

Facing the New Economy

Newfoundland and Labrador Adult
Basic Education Social History Series

A Joint Project of
The Writers' Alliance of
Newfoundland and Labrador
and Cabot College Literacy Office



In This Series...

Book 1 - Timelines of Newfoundland and Labrador

Book 2 - Facing the New Economy

Book 3 - Learning About the Past

Book 4 - Desperate Measures *The Great Depression in Newfoundland and Labrador*

Book 5 - Health and Hard Time

Book 6 - Multicultural History

Book 7 - Surviving in Rural Newfoundland

Book 8 - The Struggle for Work in the Great Depression

Book 9 - How Long do I Have to Wait?

Book 10 - William Pender *The Story of a Cooper*

Book 2: Facing the New Economy

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Foreword

In 1994, the Writers' Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador and Cabot College Literacy Office combined to produce a series of Newfoundland books on tape. Under the general title *Increasing Access to Newfoundland Literature*, the tapes and accompanying book *A Woman's Labour*, offered ABE Level 1 students and instructors, as well as the blind and the general public, an accessible and proven set of local literacy materials. The success of that project led to a second collaboration: the *Newfoundland and Labrador Adult Basic Education Social History Series*.

A major difference between the two projects is that while Newfoundland Books on Tape dealt with previously existing material, the essays in the *Social History Series* have been newly created by five professional writers. The prime objective, however, remains the same: to provide adult learners with meaningful literacy materials drawn from their own vibrant culture.

Topics in the series were chosen for their human and social interest and their importance in shaping who we are today. In addition to historical topics, current social and economic issues such as the closure of fish plants are also examined in an attempt to provide a contemporary perspective.

The five writers employed on the project carried out extensive research in public and university archives and libraries. Some also conducted personal interviews. Many of the essays contain new and fascinating historical research. Often the pieces deal with controversial subject matter: the Great Depression, Commission of Government, workfare, the erosion of social programs, poaching and the future of our rural communities. In an effort to dispel the notion that history is "dry and dull," the approach is fresh and provocative. The object is to inform, entertain and, in conjunction with the accompanying notes and questions, to effectively stimulate lively discussion among literacy students. Consequently, this series will also be of interest and practical use to the general public and, especially, to students.

The intended audience for the *Social History Series* is ABE Level 1 students. Because of the disparate subject matter, however, the essays are written in varying degrees of reading difficulty. In particular, students may need help with some of the quoted source material as this sometimes involves archaic syntax and vocabulary.

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The *Newfoundland and Labrador Adult Basic Education Social History Series* is a joint project of the Cabot College Literacy Office and the Writers' Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador.

"It's Made Me Stronger"
A Profile of Karen Westcott

by Janet McNaughton



Credit: Ned Pratt.

Introduction

Sometimes, people think they cannot do anything to change laws. This is not true. If a law becomes very unpopular, and many people let the government know they are upset, the law may be changed. It takes a lot of work to change a law. There are no promises that you will win the changes you want. But people who try to change laws in peaceful ways are very important. This piece is about Karen Westcott. She helped to change the law that sets the minimum wage in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Questions and Answers

These questions will help you understand this piece.

What is minimum wage?

Minimum wage is the lowest amount an employer is allowed to pay. The minimum wage is set by provincial law. It is usually an hourly rate. In 1995, the minimum wage in Newfoundland was \$4.75 an hour for the first 40 hours in a week, and \$7.12 an hour if more than 40 hours of work is done.

What is a two-tiered minimum wage?

"Tier" (rhymes with ear) means a row or rank or level. A two-tiered minimum wage provides two different minimum wages for different kinds of work. Newfoundland had a two-tiered minimum wage until 1991. In 1976 the minimum wage was \$2.50 an hour for most workers. But domestic servants in private homes were paid "not less than \$30.00 per week."

How are laws changed?

A democracy is a country where people vote to elect the government. In a democracy, laws are made by governments elected by the people. In Canada, we have three different levels of government for most people. The federal government is based in Ottawa. It makes laws and provides services for all of Canada. The provincial governments are based in provincial capitals and make laws and provide services for each province. Municipal governments make rules (called by-laws) and provide services for people living in towns and cities. People who live outside of cities and towns in Newfoundland and Labrador may not have a municipal government.

All these governments are elected. When there is an election, every voter can say who he or she would like to run the government. Elected governments must listen to the voters. Even between elections, we have the right to let our members of government know what we think about important issues. How do we do this? We write letters and make phone calls to our elected officials. We write to newspapers and speak out publicly. We ask for meetings with our elected officials, organize petitions and hold peaceful demonstrations. We can do all these things because we live in a country that protects our right to freedom of speech. In some countries, people can go to jail or even be put to death when they do not agree with the government. In Canada, these things do not happen.

A Profile of Karen Westcott

Karen's Early Years

When Karen Westcott was little, pre-school tests showed she would have trouble learning. Karen has a learning disability. People did not know what to do about problems like this when Karen was a child in the late 1960s. In those days, children who were different were sometimes kept out of school. Karen's mother was told that Karen would be better off living in an institution. Karen's mother did not agree, so Karen lived at home and started kindergarten.

School was hard for Karen. She was kept in kindergarten for two years. There were no special education classes at her school. A nun would come and take her out of class to help her with math and reading. But, by the time she was in grade four, Karen was far behind the other children. When she was eight or nine, she was sent to another school for special education. The other children in her class were much younger. This made her feel bad. "It was really hard," she says now, "but it was just the system."

Starting To Work

Karen stayed in school until she was 16, and then she quit. She began to work as a domestic worker, looking after other people's children and doing their housework. She usually worked from eight in the morning until six at night. Sometimes her hours were longer. She was paid \$120 a week. Her employer gave her an apartment to live in, but he took \$50 a week out of her salary to pay her rent. Karen did not know this was against the law.

There were other problems too. Her employer expected her to keep her apartment spotless. When he had visitors, he liked to show them her apartment. On the weekends, when Karen had her days off, she would be asked to baby sit the children. Sometimes this happened when she was on the way out the door. She was not paid extra for this work.

Karen's employer came to Canada from another country. He decided to visit his home country for six weeks. His children went to live at his brother's house. Karen still lived in the basement apartment of her employer's house. Now, she had to leave at 7:00 am every morning and travel across town to get her employer's children ready for school and pack their lunches. She did housework all day. She looked after the children after school until the adults returned from work. Then she went back to her apartment. The money that Karen spent on busses came out of her own pocket. The time she spent travelling did not count as part of her work.

Things Can Be Different

In 1985, Karen met Sister Lorraine Michael of the Catholic Social Action Commission. She introduced Karen to people in the Coalition for Equality, a group of union and other labour organizations. Unions are groups of people who work in the same jobs. A union tries to make sure that people are treated fairly in their jobs, and that they get the best wages they can. Karen also met people from the St. John's Women's Centre. By now she knew her employer was treating her unfairly. These people began to talk to her about what she could do to change things.

Around this time, the provincial Department of Labour held some public hearings into working conditions in the province. A hearing is a meeting where people can explain how they feel about an issue. The Department of Labour wanted workers to talk about how they were being treated by their employers. No one was talking about domestic work, so Karen was asked to speak. She

did, and soon found out that her employer had broken the law when he took her rent out of her pay. After that, Karen made a formal complaint to the Department of Labour against her former employer.

There were two minimum wages in Newfoundland and Labrador until 1991. One was for almost all workers, but there was a lower minimum wage for domestic workers—the people who did housework and full time babysitting. This system was called the two-tiered minimum wage. In 1988, the minimum wage was \$4.25 an hour for everyone except domestic workers. The minimum wage for domestic workers was \$3 an hour. The law also prevented employers from taking living expenses, such as room and board, out of this salary. This was because domestic workers were paid such a low minimum wage and many lived where they worked.

Karen's employer moved to a new house that did not have an apartment. He looked for an apartment for Karen, but everything was too expensive. Karen began to work for another brother of her employer. Her working conditions got better. Karen still waited for the Department of Labour hearing about the job she had left. At this hearing, Karen and her former employer would tell their sides of the story. Then the Department of Labour would decide if the employer had broken the law. If he had, the Department of Labour would also decide what should be done about it. While she was waiting, Karen decided she wanted a lawyer. "I knew for a fact that [people] have a lawyer on hand. A business man will have a lawyer. So of course I [wanted to have] a lawyer, and someone who is involved in labour [issues]." She met a legal aid lawyer, Dennis MacKay. He became her lawyer.

Karen and her lawyer waited years for a hearing to investigate her former employer. Three or four days would be set aside for the hearing by the Department of Labour. Then Karen's former employer would make an excuse, and the hearing was put off for months.

The Household Services Co-op

In the meantime, Karen's salary went down. She found she was making about \$75 a week, and working ten hours a day. Karen met other women with the same problems. These women did not have a union to represent them. When they felt they were being treated unfairly, they did not know who to talk to. One of these women worked 124 hours in one week. She did housework and looked after children. When she added up her pay, she had only made \$1.05 an hour.

Karen and four other women decided things might be better if they could run their own housekeeping business. Then they would work for themselves. They formed a workers' co-operative called Household Services Co-op. A workers' cooperative is a business that provides its members with jobs. The people who own the business are also the people who work in it.

It took a lot of work to put Household Services Co-op together. The women had to write a business plan and apply for loans. They could not get a loan from a bank or any government agency. They got a small start-up loan from PLURA, an inter-denominational church group. (Inter-denominational means that different churches, such as Catholic and Protestant, belong to the group.) After three years of planning, in September of 1988, Karen and her friends opened their business.

Household Services Co-op ran for about a year and a half, but it did not succeed. The cleaning jobs were too far apart. It was hard to get a vendor's permit that would let them buy supplies and equipment at wholesale rates. (A vendor's permit shows that you are buying things for your business. It lets you buy at places that sell to businesses more cheaply.) There were also problems with management and organization. But Karen learned a lot even though the business did not work out.

Changing A Law

When Karen left Household Services Co-op, she did not want to go back to working alone in someone's home. She got unemployment insurance for a year, and then went on social assistance. Karen was still waiting for the Department of Labour hearing against her former employer. While she was waiting, Karen and some other women began to talk to politicians about the problems facing domestic workers. There were elections and changes of government. A new government means that different people are in charge. Every time there was a change of government, Karen would begin again, talking to the new minister and new members of the opposition party.

Finally, Karen's lawyer got tired of waiting for the Department of Labour hearing. "Rather than working on change case by case," Karen said, "we thought we should try to change the system." They decided to challenge the law. The two-tiered minimum wage was not fair. It might even violate people's rights under Section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Section 15 promises "equality before and under the law and equal protection and benefit of law." The fact that some people were getting a lower minimum wage than others might mean they were not benefitting from the law as much as most people. Karen and her lawyer decided to challenge the law in court. Their case against the government was registered with the Supreme Court of Newfoundland in 1989.

In a democracy, the government will sometimes change laws if they are very unpopular. Karen and her lawyer did not rush their court case. They hoped publicity about their case would help people to understand it was unfair to pay two different minimum wages. Maybe this would make the government change the system before the court case began.

Things did not look good. In the spring of 1990, the government of Newfoundland filed a statement with the Supreme Court. The government said it did not want to change the two-tiered minimum wage. It looked as if Karen and her lawyer were in for a long battle in court. But in 1990 the government began to realize that the idea of two minimum wages was unpopular. Members of the opposition asked questions about the minimum wage, and said the system should be changed. Karen and other women kept talking to people in the government. No one seemed to think that the two-tiered minimum wage was a good idea.

Late in 1990, the government decided to change the law and do away with the two-tiered minimum wage. Karen and her lawyer had won their battle without ever setting foot in court. On April 1, 1991, the two-tiered minimum wage system ended. The minimum wage became \$4.75 per hour for everyone in Newfoundland and Labrador. This did not apply to casual baby sitters.

Karen Is Changed

Too Not many people can say they helped to change a law. Karen Westcott can. Did this change her? Karen thinks it did. "It's made me stronger," she says. "I know how to fight for myself... I'm more aware of things now than I was say about ten years ago. I know what legal rights are.. and I'm not afraid to speak out if I see something that's wrong."

Karen speaks out about smaller things too. "If there's a child's toy that's too dangerous," she says, "now I'll make people aware of it, and the reason why. If I see a certain item I'll speak out, I'll go to Consumer Affairs... I'm not afraid to say, well, there's something wrong."

Karen has had some short-term jobs, but is still on social assistance. She is active in the St. John's Maple Leafs booster club. She sells lottery tickets in malls to add some extra money to her income. Karen keeps on working for a better future. She recently finished her GED (General

Educational Development). This is the same as a high school diploma. It wasn't easy for Karen to do her GED because of her learning disability. She was allowed to speak rather than write some of the exams, and she was given extra time to write others. She finished with a score of 45.6%—just enough to pass.

Now Karen wants to get into an Early Childhood Education program, to become a daycare worker. "Anything to do with children, or special needs kids," she says. "[I understand them,] where I went through [it] myself." People at the community colleges and private colleges have told her she would not be able to handle the program because of her learning disability. There is nothing in the Charter of Rights to protect people with learning disabilities from being discriminated against.

Karen is part of the Learning Disabilities Association of Newfoundland. This group tries to gain recognition for people with learning disabilities. "There's a number of people who want to take a course," Karen says, "but they have trouble with writing...they've been turned down, they say, 'no, you can't do it.'" Maybe this will lead Karen to try to change a law again. She isn't sure yet.

Now, Karen is taking an evening course on basic computer skills at Cabot College. Social Services pays for this course. Karen wants to find a way to get off social assistance. Most of all, she wants to get into an Early Childhood Education course. "Eventually," she says, "I'll get in. I'll fight tooth and nail, but I'm getting in."

Notes for Instructors

Karen Westcott's story contradicts the notion that people on social assistance are passive victims who do nothing to change the world around them. This piece may also have special relevance for learning disabled students.

Many of the themes in this piece reflect the content of the Integrated Unit GOVERNMENT AND LAW, pp. 38-55 in the ABE Level I *Instructor's Handbook*. The discussion of minimum wage in the unit OCCUPATIONAL KNOWLEDGE, p. 88 of the *Handbook* is also relevant, as is the information under "Consumer Protection" in the unit CONSUMER EDUCATION, pp. 69-70 in the *Handbook*.

The co-operative movement has been active in Newfoundland and Labrador since the 1930s. For a history of this movement in the province, see the article "Co-operatives" pp. 518-526 in the *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, Volume I. Many co-operative businesses operate today, including Credit Unions and Co-op supermarkets, and fishermen's co-ops on Fogo Island and in Petty Harbour. You may wish to include a discussion of co-operative businesses when studying this piece.

Topics for Discussion

1. Levels of government and what they do.
2. The ways in which peaceful public pressure is used to change laws in a democratic system.
3. The right to freedom of expression in Canada.
4. How people make their views known to government officials.
5. Labour laws and how they affect working conditions.

6. How people find out about their rights.
7. Protection under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.
8. The education of children with special needs.

Questions for Discussion

1. When Karen was about to start school, her mother was told that she should be put in an institution. What did Karen's mother do? What does this tell us about how Karen's mother felt about her?
2. When Karen started to work, how much money was she paid each week? How much money was taken out of this for her rent? What did that leave her to live on? How easy would it be to live on that much money?
3. How did Karen find out that she was being treated unfairly by her employer? What did she decide to do about it? How can other people find out if they are being treated fairly in their jobs? If they are not being treated fairly, what can they do?
4. What is a workers' co-operative? Why did Karen and her friends want to set one up? What did they have to do to set up their co-op? How long did it take? What problems did they have?
5. Look in the Yellow Pages under Co-Operative Organizations. Are there any co-op businesses in your area? What kinds of services do they provide?
6. Karen did different things when she was trying to get the government to change the minimum wage law. What did she do? How long did she try before the law was changed? Do you think the law would have been changed if she had not tried? Why, or why not?
7. Karen said, if she saw a toy that was dangerous, she would go to Consumer Affairs. What is Consumer Affairs? What does it do?
8. Karen said that trying to change the law changed her as well. How was Karen changed?
9. What are Karen's goals for the future? What is she doing to try to reach those goals?

The Ballad of Elizabeth O'Brien

by Kathryn Welbourn

Elizabeth O'Brien is one of almost 30,000 Newfoundland fishery workers who lost their jobs when the northern cod fishery shut down in 1992. The federal government set up emergency financial aid and retraining programs. The programs were supposed to help long-time fishery workers through the crisis of losing their jobs, perhaps forever.

Elizabeth had worked at the small inshore plant in her town for 12 years. But there were so few fish the last two years that she didn't qualify for the federal help. She was one of several thousand fishery workers who were turned down.

Elizabeth's life had never been very easy. But the cod **moratorium** pushed her family into "a dark hole." Elizabeth wondered if she would ever be able to dig herself out. The details of Elizabeth's life are **unique**. At the same time, her story is the story of many lives in Newfoundland. Her problems are shared by many people.

Elizabeth is 41 years old. Her hands are large and red from her years at the fishplant. If pressed, Elizabeth will talk about her life. She tells her story quietly. She doesn't want any pity.

Elizabeth grew up on what she calls the bad side of town. She was the oldest of three children. Her father worked at odd jobs. Her mother was often sick. Elizabeth did a lot of the work around the house. She remembers ironing her father's shirts. She tried to make the creases straight and firm.

Elizabeth quit school in grade seven. She took a job in a St. John's restaurant. She gave most of her wages to her mother to help buy food.

Joe grew up in a small outport close to St. John's. His father fished for a living. There were 13 children in the family and they were very poor. Joe remembers lying on his bed and looking at the sky through the slats in the roof. He remembers watching snowflakes flutter down from the ceiling onto the kitchen table. Their house always needed repairs. Joe quit school in grade six. He worked around the house. He tried to help his mother. Joe remembers dragging a slide loaded with firewood through the trees.

Elizabeth and Joe met when they were only 17. They met at a dance and fell in love. They wanted to marry. They dreamed of having a small house of their own and of raising a family. Their parents laughed at their plans. "You'll never make anything of yourselves," Elizabeth remembers her father saying. "You'll be sorry you ever met."

Elizabeth and Joe married anyway. They promised they would always love each other. They were determined to make something of themselves. Elizabeth worked as a waitress. Joe drove a taxi cab. They rented a tiny apartment in St. John's. They walked or rode their bikes everywhere. They didn't own a television or a radio. They stayed in at night and saved their money.

Within a year Elizabeth was pregnant with their first child. She had a son. They named him after Joe. Elizabeth had two more children in the next four years. She had to stop working to look after the children. Joe took extra taxi shifts. It was getting harder to put any money aside, but they never gave up on their dream of owning a house.

In 1975 they bought a run down salt box house close to St. John's. They purchased it from a neighbour. The house only cost \$4,000. They bought it on a rent-to-own plan. The house had no electricity or running water. They planned to rebuild it while they were living in it. They tore down the walls and put up new ones as they could afford the materials. Joe drove his taxi in the day and worked on the house at night. Elizabeth hauled water from up the road. She tried to

keep the house warm with an oil stove. She cooked on a propane camping stove. She looked after the children and helped repair the house.

Elizabeth and Joe paid off the house the same month they finished rebuilding it. They had running water and an indoor toilet. They had electric heat and a new woodstove. Their lives were much easier.

In 1978 the last of Elizabeth's children started school. Elizabeth walked down the hill and applied for a job at the little inshore fishplant. She was hired to work on the filleting line. She started the same day. Elizabeth remembers those days fondly. She was paid more than the **minimum wage**. She enjoyed working with fish. It was exciting down on the wharf. There was lots of talking and laughing among the women in the plant. They used to tease and joke with the fishermen when they came to unload their fish.

Elizabeth's boss let her go home at lunchtime so she could feed her children and send them back to school. She took her evening break in time to meet her children at the end of the day. She cooked their meal and went back to work. When she first started at the plant Elizabeth worked from early spring until November. During the caplin season she worked through most of the night. But she didn't mind. The money was good. Her neighbours left their porch lights on for her and the other women. They walked home together at two or three in the morning. "We were a big part of the community," says Elizabeth. "Everything revolved around us and the plant. It made you feel important."

The money Elizabeth made helped her husband Joe start his own house repair business. He bought the tools he needed one by one. Within four years, Joe quit driving taxi and worked at his business full time. Elizabeth's money was her own then. She bought a few things the family needed: a deep freeze, a rocking chair, a microwave oven, their first television.

In 1990 Elizabeth's working hours were cut in half. There just wasn't much cod or caplin that year. She didn't work enough hours to qualify for unemployment insurance. Joe told her not to worry. His business was still doing well.

In 1992 the fishplant closed when the moratorium on cod was announced. Elizabeth had been promoted to line manager. She was supposed to get a raise. Instead she was out of work. At the same time Joe's business began to fail. The province was in the middle of a **recession**. People didn't have money to spend on new siding. Out-of-work fishermen did their own repairs.

Elizabeth didn't qualify for the federal fishery aid package because she hadn't worked enough hours in 1990 and 1991. Elizabeth explained that she hadn't worked many hours because there wasn't enough fish. She even called up her **MP** to complain, something she had never done before. But in the end the answer was the same. She was out of work. She had no income. "All my years in the fishplant. All my years working in the fishery, they just meant nothing," she says.

Joe got a job at a local pig farm. But he was soon laid off. He started collecting \$129 a week UI benefits. It just wasn't enough. They applied for welfare for the first time in their lives. They were turned down. You can't get social assistance if you are collecting UI.

The O'Brien's were sinking quickly. "I promised myself when I was young that no family of mine would go hungry even for a day," says Elizabeth. "We had to take some action."

They turned off their electric heat. Joe cut wood almost every day so they could heat their home with the woodstove. Elizabeth began baking all the family's bread. She made it from sacks of

flour Joe got cheap from a local grocery store. The bags were broken open and moldy. But the flour was fine. Elizabeth cut off the mold and used the flour. She took in sewing.

Joe did odd jobs for the neighbours. They paid him in cash. Joe didn't report the money to the UI office. He worried about getting caught, but they needed the extra money. When Joe's UI ran out, he got a job driving a school bus. It didn't pay well, but if they didn't buy anything except food they would be okay.

Elizabeth began applying for jobs. She would take any job. She applied to work on the town garbage truck, but they didn't want any women. She applied for road crews in the area, but she was told she was too old. In 1992, 88,000 Newfoundlanders were living below the poverty level. Of those, 61,000 were living on welfare. There was a lot of competition for even the lowest paying jobs.

Elizabeth thought she could go back to waitressing. But the restaurants wanted high school students or high school **graduates**. Elizabeth decided she'd have to lie about her education and her age. She dyed her hair black to help her look younger. She needed a job. She didn't care how she got it.

A year later Elizabeth did get work. She was hired as a dishwasher at a popular restaurant in St. John's. She works six days a week and makes minimum wage, just like when she was a girl living at home with her mother. Joe still drives the school bus and his house repair business is starting to come back. Two of their children have moved away from home. Their last boy is finishing school.

Elizabeth's job is **exhausting**. It takes forty minutes just to get to work and then she stands washing dishes for seven or eight hours at a time. She works shifts so sometimes she drives home, grabs something to eat and drives back to work again. Elizabeth is the oldest person working at the restaurant. The other employees don't talk to her very much. Most of them are high school or university students. They spend their money on clothes or dates. They don't have much in common with a 41-year-old mother of three.

Elizabeth still takes in sewing. She still makes the family's bread. She and Joe never turn on the electric heat.

Elizabeth doesn't know how long she will have to work as a dishwasher. She doesn't really care. She and Joe almost lost everything they had worked for. She says if they just keep working something good is bound to happen. She still hopes the fishery will come back. She would love to go back to the fishplant.

"People used to complain about working at the plant. They didn't like the water and the mess. It's true sometimes we'd be up to our ankles in cold water and up to our arms in ice and fish," she says. "But we were part of something, something big in our town. We were treated well because we knew everyone. I miss it. I'd never have given it up."

This is the song of Elizabeth's life. This is the **ballad** of her private struggle against **poverty**. How will it end? Elizabeth says she doesn't know. But she is hopeful. "We are not on that edge now. We are pulling ourselves back. Slowly, slowly our bills are being paid down, our debts are being paid," she says quietly. "And our children never went hungry, not for one day."

Word List

moratorium: a pause or an end.

unique: special.

minimum wage: lowest legal rate of pay.

recession: decline in the economy.

MP: Member of Parliament.

graduates: students who complete highschool, college or university.

exhausting: tiring.

ballad: song or poem which tells a romantic or heroic story.

poverty: being poor, existing without the basic needs for a healthy life.

Issues for Discussion

1. The fishery crisis.
2. Age, education and work.

Questions for Discussion

1. Elizabeth and Joe both quit school long before they had their grade twelve. Describe their lives at home. Why did they quit school?
2. Elizabeth says she remembers her days at the fish plant fondly. Why did she like working at the plant so much?
3. What happened to Elizabeth and Joe when the cod moratorium was announced? List the things they did to survive.
4. Why did Elizabeth have such a hard time getting work? What did she have to do to get a job? Describe Elizabeth's job as a dishwasher. How is it different from her job at the fish plant?
5. Would you compare the story of Elizabeth O'Brien to a ballad? Explain why or why not?

The Right To Work Job Prospects for the Disabled

by Ed Kavanagh

Wayne Cantwell, Fred Williams, Rene Rubia, and Cindy Knight after a production by the Longside Players.



Credit: Ed Kavanagh

Introduction

In our society we are taught that everyone has the right to work. But is this really true? This essay looks at the lives of four people with different disabilities: Cindy Knight, Fred Williams, Wayne Cantwell and Rene Rubia. They all want to work. None of them has ever had a long term, steady job. Because of their disabilities, they do not have the "right to work" that most people take for granted.

People with disabilities often have problems that others never have to face. As Cindy Knight says, "What are little things for most people are often big things for me." A disability can affect a person's education. It can interfere with his or her's ability to do a job. The disabled also have to deal with the negative or uninformed attitudes of some employers and co-workers. Sometimes, because of the system, having a job does not get a disabled person any further ahead than not having one.

Who is "Disabled?"

The term "disabled" can lead us to think that all people with disabilities are the same. This is not true. In Canada, 15% of the population has some kind of disability: physical, mental or both. Some people are severely disabled, some mildly. A person with a spinal problem who uses a wheelchair is often called disabled. The person in the wheelchair may disagree. She may think of herself as an ordinary person who just happens to use a wheelchair to get around. She may drive a car and have a husband and children. She may work as a lawyer or an accountant. People with epilepsy, schizophrenia, Tourette's Syndrome, a learning disability or arthritis may have very different social and working conditions. Everyone is special. All disabled people have their own desires, skills and goals.

The Right to Choose

While it is true that people with disabilities are different, one thing is the same for all of them: they often have trouble finding work. When they do find a job it is usually low paying. Often it is not the kind of job they really want. Most people choose their work. This is not always the case for the disabled. Too often they have to take what they can get.

In some cases, a disabled person may not want to work. He or she may find a regular nine to five job too stressful. Sometimes they cannot work—their disabilities are too severe. People with autism¹ or those who are severely mentally delayed are often unable to work in the everyday work place. But even these people can and should do *something*. Being productive is part of what gives meaning to our lives.

Many things in our society work against the hopes of disabled people who want to be usefully employed. For them, life is often made up of long periods of living on social assistance, training projects which rarely result in work, and short term (usually government funded) work projects.

Social Assistance

Many people with disabilities live on social assistance. Most would rather not. Although it sounds impossible, some disabled people do not work because they can support themselves better by staying at home. Here is an example.

¹ Autism is a mental condition where the person "lives in their own world." Autistics have great trouble communicating with other people.

If a woman on social assistance has a serious medical problem—physical or mental—Social Services gives her a drug card. She can use this card to get free medication. But if she gets a job the card is taken away. Most jobs available to people with disabilities are unskilled, minimum wage jobs. If the woman works for minimum wage she cannot make enough money to cover all her living expenses plus medication. This is especially true if she needs expensive medication. Minimum wage will not provide enough money to cover medication, rent, food and other necessities. Unless she can find a job that pays well, she is better off on social assistance.

This is why the current system is said to have "disincentives"² for the disabled person. A job will keep a person busy, but other than that, working will not improve the quality of this person's life. Most people work because they want to contribute to society and grow as human beings. But they also have to put food on the table.

Attitudes

Even though there are many disincentives in our system, most disabled people want to work. When they try to find a job, however, they often meet employers with negative or uninformed attitudes. Sometimes employers assume the disabled person is too physically weak to do a job. If the person has a psychiatric condition, the employer might think that she is not smart enough. He might worry that the disabled person will get hurt or disrupt the work place. The employer may feel that other employees will not want to work with a disabled person.

Today there are programs in Newfoundland that enable disabled people to begin a job with the help of a support person. The support person works with the disabled employee for a year. Then the disabled person is on her own. The support person helps the disabled employee learn about the job and makes sure that the work gets done. But sometimes employers will not talk to or deal directly with the disabled employee. They will only deal with the support person. They have not learned that the disabled employee is a *person*. Because of these attitudes, the disabled person is often not given a fair chance.

Unemployment is a big problem in our society. With so many able-bodied people looking for work, some employers feel it is just too risky to hire a disabled person. They prefer to play it safe. Many disabled people say "getting in the door" is the hardest part of finding a job. Once they have a job they can show what they can do. But it's hard to prove yourself if you're never given a chance.

Education

Education and literacy are important when trying to find a job. Some people with disabilities manage to get a good education. They go to university or technical college. Today, people who are blind or in wheelchairs hold many important jobs. They are lawyers, doctors, business people or teachers. But many other disabled people have poorer educations. Cindy Knight, who has rheumatoid arthritis, had to give up university because the physical strain of getting around was too hard on her. Wayne Cantwell, who has epilepsy, had hundreds of seizures when he was in grade school. The seizures would tire him out and make it difficult for him to focus on his school work. For Cindy and Wayne, hard work could not get them the educations they wanted. Without an education, the chances of getting a higher paying job are small. Cindy and Wayne and many other disabled people know this. They go to night school for upgrading in the hope that their job prospects will improve. And, of course, they try to improve their basic literacy skills.

² A disincentive is a reason to *not* do something.

All of these ideas play a role in the lives of the people profiled below. Their situations have been very different. Sometimes it seems they have nowhere to turn. But they have all kept a positive attitude. None of them has given up on life.

Cindy Knight

Cindy Knight was born in 1964 in Twillingate, Newfoundland. When she was 12, Cindy had a common childhood accident: she fell off her bike. But what happened next was not at all common.

When Cindy tumbled off her bike, she landed on her hands. At first, she did not seem badly hurt. But her hands did not heal properly. Weeks later, she still had trouble moving them. Doctors did tests and found out that Cindy had rheumatoid arthritis. Cindy was shocked when she was told. "I thought arthritis was an old person's disease," she says. "I didn't think children could get it."

When arthritis hits a young person, it is called "juvenile" arthritis. Cindy thinks she had the condition in her system long before her bike accident. She remembers, when she was little, that her legs would hurt just before it rained. Cindy thinks that her fall triggered the arthritis. Juvenile arthritis can be very painful. For most people the pain begins to lessen at about the age of 19. But the physical problems caused by the disease last forever.

After her fall, Cindy's arthritis grew worse. It soon affected nearly her whole body. It became hard for her to do things for herself. Even simple things like dressing or brushing her teeth took a long time.

Cindy missed a lot of school. Once she stayed in the Janeway Children's Hospital for a whole month. Every three months she went to the Children's Rehabilitation Centre for assessment. But her arthritis got worse. Doctors gave her gold injections.³ Sometimes she took as many as 14 aspirins a day. Nothing seemed to work. Her body grew stiff. She moved very slowly.

Even though her arthritis made things difficult, Cindy did not give up on life. She worked hard and finished high school with honours. Then she decided to try university. In her first year, the university arranged to have all of Cindy's classes in the same building. This made it easier for her to get to class on time. But it was still hard for her to get around. She was also very self-conscious. The university was filled with thousands of young people—people who had no trouble crossing the university campus. People who could run up three flights of stairs. "I was always wondering what the other students were thinking of me," she says.

During this time Cindy shared a house with four female students who were also from Twillingate. They were nervous about living with Cindy. They wanted to know how much help she would need with her day to day activities. "I told them I only needed help with my shoes," she says. "But that wasn't true. There were many things I couldn't do. I had trouble cooking and putting on some of my clothes. I guess I was afraid to tell the girls at the beginning. Anyway, once they found out, they didn't seem to mind helping me. At least not *too* much."

Cindy dropped out of university after a year and a half. She didn't find the work hard; she was just too slow getting around. Even carrying her books tired her out. Cindy went back to Twillingate. She worked for awhile in the Social Services office. One summer she worked as a tour guide at the Durell Museum. But there seemed to be little employment for her.

Cindy wasn't sure what to do. She wanted to work, but her arthritis made this difficult. She decided to move to St. John's. She took a course called "Medical Billing Specialist" at Keyin Technical College. Even though she could barely move her hands, and could only use two fingers,

she learned to type 28 words a minute. She also studied computers and communications. But the work was very hard on her.



Credit: Ed Kavanagh

Cindy Knight

Cindy discovered she was a good actor and singer.



Credit: Ed Kavanagh

Fred Williams

The most important thing he learned was that he was not alone.

When Cindy finished the course she could not find a job. Many people can type more than 28 words a minute. She became discouraged. She didn't think she would ever get a job. After a while Cindy stopped looking. She was in too much pain. She had to take anti-inflammatory drugs and lots of Tylenol. Sometimes she had painful flare-ups that lasted two or three days. Cindy was forced to live on social assistance.

In 1986, Cindy joined the Longside Club in St. John's. This club provides recreational and employment opportunities for people with all kinds of disabilities. Cindy did office work and answered the phone. Then she got a job working as an actor in a Longside Club play. Cindy discovered that she was a good actor and singer. People who saw her perform were impressed. Cindy enjoyed being an actor, but it was not a permanent job. Like many of her other jobs, this was a short term project. Performing was fun and exciting. It helped increase Cindy's confidence. But acting could not provide her with a steady living.

Cindy's legs grew stiffer and more sore. Doctors suggested she have her hips replaced. Cindy agreed. The operations were painful. She had long stays in the hospital. But the operations were successful. Now she can get around much better. Many things, however, are still difficult. She has a lot of pain in her neck and shoulders. Nothing seems to help.

Cindy still wants to find work. She knows that a full time job would probably be too hard for her. She needs a job that will let her set her own hours. "I'd like to be a counsellor," she says. "I'd like to help people who are going through the same things I am." But to be a counsellor Cindy would need more education. After her university experience, she's not sure if she could handle school. "I know I'm smart enough," she says. "But with arthritis, what are little things for most people, are often big things for me." Cindy is trying to be realistic. She would like to start her own business. At the moment she is being considered for a government plan that helps people with disabilities set up small businesses. "I'm hopeful that something will come out of it," she says. "I don't want to sit around all day on social assistance. I know I've got something to give."

Fred Williams

Fred Williams was born in Flowers Cove, Newfoundland in 1953. When he was one year old, his family moved to Current Island, just off Newfoundland's Great Northern Peninsula. In 1953 there were between 100-150 people on Current Island. Like many Newfoundland communities of the time there was no electricity or running water. People used wells, kerosene lamps and wood stoves. There were no cars. Current Island was quiet and beautiful. It was a good place for children to grow up.

Like most of the other men on the island, Fred's father was a fisherman. Most of the families were related. There were plenty of children to play with. When Fred was about five years old he began to realize there was something different about him. The other children played games like "Farmer in the Dell," "Ring Around the Rosie" and "Hopscotch." But Fred could not play these games. Fred Williams had been born blind.

In 1959 Fred moved to Main Brook, another community on the Great Northern Peninsula. That year Fred first went to Halifax to attend the School for the Blind. It took a long time to get to Halifax from Main Brook. Fred travelled from Main Brook to Corner Brook by steamer. Then he took the train (the "Newfie Bullet") from Corner Brook to Port aux Basques. From there he went by ferry from Port aux Basques to North Sydney. Finally, he took the train from North Sydney to Halifax. It was a long trip for a five year old blind boy. Over the next 12 years he would make this trip many times.

Halifax was very strange and exciting for Fred. It was much bigger than Current Island or Main Brook. There was hot and cold running water in the school; Fred had never experienced this

before. At the School for the Blind, Fred learned to read and write using braille. He also learned to feed and dress himself and other every day skills. But the most important thing he learned was that he was not alone. "It helped to know that I wasn't the only one with this disability," he says.

In Fred's second year at the School for the Blind a strange thing happened. The school had a large floor-model radio. One evening Fred and another blind boy got curious about the radio. They started playing with the wires and took some of them out. The teachers were upset. Fred was expelled for the whole school year of 1960-61. This was not a pleasant experience. He cried when he was told that he could not go back. But most of Fred's memories of the school are good ones. It was there that he took his first music lessons. He always loved music. Fred learned to play the recorder. When he was nine he got a plastic harmonica in a Cracker Jack box. He played it for a year until he got a real harmonica. He also started to play the concertina. In 1966 his mother bought him a double row accordion from Sears for \$25. When he was 18 or 19 he got his first guitar and taught himself to play. Fred always liked listening to records and the radio. He liked singers like Hank Williams, Johnny Horton, Hank Snow and Wilf Doyle. Fred started to write his own songs. Here is an early song he wrote. It is about his second home, Current Island.

Current Island

When I was just a lad, I used to feel so sad,
Because I couldn't play the games that others played;
My one and only joy, was playing with my toys,
Though I never had many of them.

I never was alone, I had my sister Joan,
She tried to make me feel so very happy;
We played out in the snow, when the winters were so cold,
But in the summer she would play with other girls.

(Chorus)
Current Island, Current Island where I was raised from just a boy,
Current Island, Current Island and fishing was my father's only joy.

We lived up on Current Isle, when I was just a child,
And now there's nothing there only the trees,
Although now I am gone, the isle will still live on;
It will be forever in my memory.

(Chorus)

When I was nine years old, I wanted to achieve a goal,
And music became my greatest pleasure,
And now I play guitar, but I'm not yet a star;
But for now this will be my greatest treasure.

So now this is my song, I hope it's not too long,
For the story is true right to the end;
So if you see a blind man, lend to him your hand,
Then he'll know that you will be his friend.

(Chorus)

Fred has now written about 22 songs.

Like many people with disabilities Fred has always had trouble finding work. Sometimes he works in bands. He has also been a member of the Longside Players. But none of these jobs were permanent. At age 19 Fred worked for a short while as a taxi dispatcher. In the early 1980s he worked in telephone sales for the Long Life Bulb Company. Fred has also done other telephone sales work.

In 1987 Fred attended a course at the Canadian Career Institute. He wanted to learn to be a disc jockey. He studied hard for a year and passed the course. He got a job at a local radio station but was laid off after 10 days. He could not find another job as a disc jockey. To be a disc jockey Fred would need someone to help him. Titles and song lists would need to be put into braille. Most employers find this too expensive. Fred knew that he would have trouble finding a job. But he wanted to try something different. "It was a good experience," he says. "I guess I was willing to try anything. No one wants to live on social assistance."

Fred continues to look for work. He would like to be a back-up musician in a recording studio. So far he has had no luck. Like Cindy Knight he lives on social assistance.

Wayne Cantwell

Wayne Cantwell was born in Avondale, Newfoundland in 1959. He lived there until he was 20. Wayne was born with two serious conditions: cerebral palsy and epilepsy.

Cerebral palsy is a brain condition that affects movement. Wayne has trouble moving one of his hands and one of his legs. But he has learned to deal with this. He walks everywhere and can make one hand do for two.

Wayne's epilepsy was also severe. People with epilepsy can have many different kinds of seizures. Sometimes the seizures are mild. They don't last long. But Wayne's seizures were serious. His legs would shake and he would fall to the ground. This kind of seizure used to be called *grand mal*. Now it is called *tonic clonic*. Sometimes Wayne had 25 seizures a day. They took a lot out of him. It was difficult for him to get his work done.

People with epilepsy take medication to control their condition. But if the epilepsy is severe the medication may not work. Doctors sometimes suggest that the person have a brain operation. In 1980 Wayne decided to do this. The operation, like all brain operations, was serious. Doctors worked on the part of Wayne's brain where they thought the seizures began. The operation was a success. Afterwards, Wayne's epilepsy got much better. Now he has only one or two seizures a month. They are usually not very severe.

Despite his problems, Wayne went to school in Avondale. From grades one to five he was in a regular class. For junior high he attended special education classes. Later, the Cerebral Palsy Association arranged for Wayne to complete his high school education at night. Wayne also took a JRT or Job Readiness Training Program. When this finished he got a job as a taxi dispatcher. Wayne had to give up the job because of his seizures.

In 1982-83 Wayne lived at Emmanuel House in St. John's. He learned life skills such as cooking. Wayne also took and passed a course in security work. He applied for many security guard jobs but did not get one. The employers said they wanted people with experience. Wayne decided that it would be a good idea to learn about computers. When Manpower did an assessment he was told that he would need two hands to work with computers. Wayne wanted to try anyway. He thought he could do the work. But he was not admitted into the course.

In 1994 Wayne got a job at a recycling plant. These plants turn old plastic and glass into new material so it can be used again. Wayne's job was to throw plastic bags into one of the big machines. Even with the use of only one arm he did a good job. He could keep up with everyone else. But Wayne was making only \$200 a week. The plant was in Mount Pearl and Wayne lived in St. John's. He could not find a cheap place to live in Mount Pearl. He ended up spending most of his money on taxis. Wayne was forced to quit.

Wayne continues to look for work. He would like to be a security guard or hospital orderly. He sends his resume everywhere. But he hardly ever gets an interview.

Wayne also lives on social assistance. Recently, his only work has been short term projects at the Longside Club. "I'm going to keep on looking for a steady job," he says. "But there are lots of people without disabilities also looking for jobs. I still keep hoping, though, that something will turn up."

Rene Rubia

Rene Rubia was born in St. John's in 1969. At first, he appeared to be a normal little boy. But at the age of five he developed a strange habit. "I would take a deep breath," says Rene, "hold it in, and tense my body up. Several times I fainted." Rene did other odd things with his breathing. "I would take a real sharp intake of breath and make long breathy noises." Rene would do this over and over. He was showing the first signs of a condition called Tourette's Syndrome.

About one in every 2500 people develop this strange disease. Doctors think that Tourette's Syndrome is caused by too much of a brain chemical called dopamine. People with Tourette's have nervous "tics"—movements or sounds that the person cannot control. Some examples of tics are constant sniffing, jerking of different parts of the body, kicking or stamping. People with Tourette's may also make strange noises: hoots, barks and hisses. One of the strangest things about the condition is that many people with Tourette's will often shout out obscene words or phrases. Some people with Tourette's also have "obsessive compulsive" behaviour. They will repeat certain actions like polishing a ring, washing their hands or brushing their teeth. Sometimes they will repeat everything that is said to them. Rene's compulsive behaviour showed in his mood swings. "I had really fast mood swings," he says. "One minute I'd be crying because I had no friends. The next minute I'd be happy as a lark."

Childhood was difficult for Rene. "I had some friends," he says. "The ones that were a little more open minded. But I spent a lot of time alone." It really upset Rene when people told him that he could control his tics if he just tried harder. "It was like they were trying to reason my Tourette's out of me," he says. "But that's impossible. This is a medical condition." When Rene was about 14, he began to have swearing tics. "I would shout out swear words at the top of my lungs," he says. "Half the time I'd be tired out by the end of the day." For Rene, school became a real problem. "Teachers would threaten to send me to the principal," he says. "But I couldn't help it. The words would just come out." He also faced a lot of teasing. "I had a bad temper," says Rene. "I used to get into a lot of fights."

When Rene was in grade seven he was sent to a school run by the Janeway Children's Hospital. But the work in the school was very simple. Rene was bored. He did not like being in a school with so many young children. After two weeks Rene quit. He demanded to be taken back into the regular school. Rene stayed in school until the beginning of grade 10. Later he completed his high school equivalency at the Brother T.I. Murphy Centre in St. John's.

For Rene, finding a good job has been hard. Although his Tourette's has gotten better and he doesn't shout obscene words any more, he still has other kinds of tics. Rene snuffles and clears his throat a lot. Sometimes his body jerks. Tourette's Syndrome is not very common. His tics

make other people very uncomfortable. Many people who see Rene's tics think he is acting strange on purpose. They think he is trying to get attention. They don't realize he has a medical condition.

Once Rene attended a seminar held by a company that sells children's books door to door. During the seminar Rene had some tics. After it was over, the man leading the seminar took Rene aside. He told Rene that he couldn't hire him because he might offend the customers. This kind of thing is common for Rene. Rene is honest about his Tourette's. He always puts it on his resume. "That's probably why I hardly ever get an interview," he says. When he does get an interview they rarely go well. "I get weird vibes from the employers. Sometimes they even snicker and stuff."

Rene managed to get a job washing dishes in a restaurant. He also did little things like preparing salads. One day he came to work and found someone else doing his job. He began to get fewer shifts. Soon he wasn't working at all. "If they wanted to get rid of me," he says, "I wish they would have come right out and done it. That would have been better than just keeping me hanging on."

Rene decided to try university. "That was probably the easiest time I ever had," he says. "The profs and other students didn't seem to mind about my tics." Rene completed two years at university. "It was a good experience," he says, "but it just wasn't for me." He has now decided to try business school at Cabot College. He is on the waiting list. In the meantime he lives on social assistance.

Conclusion: Looking to the Future

Are things getting better for the disabled? The answer is not simple. In some ways things are better. Not long ago most disabled people were never given a chance to work or improve themselves. They usually stayed at home and were cared for by their families. Sometimes they were sent to institutions. Often they were not given an education. Many people did not believe that they could contribute to society. These ideas are changing.

Today people are better educated about disabilities. Employers are learning that the disabled can do a great deal. They are good workers who want to make a contribution. But disabled people who want to work face the same uncertain future as the non-disabled. Finding a job in the 1990s is hard for everyone.

Many people are struggling with difficult questions: should governments pass laws that would make companies hire a certain number of people with disabilities? Many employers do not like this idea. They say it takes away their right to hire who they want. Even some disabled people do not like the idea. They would prefer to get a job based on their own skills and merits. They say that under such a system they would lose self esteem. The Newfoundland government has no rules about jobs for the disabled. The government itself hires very few disabled people. Less than 1% of the thousands of people who work for the government are disabled. The federal government does require companies to hire some disabled people, but the companies must be very big.

What about technology? Is the growing role of technology in our society good for the disabled? Again, the answer is not simple. Technological advances have helped many disabled people, giving them better wheelchairs and talking computers. But technology is also taking away many jobs that disabled people have usually done. Most disabled people work in the unskilled job market. In 1991, 50% of jobs were unskilled. Because of technology, by the year 2000 only 5%

of jobs will be unskilled. If the disabled are going to lose 45% of their job market, where will they find work in the future?

For people like Cindy, Wayne, Fred and Rene the answers are not clear. The disabled have come a long way. But there is still a long way to go. Their "right to work" has never been a sure thing. In the 1990s it is not a sure thing for the able-bodied either. But the disabled are tired of being left out. They will continue to fight for the right to work. They will continue to educate other people and themselves. They will learn the new technologies. They will continue to dream. As we enter the 21st century, they are determined to not be left behind.

Note to Instructors

"The Right to Work: Job Prospects for the Disabled" is appropriate for all work related discussions. Students should be encouraged to compare the life experiences of the people profiled with their own personal histories. Comparisons should be made to Karen Westcott and Elizabeth O'Brien who are also profiled in this booklet.

Government policy towards the disabled is an especially important consideration. Students should express their views on the role of government (if any) in helping the disabled find meaningful employment.

Many people with disabilities partake of literacy upgrading services and Adult Basic Education. Students with disabilities should be encouraged to share their stories. The importance of good literacy skills for all those who want to work should also be focused on.

Issues for Discussion

1. The role of government in helping the disabled find work.
2. The idea of "meaningful" as opposed to "drudge" employment. Should a person take a minimum wage job just for the sake of working?
3. The insidious nature of prejudice. Do people always realize when they are being prejudiced?
4. Human rights and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms as applied to the disabled.
5. The "right to work" as applied to other minorities: native people, immigrants, women etc.
6. The role of work in our lives. How it affects our psychological well being.
7. The role of education in finding meaningful employment.
8. The stigma of "social assistance." How does this affect the self worth of a person? Does living on social assistance mean something different for the disabled as compared to the non disabled?
9. Employer attitudes towards the disabled. Are employers' attitudes different from those of other people?
10. The economic reality of the 90s and the disabled. Should the disabled accept that there is little or no work for them in an era of high unemployment?

11. Technology and the disabled.
12. Predictions for the disabled job market. What will the situation be in 20, 30, 50 years from now?

Questions for Discussion

1. Has the meaning of the word "disabled" changed in the last 100 years? Is the term "disabled" a good way to describe someone? If not, what would be a better way? Why?
2. Do you think people should have the right to choose their type of employment? Would your answer be the same during periods when the economy is in "recession?" Should all people have this right?
3. Should everyone in our society work? How should those who do not want to work—both able-bodied and disabled—be treated? Why?
4. Are short term government funded projects helpful to the disabled? What does the local expression "10 for 42" mean?
5. Explain how it is that some people can make more money living on social assistance than by working. What does this say about our social programs? Should people who can make more money on social assistance stay on it or should they take a job?
6. What is a "disincentive?"
7. List a number of reasons why an employer may not want to hire a disabled person. Would these reasons be the same for people with all types of disabilities or just some?
8. List a number of reasons why an employer would want to hire a disabled person.
9. How can negative attitudes about disabilities be changed?

Cindy Knight

10. What is arthritis called when it hits a young person or a child?
11. What kind of problems did Cindy have at university? What did she think about the other students?
12. Was enough done to help Cindy succeed at university? If not, what else could have been done?
13. Why did Cindy leave university? Was this a good decision?
14. Do you think Cindy is a strong person? What must change if she is ever to find a meaningful job?

Fred Williams

15. Why did Fred leave Newfoundland when he was six years old? Where did he go? Was this a good idea?
16. Why was Fred expelled from school? Was this punishment too harsh? How did it affect him?
17. What role does music play in Fred's life? Do you think music is important for all blind people?
18. What is Fred's song "Current Island" about?
19. Fred has never had many jobs. Was it a good idea for him to take the "disc jockey" course? Why was he encouraged to do so? What was the result of this course?
20. What would you do about finding a job if you were Fred? Have things changed much for the blind in the last 50 years?

Wayne Cantwell

21. Are *tonic clonic* epileptic seizures serious? How did they affect Wayne's education?
22. Why did Wayne have a brain operation?
23. Why did Wayne have to leave his job at the recycling plant?
24. What did Manpower say when Wayne wanted to study computers? Should they have given him a chance?

Rene Rubia

25. Describe Tourette's Syndrome. Is it a common disease? When did Rene first show signs of it?
26. What is "obsessive compulsive" behaviour? How would this affect someone socially?
27. Describe Rene's childhood.
28. Why was Rene sent to the school at the Janeway Children's Hospital? Why did he leave?
29. What kinds of jobs do you think would be suitable for someone with Tourette's Syndrome? If you were an employer would you hire someone with Tourette's? Why?
30. Which of the disabilities discussed do you think is the most serious? Which would make it harder to get a job?

Activities

1. Ask a disabled person you know about their work history.
2. Name some well known people who have had disabilities: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Itzhak Perlman etc.