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## "To me, disability means...": Words from the Community

By ERIN KREKOSKI, *Resource Coordinator*

A label, a concept, a source of pride, stigma – 'disability' is understood many different ways, depending on who you ask. So we asked a number of people what disability means to them. This is what they said:

**"To me, disability means** a condition that society has created that unfortunately isolates, marginalizes and oppresses people with certain differences.

*I am* a mother, grandmother, friend, ally, instructor, program director, support broker....."

**"To me, disability means** having an ability that has been impaired before, during or after birth, mentally or physically. If being disabled truly was understood – that 1 in 5 Albertans have a disability – I believe Universal Designs and Accessibility would be easily accepted and enforced.

*I am* a quadriplegic since 1983. I've been involved in housing and accessibility issues for all disabilities. I'm 46 years old and like to fix the broken things that are not accessible."

**"To us disability means** having a little something extra inside you. It seems that sometimes being called "disabled" is a burden for other people more than you as an individual. Having a developmental disability is just a small part of a person. The word disability can often have a negative context because it can unfairly label people for what they cannot do. Everyone was born with different abilities in life. To many people, the term disability means that you can't do anything because you are different. They are so wrong. Differences make the community a better place for everyone.

Words and language are powerful, however abilities and community acceptance will win every time!!!

**We are** The Canadian Down Syndrome Society Voices at the Table Advocacy committee."

**"People have been trying to define disability forever.**

We usually define disability so that people can access services. It is difficult to define disability because it is different for each person. Defining a disability takes on detrimental aspects because it can only be done through judging and then people become labeled. The best way is for persons to define their disabilities on their own terms in any which way that they wish to disclose.

*I am* a long time advocate for persons with disabilities and a human rights activist."

**"To me, disability means** to be set apart from the "norm", to be seen and often treated differently - usually as "less than". It means to have many obstacles during the course of a normal day - just to get the average types of activities completed. It means not being able to do many things because the environment has not been set up in such a way as to allow participation. It means not to be treated as an "equal".

*I am* a person with a physical disability since birth."

**"To me, disability means** inequitable access to housing, paying more for everything, and sacrificing personal dignity, with dignity, in order to be accepted. In general disability means a perceived inability of self, family and/or society to function at an acceptable norm. I was fortunate to have an amazing family and community so I perceive myself disabled by society.



(Continued on page 2)





## Nominate Someone for the 2009 Mayor's Awards

On Thursday, May 21st, the Mayor's Awards will recognize individuals, organizations and businesses that demonstrate a commitment to persons with disabilities.

**You** can make a nomination for an award in one of four categories:

- ♦ Universal design in architecture
- ♦ Outstanding service
- ♦ Employment—paid & volunteer
- ♦ Ewen Nelson Award for Self Advocacy

Get nomination forms & judging criteria online @ [www.edmonton.ca/disability](http://www.edmonton.ca/disability)

Or contact Fiona at 780-496-4910 or [fiona.hoenmans@edmonton.ca](mailto:fiona.hoenmans@edmonton.ca)

## Disability Means, *cont'd from page 1*

Although I have moments of utter frustration, I am able to function individually and within my family but society still perceives me as unable, actually it's more like society does not recognize my existence or that of my peers with disabilities. In fact, many of us spend a large portion of our incomes paying for things others take for granted.

My disability is a complete lack of interest and political will towards disability issues in the last 30 years in Edmonton. Interesting enough, that coincides closely within integration into our school systems. Many of my peers and I grew up in our own communities. Even though we were the same age and attended the same medical clinics, we never met each other. We were "integrated" and our disability became a community issue and disability issues seemed to stagnate around the same time.

I pray for an environment of social and economic inclusion where all citizens are perceived as equal and valuable so that we can focus on restoring harmony with our planet.

**I am** an intelligent, educated, thoughtful woman who tries to face each day's challenges with dignity and grace."

### "To us, disability means:

- ♦ Standing up for our rights;
- ♦ Being good to other people (being understanding and caring)
- ♦ Being misunderstood
- ♦ Knowing there are differences in people all over the world
- ♦ Loving challenges (but challenges don't stop)
- ♦ Loving hurt and bad experiences in life
- ♦ Sharing our strengths together
- ♦ Knowing who you are and what you can do.

**We are** members of the Self Advocacy Federation."

**"To me, disability means** having challenges within certain areas.

Unfortunately, it is used as a qualifier to label someone in a limited way. Everyone has abilities and handicaps but we don't describe ourselves as having a disability so why do we use it for others? It provides people with a unfair preconceived idea of who that person is.

**I am** an advocate for people"



**"To me, disability means** being unable to perform the tasks that the average person could perform without difficulty. In our home, disability refers to the inability to perform simple physical tasks like using the washroom, rolling over in bed, bathing, picking up a dropped item, opening the fridge, using the stove or microwave, reaching for, moving, lifting or holding a heavy object, getting dressed and even putting on a coat.

**I am** the mother of a 16 year old boy who has Congenital Muscular Dystrophy. Matt attends grade 10 in a regular high school and has normal cognitive skills. His struggles are all physical, due to severe muscle weakness."

**"Disability, to me, means** a functional limitation or restriction of an individual's ability to perform an activity.

**I am** a person who is classified as having a disability, even though this is not how I see myself. This has caused me greater difficulty in accessing employment which is why I work with individuals with disabilities and employers to assist with the process and dispel myths relating to employment."

*Thank you to everyone who contributed to this article!*

**Disclaimer:** Articles, quotes and commentary in this edition of *the fACTivist* produced by contributors outside the Edmonton Social Planning Council (ESPC) reflect the views of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policy of the ESPC.



# One Size Does Not Fit All: Economic Dimensions of Disability

By JOHN KOLKMAN, *Research & Policy Analysis Coordinator*

There are many disabled persons who, due to the severity of their disability, will not be able to sustain themselves through paid employment alone. They may need supplementary income and other supports in order to avoid poverty and live fulfilling lives. What can be done to improve their lives?

According to a recent report from Human Resources and Social Development Canada, one in three Canadians with a disability lives below the poverty line. Disabled Canadians are over three times as likely to live in poverty as Canadians without a disability. This is one of the highest poverty rates of any vulnerable group.

The true extent of the economic challenges facing persons with disabilities and their families is even greater. Many face thousands of dollars in extra costs each year directly related to their disability. Motorized scooters, expensive drugs, and other specialized equipment are just a few examples of those costs. These extra costs of being disabled are not accounted for in any of the measures of low income and poverty.

In researching this article, I concluded there is no "one size fits all" solution. Instead, a comprehensive strategy is needed involving all orders of government, disability organizations and other civil society groups. Only with everyone

working together can we make a meaningful dent in the unacceptably large number of persons with disabilities who live in poverty.

## Tax Benefits

At the federal level, the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CTB) needs to be improved for families with disabled children. In addition to increasing the maximum yearly benefit per child from the current \$3,332 to at least \$5,000, the CTB's

child disability benefit should be increased. The Caledon Institute of Social Policy is recommending that the current maximum disability benefit of \$2,395 be increased to \$3,600 per year.

The federal government also provides a tax deduction for disabled adults whereby they can reduce the amount of income tax they would otherwise be liable to pay. Given that many disabled persons have low incomes and pay little or no tax, it would be more helpful if this deduction is instead turned into a refundable tax credit, similar to the child disability benefit.

## Registered Disability Savings Plan

The federal government recently introduced a registered disability savings plan (RDSP). The RDSP took effect on December 1, 2008. Under the RDSP, family members can receive up to a 3 to 1 match of dollars contributed for the benefit of a disabled person. In addition, any amounts deposited in an RDSP grow tax-free. Most provinces, including Alberta, have announced that RDSPs will be exempt from the income and asset limits that otherwise apply to their provincial income support programs.

## AISH

At the provincial level, further improvements to the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) are needed. The Alberta Disabilities Forum, a coalition of 40 community-based disability organizations, is urging the provincial government to increase the AISH benefit annually, by an increment of no less than the increase in the cost of living. Inflation indexing is currently not in place, and there have been many years when there has been no increase.

## Community Supports

It's not only a question of improving income supports for persons with disabilities. The development of community supports is allowing many disabled people who only a generation ago were institutionalized to successfully live independently in the community. These aids and supports allow disabled persons to get to and from work,

*(Continued on page 4)*

## Sources Cited

### *Economic Dimensions article (p 3)*

- ♦ HRSDC. (2008). *Low Income in Canada: 2000-2006 Using the Market Basket Measure*. Available at: [www.hrsdc.gc.ca](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca)
- ♦ Information on AISH improvement available at: [www.adforum.ca/publications.html](http://www.adforum.ca/publications.html)
- ♦ Metcalf Foundation, John Stapleton. (2008). *Income Security for Working-Age Adults in Canada: Let's consider the model under our nose*. Available at: [www.metcalffoundation.com](http://www.metcalffoundation.com)

### *Employment Barriers article (p 8)*

- ♦ Canadian Labour Congress. (2008). *Toward Inclusion of People with Disabilities in the Workplace*. Available at: [www.canadianlabour.ca](http://www.canadianlabour.ca)
- ♦ Maytree Foundation. (2008). *Policy in Focus*, Issue 6. Available at: [www.maytree.com/policy/maytree-policy-in-focus](http://www.maytree.com/policy/maytree-policy-in-focus)





## Poverty & Disability, *cont'd from page 3...*

stay out of hospital, do their own shopping, engage in recreation, and participate in a multitude of activities most of us take for granted.

When living in institutions many of these supports would have been covered. Now that most disabled persons are living in the community, they often are required to use personal or family funds to fully or partly cover the cost of supports that would previously have been provided.

### A Comprehensive Poverty Reduction Plan

Part of the problem with reducing poverty among disabled persons is the haphazard and uncoordinated nature of many programs and benefits. What is needed by disabled persons is the much the same as is needed by everyone living in low income; a more comprehensive approach that sets clear targets and timelines for lifting disabled persons out of poverty.

John Stapleton, a social policy consultant, recently proposed that income support for working-age adults (included disabled persons) be modeled on an approach that has successfully resulted in seniors going from having one of the highest poverty rates in the country to having one of the lowest in little more than a generation. In a report prepared for the Metcalf Foundation, Stapleton proposes an income security system consisting of a widely available base benefit, income tested benefits (extra help for people with low incomes), registered tax-savings instruments like the Registered Disability Savings Plan, and matching government contributions to reward individual savings. Moreover, disabled persons also need full coverage of needed aids and supports so that they can live successful lives in the community free of poverty.

*See page 3 for sources used in this article.*

### Barrier Free Press

Want to stay up to date on disability issues in Edmonton?

Sign up for the *Barrier Free Press*, a free e-mail newsletter by the Advisory Board for Persons with Disabilities.

Send an email to [fiona.hoenmans@edmonton.ca](mailto:fiona.hoenmans@edmonton.ca) with "Barrier Free Press" in the subject line.

Previous editions can be viewed at [www.edmonton.ca/disability](http://www.edmonton.ca/disability)

## Taking Adversity "With a Grain of Salt": The Life of (Mel)anie

By JAYLENE ELLARD, *MacEwan Social Work Practicum Student*

*We wanted to include some personal stories in this edition of the fACTivist. Our social work practicum student, Jaylene, jumped at the chance to feature her friend Melanie.*

**Nicknames:** Mel, Melba Toast, Melvin, Small Fry, Chatterbox, Trouble, Grasshopper

Mel is my good friend from Vermilion, AB. Many people who have gotten to know Mel might describe her as easy-going, goofy, very talkative, a chocoholic and just a cute bundle of sunshine. I have known Mel for many years and am truly lucky to have her for a friend. Her favourite activities are (to name a few) watching movies, reading books, hanging out with her tree frog Winston/Chuck, going for coffee, hanging out with friends, going to concerts, various things on the computer, listening to music, and playing card/ board games. Mel also likes to collect things from merchandise of her favourite hockey team (the Oilers!) to perfume bottles, calendars, and more recently, fish (she now has 7 Siamese Fighting Fish!).

Mel is 25 years old and lives by herself in a fourplex that is only a short walk away from her Baba's place where the eating is always good. The oldest of four, Mel enjoys spending time with her siblings. She works part-time both at the local pet store and preschool. In the future, Mel is planning on going to school at NAIT to take Journalism where she can "get paid to talk a lot". Two of the main things Mel would most like to do in life are to go skydiving and get a tattoo.

My friend Mel also has a disability called cerebral palsy. When asked to describe it she said it is difficult to explain as everyone is different and cases vary person to person. Generally, cerebral palsy refers to a group of neurological conditions that influence body movement, balance and posture. Mel goes to physiotherapy three times a week to ensure mobility and ease of muscle movement. In the face of adversity Mel always tries to "take it with a grain of salt".

*For more information on cerebral palsy, check out [www.cpalberta.com/](http://www.cpalberta.com/)*



# 2009 Heralds New and Strengthened Partnerships

by SUSAN MORRISSEY, Executive Director, Edmonton Social Planning Council

One of the ways the Council can fulfill its public education mandate is by focusing our newsletter editions on specific social issues. This edition of *the fACTivist* takes its roots from a conversation I had with Cindy DeBruin, the Executive Director of Gateway Association for Community Living (see p7 for an article by Cindy). We were meeting to share some of the challenges families of persons with developmental disabilities were facing.

It was this meeting with Cindy, as well as a conversation I had with a former staff member regarding the low awareness of the Council within the disability community, that led us to dedicate this edition to the issues of the disabled population. Our staff has worked very hard to make this a well-

rounded edition, particularly by gathering input from our community partners.

For the Council, the transition to 2009 brings new projects into focus. The *We Can Do Better* report will be highlighted across Alberta this Spring (see below). We are also working on a 2009 edition of *Tracking the Trends*, and have partnered with the Social Planning and Research Council of BC to develop a social plan for the Wood Buffalo Regional Municipality. We are also hopeful that our meeting in December with Housing and Urban Affairs Minister, Yvonne Fritz, regarding our Renters' Survey report will lead to positive policy change.

As always, we welcome your comments and suggestions.

## Looking for Information on Social Issues?

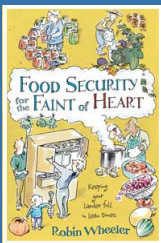
Visit the ESPC Resource Library today!

Open to the public:  
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Online Catalogue:  
Available 24/7 @  
[socialresearchlibrary.ca](http://socialresearchlibrary.ca)

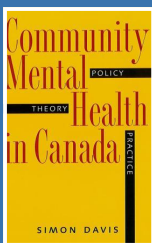
Our resource library is a rich source of current and historical publications on social issues.

## Featured Books:



Food security for the faint of heart: keeping your larder full in lean times (Wheeler, R.)

Community Mental Health in Canada: Policy, Theory, and Practice (Davis, S.)



## We Can Do Better to End Child & Family Poverty; Spring Forums

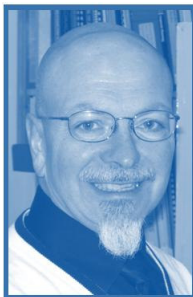
The public release of the *We Can Do Better* report on November 21, 2008 garnered extensive media coverage, not only in Edmonton and Calgary, but also in Alberta's regional cities (see our website).

An indicator of the report's impact is that the Council received three letters responding to the report from the Premier, the Finance Minister and the Minister of Employment and Immigration (EI). In his letter, EI Minister Hector Goudreau noted that his ministry is committed to reducing child poverty in Alberta, though he stopped short of committing to a comprehensive strategy for doing so.

The ESPC and its partners (including United Ways across Alberta, the Calgary Poverty Reduction Coalition, Vibrant Communities Edmonton, and Public Interest Alberta) are determined not to let this report gather dust on a shelf. We continue working to build support for an Alberta poverty reduction strategy. Currently, we are busy organizing public forums on poverty reduction to be held in late April across the province. Stay tuned for dates and locations.

Copies of the report are available free of charge. Contact us at 780-423-2031, or download from [edmontonsocialplanning.ca](http://edmontonsocialplanning.ca).

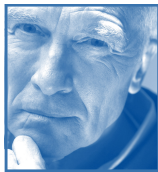
## meet the ESPC BOARD OF DIRECTORS Brockman Brings Diverse Experience to Council



For 25 years, Larry Brockman has worked in community service organizations doing tasks from reception to executive director. As Executive Director of a nonprofit organization, Larry manages a team of 11 staff and a budget of \$650,000. He has held a range of positions on boards of

national organizations to small totally voluntary neighbourhood organizations with no staff, no money and lots of challenges.

Organizational planning is one of Larry's key strengths. He has facilitated and co-facilitated a variety of planning workshops, retreats and conferences including the monitoring of the implementation of the work plans developed through these events.



## “Retardation” to “Disability”: How our Language has Evolved

By JAYLENE ELLARD, MacEwan Social Work Practicum Student

**Pappass:** *I'm not retarded anymore.*  
**Tom:** *Oh really?*  
**Pappass:** *Really.*  
**Tom:** *When did that happen?*  
**Pappass:** *1984. Sometime in the spring. I went from retard to mentally handicapped. And then in 1987-88, I went from handicapped to challenged. I changed again. I'm probably changing right now. Who knows what I'll be next?*  
 - Quote from the movie *House of D*

“International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health”. The previous title utilizes the word handicap, which is partly defined as placing certain individuals at a disadvantage in relation to their peers when viewed from the norms of society. With the newer classification, the WHO recognized disability as a ‘universal human experience.’ It acknowledged that every human being can experience a decline in health and therefore experience some degree of disability.

This quote from *House of D*, a movie starring Robin Williams, shows just how quickly and how often the language around disability has changed. So, too, has the treatment and inclusion of persons with disabilities changed. In the early 1900’s, the eugenics movement, resulted in the sterilization of so-called “feeble-minded” or “defective” disabled persons due to the belief that their babies would also be “defective.” The Alberta Sterilization Act was finally repealed in 1972, nearly 60 years after sterilization began in Alberta.

Until the push for human rights in the late 70’s and 80’s, the institutionalization of various persons with disabilities was also common. Though Canada began to deinstitutionalize (with controversy) at that time, there are still various institutions in which people face isolation and segregation in across Canada.

So what does the changing perspective of society have to do with a changing language? In my view: everything. For human rights and social justice movements, it is important to change terms to adapt to the changing contexts in which those words are used.

An example of changing terms is found in 2001, when the title of the “International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, and Handicaps” of the World Health Organization was modified to become the



The word ‘handicap,’ though still commonly used, is viewed as an obsolete and derogatory term. Some other derogatory words that have been used (and some continue to be) to describe persons

with disabilities are: challenged, lame, retarded, cripple, insane, stupid, and so on. In avoidance of such terms that may promote discrimination, the most commonplace and accepted umbrella-term used in Canada today is ‘disability.’ There is also a focus in using “person-first language,” which places focus on the person first and the disability second. Saying “person with a disability,” as opposed to “disabled person”, recognizes that the person is an individual human being, not a medical condition.

Even though there are more pressing issues in the disability community today, I believe it is important to understand how language of disability has changed over time. That history, of which I have only covered a small fraction, can only help our efforts to promote further change and understanding. Language holds much power and, though words may be used with good intentions, their misuse can hurt.

### ESPC Book Club

The book club has a great lineup of literature for 2009!

Our next books will be:

***One Native Life***  
by Richard Wagamese

**Date:** Feb 5, 2009

&

***Lullabies for Little Criminals*** by Heather O'Neill

**Date:** Mar 5, 2009

**Please join us!**

Visit the Book Club page on [edmontonsocialplanning.ca](http://edmontonsocialplanning.ca) (under Resource Library & Links) for more information.

### Welcome!

The ESPC is pleased to welcome our new social work practicum student, **Cheryl Melny**, to our team!

Cheryl will be with us until April 2009, assisting us with many of our ongoing and upcoming projects.



# People Working for \$1.50 per Hour: Alberta Advantage?

By CINDY DE BRUIJN, *Executive Director, Gateway Association for Community Living*

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (15.1) guarantees that everyone is entitled to equal benefit of the law without discrimination based on mental or physical disability.

Yet Alberta Employment Standards Division 10, Section 67 (1) (a) states that with permission, employers can pay employees with disabilities less than minimum wage. It is called the Minimum Wage Exemption, and we should be ashamed that in the year 2009 this is happening in our Province.

Policies such as the minimum wage exemption exist because of the misconception that people with developmental disabilities aren't as productive as other workers. This fallacy provides a basis for taking advantage of people. It is believed that if a person with a developmental disability can only perform a job at 75%, then he or she should only be compensated at that level. First of all, this conveys the major assumption that just because someone has a developmental disability, they could only perform at a certain level. Furthermore, if we are being truthful, most of us can admit that our performance at work isn't at maximum potential. We are constantly bombarded with all the distractions of technology like cell phones and Facebook, and others generally have a poor work ethic. However, we are not having our wages garnished based on assumed lacks of productivity.

When you first meet someone, the conversation usually leads to "what do you do for a living?" This is because so much of how we identify ourselves is through our work. Yet there is an entire segment of

people in our society that are not being given sustainable work opportunities, simply because employers aware of this this old piece of legislation can use it to their advantage to save money.

How would you feel if you didn't receive fair compensation for your work? What if you received no sick days or vacation time? How would you feel if you didn't receive a raise in three years, while your friends, neighbours, and colleagues did? Wouldn't it be degrading if you were told that you had to train for a job indefinitely?

Here are some real life Edmonton examples, because this happens more than any of us would want to admit:

Mike has been employed for 5 years at a convenience store where he gets along great with his fellow coworkers, has positive job evaluations and a perfect attendance record. His manager's request to the government to apply the minimal wage exemption has been approved every year and as such Mike earns \$1.50 per hour.

Sue works at a sheltered workshop: In a large warehouse, she and a handful of other people with developmental disabilities sit in a separate room and sort the nuts and bolts that accompany the large products that are being assembled. They get paid as a unit, meaning that Sue will typically earn \$120 month – for about 80 hours per month.

Support agencies will often receive employment contracts or have thrift stores where people with developmental disabilities work. They will do the work as "job training" often for many years with unfair or no compensation. The profits that are raised from these stores or other contracts goes into the bank accounts of the support agencies as general "Fundraising Dollars", which can be spent however the organization deems best – which is never in providing minimum wage or better to the employees.

In December 2008 the unemployment rate in Alberta was 4.1%, the lowest in Canada. Think about it: **Who is the Alberta Advantage for?**



## Disability Groups and Resources in Edmonton

- ♦ Alberta Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health
- ♦ Alberta Artists with Brain Injury Society
- ♦ Alberta Caregivers Association
- ♦ Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities
- ♦ Alberta Council of Disability Services
- ♦ Alberta Disabilities Forum
- ♦ Alberta Easter Seals
- ♦ Alberta Network for Mental Health
- ♦ Alberta Association of the Deaf
- ♦ Alberta Works - Disability Related Employment
- ♦ Autism Society of Edmonton and Area
- ♦ Canadian Council of the Blind
- ♦ Canadian Deaf Blind and Rubella Association
- ♦ Canadian Down Syndrome Society
- ♦ Canadian Mental Health Association – Edmonton Region
- ♦ Canadian Paraplegic Association (Alberta)
- ♦ Catholic Social Services – Community Endeavours
- ♦ Cerebral Palsy Association in Alberta
- ♦ Children's Ability Fund – Northern Alberta Crippled Children Foundation

*Continued on page 8*



# Disabling Barriers to Work Participation & Productivity

By ANETTE KINLEY, *Research & Communications Assistant*

Over one in ten working-age Canadians have a disability (Statistics Canada, PALS 2006). A recent report by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), titled *Toward Inclusion of People with Disabilities*, revealed some unsettling realities about this segment of the population:

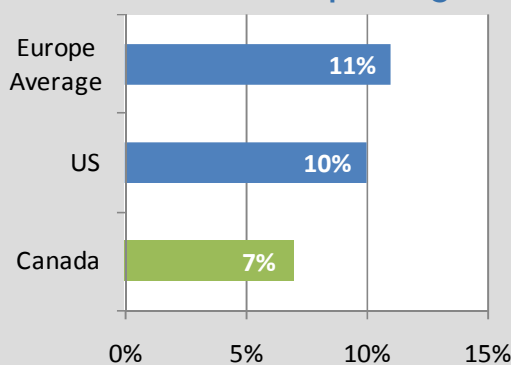
- One in three persons with disabilities live in poverty—that's a rate three times higher than the general working age population,
- Persons with disabilities are four times more likely to live in poverty for long periods of time,
- In 2006, only 51% of persons with disabilities were employed, compared to three out of four persons without disabilities, and;
- The unemployment rate for persons with disabilities is 4% higher than the general population, at 10%.

What is the cause of these inequities? Three main factors stand out in the report: government income supports, wage inequities, and employment barriers.

## Government Income Supports

Approximately one-third of persons with disabilities receive some form of government benefit (*see page 3*). However, the CLC points out that those benefits are often low. As shown in the following graph, Canada's investment in disability supports and services is low relative to the US and Europe.

**Disability Spending as Percentage of Public Social Spending**



One of the key issues with provincial disability benefit programs, in particular, is the requirement for recipients to demonstrate that their disability prevents

them from working. Those who could work part-time or part-year are put in a Catch 22 situation by this precondition:

- ♦ **Choosing employment** would allow wider opportunities for productive involvement in the community. However, working for limited hours or time periods generally offers a low and insecure income—an income earned at the risk of losing government benefits. Once benefits are given up, it can be very hard to re-qualify.
- ♦ **Choosing benefits** offers a more stable (but still low) income, and potentially other benefits such as prescription coverage and supported housing. However, those benefits often come with tight restrictions on how much paid employment can be taken. Workers receiving CPP-D, for example, can only supplement their income by a maximum of \$4,200 per year (Maytree).

It's a choice between poverty on assistance and poverty in employment.

## Wage Inequity

Compared to that of the general population, the median hourly wage of workers with disabilities is 5% less for men and 14% less for women. In some cases, this may reflect the barriers to education that persons with disabilities face. It may also be a reflection of some employers' preconceptions about the performance capacity of employees with disabilities. (*See p7 for more on wage inequity.*)

## Employment Barriers

While those with severe disabilities are considerably less likely to hold paid employment, most persons with disabilities are able to take on *at least* part-year or part-time work. Why then, do we see such low participation and high unemployment? Why is it that persons with disabilities are under-represented in managerial, supervisory and professional positions? This mismatch between ability and employment indicates that something else is holding people back.

In some cases, underemployment, or unemployment, may be the result of employer discrimination (whether intentional or not). One in eight employed

## Resources

...cont'd from p 7

- ♦ Chrysalis Society
- ♦ City of Edmonton Advisory Board on Services for Persons with Disabilities
- ♦ CONNECT Society
- ♦ Distinctive Employment Counselling Services of Alberta
- ♦ Edmonton and Area FASD
- ♦ EmployAbilities
- ♦ Fetal Alcohol Support Society
- ♦ Gateway Association of Community Living
- ♦ Kidney Foundation of Canada
- ♦ Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta
- ♦ Lupus Society of Alberta
- ♦ Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada
- ♦ Muscular Dystrophy Canada
- ♦ Northern Alberta Brain Injury Society
- ♦ On Site Placements Services
- ♦ Parkinson's Society of Alberta
- ♦ PLAN Edmonton
- ♦ Schizophrenia Society of Alberta
- ♦ Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Association of Northern Alberta
- ♦ Steadward Centre (Uof A)
- ♦ The Arthritis Society Alberta and NWT Division
- ♦ The Self Advocacy Federation
- ♦ VoicePrint Canada

(Continued on page 9)



## Employment, *cont'd from page 5*

persons with disabilities (and one in four unemployed) report having experienced discrimination based on their disability. This includes being refused a job.

The main factor that the CLC focuses on, however, is the failure on the part of governments and employers to break down barriers to employment and to accommodate the different needs of persons with disabilities. If adequate supports were in place, the CLC argues, employment rates would increase.

One of the main concerns is that employers perceive the cost of providing workplace accommodations as prohibitively high. In reality, the cost is often manageable. For around half of the persons requiring accommodations, the cost would be less than \$500 per person, per year. For one fourth of employees with disabilities, the cost would be between \$500 and \$1,500 per year. The most common workplace accommodations needed include:

- ♦ Modified work hours or days, or reduced hours;
- ♦ Special chairs or back support;
- ♦ Job redesign, and;
- ♦ Modified or ergonomic work stations.

Despite the ease of implementing most



workplace supports, Statistics Canada's Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) results suggest that satisfaction with workplace modification is falling. The price employers pay for inadequate accommodation is reduced productivity—4 out of 10 persons surveyed reported that a lack of supports made it more difficult for them to complete their work to their full potential.

Removing the barriers to labour force participation and productivity would have a tremendous impact on the lives of persons with disabilities—especially in terms of quality of life and economic security. Perhaps most importantly, employers in all sectors would benefit from the skills, experiences and perspectives that these employees can bring to the table.

*See page 3 for sources used in this article.*

***"One of the biggest barriers I've had in my adult life is discrimination in employment. It's very hard for me to get hired for a job, despite being qualified. More often than not, I apply for jobs where I am over-qualified. Nine interviews out of ten go absolutely nowhere. Often I'll find out through the grapevine who was hired for the job I tried to get, and it will turn out to be someone able-bodied with far less skills or experience. This makes me so. ANGRY. I know it's the disability, I know it from the moment I see the interviewer's face or hear their voice if I inquire about the accessibility of their office over the phone. Whether I warn or surprise them, it doesn't seem to matter with most people."***

Blog excerpt from *The Angry Gimp*. "I'm BAD. And ANGRY." May 01, 2008  
theangrygimp.blogspot.com

## meet the ESPC STAFF

### Kolkman has Passion for Politics, Policy & Social Justice



John Kolkman, the Council's Research and Policy Analysis Coordinator, joined the ESPC in May 2006, and holds the record for avoiding being featured in the *fACTivist* the longest! He also has the dubious distinction of having the most grey hairs on staff, as well as being the only staff person with an XY chromosome.

One of eight children, John grew up on a dairy farm in the Ardrossan area. His parents had immigrated from the Netherlands two years before he was born. Growing up, John learned the values of hard work, strong family values, and community involvement. Those values no doubt had an influence on his choice to earn a degree in political science.

John counts himself as exceedingly

fortunate to have found meaningful work that has allowed him to employ his passion for politics, public policy and social justice.

Prior to joining the Council, John was the Research Director for the NDP Opposition at the Alberta Legislature for nine years. Before that, he served as the Assistant Director of the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers for four years. These are only the most recent jobs in his colourful, if not conventional, career path.

John has two young adult sons with his wife, Kate Quinn, who shares his passion for social justice. John has lived in the inner city McCauley neighbourhood for over thirty years, and has been very active in the community. Outside of his work and community life, John's hobbies are gardening, wine-making, skiing and hiking.



## our VISION

A healthy, just and inclusive community.

## our MISSION

The Edmonton Social Planning Council provides leadership to the community and its organizations in addressing social issues and effecting changes to social policy.

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