductive job
- keep someone unable to meet their employment obligations despite accommodations
- Face undue hardship. However, if an employee is denied accommodation he/she can file a complaint under the Canadian Human Rights Act.

Is there a high cost to integrating people with disabilities into the office?
No. The cost of accommodation is reasonably modest. According to the Job Accommodation Network (http://janweb.iclei.wvu.edu), employers can accommodate most needs for $500 or less. These costs are even more reasonable when you consider them amortized over the entire
duration of the employee’s time with the organization. The cost of adapting a workstation to the needs of a person with a disability can sometimes be high, but not prohibitively high – accommodation is just one part of the continuum of meeting the needs of your employees.

Examples:

• Changing a desk layout from the right to the left side for a data entry operator who has a shoulder injury ($0).

• Supplying a telephone amplifier for a computer programmer who is hard of hearing ($70).

• Providing a special chair for a payroll clerk to alleviate pain caused by a back injury ($400).

• Providing a drafting table, page turner and pressure sensitive tape recorder for a statistician who is paralyzed from a spinal cord injury ($1,100).

What is the Bona Fide Occupational Requirement (BFOR)?

A BFOR refers to an essential task or objective required to perform a job. An employer must review tasks in job descriptions to determine if the tasks are essential for the position. If a task is not essential and is discriminatory, it must be removed.

As well, employers must pay particular attention to the difference between the processes and objectives of a job. In many instances, it is possible to alter, or accommodate, a process while still achieving the objective.

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