

There are lots of ways to 'read' information. There is a tactile copy of our project logo in the printed version of the report. A tactile image is one that you can understand by touching rather than by looking at it. This works well for people who are blind or visually impaired. The logo is a female symbol – a circle joined to a 't'. There is a computer inside the circle as a symbol of one type of Adaptive Technology.

This is the short version of the final report. It is also available on CD in Rich Text Format (rtf), Microsoft Word (.doc), PDF, Braille (Duxbury) and Plain Language formats.

A detailed report or Full Report is available on CD in Rich Text Format (rtf), Microsoft Word, PDF, and Braille (Duxbury). Summary and Full Reports are posted on the ILRC website: <http://www.ilrc.nf.ca>.

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Note: People in the photos have given permission for their pictures to be used. These are not necessarily pictures of women who were in the project.

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EXECUTIVE Summary

This report is about the life experiences of women with disabilities. The project looked at women's experiences with unemployment, underemployment, employment and Adaptive Technology.

Underemployment may mean a woman has a lot more qualifications than the job she is doing requires. It can also mean a woman wants to work full-time but can only find part-time or occasional work.

Adaptive technology is whatever equipment, hardware or software it takes for any person to use a computer.



Many people think that Adaptive Technology is the solution that will provide more jobs for women with disabilities. Lots of research and government reports say this but no plan has been put in place to make Adaptive Technology work for women. In fact sometimes other issues have to be dealt with before adaptive technology can make a difference. We make eighteen recommendations that, if carried may help to solve some of the problems.

This was a Participatory Action Research project. This type of research brings together people and groups to talk about the issues. These are groups that would not normally get together but do so because of interest in the topic. The groups or 'communities' in this research were:

- Twelve women with disabilities from the St. John's, NL area. They are called the participants.
- Two Executive Directors of the Independent Living Resource Centre in St. John's. They are called co-investigator.
- One university academic with the Division of Community Health at Memorial University of Newfoundland. She is also called co-investigator.
- A woman with disabilities who is a graduate student in the Women's Studies Programme at Memorial University of Newfoundland. She is also an active member of the Independent Living Resource Centre. She is called the primary investigator.

The Independent Living Resource Centre works by the same ideals as participatory action research. These ideals support women with disabilities. They encourage women to control their own lives and experiences, to make choices, to take risks and to be responsible for herself.

Background

Reports from the federal government Office for Disability Issues,¹ say half of all Canadians with disabilities 16-65 years of age (working age) are not working. When information is compared between men and women some reports say 75% of women with disabilities are unemployed, underemployed or living below the poverty line.² Underemployment is when a person is not working to her full ability, such as being overqualified for a job. Or she may be in a job where she is unable to work as many hours as she wants.

One of the main principles of the Disability Rights Movement is that everyone in society should have equal rights.³⁻⁵ Everyone has the right to be included in all parts of society. A part of this inclusion is the right for a woman to have access to a job so that she can earn enough income to support herself.⁶ This means she must have the right to:

- work.
- have a reasonable amount of money to live on.
- have her disability related needs met at work.

Computers can be accessible to everyone through Adaptive Technology. Adaptive technology is whatever type of hardware, software or equipment it takes to use a computer. Some experts say Adaptive Technology is one way to provide more employment opportunities for women with disabilities.⁷

Most of the women who participated in this study say that

Adaptive Technology will not help them find a job. All of the women who said this have high school education and experience using a computer. Many also have post secondary education. Women say that other problems must be fixed before Adaptive Technology can make a change in their lives.



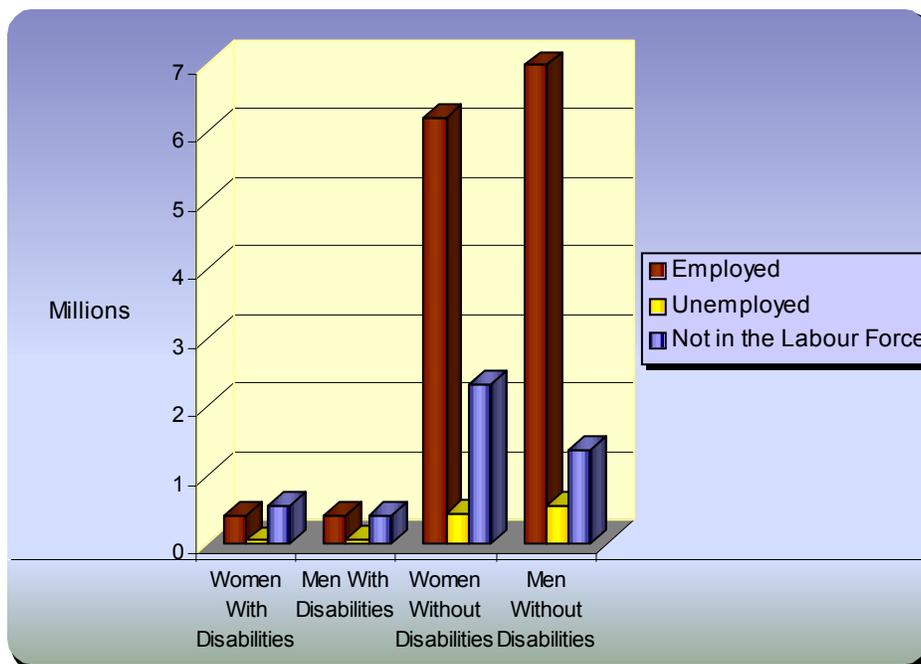
UNEMPLOYMENT and Underemployment

In 2001, Statistics Canada collected information about the workforce including women and men who are:

- working,
- not working but looking for work, or
- not working or not looking for work at present.

There is a difference between these three groups of women and men with and without disabilities (Table 1). Women with disabilities have a much lower employment rate than all the others.

Table 1 : Canadian Labour Force Activity for Women and Men With and Without Disabilities (2001)⁸



Women with disabilities are more likely to be very poor. This often the result of being underemployed or unemployed. Living in poverty also means it is more likely a woman will be isolated within her community.^{5,9,10, 20}

The World Health Organization is a world wide organization that looks at the conditions people live in around the world. It works to finds ways to improve the health and well-being of all people. This organization says that people who live in poverty are more likely to have disease and chronic illness. People who live in poverty usually do not live as long as people who have more money.⁹

Employment Equity LEGISLATION

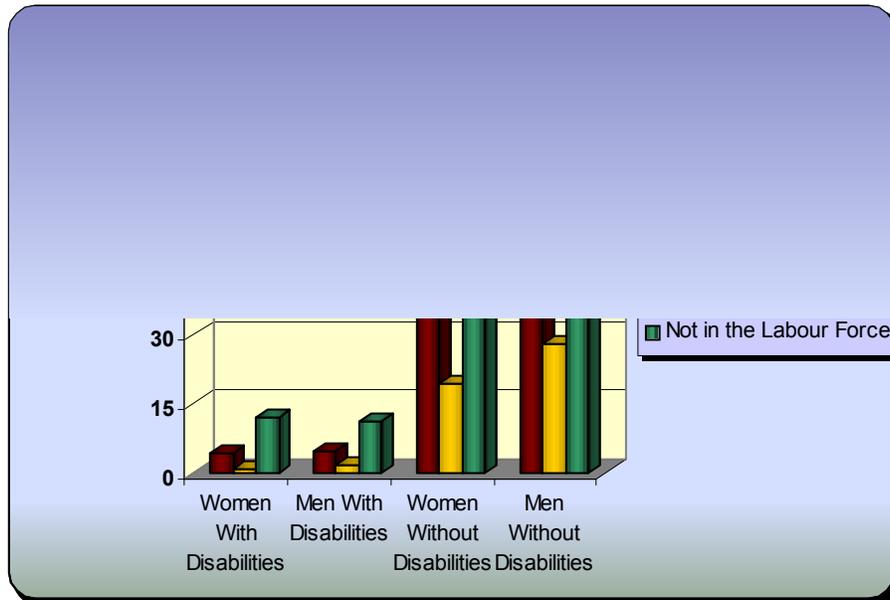
The federal government has laws and policies to protect the rights of everyone living in Canada. One of these is the federal Employment Equity Policies and Programs. These policies and programs are said to be the most advanced in the world.¹¹ But even so the federal Office for Disability Issues agrees it is very difficult for some to get jobs especially people in minority groups. People with disabilities are a minority group in Canada.^{1,10}

Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) is one of two provinces in Canada that does not have employment equity or pay equity laws. Employment equity means everyone has the same chance to get a job. No one can be singled out against because of ability, religion, race, gender and so on. Pay equity means everyone gets the same pay for similar work. We need employment equity because:

- Overall women in NL earn less money than men.
- For every dollar earned by men, women earn 70 cents.¹²
- More women receive social assistance benefits than men. Of all the people in NL who receive social assistance almost one quarter (or 23%) have an illness or disability.¹²

In 2001, Statistics Canada collected information about employment in NL (Table 2). These statistics show similar patterns reported around Canada. NL women with disabilities experience a much lower rate of employment than all other groups.

Table2: Labour Force Activity for Men and Women With and Without Disabilities (Newfoundland 2001)¹³



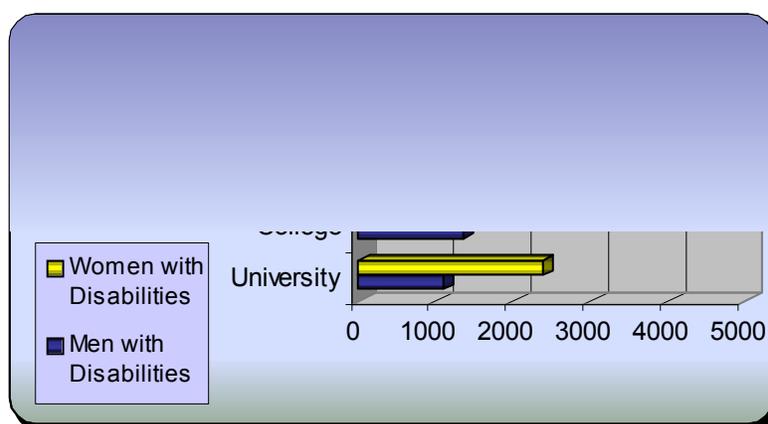
Participants in this research project say that we need equity laws. Relying on employers to do the right thing is not enough. Women with disabilities are not getting full time work and they find it hard to get a job for them to live comfortably. Women with disabilities are one group that would benefit from employment equity and pay equity legislation in NL.¹¹

EDUCATION and Employment

Usually a person has a better chance to get a job if they have more education.

Many people with disabilities do not complete high school. Table 3 compares the difference in education between women with disabilities and men with disabilities. More women with disabilities finish high school than men with disabilities. Fewer women attend trades and technology schools. More women go to college and university. Almost twice as many women as men with disabilities graduate from university.

Table 3: Post secondary education trends for women and men with disabilities (Newfoundland 2001)¹⁴



There is research about women with disabilities and education.¹⁵⁻¹⁷ Women without disabilities are more likely to get better jobs. This is not the same for women with disabilities.

Research shows women with disabilities report increased levels of self esteem when they get more education. However, they are not more likely to be employed.

All women in this research project had completed high school and many had post secondary education. Most were unemployed or underemployed.

DISABILITY: Concept and Lived Experience

There is no single, widely accepted definition of disability. The word 'disability' includes a number of meanings.

The House of Commons Subcommittee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities felt it was necessary to look at the word 'disability'. The federal Office of Disability Issues wrote a report called *Defining Disability*.¹ Disability advocates, academics, mental health representatives, and medical professionals were brought together. They could not agree on one definition of disability.

Perspectives on Disability

There are many perspectives of disability. A perspective is a way of looking at something. The Canadian government recognizes three perspectives of disability.¹

1. The **impairment perspective** is considers doctors, health professions and researchers as the experts on disability. Disability is seen as an injury or illness of the mind or the body or both. The impairment perspective looks at disability as a condition that needs to be fixed or treated.
2. The **functional limitation perspective** is similar to the impairment perspective. The focus is on how severe the disability is. This perspective puts people into categories of mild, moderate, or severe. An expert decides a woman's physical and social limitations.
3. The **ecological perspective** says that women with disabilities are the experts. Each woman decides for herself whether she identifies as having a disability. This perspective supports personal choice.



Independent LIVING

In the 1960-1970's the American civil rights and second wave feminist movements took place. These movements helped start the Disability Rights Movement. The disability rights movement believes *all* people with disabilities have the right to be full member of society. This is also called full citizenship. Part of being a full member is the right to take part in education and employment.^{3,4}

Independent Living (IL) came from the Disability Rights Movement. IL is about having control over one's life, making choices, and taking risks. This is very different from what people with disabilities experienced in the past when they were placed in institutions and separated from the rest of society. It was believed that people could be 'fixed', 'treated' or 'rehabilitated.' Independent Living means that people with disabilities are the experts.

Independent Living thinks of people with disabilities as consumers instead of patients or clients. A consumer is who has a disability. Principles of Independent Living say a woman is capable of controlling her own life experiences, making informed choices, taking risks, and being responsible for herself. IL works best when the consumer is given the disability supports or accommodations she requires.

One of the partners in this research is the Independent Living Resource Centre (ILRC). The ILRC is built on the principles of Independent Living.



PARTICIPATORY Action Research



Research Method

Participatory action research is a way to build knowledge and understanding between different groups of people. In our research we formed a relationship between a group of women with disabilities, the Independent Living Resource Centre, and a group from Memorial University of Newfoundland. An important piece of working together was to share decision making. The main point was to make sure participant voices were heard throughout the entire project.



Strengths of Doing Participatory Action Research with Women with Disabilities

There are four principles of participatory action research; ^{18(p106-7)}

1. Women take part in all of the research. They decide what to speak about, explore the problem through their own personal experience and look at possible solutions.
2. Participants share their real experiences.
3. Taking part in the research can help participants become more aware of their own knowledge and strengths.
4. The ultimate goal of research is to improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

Research Limitations

This report is about women with disabilities. It focused on the experiences of 12 women from in and around St. John's, NL over several months in 2004-2005. It does not try to speak for all women or all people with disabilities. It does not speak about the work experiences of all women with disabilities.

Participants shared many interesting experiences. As we listened to others and thought more about our own experiences our thinking began to change.

We spent a lot of time getting this report ready. There was so much information shared that we found it hard to include everything.

It was hard to decide what information to include and what to leave out of this report. We worked hard as a group to develop a report that we could all support and agree with.



Participant PROFILE

The participants had different types of disability, education, work experience and knowledge of Adaptive Technology. There was a wide variety of ages (Table 4). Women did not want to be identified in this study so we have been very general in our description.

Table 4: Representation of Participants According to Age

Age Range (years)	19-29	30-39	40-49	50-65	Total
Number of Participants	3	5	3	1	12

Participants had a variety of disabilities including:

- Developmental
- Learning
- Blind or visually impaired
- Mobility
- AIDS related complications
- Chronic pain



paying jobs or no jobs at all.

Three participants were working full time. Two were working within the disability community. One participant was on long-term disability. One was retired. Other participants were looking for work or going to school. Most do a lot of volunteer work.

Some participants said they have found it hard to stay interested when looking for long-term work. They had a lot of experience trying job programs and work placements. Many participants said these programs resulted in short term jobs, low

All women in this study had completed high school. Eight women had some type of post- secondary education. Many took part in a variety of job readiness training including vocational assessments and work placements, intake assessments, skill development, occupational therapy, skills upgrade, and Dress for Success.

Their experience was that more education, vocational training, and workplace experience had not enabled them to overcome whatever it is that keeps them from getting a full time job.



Participant TECHNOLOGY Profile

Computer Use

All participants said they used their computers almost every day. Most used email throughout this study.

Ten of the twelve participants had a computer at home. The other two used a computer either at a community organization or in other places.

All but two participants used the Internet. One participant said she had Internet access when she could afford it. One participant disability reported that the Internet was too frustrating for her to use on a regular basis.

Eleven participants reported they did not shop on-line. They said this was because they did not trust the system or did not own a credit card.



Use of Adaptive Technology

This section looks at how participants use Adaptive Technology.

Table 5: Participants' reported experiences using adaptive technology

Participant	Remarks
A	[I use] "Kurzweil, tape recorder, JAWS, Dragon Dictate, Dragon Naturally Speaking"
B	[I use a] "height adjustable desk, [but] little other"
C	[I use] "very little [adaptive technology]. I don't know what's available and what can help make my education and job search easier."
D	[I use] "computers with WordPerfect and Microsoft Word, [and no adaptive technology]."
E	[I use] "wheelchair desks; I know AT [adaptive technology] is available on computers but I've never used it before."
F	[I do not use adaptive technology] "I am not sure what is out there."
G	"I use some adaptive technology like a key guard. I am interested in finding out more – specifically [about]voice activation systems."
H	"minimal" [use of adaptive technology]
I	[I use adaptive technology] "to ease pain on joints and muscles and bones." [I also use] "voice input system and an ergonomic set up."
J	[I volunteer in an] "Canadian-Newfoundland and Labrador Community Access Program site."
K	[I use] "technical aids [to help with computer use, as well as] disability options under Windows to assist writing."
L	"I use AT everyday in both my personal and work life. Adaptive Technology helps me work, read, communicate, learn, write and note take independently."



Who are the EXPERTS?

People who create adaptive technology are experts about technology. Participants felt these 'experts' were defining what adaptive technology is on behalf of people with disabilities.

Women don't agree. They say Adaptive Technology means more to them than what technology experts say it is. One woman said, "Adaptive Technology can be many things. It doesn't necessarily have to be a piece of software or a piece of complicated equipment or something that costs three or four thousand dollars."

One woman said, "I think it's whatever you need to give you a good quality of living. For me it's a two-inch lift on my left shoe because if not I couldn't walk across the room." Another agreed, "Well I think it could be anything from a feeding device to a computer device. It's all adaptive."

Others disagreed and said Adaptive Technology does not include everything. They said it was anything that helped them to use a computer. Such as adjustable workstations, Braille texts, and arm supports were considered adaptive technology. At least one woman believed adaptive technology should be "limited to anything that plugs in."

The participants did not agree on one meaning for the word adaptive technology. But they did agree that adaptive technology is their word to use or not as they are the ones who use the AT. Women believe they are the experts.



UNIVERSAL Computer Access

For the purposes of this discussion, adaptive technology is whatever it takes for everyone to use a computer. Each person must have the Adaptive Technology that meets their need. What works for one person may not work as well for another. In the beginning some Adaptive Technology was designed to suit the needs of people with a particular disability. Over time people started to use whatever they liked best. So it is no longer about the type of disability a person has but it is about what works best for the person.



Research Findings and RECOMMENDATIONS

The participants and each of the partners made a number of recommendations that could improve life for women with disabilities. We hope the following people will listen to what we have learned:

- Government
- Non-governmental agencies
- Educational institutions
- Employers
- Individuals interested in supporting increased employment and educational advancement for women with disabilities



FINDING #1 Women with disabilities face many different barriers when trying to find and keep jobs. They are related to:

- Education
- Transportation
- Adaptive Technology
- Attitudes

Because of this many women are not working or are not working as much as they want. Women are more likely to feel poorly about themselves because so many doors have been closed on them in the past. ^{1, 11, 15, 20}

Women with disabilities have similar difficulties across the country. In Alberta people with disabilities supported the Alberta government to open an Office for Disability Issues. The idea of this Office is to improve attitudes towards disability issues and provide information.¹⁹ It also looks at the problems that keep people with disabilities from getting government jobs and services and tries to remove these barriers.

There are other people with disabilities who think this type of Office does not work well. Some say such Offices are unsuccessful speaking to and working out disability concerns. In the early 1991 there was a study done in NL.²¹ That study suggested NL set up a Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Such an office would have been a lot like the NL Women's Policy Office. The idea was to create an office that would look at disability issues and barriers. It would have also looked at policies and how these policies might affect people with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATION:

- *Support the idea to create a Newfoundland and Labrador Disabilities Policy Office.^{21, 22} This Office would be responsible for looking at policies. This office would also work with advocacy groups to support people with disabilities. Advocacy means supporting people with disabilities to have control over their lives.*

FINDING #2 Women with disabilities cannot find paid work. This is same for the women with more education. Women want long term jobs. They want benefits and a steady income. They want to make Enough money to live comfortably. Both the federal and provincial governments of Canada know that these problems exist^{5,10,12}. However, the government does not have a real plan to make things better.

RECOMMENDATION:

- ❑ *Develop a detailed plan to deal with the employment problems reported by women with disabilities.*



FINDING #3 The provincial government has set aside 75 jobs for certain groups of people who find it difficult to get jobs. These groups include people with disabilities, people of colour, and other minority groups. These jobs are called Employment Equity and Strategic Initiatives. 75 jobs are not enough. There must be more jobs. And some of them must be specifically for women. The provincial and federal government must make this happen.

RECOMMENDATION:

- ❑ *Increase the number of jobs available within the government for people with disabilities. Make some of those jobs available specifically to women.*



FINDING #4 There are not many employers in NL that make employment equity an important part of their business. This means they do not always give everyone the same chance to get a job. Memorial University of Newfoundland is one employer that is beginning to realize how important employment equity is.

Women and other members of the disability community want to know why jobs are so hard to find. Employers do not record details about why they hire one person over another. So there is nothing to explain why women with disabilities do not get hired.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ❑ *Create a way for employers to tell people how they make decisions about finding, hiring and promoting women with disabilities in the workplace.*
- ❑ *Make this information available to community organizations when they ask for it.*

FINDING #5 In Newfoundland and Labrador, women with disabilities depend on employers to do the right thing and treat them fairly. However, this does not always work. It has not helped women with disabilities find more paid jobs.

RECOMMENDATION:

- ❑ *Create a law for employment equity. People in disability organizations, women's groups, and other individuals must put pressure on the government of NL. The government has to create a law that says employers must give everyone the same opportunity to get a job.*



FINDING #6 There are 75 Employment Equity And Strategic Initiatives jobs in the provincial government. However, women in this research said it is hard to get these jobs.

Women feel they have a lot of education and job skills but there are other barriers. Transportation can be a problem. Some of the jobs are located in other areas of the province. Women would have to move. But it is not always possible to get all the disability support they need in areas need outside of St. John's.

Women with disabilities, people from the disability community and people working in government must make sure that the jobs they set aside for women are accessible.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ❑ *Make sure the jobs within the Employment Equity and Strategic Initiatives program are suitable. Do this with members of the disability community.*
- ❑ *Build disability related supports for transportation and relocation into the job program.*

FINDING #7 Many employers in NL are small businesses. Many employers, small and large do not know about Adaptive Technology or how it can be used in the workplace. Women with disabilities want to make them aware of it. They want to meet with employers, people who make policies, and people from the disability community to talk about Adaptive Technology.

RECOMMENDATION:

- ❑ *Develop a plan to talk about employment and Adaptive Technology and how important it is for women with disabilities in the workplace. Women must be involved in this plan.*

FINDING #8 It often takes a long time to get Adaptive Technology or other disability related supports that a person needs for a job. Some of the women in the research project said that they have missed out on jobs because they had to wait so long for accommodations. There must be a better and faster way to access the equipment so that women are not missing out on jobs.

RECOMMENDATION:

- ❑ *Speed up the process of getting Adaptive Technology and other supports that women with disabilities need for work.*

FINDING #9 If you work in a government department and need Adaptive Technology the department will help you get it. However, if you want to change departments you might not be able to take the Adaptive Technology with you. It belongs to the department, not the person. The new department would have to work with you to get the same equipment.

Because this process is so complicated, people in government might think that it is too much trouble to hire a woman with a disability who needs Adaptive Technology. It would be easier to hire someone who doesn't need it. Being able to transfer Adaptive Technology from one department to another is called 'portability'. There is no policy to make equipment portable.

RECOMMENDATION:

- ❑ *Create a policy that links Adaptive technology to the women with the disability. Then when she changes jobs her disability related supports go with her.*

FINDING #10 Adaptive Technology usually does not look very nice. Women think it looks institutional. A lot of other technology, such as cell phones, is made to appeal to people buying it.

Women may not feel comfortable using Adaptive Technology in the workplace if they don't like how it looks. They may think that it makes them 'different'. Why is Adaptive Technology less attractive than other technology? The people who make Adaptive Technology must realize that women who use it want it to look nice. If it were more attractive, more people might use it in their jobs.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ❑ *Create an accessible way for consumers to share their opinions about Adaptive Technology with the people who make it.*
- ❑ *Realize that the way equipment looks and works is important to the people who use it.*



FINDING #11 The Canada Newfoundland and Labrador - Community Access Program (CAP) room at the Independent Living Resource Centre has a lot of great Adaptive Technology . In 2002, it was named a Centre of Excellence. There are many other CAP sites across NL but not all of them have Adaptive Technology. As well not all have staff that know about Adaptive Technology and can show others how to use it.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ❑ *Make sure there is money available for Adaptive Technology at the Independent Living Resource Centre in St. John's, NL.*
- ❑ *Examine other CAP sites in the province to see what they are doing well and what they need to improve upon.*
- ❑ *Provide money for programs that provide Adaptive Technology.*

FINDING #12 Adaptive Technology is a disability related support. Other disability related equipment is not taxed. People should not have to pay tax on Adaptive Technology.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ❑ *Realize that Adaptive Technology is a disability related support. It should be tax free.*
- ❑ *Provide a tax rebate for the cost of all disability related equipment that insurance does not pay for. A tax rebate is money that is paid directly back to the woman instead of being claimed on income tax.*

FINDING #13 Adaptive Technology was made for women, men and children with certain disabilities. Programs that provide money for adaptive technology still put equipment into categories of disability. However, women who use Adaptive Technology don't do this anymore.

Women use whatever suits their needs. The type of disability does not matter.

Some women have to depend on programs to pay for their Adaptive Technology. This way they might not get what they need.

RECOMMENDATION:

- ❑ *Allow women access to the adaptive technology that best suits their needs.*

FINDING #14 Some women believe that adaptive technology can really help them at work or in school. But other women disagree. They believe Adaptive Technology makes people think that a woman is needy or not able to do her job.

One participant in the research said: “From an employer’s perspective, they see one person who needs Adaptive Technology versus another person who doesn’t. Who are they going to hire?”

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ❑ *Increase public awareness about how important adaptive technology is for women with disabilities.*
- ❑ *Create an accessible way for women with disabilities to get information about Adaptive Technology.*
- ❑ *Provide money for a staff person at the NL Independent Living Resource Centre to work in the CAP room. This person will share information about the value of adaptive technology.*

FINDING #15 Some reports say education can help women live a healthier and more comfortable lifestyle. However, women with disabilities say that it is sometimes hard to get education. There may maybe physical barriers such as getting into a building. There may also be barriers because other people believe women with disabilities are not able to do things.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ❑ *Create a relationship between school leaders and women with disabilities to talk about all the barriers that women face. Create a plan to improve accessibility to buildings and programs.*
- ❑ *Support different ways for students with disabilities to voice their concerns about accessibility in their schools.*

FINDING #16 Some women in the research say that applying for the Canada Study Grants for Students with Disability is quite confusing. For example:

- It seems to be aimed toward for young people, or people living at home. The forms request information like parents’ names and address.
- Women have to prove they have “need of one dollar”. They don’t know what this means or how to prove it.
- Women are afraid that the grant will cause problems with other programs they use. Some feel safer and stay away from it.

The application form must be examined to see why women are saying these things.

RECOMMENDATION:

- ❑ *Examine the Canada Study Grants for Students with Disability.*

FINDING #17 Women with disabilities say they receive a lot of support while they are going to school. But this support ends when they finish their education. This means most women do not have a plan that will help them find a job.

Some women have to give back their Adaptive Technology as soon as they finish school even if they still need it to look for work. Adaptive Technology often does not belong to the person who uses it but it should. This way women could move from the school to work more easily.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ❑ *Make Adaptive Technology more portable. Portable means a woman could keep the Adaptive Technology when she leaves school and looks for work.*
- ❑ *Educate the people who help women with disabilities plan their careers about the value of Adaptive Technology.*
- ❑ *Provide money for research to look at how women with disabilities plan for careers.*
- ❑ *Hold information sessions for women with disabilities before they go to university or college. Talk about the types of jobs that are available to them through different programs such as the Employment Equity and Strategic Initiatives.*

FINDING #18 There are many reasons why women may not be working at a given time. This is the same for women with disabilities.

Adaptive Technology is not only used for work. Women use it in their personal lives as well. They use it to read, communicate, organize their daily activities and get information. Most women with disabilities don't have money to buy Adaptive Technology for personal use. However, it is important for women to keep their computer skills up to date. And some are not able to go to public places to use a computer. They might not have money for transportation or someone to take care of children.

RECOMMENDATION:

- ❑ *Develop a way for women with disabilities to have better access to Adaptive Technology for both personal use and job purposes.*



References

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