
ADULT LEARNING KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

CENTRE DU SAVOIR SUR L'APPRENTISSAGE CHEZ LES ADULTES

COMMUNITY OUTREACH INITIATIVE

LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES

2008

Revisiting Accessibility to Learning
Challenges and Barriers for Adult Learners with Disabilities
in Atlantic Canada
July 2008

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Introduction to Community Outreach Initiative | 1 |
| Summary | 2 |
| Introduction | 4 |
| The Independent Living Philosophy and Adult Learning | 6 |
| Discussion | 7 |
| Reasons for Adult Learning | 13 |
| Barriers | 13 |
| Recommendations | 16 |
| Conclusion | 17 |
| Appendices | |
| Appendix A: Survey Questions in English and French | |
| Appendix B: Report from ILRC Halifax | |
| Appendix C: Report from CVRA-PA Shippagan | |
| Appendix D: Report from ILRC Miramichi | |
| Appendix E: Report from ILRC St. John's | |
| Appendix F: Report from Prince Edward Island Council of the Disabled | |

INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMUNITY OUTREACH INITIATIVE

The Adult Learning Knowledge Centre (AdLKC) was established in 2005 by the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) to advance adult learning across Canada. Working with government, educational institutes and community organizations, AdLKC seeks to improve the general public's understanding of the role of lifelong learning in creating economic productivity, social equity and civic engagement, and to foster adult learning systems that are coordinated, accessible and relevant to the needs and interests of all Canadians.

CCL is an independent, non-profit corporation that promotes and supports research to improve all aspects of learning—across the country and across all walks of life. Funded by Human Resources and Social Development Canada, CCL was created in 2004 following a series of nationwide consultations where Canadians agreed that lifelong learning is essential to make Canada a world leader in innovation, skills and learning.

Adult learning encompasses a broad spectrum of *activities including formal and informal learning. It is usually understood to be purposeful and intentional learning undertaken by adults, either alone or in groups, resulting in distinct and measurable advances in their knowledge, skills and/or attitudes.* Adult learning also includes community development initiatives which create opportunities for communities and for individuals within these communities.

In its commitment to developing equitable and accessible adult learning, AdLKC recognizes the importance of overcoming systemic barriers to learning, particularly related to language, race, class, ethnicity and accessibility.

In 2008, AdLKC initiated a community outreach project aimed at five identity-based communities within Atlantic Canada: Aboriginal, African-Canadian, Francophone, immigrants, and people with disabilities. Guided by the adult learning principle that communities are the experts on their issues, the outreach project sought advice from community representatives.

During the first six months of 2008, consultations took place throughout Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador. These provided opportunities for dynamic dialogue about adult learning issues. Problems were identified and solutions articulated.

While each of the five communities is distinct in its history, character, and concerns, each shares a desire to increase adult learning opportunities available to their communities, to expand their knowledge, understanding and skills, and to improve the future for themselves and their children.

Each report offers wide-ranging recommendations for expanded programs, improved access and a better understanding of the barriers. Whether the systemic barriers are physical, financial or attitudinal, they impede both individual and community advancement. The reports of AdLKC's community outreach initiative offer insight into adult learning from the perspectives of five vital communities in Atlantic Canada.

SUMMARY

Revisiting Accessibility to Learning was researched and written in 2008 by the Independent Living Resource Centre, Halifax, Nova Scotia. We contacted four sister groups to hold meetings of adult learners with disabilities in their local communities: Independent Living Resource Centres in St. John's, NL and in Miramichi and Shippagan, NB; and the Prince Edward Island Council of the Disabled.

They asked questions about people's experience with learning: why they picked a course or program; barriers they had faced; how they got past those barriers; and how to improve learning for adults. The questions are in Appendix A and Appendix B.

WHAT IS INDEPENDENT LIVING?

Independent Living (IL) is an international movement that started in the 1970s in the United States. IL puts persons with disabilities in the driver's seat. It helps them to get information they need to make choices about their own lives. It encourages persons with disabilities to be active citizens in their communities. The Independent Living Resource Centre in Halifax is one of 28 IL centres across Canada.

WHAT DID WE LEARN IN THIS RESEARCH?

About 250 people with disabilities took part in the four Atlantic provinces. They had different disabilities including physical, mental, intellectual and learning.

People had many reasons for wanting to learn as adults. Most wanted to improve their skills to get a job or to find a better job. Others wanted to gain life skills so that they could live independently. Some took courses for fun and leisure. We learned they had faced many barriers to learning.

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS?

Physical accessibility

The biggest barrier is lack of accessibility. For some people, this meant they couldn't get into a building, classroom or job site. Many people said lack of accessible transportation is a major barrier. In Atlantic Canada, only major cities and towns have accessible public transit. Many people with disabilities have no way to travel to learning opportunities.

Financial issues

Many people with disabilities cannot afford to take courses or programs, even to improve chances of finding work. Student assistance programs have red tape and waiting lists.

Attitudes

Some people said they were afraid of going back for further education because of their bad memories of school. Others found their instructors insensitive and did not provide the disability-related accommodations they need, such as note-takers or more time for tests.

WHAT CAN WE DO BETTER?

Meeting participants made five recommendations:

- Secure funding so that persons with disabilities can be lifelong learners.
- Provide accessible transportation and accessible buildings.
- Provide alternative formats for learning and testing materials.
- Create peer support networks and services for adult learners with disabilities.
- Establish disability awareness training for educators.

With education and innovation, seemingly insurmountable physical and societal barriers have been knocked down, marking the history of disability issues. The data collected in this study tell a story of people who have an inherent desire for self-improvement and community integration. If continued lifelong learning is to be supported as a benchmark for a successful Canadian society, it must be advocated for all – regardless of ability.

INTRODUCTION

The Independent Living Resource Centre (ILRC) was selected to engage in research within the disability community. Based in Halifax, the Centre worked with its sister organizations across Atlantic Canada to contribute to a comprehensive report expressing the unique challenges of adult learners with disabilities. Five strategic partners in each of the four Atlantic provinces were selected. Each organized focus groups and other methods of sample collection appropriate for their local population. Where possible, other Independent Living Centres were utilized. The Prince Edward Island group is the exception as there is no IL centre in the province. The centres involved were:

- ILRC, Halifax (Nova Scotia)¹
- ILRC, St. John's (Newfoundland and Labrador)
- ILRC, Miramichi (New Brunswick)
- CRVA-PA (ILRC), Shippagan (New Brunswick)
- Prince Edward Island Council of the Disabled (Charlottetown, PE)

Respondents were asked a series of questions about their individual disability, history with adult learning, barriers and problems they encountered as learners, strategies they implemented to overcome these difficulties, and recommendations for change. While each centre was given a basic questionnaire format, it is interesting to note that each took varied approaches in collecting and reporting results. For instance, the “community-based knowledge-exchange meetings,” as termed by AdLKC, was interpreted as ranging from a formal focus group or workshop in a larger meeting, to a town-hall meeting to a

¹ The IRLC in Halifax sent 20 surveys to a learning disability workshop in Digby, Nova Scotia. Only one survey was returned and was included in the data from Halifax. We tried unsuccessfully to arrange meetings in Truro, Halifax, Yarmouth and Sydney, NS. Unfortunately, our partner groups said they were too busy with annual meetings and other year-end activities to host meetings.

formal questionnaire. Despite the varied approaches, the following “suggested questions” were given to each coordinating centre:

- 1) Do you consider yourself a person with a disability? If so, what is the nature of your disability?
- 2) Have you ever signed up for an adult learning program? If so, what kind of program?
- 3) Why did you pick this program?
 - a) To learn a new skill like computers, home repair, a second language, painting?
 - b) For fun or personal growth; for example, going to a museum or historic site, or a lecture?
 - c) To get a degree or pass a test like getting your GED, or finishing your bachelor’s degree?
- 4) Did you run into any problems or barriers? What were they?
- 5) Who helped you get past those barriers? An individual? An organization? What did they do that worked?
- 6) How can adult education be improved in your community? Any suggestions?

Each centre submitted a report to ILRC, Halifax (see appendix) and the results were analyzed. While common threads run through the survey, each region had its own unique challenges in service delivery. A detailed discussion of the results can be found below.

THE INDEPENDENT LIVING PHILOSOPHY AND ADULT LEARNING

Originating in the United States during the 1970s, the independent living (IL) movement shifted the focus on disability issues from a passive to a proactive approach of service

The Independent Living Resource Centre (HRM) supports persons with disabilities to make informed choices about their lives. We do this by providing programs and services that support independent living. IRLC, HRM's Mission Statement

delivery. The person with a disability, or *consumer*, is expected to make life decisions after being provided with services and programming promoting independence. IL places consumers away from being “patients” or “clients,” aiming to empower the individuals to reach their full potential as citizens. It moves the “problem”

away from the diagnosed medical condition and places emphasis on the elimination of social and physical barriers within broader society.

The ILRC in Halifax is one of 28 IL resource centres across the country, and is affiliated with Independent Living Canada, the national voice of the movement based in Ottawa.

Knowledge and lifelong learning give power, and the ILRC has a long history of providing support. The Centre operates the Access to Community Education and Employment (ACEE) program that allows young persons with disabilities to make a transition from high school to further studies or to employment. In addition, the Centre runs a literacy program called *Making the Connection*. This program is designed for a small group of individuals with disabilities wanting to improve their reading, writing, math and computer skills.

This experience has placed IRLC very strategically to undertake this research in partnership with the Adult Learning Knowledge Centre. For its component of the larger project, AdLKC tasked the ILRC to organize up to five knowledge exchange meetings, prepare a final report, and submit participants' recommendations.

DISCUSSION

An initial overview of the information collected reveals a variety of differing definitions and approaches to adult learning. In general terms, each group reported that adult learning is an activity that can be a strategic means to an end goal, a process of personal growth and improvement, part of a rehabilitation process, career development, and community involvement. For many, learning involved both formal and informal educational experiences in and out of a classroom environment, ranging from fitness classes to post-secondary and graduate studies.

The results of this survey came from a truly cross-disability perspective. Participants reported a vast range of physical, mental and intellectual disabilities. It must be noted that disabilities are very person-specific and will impact a learning experience depending on the individual. Furthermore, some medical conditions may not, at first glance to some people, be considered a “disability.” Again, the definition is dependent upon personal experience.

The reported challenges of adult learning should not come as a shock as they reflect struggles persons with disabilities face daily in most societal contexts. Issues of *accessibility* dominate, and these ranged from difficulties of physically getting to and into a building and financially affording to make the best of an opportunity, to being accepted socially within an educational/training environment. Access is more than what society generally perceives; it involves having all the resources and supports in place to make a learning experience viable.

This report features a detailed discussion of the challenges that adult learners with disabilities face. Please see the appendix for the reports from individual focus groups. The following is a summary “matrix” of the results from each centre.

| ILRC Halifax | Number of participants | Nature of disability | Type of Program | Reasons for picking program | Problems and barriers encountered | Who assisted with problems and barriers | Suggestions for community improvement |
|--------------|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | 45 | Learning disability Intellectual disability Polio Epilepsy Mental illness Spinal cord injury Muscular dystrophy Cerebral palsy Quadriplegia Physical disability Subdural hematoma Visual impairment Cystic fibrosis Major depression Bipolar disorder Anxiety disorders | University classes Professional Development WHMIS First Aid Computer literacy Crafts Continuing ed. Writing course Communications YMCA classes Sign language Business courses Human resources Sewing ESL Bookkeeping Taxation courses Literacy courses Painting courses Language courses Tai Chi Photography Work activity programs Distance ed. GED Home repair Christian fellowship Computer graphics Workplace education for women | Changing preferences/learning something new; Avoiding social isolation; Building relationships; Career advancement; Personal growth | Building accessibility; Transportation Inflexible/instructors; Home care Past negative learning experiences; Not understanding what was expected. | Classmates Instructors Social services Friends IRLC Media Job counselors | Reduce waits for funding; Reduce funding uncertainty; Positive learning environment/sensitivity training for instructors; Accessible transit Media coverage of disability issues. |

Focus Group Results ILRC, Halifax Regional Municipality

Focus Group Results

ILRC, Miramichi

| | Number of participants | Nature of disability | Type of Program | Reasons for picking program | Problems and barriers encountered | Who assisted with problems and barriers | Suggestions for community improvement |
|-------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ILRC Miramichi | 10 | Multiple sclerosis Spinal cord injury Epilepsy Head injury Cerebral palsy Depression\ Anxiety Bipolar disorders | Rehabilitation programs; Computer literacy; Peer support group (CMHA, CPA, Neil Squire Society); Academic upgrading. | Employability; Learning new skills; Personal growth; Independent living skills; Survival | Physical access to class; Transportation Learning difficulties/ time with instructor; Financial assistance; Weather | Family Instructor/ School; Organization (CPA, MPDA); Rehabilitation team; Group; Friend | Financial assistance; Accessible buildings; More interaction with students and instructors; Technical aids, support networks; Accessible transportation; Sensitivity training |

Focus Group Results

ILRC, St. John's

| | Number of participants | Nature of disability | Type of Program | Reasons for picking program | Problems and barriers encountered | Who assisted with problems and barriers | Suggestions for community improvement |
|---------------|------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| IL St. John's | 176 | | | | <p>Past negative learning experiences; Negative labeling; Attitudinal issues regarding student accommodation; Inaccessible job placements for co-op programs; Lack of student support organizations; Campus accessibility (including housing and information); Transportation; Financial</p> | | <p>Student tutor program; Universities set an example for accessibility; Universities must ensure accessible job placements/internships; More coordination between institutions to ensure credit transfers for students with accessibility issues; Better coordination between student funding and institution; Loosening funding eligibility criteria.</p> |

Focus Group Results Prince Edward Island

| | Number of participants | Nature of disability | Type of Program | Reasons for picking program | Problems and barriers encountered | Who assisted with problems and barriers | Suggestions for community improvement |
|--------|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PEICOD | 8 | Rheumatoid arthritis; Juvenile arthritis; Diabetes; Learning disabilities; Carpal tunnel; Neck injury – weak ligaments; Depression; Visual impairment. | Academic upgrading; Resident care worker; Business Administration; GED; Career Bridges; Harmony Training Centre Program; Highway traffic signaler; Literacy enhancement; Work Abilities. | Career research and development; Employability. | Instructors not respecting previously arranged classroom accommodations; Financial; Keeping up with pace; Illness; Not fully understanding course expectations; Brushed off by instructors. | Council of People with Disabilities; Other students; Family doctor; Understanding professors; Specialized computer software; Parents and family; Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA). | Sensitivity in educational institutions; Additional resources in English; Variety of testing methods; Appropriate teaching methodologies to aid in comprehension and memory; Appropriate learning methodologies; Better communication; More local adult learning facilities; Accessible transportation; Improved physical accessibility; Financial assistance; Increased programming accessibility; Better school-work transitions. |

Focus Group Results

ILRC, Shippagan

| | Number of participants | Nature of disability | Type of Program | Reasons for picking program | Problems and barriers encountered | Who assisted with problems and barriers | Suggestions for community improvement |
|--------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| CRVA-PA Ship-pagan | 9 | Visual impairment; Loss of leg function; Mental health; Anxiety; Panic; Dyslexia; Speech impediment; High blood pressure; Learning disability. | Academic upgrading GED; Child care; English; French Simply Accounting; Computer proficiency; Office techniques and management; University courses. | Pass a test; Obtain a degree; Develop new skills. | Nervousness; Learning disability; Dyslexia; Time management; Financial difficulties; Travelling long distances. | CRVA-PA; CIPA; An individual; An organization; Television; Books. | Make classes and learning experiences accessible to everyone. |

REASONS FOR ADULT LEARNING

Adult learners with disabilities have the same motivations for continued education as the rest of society.

All the focus groups reported a wide range of reasons for adult learning. The majority of respondents said their motivations were academic and professional, to enhance employability, or to seek career advancement. Varied pursuits were listed, from passing a GED or a university degree, to a skilled trade. Many also reported taking computer literacy or training on specific software (for instance, Simply Accounting) to be more employable. There were other motivations such as rehabilitation sessions and classes on life skills that promote independent living. These were also identified as peer support groups sponsored by specific disability-related agencies.

However, a large portion of respondents indicated adult learning programs allowed personal growth and a means for social activity. These activities included fitness programs, hobbies, and involvement in community organizations.

In short, people were motivated by opportunities for self-improvement and achieving personal goals.

BARRIERS

Accessibility

Getting from where people are to where they want to go is at the very heart of the disability rights movement and, of all the potential barriers to adult learning, *access* was the key word. While a philosophical discussion of the definition of access is beyond this report, it should be noted that this concept moves well beyond the physical (such as ramps and elevators), although this was a very common complaint with participants. Accessibility has both economic and social implications that seriously limit adult learners with disabilities from taking full advantage of opportunities around them.

Physical barriers

This was a common thread and complaint with all focus group participants. If a class is in a public building that is inaccessible to wheelchair users, the learning opportunity is lost. Participants also noted that many activities on a university campus, for instance, could be resolved with a little flexibility. Many also noted frustration in being unable to participate in academic and student community life and to interact socially. One participant in Halifax said, “Of all the free space in the building, they had to choose the room that was located upstairs. There was no elevator for me to get up there, so I had no other choice but to leave.” Another student from Newfoundland reported that he had problems in finding accessible housing and encountered delays getting his dorm room modified for his wheelchair. Some reported inconsistent accessibility requirements for cooperative student work placements. Even leaving school may be inaccessible if graduation ceremonies do not accommodate persons who use wheelchairs and other assistive technologies.

Of all the free space in the building, they had to choose the room that was located upstairs. There was no elevator for me to get up there, so I had no other choice but to leave. -
Learner in Halifax

Barriers are even encountered before an adult learner gets to class. An overwhelming number of respondents said that access to public transportation is an incredible barrier to learning. While urban Atlantic Canada does have public transit, it is often inaccessible for those using wheelchairs. Specialized transit such as Access-a-Bus in the urban Halifax Regional Municipality is severely overextended and requires advanced bookings. People outside urban centres reported few to no options for public transit services. In rural areas, like Shippagan, participants said they simply couldn’t travel long distances for learning opportunities.

Financial issues

Persons with disabilities are often marginalized from the workforce. From the perspective of adult education, this becomes a double-edged sword. Without proper funding, adult learners with disabilities cannot adequately seek further education or

training for employment and professional development. Conversely, to access employment opportunities, one requires proper education and training.

The lack of proper funding was a major complaint in all focus group reports. It must be recognized that funding for education poses unique challenges for those who, quite often, face difficulties in meeting daily living expenses and the specialized costs of having a disability. Often, student loans for post-secondary education leave students with a disability financially destitute if they remain unemployed or underemployed.

Many also expressed concerns over long waiting lists and rigid bureaucratic requirements that discouraged potential adult learners with disabilities from applying for specific program funding.

Social success/acceptance

Many adult learners with disabilities found that both social stigma and a general lack of knowledge about persons with disabilities in the classroom were major barriers to continued learning experiences. Learning is an exercise demanding confidence in one's abilities and a comfort level to reach desired goals. Past learning experiences can both encourage and discourage lifelong learning. Many respondents expressed apprehension in returning to a school environment due to bad memories. Others pushed beyond that and reported being empowered by taking that chance. The result is if an adult learner is not treated like a "normal" student, then any potential notions of self-improvement will be lost.

I realized the only thing standing in the way of bettering my life, was me. – *Adult learner in HRM*

knowledge about persons with disabilities in the classroom were major barriers to continued learning experiences. Learning is an exercise demanding confidence in one's abilities and a comfort level to reach desired

Several people reported specific experience with instructors who did not respect any prior arrangements made for accommodating students (note taking, more time for testing, etc). Other instructors suggested accommodations would give students an unfair advantage, or cause a distraction in class. Another common theme for adult learners with a disability was simply being dismissed as a creditable student and a good investment of the instructor's time. A person from Prince Edward Island reported not being taken seriously

and given blanket answers every time he asked a question in class. Many commented that they felt they received limited information from the instructor and institution that put them at a further disadvantage.

People felt that their learning experiences were hampered by generalities and a lack of sensitivity toward learners and their circumstances.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There was certainly no lack of input to recommend positive change to further integrate adult learners with disabilities. This list summarizes the recommendations from the participating organizations:

- Viable funding programs recognizing specific needs and circumstances of adult learners with disabilities;
- Accessible transportation; increased emphasis placed on physical accessibility in learning institutions throughout all buildings;
- Accessible/alternative training and testing materials to accommodate persons with disabilities;
- Emphasis placed on creating peer support programming and services;
- More disability awareness training in public schools and within the academic community.

CONCLUSION

Insurmountable physical and societal barriers that have been knocked down by education and innovation mark the history of disability issues. The data collected in this study tell a story of people who have an inherent desire for self-improvement and community integration. If continued lifelong learning is to be supported as a benchmark for a successful Canadian society, it must be advocated for all – regardless of ability.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY QUESTIONS IN ENGLISH AND FRENCH

1. Do you consider yourself a person with a disability?
If so, what is the nature of your disability?
 2. Have you ever signed up for an adult learning program?
If so, what kind of program?
 3. Why did you pick this program?
 4. Did you run into any problems or barriers?
What were they?
 5. Who helped you get past those barriers?
 6. How can adult education be improved in your community? Any suggestions?
-
1. Est-ce que vous vous considérez comme une personne ayant une incapacité?
Si oui, de quelle nature est votre incapacité?
 2. Est-ce que vous vous êtes déjà inscrit à un programme de formation pour adulte?
Si oui, quel type de programme s'agissait-il?
 3. Pourquoi avez-vous choisi ce programme?
 4. Est-ce que vous vous êtes heurté à des problèmes ou à des obstacles?
De quelle nature étaient ces problèmes ou obstacles?
 5. Qui vous a aidé à surmonter ces obstacles?
 6. Qu'est-ce qu'ils ont fait qui a bien marché pour vous?

**APPENDIX B
REPORT FROM ILRC, HALIFAX, NS**



Independent Living Resource Centre

ADULT LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES – JUNE 2008

A discussion of the challenges facing adult learners with disabilities in Halifax, Nova Scotia

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INTRODUCTION

The following information was collected from discussions facilitated by the Independent Living Resource Centre (ILRC) in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

On June 11, 2008, the ILRC held a number of small table discussions about the issues of adult learners with disabilities. Forty-five people participated. The ILRC sought to gain an understanding of the many barriers, limitations and successes persons with disabilities have experienced in regards to adult learning.

Adult learners usually are 25 or over. Adult learners with disabilities are returning to classes to update professional skills, further career advancement and for personal and financial reasons. Whatever the motivation, persons with disabilities are looking to achieve a better life through adult learning.

THE PARTICIPANTS

The majority of people at our table discussions identified themselves as persons with a disability. However, many have different ideas of what a disability is and some classify themselves as strictly having a medical condition. The following is a list of disabilities our participants identified themselves as having:

| | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Learning disability | Intellectual disability | Polio |
| Epilepsy | Multiple sclerosis | Mental Illness |
| Spinal Cord Injury | Muscular Dystrophy | Cerebral Palsy |
| Quadriplegic | Physical disability | Subdural hematoma |
| Congestive heart failure | Visual impairment | Cystic fibrosis |
| Major depression | Bipolar disorder | Anxiety disorders |

THE MOTIVATION PROCESS

Like most people, our participants usually know what they want to accomplish when they begin a new initiative. However, they need motivation and support to help them achieve their goals. Before you begin such a program, you must have the desire to enroll.

Throughout our discussions, the participants outlined these reasons why they enrolled in an adult learning program:

- **Changing preferences:** Many people just want to learn something new. They want to change their routine and learn for the sake of learning.
- **Avoiding social isolation:** Often, due to lack of transportation and money, many persons with disabilities are forced to stay home. Adult learning programs allowed them to break the isolation and become involved with a larger outside group. This gave them a sense of freedom and personal control.
- **Building relationships:** These programs provided them the opportunity to meet new people, to find a place to build new friendships and make business connections.
- **Career Advancement:** Persons with disabilities are building on their skills to stay employed or to gain new employment. Many wanted to change careers or upgrade to a better paying job.
- **Personal growth:** Several wanted to be a contributing member of society. They wanted to feel they were making a difference. Others just wanted to know if they could indeed become skilled at a new hobby.

ADULT LEARNING CLASSES

The following is a list of programs the participants attended as adult learners:

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Sign language | Business courses | HR courses | Fitness courses |
| Sewing | ESL | Bookkeeping | Computer Literacy |
| Crafts | Taxation courses | Literacy courses | Painting classes |
| Language classes | Tai Chi | Photography | University classes |
| WHMIS | Christian Fellowship | Computer graphics | First Aid |
| Continuing Education | Writing course | Communication course | YMCA classes |
| Photography | Work activity program | Distance Education | GED |
| Home repair | Seminars | Christian Fellowship | Computer graphics |
| Professional Development classes | | | |

BARRIERS

Many adult learners with disabilities experience numerous barriers to accessing adult learning programs. Some of these barriers include: time restraints, money, self-confidence, scheduling problems with caregivers and transportation. However, the following are the most difficult to overcome.

- ***Building Accessibility:***

This topic was mentioned at every table. Accessibility is an important factor. For instance, if a class is located on the second floor of a building and there is no elevator, a wheelchair user is unable to access the class. Others mentioned that the building did not have a wheelchair ramp. One participant said, “Of all the free space in the building, they had to choose the room that was located upstairs. There was no elevator for me to get up there, so I had no other choice but to leave.”

- ***Transportation:***

This is a huge barrier for persons with disabilities. Halifax does have a transit bus system but it does not run effectively on the outskirts of Halifax and Dartmouth. Also, there are only a few accessible low floor buses that operate on particular routes. Halifax Transit does offer an Access-A-Bus service, but the registration process is long and you have to book a bus at least seven days in advance. A limited number of accessible taxis services is available but it is rather expensive and limited to the size of your wheelchair and location. Some participants stated that they do not need a bus or taxis because they have their own transportation, but food and rent come first because of the price of gas.

- ***Instructors:***

Some instructors are unaware of disability-related issues. Many participants stated that they were very anxious and nervous when faced with a new learning situation. Many persons with disabilities feel this way because they do not always know how instructors will react when they ask for extra time or assistance. One man mentioned that his instructor saw him as a distraction because he spent so much time with him and not enough with the other students. One participant said, “People had no patience for me.”

- ***Home Care:***

No control over home care is another barrier. Home care makes it possible for persons with disabilities to remain at home rather than living at a rest home, residential or long-term facility. Home-care providers have their own schedules and sometimes care for one or more persons with disabilities. Home-care workers help with daily tasks such as meal preparation, assisting with medication, laundry, housekeeping, errands and transportation arrangements. Persons with disabilities usually work around their care provider's schedule because they need to have that care daily or weekly. Adult learning is often put on hold because home care is their primary concern.

- ***Negative Attitudes:***

Persons with disabilities often experience attitude barriers and self-confidence problems. Many said that when they went through the school system as a child, they rarely were given a chance to do things for themselves. They were often pushed through the system or had teachers who automatically thought they were incapable of learning. Some participants said they were not comfortable going back to a class setting because of those memories. A few said, however, they took the chance and were happy they returned. One participant said, "I realized the only thing standing in the way of me bettering my life, was me." However, for most, those bad memories still haunt them and cause problems when they want to go to enroll in such programs. For some, even seeing a school building brings those old memories back.

SUCCESS

A barrier is perceived to be a hurdle to get over in order to achieve your goals. Some barriers can be resolved and some cannot. We asked our participants if they received any help to get past their barriers.

A number of participants expressed negative comments such as, “Nobody helps me; I have to do everything myself,” while others said they stayed positive and asked for help. One woman, who could not attend a class because the classroom location was inaccessible, sought help from the media. She said, “They wouldn’t change the classroom to the main floor, so I went to the media to tell my story.” Apparently, self-advocacy worked because the following week the classroom was moved to the main floor. Others received help from classmates, instructors, social services and friends. Some even said the ILRC helped them be successful with their adult learning education.

Many have had a great deal of success with their adult learning programs and others have not. One man said, “I was scared to go back but I wanted to prove to myself and others that just because I am physically disabled, it doesn’t mean my mind is disabled.”

IMPROVING ADULT LEARNING IN THE COMMUNITY

Many participants said stable funding is the way adult learning can be improved in the community. Long waits and the uncertainty of funding make it hard for people to plan ahead. A parent of an adult learner said, “Programs like the ILRC’s Access to Community Education and Employment (ACEE) are important programs. ACEE has been a blessing for our daughter, and to see a program like this stop because of lack of funding is a crime.” ACEE is a transition program for youth with disabilities who face barriers making a successful transition from high school to post-secondary education or competitive employment.

The participants would like to see a positive learning environment where everyone can learn regardless of their disability, age, gender, race and religion. They would also like to have their instructors educated on disability-related issues. This education would help them understand certain situations when and if they occur. This, however, would be the greater responsibility of the instructor.

Others suggested promoting these programs on a larger scale and having them available for everyone in the community. Almost everyone recommended that Halifax have an extended bus system, a system that runs in all towns and one that is fully accessible. One participant said, “I would just like to have the option to be able to go or not.”

CONCLUSION

Adult learning programs allow persons with disabilities to illustrate their potential for greater success. With the help and support from the community they will perform better when involved in supportive learning environment. Although several of our participants have experienced many barriers throughout their days, they all agreed that adult learning can be one of the most enriching parts of life.

APPENDIX C REPORTS FROM CRVA-PA SHIPPAGAN, NB

SUMMARY

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR ADULT LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES

Nine people answered the questions.

Questions

1. Do you consider yourself a person with a disability?

Eight answered yes and one answered no.

If so, what is the nature of your disability?

Blind, loss of leg function, mental health, anxiety, panic, dyslexia, speech impediment, high blood pressure, learning disability

2. Have you ever signed up for an adult learning program?

They all answered yes.

If so, what kind of program?

Academic upgrading, GED, to help children with special needs, English, French, Simply Accounting, computer proficiency, office techniques and management, university course

3. Why did you pick this program?

The majority answered: to obtain a degree or pass a test (GED, bachelor degree, etc.) and to develop new skills (computer, handiwork, second language, painting, etc.)

4. Did you run into any problems or barriers?

The majority answered yes and only two answered no.

What were they?

Nervousness, learning disability, dyslexia, time management, financial difficulties, the need to travel long distances

5. Who helped you get past those barriers?

The CRVA-PA, the CIPA, an individual, an organization, television, and books

How can adult education be improved in your community? Any suggestions?

To have classes, social activities sometimes to entertain people in wheelchairs and others.

RÉSUMÉ

QUESTIONS SUGGÉRÉES POUR LES APPRENANTS ADULTES SOUFFRANT D'INCAPACITÉS

Le nombre de personne qui a répondu aux questions est de neuf.

Questions

1. Est-ce que vous vous considérez comme une personne ayant une incapacité ?

Huit ont répondu oui et un a répondu non

Si oui, de quelle nature est votre incapacité ?

Aveugle, perte des fonctions d'une jambe, santé mentale, anxiété, panique,
dyslexie, phonologique, hypertension et déficit d'apprentissage

2. Est-ce que vous vous êtes déjà inscrit à un programme de formation pour adulte ?

Ils ont tous répondu oui.

Si oui, quel type de programme s'agissait-il ?

Récupération scolaire, GED, aider les enfants à besoins spéciaux, anglais,
français, simple comptable, apprentissage de l'informatique, technique et gestions
de bureau et cours universitaire

3. Pourquoi avez-vous choisi ce programme ?

La majorité ont répondu: Pour obtenir un diplôme ou passer un test (GED, baccalauréat, etc.) et Pour apprendre de nouvelles compétences (informatique, bricolage, langue seconde, peinture, etc.)

4. Est-ce vous vous êtes heurté à des problèmes ou à des obstacles ?

La majorité ont répondu oui et deux seulement ont répondu non.

De quelle nature étaient ces problèmes ou obstacles ?

Nervosité, gêne, difficulté d'apprentissage, dyslexie, gestion du temps, difficulté financière et devoir se déplacer sur de longue distance.

5. Qui vous a aidé à surmonter ces obstacles ?

Le CRVA-PA, la Cipa, un individu, un organisme, la télévision et les livres.

6. Qu'est-ce qu'ils ont fait qui a bien marché pour vous ?

Avoir des classes, des activités sociales quelques fois pour distraire les personnes en fauteuils roulants et les autres. Que pourrait-on faire pour améliorer la formation des adultes dans votre communauté ? Avez-vous des suggestions ?

APPENDIX D

REPORT FROM ILRC MIRAMICHI, NB



Our Mission: “To promote and enable the progressive process of citizens with disabilities taking responsibility for the development and management of personal and community resources”

ADULT LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES

FOCUS GROUP MAY 30, 2008

The focus group was evenly divided with five participants having physical disabilities and five with mental illness. The common theme centered on attitudinal barriers and a misunderstanding about what an Adult Learning Program was or could be. Other commonalities included financial constraint, physical barriers, transportation, anxiety and geographical location.

PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

Five Participants

- Multiple Sclerosis
- Spinal Cord Injury
- Epilepsy
- Head Injury
- Cerebral Palsy

Participants with spinal cord injury and head injury have attended rehabilitation programs including those with the Canadian Paraplegic Association and Neil Squire Society.

Interestingly, the participant with spinal cord injury identified accessibility, poor support services funding and being underpaid as barriers to adult learning.

Conversely, the participant who sustained a head injury and has severe mobility issues identified no personal barriers to adult learning but felt that Miramichi needed rehabilitation programs with accessible transportation and financial assistance.

The participant with epilepsy considers it a disability and identifies transportation as a barrier to adult learning.

The remaining participants with physical disabilities identified themselves as having MS and CP. Both have taken computer related courses for employability and/or physical limitations. Barriers identified were physical (no elevator to second story classrooms) and lack of one-on-one with the teacher.

What helped these individuals overcome barriers included family members, more one-on-one time with teacher, CPA and Neil Squire and the rehabilitation team.

Suggestions included accessible transportation, financial accessibility, community supports, proper equipment, and a support network.

MENTAL ILLNESS

Five Participants

- Depression, panic attacks, anxiety disorder, social phobia
- Depression, anxiety
- Anxiety
- Bipolar disorder
- Major depression

One participant with bipolar disorder may have displayed an attitudinal barrier by answering no to question #2 and subsequently leaving the rest of the questions blank.

One of the participants does not consider himself as having a disability, although he indicated that he will receive CPPD. He says he has problems with anxiety and may also be displaying an attitudinal barrier as the questionnaire indicated that he was to be further trained. This participant considers a peer support group to be adult learning.

Another participant indicated that mental illness, in the form of depression, panic attacks, anxiety disorder and social phobia, is a disability and has attended adult learning programs through CMHA and peer support groups. These programs were taken for personal growth, but anxiety and weather were barriers. The group, the facilitator and attending programs with a friend were identified as helping to overcome barriers.

The remaining two participants identified themselves as having depression and anxiety. It is interesting to note that one of these participants chose not to answer if they considered themselves a person with a disability. One of these participants has taken academic upgrading, programs through CMHA, and peer support for personal growth. A personal mental block was noted as a barrier. Mental health, teachers and peer support group were indicated as help to surpass barriers.

Suggestions from those identifying themselves as having mental illness include: consolidation of governmental and non-governmental services with peer support and guidance, financial costs, geographical location, transportation and educating children in schools.

APPENDIX E

REPORT FROM ILRC ST. JOHN'S, NL



Independent Living Resource Centre



A DISCUSSION OF THE CHALLENGES

FACING ADULT LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES

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ADULT LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES: OVERCOMING BARRIERS

The Independent Living Resource Centre (ILRC) is a resource centre designed by and for people with disabilities.

We are:

- located in St. John's, Newfoundland & Labrador, Canada;
- a not-for-profit community based organization;
- managed by a consumer-controlled volunteer board of directors;
- open to people who have any type(s) of disability; and
- a member of Independent Living Canada (IL Canada).

We offer a wide range of disability-related information, services and resources. Our goal is to support people in making informed decisions about their lives.

Independent Living is about:

- having choices;
- making informed decisions;
- finding solutions that work for you;
- choosing where and how you want to live;
- taking risks;
- taking responsibility;
- managing your resources;
- controlling your own supports; and
- learning from each other.

A *consumer* is a person with a disability. Instead of being "patients" or "clients" we see ourselves as active and informed consumers of products, programs and services.

The following entails a narrative summation of a series of discussions facilitated by the Independent Living Resource Centre (ILRC) in St. John's Newfoundland and Labrador in partnership with our colleagues at the Halifax ILRC. We are part of the Independent

Living movement in Canada and are among the 28 Independent Living Centres under the umbrella organization Independent Living Canada.

The Halifax ILRC created a survey of questions to elicit discussion among consumers/ adult learners with disabilities. The ILRC in St. John’s facilitated a series of “*TOWN HALL*” meetings across Newfoundland and Labrador during May-June 2008. They also held a public meeting on June 11, 2008 in St. John’s, specific to the barriers faced by Adult Learners. All meetings were open to anyone with any type(s) of disability. Individuals identified as having physical, sensory, intellectual, psychological and invisible barriers.

Discussion locations

| <i>Location</i> | <i>Date</i> | <i>Number Attending</i> |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| St. John’s | May 20, 2008 June 11,2008 | 63 + 14 = 77 |
| Clarenville | May 21, 2008 | 4 |
| Carbonear | May 22, 2008 | 11 |
| Stephenville | May 26, 2008 | 17 |
| Grand Falls/ Windsor | May 28, 2008 | 27 |
| Corner Brook | May 27, 2008 | 21 |
| Goose Bay | June 19,2008 | 12 |
| Email Responses | | 7 |
| TOTAL | | 176 |



FINDINGS

The perceptions and attitudes of educational professionals towards adult learners with disabilities often prevent appropriate accommodations.

- Once a person is labeled, professionals tend to see the label and not the person.

It became quickly evident throughout our focus group discussions that it was difficult to discuss adult learner barriers without first paying homage to their experiences within the school system. From K-12, “special” educational streams were established for people labeled “delayed.” These “streams or units”

“Combin’ my hair... that’s the first thing on my list of skills in life!” said one consumer. “I thought life skills was how to survive not how to groom

were described by consumers as devaluing and demeaning; “teaching things like life skills” – or as one consumer put it “how to comb your hair.” The perception at some level as one individual said was to “...protect the student from failure...” which in the professionals’ eyes “...seemed inevitable.” With these sorts of preconceived notions regarding a learner’s ability or lack of ability, there was little likelihood of success for the individual. The educator had already given up and ostensibly made the decision that the potential contribution of the individual was negligible.

One learner discussed her experience after receiving a label of “Mental Retardation.” Prior to receiving the label she was treated “...like everyone else,” however upon acquiring the label all opportunities seemed to be removed. She described discussing her educational goals with teachers and administration who simply dismissed her and denied her the opportunity as she put it “...even to fail.”

- Instructors sometimes see accommodations as “special treatment” that gives adult learners with disabilities an unfair advantage.

Instructors have also suggested that they cannot properly test adult learners with disabilities if they are required to make certain accommodations. In one situation, an instructor denied a note-taker to his student who was identified as hard of hearing. The instructor maintained that he was testing the ability of his students to interpret a presentation through the notes he took.

The instructor refused to discuss any other possible accommodation for the student, but rather insisted the individual take his own notes, a task the student was unable to do. This type of experience was common to many consumers.

- Many programs require work-term placements from their students; however, there is no attempt to ensure that the agencies, organizations or businesses that offer a placement are accessible.

Universities and their individual departments claim that they have no control over accommodations and accessibility in the community during work-term placements. Consumers said, “We expect our universities to lead the way and set an example for our communities; or should we expect a student who uses a wheelchair to work in a building with two steps at the front door?” Another consumer noted, “Imagine having...(for example) a department of social work that forces its students into situations (that as Social Workers) we try to take our clients out of?”

- Educational program accommodations need organizational infrastructure if adult learners with disabilities are to have full access to the education of their choice.

Adult learners with disabilities do not always have an established support system within their chosen educational institution. In these instances the students feel overwhelmed and alone.

Adult learners described the challenge of advocating for their own accommodations. They *alone* ensure that the accommodations are provided; they are the only quality control system. If new accommodations are needed, (as in the case of a progressive disability) or if instructors change, the individual is solely responsible for discussing accommodations with instructors and often defending their right to receive

“There is one accessible room but the RA/ Proctor has it...” said one individual, “ I know it should be mine and if it was for someone else I’d be all over it” [getting accommodations in place] “but if it’s for me...I’ll just deal with it...”

them. One student was enrolled in a course where there was a guest lecturer *every* class. It was left to her to identify the required accommodations before each class.

“The campus is pretty accessible but attitude is a barrier. There is resistance to creating modified programs for people with disabilities.”

She said: “I felt like I was ambushing my instructors. This is not a system that is accommodating the needs of the student.”

Unfortunately, many consumers felt that they were the people accommodating a complex, poorly designed system.

- Workload accommodations are needed. Adult learners with disabilities feel that our society puts an unreasonable amount of emphasis on the time in which someone can complete a task. Educational programs are usually inflexible with respect to both course load and the time to complete assignments within a course. This issue came up in every discussion held throughout the province. Requiring more time to complete assignments and tests should not be equated with an inability to perform the task required. Often the increased time needed is related to the inaccessibility of the task. These rigidly structured programs need to acknowledge the diversity of adult learners with disabilities or run the risk of excluding a segment of the population that has a valuable contribution to make.

“My Son has ADD and I am struggling to have him stay in school - He needs supports but is falling through the cracks.”

- Investment must be made in instructional settings other than the classroom.

Consumers felt that “the classroom is not the world,” and learning styles of adult learners with disabilities are as different as the learning styles of everyone in society. One person indicated “...that the confines of the classroom is itself a disability-related barrier.”

Cooperative approaches to education and a renewed sense of the value of apprenticeships/internships increase the choices available and the potential flexibility of adult learning situations.

- Accessibility is needed in housing, campus buildings, information (including the provision of alternate formats) and in transportation if students are to be accommodated.

Housing arrangements must be accessible if adult learners with disabilities are to have a fair and equal chance at post-secondary education. There is insufficient accessible on-campus housing. There are regular delays in receiving necessary housing modifications, "... I was waiting over one month for an accessible desk in my dorm.... They finally cut a piece out of the one that was there so that I could get my chair in..." There is inconsistent availability of accessible housing from one year to the next, and the general fragmented and inconsistent housing conditions, which is not limited to just one institution, leads to difficulties for adult learners with disabilities. It should be noted that incomplete accessibility is not accessibility.

"Accessibility on campus is not as good as you may think," said one consumer. Adult learners using wheelchairs have indicated that they have had to travel far and wide to find an accessible bathroom, that instructors' offices are not always accessible and that elevators are often out of order. Even the *graduation ceremonies* at some institutions are inaccessible to the adult learners who use wheelchairs. Another consumer described a bomb scare while attending a class on the fourth floor of a building with access denied to the elevator because of the bomb threat. "I was carried by four of my buddies down over four flights of stairs and me in a 300-pound chair."

- Problems attaining accessible housing, inaccessibility on campus and inflexible programs have required some adult learners with disabilities to attend multiple institutions to find a more accessible environment, to accommodate the changing

nature of their disability, or simply to find some way of achieving their academic goals.

This has had the undesired affect of “fragmenting” students’ academic records. This presents a major challenge with the policy that most post-secondary institutions have requiring students to complete the majority of their studies at one institution. This has prevented some students from receiving their diploma/degree although they had completed more than enough courses. One adult learner talked about having received 60 credits from two different universities. Because neither university was accommodating, the individual could not meet the criteria to be awarded a diploma.

- Transportation provided by schools and in communities is generally inaccessible. A bus may be provided for field trips and other outings but it is most often physically inaccessible. Inaccessibility within the transit system in most cities and failures within a poorly funded para-transit system affect the choices available. Some adult learners will choose to pursue online or at-home courses even if it isn’t their desired course of study. Other consumers discussed the barriers to accessible technology when they have chosen online learning opportunities. “... we only have dial-up in our part of the province.”

Consumers outside St. John's have difficulty getting any accessible transportation for educational pursuits, as there is no public transportation and transportation in general is more expensive. “I live just outside the city limits.

It is very costly...the last quote I received from them was \$45.00 return trip.”

- Adult learners with disabilities experience multiple financial barriers related to accessing learning opportunities. Many do not have an income that adequately supports their learning goals.

One individual said, “I am 40 years old and I have a

“... I have encouraged people to go on income support just so that they can access a service, such as funding to go back to school!” said one professional.

learning disability... I need money to go back to school. It costs \$1,500 to get an assessment in order to prove I need supports... where do I get \$1,500 when I'm not working?" Individuals also discussed their feelings when they have been told their only option is to access an Income Support program to get funding for school. One said, "My family has been paying for my (supports) all my life but now because I want to go to school I have to go on Social Services. I can't afford to pay for my own (supports) and pay for school as well."

- There is little funding for the necessary tutors required. Tutors are clearly a support that adult learners identified as being essential. It was suggested that the educational institution create a *student tutor program* whereby the tutors could receive credit on transcripts for their volunteer work and those requiring extra support could receive it free of charge.
- Student loans are not an option for many people with disabilities. As one person said: "I went to school to make something of myself. Social Services wouldn't pay so I got a student loan. Then I had to find a job, pay for my rent and stuff like everyone else and I had to pay off the loan and also pay for all my disability related supports and my attendant. I ended up back on social services." Repayment is more difficult for many consumers because they must also pay for their disability-related supports.
- There are long waits for the funding necessary to register for adult education. Individuals discussed many issues related to wait times. They reported wait times of two to three years for access to specific adult education programs.
- Consumers felt there is poor coordination between registration of adult education programs and the approval of provincial funding programs such as LMAPD. They reported that they may be approved for one, while facing a lengthy waitlist for the other.

"I'm tired of getting the run around. Just talk to me straight. Give ME the information and I can make the choice for myself."

- Eligibility requirements for funding programs, such as LMAPD, can be prohibitively strict. If an adult learner with a disability has worked in the past three years, they are required to wait until they are no longer EI eligible.

- Consumers are not informed of funding options for their education. They feel there should be a place where they could go to get information.



The Black Spruce, which proudly we display as our logo, is an emblem of strength, which thrives even when the odds weigh heavily against it. Like the Black Spruce the ILRC gains strength with each new consumer and each new barrier that is removed. We know that each time we share our voice and our experience; each time we speak up and challenge inequity; each time we make our own choice, we grow in strength because we are living the Independent Living Philosophy.

APPENDIX F

REPORT FROM THE PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND COUNCIL OF THE DISABLED

Adult learners with disabilities focus group

July 3, 2008

We held our focus group on Thursday July 3, 2008. Although twelve confirmed that they would attend, only eight were present. They, however, provided excellent input. The facilitator presented questions and the note-taker captured individuals' comments.

1. Do you consider yourself a person with a disability – if so, what is the nature of your disability?

- Rheumatoid Arthritis
- Juvenile Arthritis
- Auditory Processing Deficit
- Diabetes
- Learning
- Carpal Tunnel
- Neck Injury – weak ligaments
- Depression
- Visual

2. Have you ever signed up for a learning program? If so what was the program?

- Updating university degree – communications studies in music – St. Mary's University and UPEI
- Resident Care Worker – Holland College
- Adult Education Upgrading – GED Holland College
- On-line Support Worker – Academy of Learning
- Career Bridges
- Harmony Training Centre Program
- Highway Traffic Signaler
- Literacy Enhancement
- Work Abilities

3. Why did you pick this program?

- Career research and development;
- To increase opportunities to obtain full-time employment;
- Acquire meaningful employment;
- To increase chances for employment – open doors to work.

4. Did you run into any problems or barriers?

- Instructors did not follow through with previously arranged classroom supports.
- Learning how to access grants and loans – very complicated process;
- Keeping up with the pace;
- Illness – having to drop out;
- Financial difficulties;
- Left out of the loop – not fully understanding what was going on or expected and no extra effort put into help from instructors;
- Recommendations not respected;
- Not being heard – brushed off with blanket statements.

5. Who helped you get past those barriers? An individual? An organization? What did they do that worked?

- Council of People with Disabilities provided a tape recorder for recording notes, ergonomic keyboard;
- Other students;
- Family doctor;
- Understanding professors;
- Computer software for learning and visual disabilities;
- Parents and other family members;
- Instructors;
- Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority.

6. How can adult education be improved in your community? Any suggestions?

- More understanding within the educational institutions in regards to people's struggles with learning disabilities – they are unlikely to understand something not experienced;
- Additional resources in English;

- A variety of testing methods (written, multiple choice, fill in the blanks) more verbal testing;
- More focus on teaching how to learn new methods to aid in comprehension and memory;
- Simplify information;
- Use most effective method/recommended method of learning to suit learning disability;
- Better communication;
- More education on disabilities promoted throughout the education system;
- More local community adult education facilities;
- Increased training to all instructors on how to teach persons with disabilities
- More access to transportation;
- Improved accessibility where needed;
- Flexible hours;
- Make it more affordable;
- Grant monies should reflect actual living expenses;
- Knowledge of actual employers who are willing to hire when training is successfully completed.

Adult Learning – Audit for Physical Accessibility 2009

Independent Living Nova Scotia (ILNS) has worked with the Adult Learning Knowledge Centre to produce and distribute an accessibility audit that will facilitate adult learning programs to be more accessible for learners with disabilities. From conversations with Atlantic Canadians with disabilities, we heard that inaccessibility—sometimes just getting in the door of a classroom or office—is a significant barrier to full participation in adult learning opportunities. Having a fully accessible program includes more than eliminating physical barriers. It also means eliminating communication and attitudinal barriers. This accessibility audit focuses on physical barriers; when these are eliminated, other barriers, such as attitudinal ones, can be addressed. While we realize that achieving the goal of full accessibility is a continuous process, we offer this audit as a tool and starting point for adult educators who want to determine whether their facilities have barriers that limit or prevent anyone from participating fully in the program.

What Is an Accessibility Audit?

The purpose of an Accessibility Audit is to establish how well a program performs in relation to access and ease of use by a wide range of potential users, including people with diverse disabilities.

The audit may also be used to assist educators in identifying barriers that can cause persons with disabilities to be excluded from full participation in programs and other activities.

This audit will help you assess these features:

- **Parking**
- **Building Entrances**
- **Corridors, Stairs, Elevator**
- **Washrooms**
- **Cafeteria/Lunchroom/Lounge**
- **Classroom/Labs**
- **Communications**
- **Program Requirements**
- **Housing Options**
- **Emergency Preparation**

It is recommended that this accessibility audit be conducted weeks before a program begins. As the audit results are made, it is important to consider what can be accomplished in a short period of time and which goals must be long-term. The process of doing the audit should take less than an hour.

Acknowledgements: ILNS thanks the Adult Learning Knowledge Centre, co-ordinator Dr. Kathleen Flanagan and her colleagues, for their support and co-operation during the preparation of this audit and the Metropolitan-Montreal Independent Living Resource Centre for its assistance. For more information, please contact Independent Living Nova Scotia (ILNS) at 902-453-0004; info@ilns.ca; www.ilns.ca

Adult Learning – Audit for Physical Accessibility 2009

CHECK YES(Y) or NO (N)

A. PARKING

| Y | N | |
|---------------|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ___ | ___ | Have you provided accessible parking? |
| ___ | ___ | Do the accessible parking spaces have signs indicating that the space is only for persons with disabilities? |
| ___ | ___ | In the parking area, do you have an overall ratio of 1 accessible space to 25 total spaces? |
| ___ | ___ | Do the parking areas have clearly marked aisles for larger vans? |
| ___ | ___ | Is there an accessible route linking accessible spaces to accessible buildings? |
| ___ | ___ | Is the accessible parking located between the entrance drive and the building so that the accessible route is short and does not cross streets, drives or the parking lot? |
| Total: | | |
| ___ | ___ | |

B. BUILDING ENTRANCES

| Y | N | |
|---------------|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ___ | ___ | Have you provided a passenger drop-off zone? |
| ___ | ___ | Where there are steps or platforms, does the building provide a ramp as another possible entry point? |
| ___ | ___ | Do the stairs and ramps have handrails? |
| ___ | ___ | Is there at least one accessible door at each accessible entrance to the building? |
| ___ | ___ | Is there a power door operator? |
| ___ | ___ | Do the entrances have levers, U-shaped handles, push plates or door pulls, panic bars or other components that can be operated with one hand (elbow or by service dog)? |
| Total: | | |
| ___ | ___ | |

Adult Learning – Audit for Physical Accessibility 2009

C. CORRIDORS, STAIRS, ELEVATOR

Y N

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do the corridors have handrails? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do the stairs have handrails on both sides or at least one side? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do the stairs have markings for those with visual impairments? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do the stairs have slip-resistant surfaces? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the building have an elevator or lift? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the building have good lighting and markings? |

Total:

D. WASHROOMS

Y N

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is there at least one wheelchair accessible stall in the men's washroom? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is there at least one wheelchair accessible stall in the women's washroom? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | If the washroom is unisex, is it fully accessible? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is there at least one accessible washroom on the ground floor? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are the accessible toilet stalls equipped with grab bars? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are the washroom stalls able to accommodate wheelchair turning space? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is there knee space under the sink to accommodate wheelchair users? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do faucets have lever handles to ensure easy operation? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is the soap dispenser reachable for a wheelchair user? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are paper towel dispensers or hand-dry devices reachable for a wheelchair user? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is the mirror in the washroom at a level with a wheelchair user? |

Total:

Adult Learning – Audit for Physical Accessibility 2009

E. CAFETERIA/LUNCHROOM/LOUNGE

| Y | N | |
|---------------|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| ___ | ___ | Does the building have a food and beverage area? |
| ___ | ___ | Are there designated seating areas for wheelchair users? |
| ___ | ___ | Are there removable chairs at the tables? |
| ___ | ___ | Is there an accessible deck, patio or other outdoor area? |
| Total: | | |
| ___ | ___ | |

F. CLASSROOMS/LABS

| Y | N | |
|---------------|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ___ | ___ | Are all aisles, including side aisles, wide enough for a wheelchair user to get through? |
| ___ | ___ | Are desks or desk-tops available for wheelchair users? |
| ___ | ___ | Are assistive listening devices provided for persons who are hard-of-hearing? |
| ___ | ___ | Are video presentations closed- captioned for those who request it? |
| ___ | ___ | Are interpreters available for the hearing-impaired when requested? |
| ___ | ___ | Do speakers read aloud all the material on overheads and flip charts for persons with visual-impairments? |
| ___ | ___ | Are school materials (handouts, exams) all readily available in large print? |
| ___ | ___ | Are computer labs fully accessible? |
| ___ | ___ | Are the library facilities fully accessible? |
| ___ | ___ | Are science labs fully accessible? |
| ___ | ___ | Are exam/lecture rooms fully accessible? |
| ___ | ___ | Are auditoriums fully accessible? |
| ___ | ___ | Are tutorial spaces fully-accessible? |
| Total: | | |
| ___ | ___ | |

Adult Learning – Audit for Physical Accessibility 2009

G. COMMUNICATIONS

| Y | N | |
|---------------|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ___ | ___ | Are all reception desks accessible for persons with disabilities? (For example, is a wheelchair user able to see over the counter to the receptionist?) |
| ___ | ___ | Are there international signs and symbols of accessibility posted where people can see them? |
| ___ | ___ | Are community bulletins in large print? |
| ___ | ___ | Have you provided easily reached telephones? |
| ___ | ___ | Is there at least one phone equipped with a volume control for the hearing-impaired? |
| ___ | ___ | Is there a telephone communications device – Text Telephone Yoke (TTY) – available to accommodate persons who are Deaf or hard-of-hearing? |
| ___ | ___ | Does your building include any tactile signage for persons with visual impairments? |
| Total: | | |
| ___ | ___ | |

H. PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

| Y | N | |
|---------------|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ___ | ___ | For application procedures, do you include a section regarding need for disability-related accommodations? (Example: admissions forms, application forms) |
| ___ | ___ | Do you include questions regarding disability-related accommodations for co-op/work-term placement options? |
| ___ | ___ | Are professors/instructors offices located in accessible areas? |
| ___ | ___ | Are co-op/ academic advisor offices located in accessible areas? |
| ___ | ___ | Is disability awareness training offered to professors/instructors? |
| ___ | ___ | Are teaching-assistants available for those persons with disabilities who acquire assistance? |
| Total: | | |
| ___ | ___ | |

Adult Learning – Audit for Physical Accessibility 2009

I. Housing Options

| Y | N | |
|---------------|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ___ | ___ | Do you have student dorms or student housing options at your location? <i>(If no, please go to the next section.)</i> |
| ___ | ___ | Do you offer fully-accessible rooms for persons with disabilities? |
| ___ | ___ | Are there elevators or lifts in the student dorms or student housing units? |
| ___ | ___ | Do you provide student desks that are designed to fit a wheelchair? |
| ___ | ___ | Are all the controls for lighting and heating reachable for a wheelchair user? |
| ___ | ___ | Are laundry facilities fully-accessible? |
| ___ | ___ | Are there grab-bars in the bath or shower? |
| Total: | | |
| ___ | ___ | |

J. EMERGENCY PREPARATION

| Y | N | |
|---------------|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ___ | ___ | Do you have an emergency evacuation plan (fire drill, storm drill, etc.) that includes persons with disabilities? |
| ___ | ___ | Do you have an emergency wheelchair available for use? |
| ___ | ___ | Do you have first-aid responders on-hand who can properly assist a person with a disability? |
| ___ | ___ | In case of an emergency, are there at least two exits that a person with a disability could use? |
| Total: | | |
| ___ | ___ | |

Adult Learning – Audit for Physical Accessibility 2009

Accessibility Audit Evaluation

Please put the total number of YES(Y) and NO (N) responses answered in each category below:

Total

| Y | N | | Y | N | |
|-----|-----|--------------------------------|-----|-----|--------------------------|
| ___ | ___ | A. Parking | ___ | ___ | F. Classroom/Labs |
| ___ | ___ | B. Building Entrances | ___ | ___ | G. Communications |
| ___ | ___ | C. Corridors, Stairs, Elevator | ___ | ___ | H. Program Requirements |
| ___ | ___ | D. Washrooms | ___ | ___ | I. Housing Options |
| ___ | ___ | E. Cafeteria/Lunchroom/Lounge | ___ | ___ | J. Emergency Preparation |

If you have more than three NO answers in each section, you may not be considered accessible. What areas do you need to approve on?

Priority Items Based Upon Audit Results:

Short Term Goals:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Long Term Goals:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Checklist Completed by: _____

Date _____