

INCLUSIVENESS  
*Accessibility*

**Inclusion in the Workforce**  
**Persons with Disabilities**  
**Focused Project**

*Employer Community Study*

*April 2009*

Talent  
*Opportunities*

DIALOGUE



York South Simcoe Training and Adjustment Board

# **Inclusion in the Workforce Persons with Disabilities Focused Project**

## *Employer Community Study*

*April 2009*



### **York South Simcoe Training and Adjustment Board**

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**EMPLOYMENT  
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## Background

Historically there has always been a social disconnect between corporations and/or businesses and the average individual with a disability. In York Region, there has been an on-going discussion among various levels of government and service agencies supporting individuals with disabilities, about how to bridge this gap and specifically improve the facilitation of inclusion in the workforce.

The unemployment rate among individuals with disabilities ranges from province to province and among various areas and regions due to barriers such as rural locations, lack of transportation, affordable housing, lack of education or literacy programs, assistive services, etc. Currently the unemployment rate for persons with disabilities within Ontario is 10.2%.

In the past there have been networking meetings and social service agency training sessions and specialized job fairs and events specific for job seekers with disabilities, in York Region.

Through these types of efforts there was a potential oversight that the majority of the employer voices were not being 'heard' or represented in conjunction with diversity hiring or recruitment. Events were typically attended by a marginal amount of employers who previously had experience or knowledge with disability already in their workplace.

This study scratches the surface of information and knowledge that has been forming for several decades among the business community. Legislation and best practices will only assist us so far. The nature of 'disability' is complicated and rich in its historical context of oppression and marginalization.

The problem goes beyond inaccessibility of a physical nature and lies with the larger problem of shifting attitudes and the places of engagement. We need to continue to dialogue, share information and learn from each other.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The York South Simcoe Training & Adjustment Board has identified “Marginalized Workforce: Person with Disabilities as a trend in York Region in the 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009 Trends, Opportunities and Priorities (TOP) Reports. The YSSTAB continues to identify that the lack of knowledge of disabilities in the business world is still very prevalent and impacts hiring practices and corporate culture. Increased collaboration amongst community partners who support job seekers with disabilities is required. Supports for job seekers and employers are also needed.

The intent of the project was to ‘open a new dialogue’ about disability in the workplace. It was based on the statistical fact that job seekers with disabilities are underutilized and an unknown source to the average business owner in York Region and the assumption that most business owners or corporations are not familiar with the AODA legislation and how it will impact their business, their customer service or their hiring practices.

This Employer Community Study was conducted on behalf of the York South Simcoe Training and Adjustment Board. The goal of the project was to bridge the gap between local employers and job seekers with disabilities to identify areas of focus for future enhancement and opportunities for the improvement and growth in hiring of job seekers with disabilities.

The consultant contacted medium size employers from a variety of sectors throughout York Region to discuss and identify gaps that exist regarding the hiring and retention of job seekers with disabilities in York Region.

## **Community Support for the Study**

Any social change and context requires collaboration. Over the past two years we have been able to see an increase and evidence of community collaboration. Small informal groups and interested parties are changing the appearance of the local community by working together towards a common goal.

The development of the “One Voice Networking” group in 2008 is an example of 20 like-minded agencies that are working towards common goals and inclusive practices to integrate individuals with disabilities into the workforce.

Community support for the study and community was obtained from ‘One Voice’ membership and the YSSTAB Board of Directors and supported by the findings and recommendations of the TDSB GAP Analysis.

This community study was supported in principle by the ‘One Voice’ group and its committee as an area of communication that was needed prior to the project consultant completing any on-site interviews or business consultations and the development of the participation documents.

Primarily the 'One Voice' Membership was involved at the on-set of the project with assisting in what core areas of interest/subjects the interviews should include for the employer community.

'One Voice' has a Vision and Mission Statement that is relevant to the study and follows the social principles of dignity, respect and inclusion for all. Their vision is "The inclusion of all individuals in the workforce, creating a society that embraces people of all abilities." Their mission statement is "A collaboration of individuals who champion best practices in serving the needs of job seekers with disabilities."

One Voice is made up of various members of the York Region Community who advocate for People with Disabilities in York Region, Bradford and West Gwillimbury.

The Gap Analysis on Employment Accessibility for York Region, Bradford, West Gwillimbury was conducted by the Toronto District School Board from September 2008 to January 2009 to identify the barriers as well as impact on persons with disabilities in accessing and maintaining employment from the perspective of all stakeholders with a focus on employment services, training and skills training and work experience in the community.

Recommendations by participants will provide future programming input for the Ontario Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities and will be a starting point for the community to use for capacity building and action planning.

## Definition of Disability

The definition of disability used for the purpose of the study was the same definition used by the Ontario Human Rights Code:

- a. any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device;
- b. a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;
- c. a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;
- d. a mental disorder; or
- e. an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 (“handicap”).

Through out the study we were able to acknowledge that job seekers with disabilities include a cross section of skilled and unskilled workers from all neighbourhoods and communities regardless of their race, gender or ethnicity. They are plagued with unemployment or under-employment in areas that are below their skill set or potential.

## Research Methodology

The research methodology used for this community study was community based, ‘participatory’ research. Methods used included phone consultation, formal participant interviews, print surveys and individual face-to-face consultation meetings. Surveys were available in alternative format, and interview questions were made available in large print versions. Accessibility accommodations (such as sign language interpreters, assistive devices, etc) in relation to the business respondents over the duration of this community study were made available upon request.

The project utilized an “exclusive” invitation outlining the benefits of participating in the community study. Participants from the business community were directly solicited by YSSTAB staff and the project consultant using phone, email and in person as well as networking with local chambers of commerce and researching public business directories.

Potential respondents were pre-screened and then sent out an invitation to register for their individual free consultation with the project consultant. A modified version of the invitation was also used on the YSSTAB website to help gain interest in the community project.

**Benefits of participation outlined to the participants included:**

- The opportunity to increase their understanding of disability on a personal and corporate level.
- The ability to be better prepared to consider their customer base when marketing their products or services, likely leading to enhanced customer service and therefore higher consumer dollars and customer loyalty.
- The ability to expand their recruitment (if desired) to persons with disabilities, accessing community supports and interventions available (lowering their hiring costs and increasing their retention due to post hiring support available in the York Region area – job coaches, on-the-job training subsidies, job maintenance support, etc.).
- The advanced notice of legislation changes impacting their business and industry, including up to date information on the AODA, their obligations under the AODA, the provision of an accessibility audit checklist and other related resources.

Interviews with local Employers started over the phone in the pre-screening stage to determine the subject matter to be discussed during the face-to-face consultation.

Surveys were conducted before the on-site interviews to determine areas of current knowledge and areas that needed to be addressed.

On site one to two hour consultations were held with each employer to discuss their disability knowledge base, diversity hiring and recruitment practices (if any), and the legislated Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

Post interview surveys were completed after the interview to determine the extent of the increase in knowledge and level of comfort that employers now had on the subject of job seekers with disabilities.

**Short-term objectives of the study included:**

- Developing an open and candid dialogue with company decision makers regarding hiring and integrating disabled job seekers into their employee workforce.
- Determining areas of opportunities for employment that could be potentially developed for job seekers with disabilities.
- To determine employers readiness or awareness to comply to the legislated AODA legislation.
- Determining their readiness and ability to increase sensitivity and education to their workforce regarding customers with disabilities in order to meet their obligation under the AODA customer service standards and regulation 429/07, therefore increasing potential for serious consideration of a more diverse labour pool reflective of their customer base.
- Identifying further actions required for future labour market projects with a disability mandate that could reach a wider York Region community in a cost effective manner.
- Determining resources to be made available to the business community at large as York Region works collaboratively to become more inclusive (as per the Regions current Accessibility Plan).
- To dispel myths such as the “cost” to hiring and retaining a person with a disability.

**Long-term Objectives Included:**

- To enhance communication, develop and increase communications among business contacts, business leaders or decision makers with service agencies that support job seekers with disabilities.
- To enhance entry points of employment among York Region businesses for job seekers with disabilities.

## Participant Criteria

The majority of the businesses in York Region are considered small to medium enterprises (less than 20 employees and 20 – 99 employees). The community project approached and included businesses from various types of industries so that a cross-section of information could be extracted from several different sectors that may be relevant to future diversity hiring and recruitment for the region.

Criteria for pre-screening suitable participants in the employer community study included:

- Their desire to have a strong interest in social change.
- A desire to work towards being an “equal opportunity” employer.
- Physically located within York Region boundaries.
- Having a staff of 30 employees or more.
- Not having ‘championed’ any known past disability events or community strategies in York Region via other community agencies or supports.
- Not having a diversity specialist or current accessibility plan or advisor on staff.
- Companies that represented a variety of sectors.

By using the above criteria we were able to focus on some larger employers that did not have resources already in place or readily available in response to disability in the workplace. Only one employer group interviewed had a plan in place in response to the customer service standards and regulations for the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

All participants were informed that a final public report would be made available to the community, but that individual employee names of participants from various businesses would be withheld and remain in strict confidence with the funding agency, York South Simcoe Adjustment and Training Board (YSSTAB).

### **York Region Employers that participated in the study included:**

- CHATS: Community Home Assistance for Seniors, a community support service agency (Aurora Location).
- St. Andrews College: An internationally recognized and private historical education institution (Aurora Location).
- Power Stream: A newly merged utility company that is municipally owned/operated (Vaughan Location).
- State Farm: A national insurance company and industry leader (Aurora Location – Corporate Office).

- Seneca College Faculty of Workforce Development Unit: A publicly assisted community college conducting a training/education and employment assessment centre (Newmarket Location).
- Academy of Learning: A private career college conducting training and employment related, self-directed services (Newmarket Location).
- Comport Communications: A private internet technology company that has customers internationally, providing electronic data and E-commerce solutions to companies around the world (Aurora Location – Corporate office).

Solicitation of employer participants took place during the first 3-4 weeks of the project. It was directly impacted by the announcement of a formal recession during the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of the project. The recession became every employer's main focus and the project had 3 employers negate their earlier verbal commitment to participate in a consultation for the study at the time. Despite this set back the project moved forward with the other participants.

From the on-set of the project the consultant had anticipated concern from employers about confidentiality or proprietary information from businesses but this was not apparent during consultations or interviews with the respondents. No respondents required or asked for a formal confidentiality business document. (Although one was available by request)

## Areas of Discussion

Through out the pre-survey participation and pre-interview phone conversations, the consultant was able to identify the topics and subject matter to be discussed prior to employers on-site consultations.

- Most employers have considered diversity but were not currently aware of what their individual companies were doing to specifically recruit applicants from a diverse labour pool that included 'disability' nor could they explain readily if they were an "Equal Opportunity" employer as some of them had advertised on their websites or business literature.
- Most had minimal or no knowledge of the legislated Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act .
- Employers equated "accessibility in the workplace" to a limited definition of physical access into a building or environment, not necessarily including a wheelchair accessible washroom or other areas of accessibility; including access to information, print communications in alternate formats, accessible website functions etc.
- Most employers expressed concerns regarding the ability to integrate someone with a disability into the workplace and the stereotype and assumption of it being someone in a wheelchair in addition to the other stereotyped concern that disability may somehow compromise business practice(s).
- Most associated disability to negative word associations such as challenging, costly and injury.
- Not a lot of thought has been given to retention issues or succession planning for their business or industry.

## Face-to-Face Consultations Identified

- 90% had not thought about diversity recruitment that includes specific recruitment for persons with disabilities but instead relate diversity with ethnicity and country of origin.
- Local employers are only moderately interested in how they can increase their hiring practice or recruitment strategies to better include job seekers with disabilities (\*Note – moderate/lower interest is likely based on the state of the economy and current recession. It is hoped that interest would increase and be higher as the business and economy grows and recovers from the current recession and hiring needs increase in the future).
- Most had minimal or no knowledge of the legislated Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and expressed concern that they do not know where to find the information that is relevant to their business and that the government is not marketing this Act appropriately or widely.

- There was an identified need for corporations and businesses to have resources or tools available to them re: appropriate use of language and terms for disabilities (Resources were provided accordingly through AODA web resources).
- Majority had minimal disability experience or knowledge other than their own personal experiences via friends, family or colleagues and that it was usually related to workers returning to the workforce post-injury or accident.
- Individual 'disability' knowledge through the above channels of family and friends was still very minimal and related to crisis health situations only such as a heart attack or stroke, in relation to the aging workforce and did not encompass or include 'disability' in general as outlined by the definition of disability used by the Ontario Human Rights Code.
- 80% equated "accessibility in the workplace" to a limited definition of physical access into a building or environment and that there is a huge need for employer education to think of access beyond the wheelchair symbol and to think about accessibility in terms of communication, access to information, access to employment and the ability to participate in communities through work and recreation, etc.
- None of the participants have interviewed a deaf person, yet some acknowledged that some of them believed they had deaf customers but were unsure if accommodations for the deaf were in place. Only 2 of the respondents had teletypewriter services for the deaf readily available.
- None of the respondents could confirm that they had policies in place with regards to what occurs during disruption of services to customers with disabilities (an area of compliance under the AODA as of January 2010).
- That most related disability to negative word associations such as challenging, costly and injury (before participation) versus positive word associations of freedom, ability and inclusion (post participation).
- That only 3 of the 7 businesses interviewed were concerned about retention issues or interested in succession planning for their business or industry.
- Areas of concern from a retention perspective identified were minimal and specific to certain industries that anticipate a high retirement rate over the next 10 years
- Personal knowledge was gained by the respondents by participating in the study and consultations based on their survey results.

## Feedback from Participants

In relation to being “Politically Correct”:

- In every interaction of the study there were areas of concern that respondents were worried about being politically correct, using the right use of language and words for disability areas discussed
- There was a ‘hidden’ resistance during the on-set of the project by the way people responded to voicemails or emails unsure if they would commit to participate, inquiring if they would be videotaped or audio taped during their discussion with the consultant
- Three respondents from two different employers asked if they would be provided with a ‘disability’ report card and were concerned that they were going to ‘fail’ their interview/business consultation
- Some respondents felt the need to have others present to ‘witness’ the interview and consultation in order to feel comfortable in participating in the study. These included extra respondents that varied from various departments including Business Management, Corporate Legal or Human Resources.

## Results of Employer Interviews

Through out the study we were able to determine that there is room for growth and improvement in 3 key areas.

- Developing a skilled workforce among the job seeker pool in York Region through the use of but not limited to the use of essential skills.
- Increasing knowledge among the business community about disability
- Streamlining a point of access for information for both job seekers and the employer community regarding resources, services available, etc

Recommendations for Further Action in the Community addressing the key areas for growth and improvement include:

- Providing opportunities for job seekers with disabilities to access Essential Skills training and/or assessment to help determine job readiness within the current job market
- Improving ways for job seekers to market themselves and gain exposure using local newspapers for the community at large (Approach York Region Media Group about highlighting a Candidate of the Week similar to Athlete of the Week and Volunteer/ Citizen of the Week)

- Creating and acknowledging opportunities for work sampling for job seekers among the business community via job trials, work co-op placements, short-term learning contracts, etc.
- Determining sources of funding and assistance for training or upgrading skills for job seekers who require skill enhancement or job change due to changes in the current labour market and/or their individual work experience/related change in disability/health status, etc
- Providing the business community through website access of various templates or samples of best practices, including sample diversity policies, accessibility checklists, links for resources, etc.
- Compile and distribute an updated print publication that is specific to York Region of available resources and services in conjunction with disability and specialized employment services, including recruitment options.
- Develop and distribute written materials (tip sheet) about BOTH the job seekers and employers right and obligations about workplace accommodation. Most accommodations can be put in place with minimal money spent, but there is a current disconnect about how a job seeker is required to request this from an employer.
- Developing a learning or knowledge series to engage the business community with core disability information – Business obligations under the current AODA could serve as a further incentive to get them involved.
- The development of an “Accessibility Award” program or community acknowledgement to recognize businesses that are inclusive and making extra efforts to create an inclusive workforce in York Region. (Several programs exist in other areas of the province)

## Evaluation of Methodology and Materials used for the Study

Materials prepared by the consultant and used through out the study were easy to read and attempted to follow plain language guidelines. Additional documents were available in large print and used as a sample for employers to view but no formal requests for large print or alternative formats were made.

Employers received documents with enthusiasm and appeared to be candid and authentic in their responses. Methodology used appeared to be welcomed and accepted by the majority of the respondents, likely due to the fact as it appeared casual and informative and outside of their regular business practices.

Improvements could have been made with the use of the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) print materials. It is recommended for future studies to re-create some of these documents internally into a more user friendly format versus just dispersing the prepared ones available on the MCSS website as some employers/respondents found them confusing and too lengthy.

The Ministry is currently developing ‘user friendly’ tools and booklets but these were not available at the time of the study.

Through out the study we were also able to acknowledge the various “Intersections of Participation” and related discourse experienced. Primarily these were the areas of concern that arose during the study and the completion of the on-site interviews and business consultations.

The majority of the discourse experienced during these “intersections” included these 5 areas:

- Concern over the consultant’s role,
- Concern from individual respondents of their ability to be politically correct and acting appropriately during the meetings and interviews,
- Concern on behalf of the “business” organization of them being inappropriate or non-compliant or even charged under the new AODA legislation,
- Additional specific areas of concern were in relation to legislation such as the Human Rights Code, the Ontario Building Code, Employment Standards Act, Customer Service Standards and regulations for the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and finally,
- How the information being discussed would be used in the community.

## Labour Market Opportunities for Job Seekers with Disabilities Identified

- It was very apparent that there are a number of small fissures for developing skills and potential for job seekers with disabilities within the local labour market. However, there were concerns from some of the respondents of the number of the agencies approaching companies to hire people with disabilities that have no skills or limited skills for their particular industry.
- Companies want to be inclusive but do not want to change the way they do business. There were potential opportunities identified in bi-lingual customer service, general office and personal support worker roles to name a few.
- There is a substantial need for personal support workers that speak 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> languages in York Region due to the growing diverse clientele. It was discussed that there may be an opportunity for recruitment of persons with disabilities into this industry and that it should be explored further at a later date. The need for staff in the northern areas of York Region was also discussed. Individuals with disabilities where their disability is not of a physical nature but are related to other senses may be able to be integrated into the personal support worker industry. (For example – an individual with a mental health disability who is stable and able to work and is seeking job re-entry or a person who has a vision or hearing loss that can be easily accommodated by personal hand held devices, etc. amplified in a one on one setting, etc).
- Personal support work may also be appropriate for individuals who can't/prefer not to work long steady 8 hour shifts and don't mind working split shifts or shared shifts for 4 hours, or shared among different locations, etc. The needs change according to the customer/clientele and level of support required.
- There was also an emerging need identified for people with disabilities to be better integrated as potential employees into employment related services and private training as the need for sensitivity and assistive devices continues to grow in this area due to the diverse population in York Region. Staff should be representative of the people that are being supported.
- Customer service and retail based jobs continue to appear to be the majority of work available in the York Region area, due to the retail based economy.

## Summary

The consultant was able to identify that there was a moderate interest or absolute need of how to recruit or enhance their current efforts to include persons with disabilities in a concentrated effort and an acknowledgement from all respondents that there was ample room for improvement. Having local employers self-identify and accept that there is a need, should be considered the first step and milestone towards inclusion.

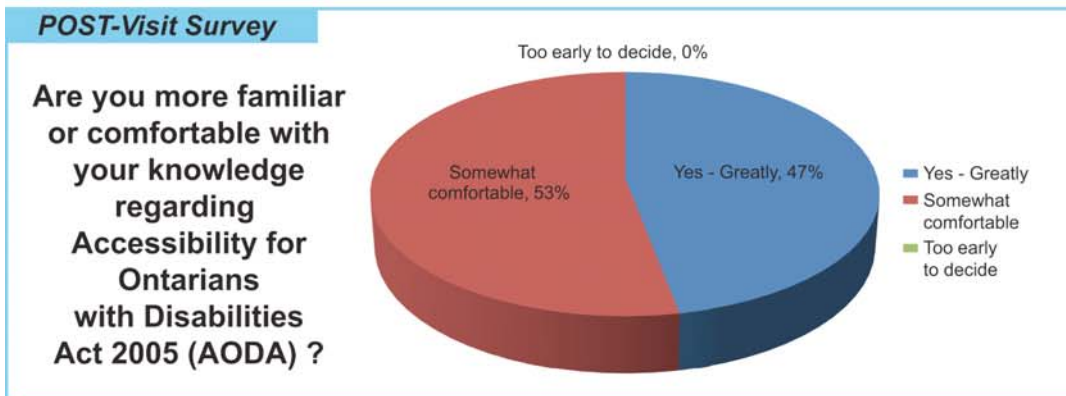
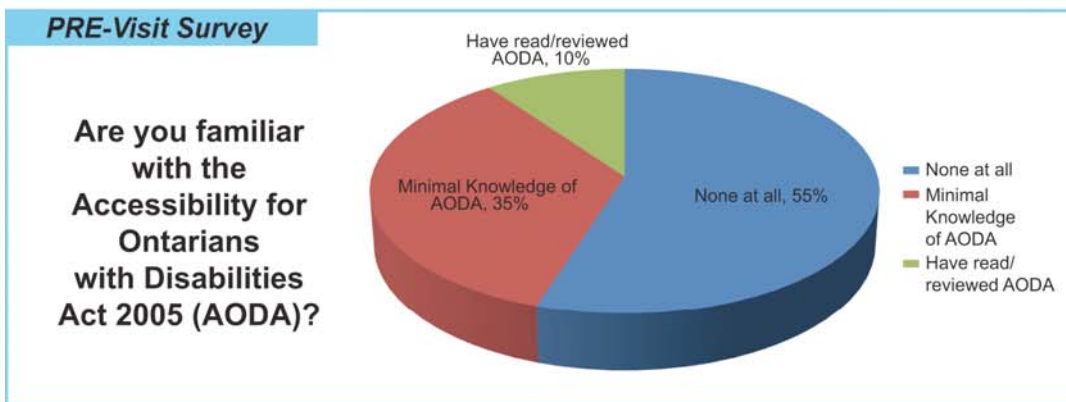
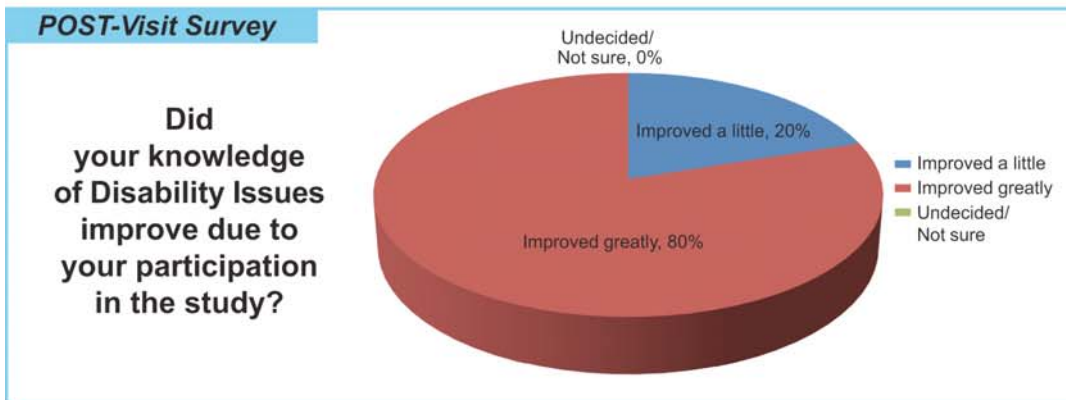
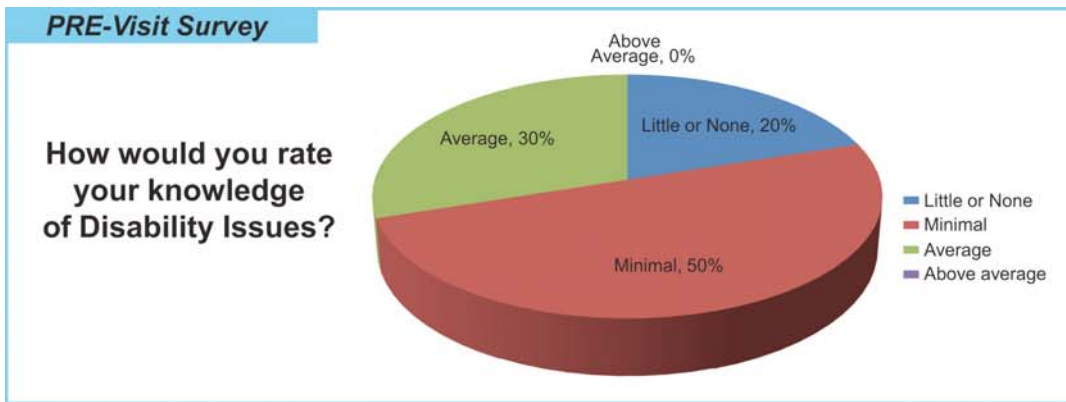
In order to work towards community inclusion in the workforce there must be collaboration from 3 key stakeholders/groups. Stakeholders represented should include the business leaders/decision makers, the individual job seekers with disabilities and the agencies that advocate or provide employment supports to job seekers with disabilities. Essential skills are crucial in the workplace. The labour market is competitive and business leaders want employees that are current and ready to be integrated with up to date knowledge and marketable skills. It is important for job seekers to acknowledge this and know their skill levels and their 'value' in the work place in addition to service providers being able to represent their clientele in a true manner that is relevant to the industry that the job seeker is interested in pursuing.

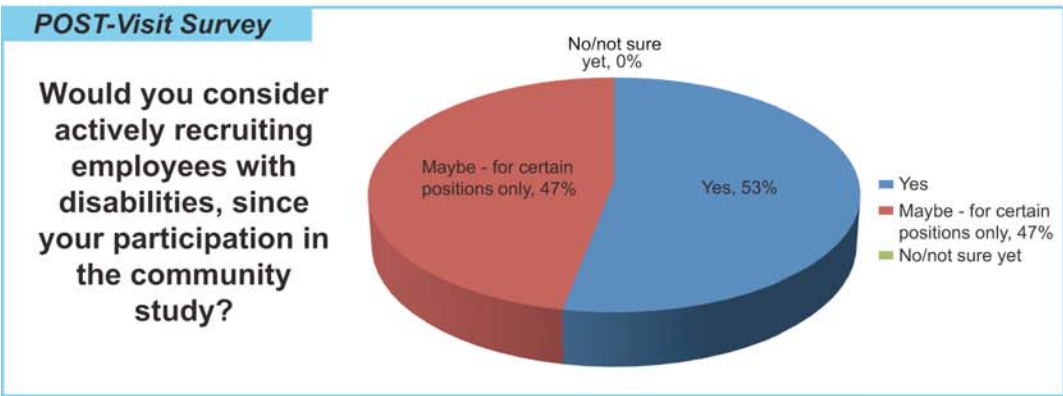
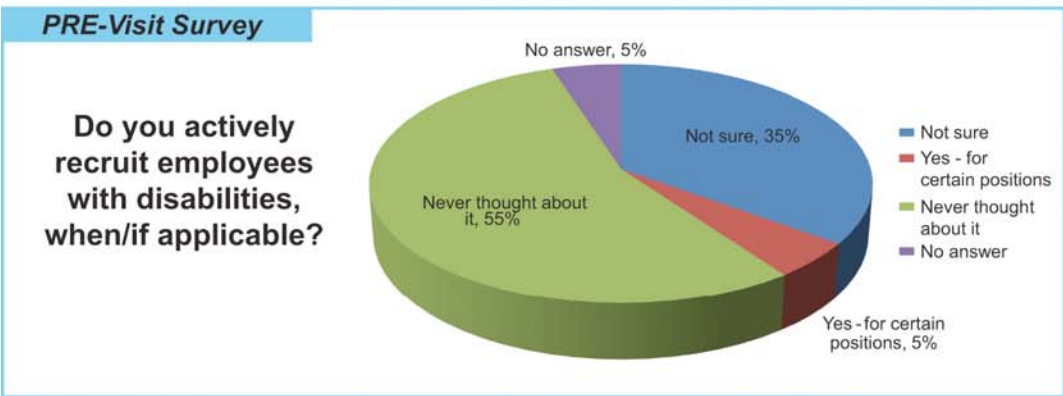
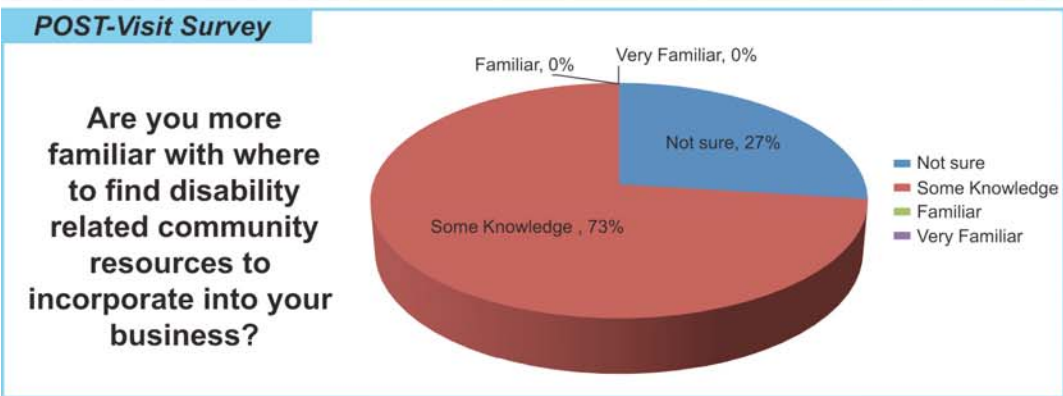
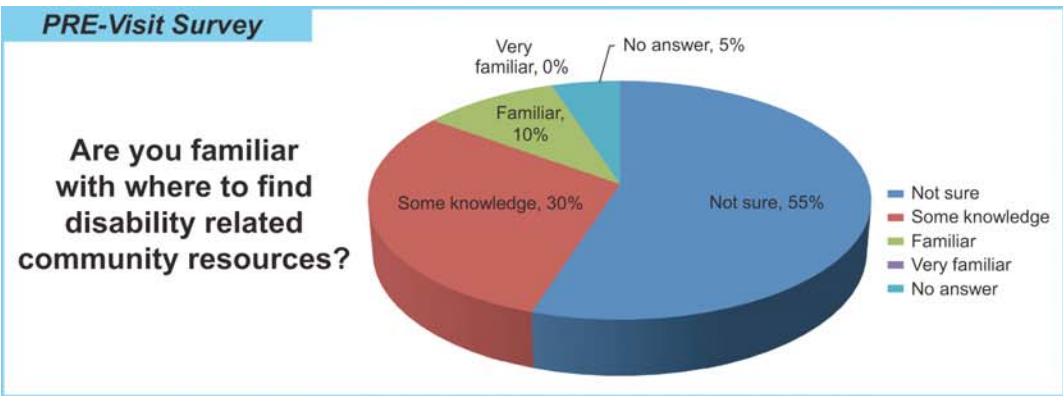
Due to changes in technology and corporate thinking, gone are the days where someone could be hired as the 'token' disabled employee. Quite often this meant someone was hired to be a 'helper' and was designated to help run the mailroom or assist with manual office procedures, which have now been replaced with newer technology. These changes allow us to progress and benefit as a society, and re-think diversity hiring.

One of the guiding principles for diverse hiring and inclusion should include 'equal value for equal pay' when it comes to hiring persons with disabilities. Skills should be first and foremost.

All stakeholders involved have rights but they also have responsibilities to be accountable for themselves. We can't depend on legislation or words on a page to make things right. We all benefit as a society when we work towards inclusion.

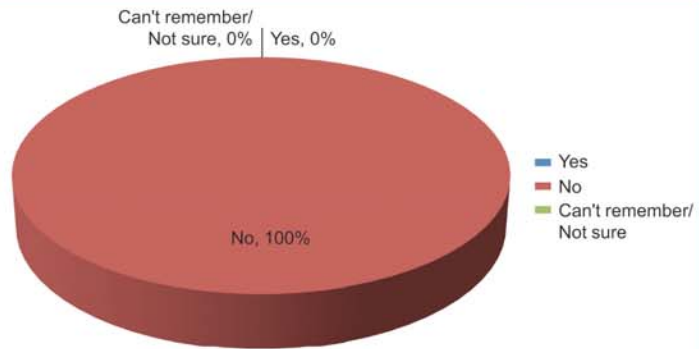
APPENDIX: PRE-Visit and POST-Visit Participant Survey Results





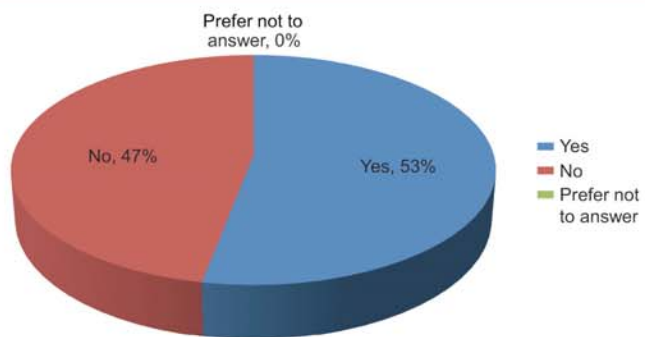
**PRE-Visit Survey**

**Have you ever experienced interviewing a deaf person?**



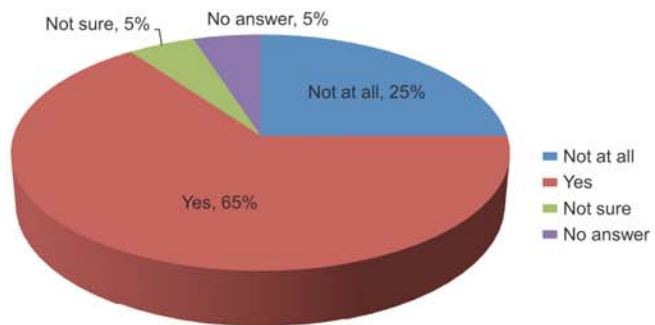
**POST-Visit Survey**

**Do you feel more prepared if you had to interview a deaf person?**



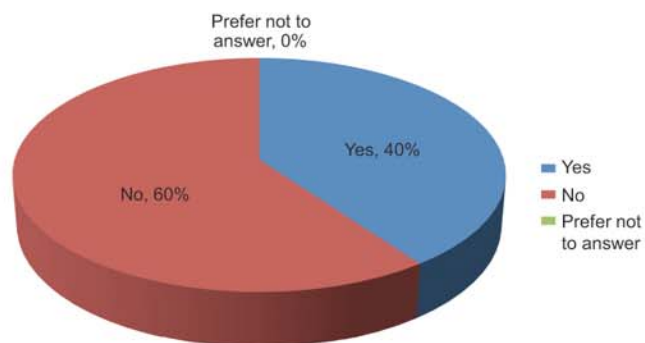
**PRE-Visit Survey**

**Are you concerned about employee retention?**



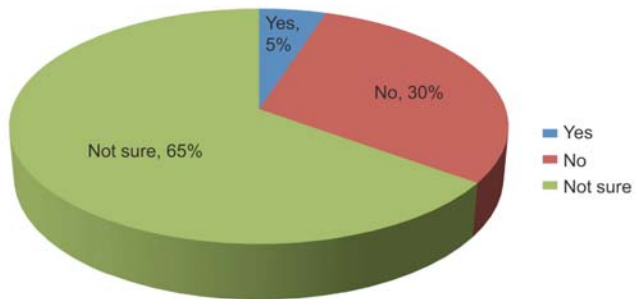
**POST-Visit Survey**

**Did participating in the community study help with ideas regarding employee retention?**



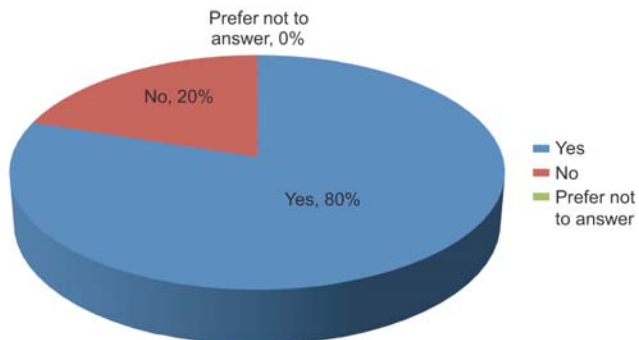
**PRE-Visit Survey**

**Do you have an accessibility plan for your business location?**



**POST-Visit Survey**

**Do you have concerns about meeting accessibility guidelines for Ontario businesses over the next few years?**



## Initial Recommendations for Individual Accessibility Assessment

<b>Respondent A</b>		
<i>Area of Concern</i>	<i>Barrier Identified</i>	<i>Potential Solution</i>
<b>Physical Space &amp; Built Environments</b>	No automatic door opener for wheelchair access into centre	Apply for funding to improve access
	Table with chairs and newspapers potential hazard for those with mobility issues	Remind resource staff to place chairs in and keep area clear of any clutter etc.
<b>Attitudinal</b>	None identified – staff are knowledgeable of several disabilities due to the nature of the work	Improve capacities of staff via professional development opportunities as the need arises
	Goal to work towards would be recruitment of people with disabilities for their labour pool	(ie. Assistive device training, sign language basics, etc.)
<b>Communications</b>	Availability of large print and alternate format of documents or resource area not available	Large print signage to request assistance if needed for accessing print information/ alternate format, etc.
<b>Recruitment &amp; Retention</b>	Not discussed as HR function is located at another location	N/A
<b>Customer Service</b>	No specific customer service training available for sensitivity or awareness	Develop or purchase training for staff to become more aware as per AODA compliance for Jan 2010
<b>Technology</b>	No additional accessibility devices available in the resource centre	Purchase of Zoomtext or electronic magnifier system for a designated resource computer
	Limited technology available but would be considered on an 'as needed basis'	Recommend the use of W3 accessibility standards for their website in addition to consulting with CNIB for an accessibility web audit to test current level of access

**Additional Notes:** Area was well lit and had sufficient natural light. Staff were knowledgeable of several disability types and welcoming at the front desk. Reception desk had alternate counter level for individuals with mobility issues/wheelchair users. A table close by was also available and used to assist clients with low literacy or agility issues to complete forms, etc. Teletypewriter (TTY) for the deaf is available on site and available to all clients. Chairs and couch area available for respite/relief for those with agility or fatigue issues.

## Initial Recommendations for Individual Accessibility Assessment

<b>Respondent B</b>		
<i>Area of Concern</i>	<i>Barrier Identified</i>	<i>Potential Solution</i>
<b>Physical Space &amp; Built Environments</b>	<p>Locked doors – due to safety of seniors with Alzheimers, may cause problems for those with agility of mobility issues</p> <p>Ramp space – no clear markings</p> <p>Reception Counter has no wheelchair height counter space</p>	<p>Add signage to an alternate door or indicate that a volunteer is available to assist with unlocking the door and opening for those with agility or mobility issues</p> <p>Needs to be re-painted</p> <p>When/if counter is replaced, incorporate universal design principles to add a sit/stand component of the desk</p>
<b>Attitudinal</b>	<p>None identified – staff are knowledgeable of several disabilities</p> <p>Goal to work towards would be recruitment of people with disabilities for their labour pool</p>	<p>Virtual job fair/info session for agencies supporting individuals with disabilities</p>
<b>Communications</b>	<p>Availability of large print and alternate format</p>	<p>For their IT dept and communications dept to increase their materials</p>
<b>Recruitment &amp; Retention</b>	<p>No diversity policy for HR to use</p> <p>Retention an issue for PSW staff</p>	<p>Develop diversity policy and recruit job seekers with disabilities</p> <p>Offer incentives for staff to recruit other staff</p>
<b>Customer Service</b>	<p>No specific customer service or sensitivity training available for AODA customer service with persons with disabilities</p>	<p>Develop or purchase sensitivity training to meet compliance for AODA</p>
<b>Technology</b>	<p>Not known</p>	<p>Recommend the use of W3 accessibility standards for their website in addition to consulting with CNIB for an accessibility web audit to test current level of access</p>

**Additional Notes:** Area was well lit and had sufficient natural light. There were lower light switches and accessible fire pull stations placed through out the area visited. Accessible parking was available. Curb cut to ramp and main door could be better marked and reminders to couriers to not block the ramped area of the side walk would be beneficial.

## Initial Recommendations for Individual Accessibility Assessment

<b>Respondent C</b>		
<i>Area of Concern</i>	<i>Barrier Identified</i>	<i>Potential Solution</i>
<b>Physical Space &amp; Built Environments</b>	<p>Old Building has minimal accessibility features</p> <p>Ramp space and parking – no clear markings</p> <p>Reception Counter has no wheelchair height counter space</p>	<p>*Moving Aug 15/09 approx. New building will be more accessible under current OBC design guidelines</p> <p>Needs to be re-painted</p> <p>When/if counter is replaced, incorporate universal design principles to add a sit/stand component of the desk</p>
<b>Attitudinal</b>	None identified – front-line staff have superior customer service skills due to international customer base and several language barriers, etc.	Opportunities be provided for capacity building to increase disability based knowledge for expanding services
<b>Communications</b>	Availability of large print and alternate format not readily available	Develop a request only strategy among departments
<b>Recruitment &amp; Retention</b>	<p>No diversity policy for HR to use, no specific HR department</p> <p>Retention not an issue – growing company</p>	<p>Develop diversity policy and recruit job seekers with disabilities</p> <p>Offer incentives for staff to recruit other staff</p>
<b>Customer Service</b>	No specific customer service or sensitivity training available for AODA customer service with persons with disabilities	Develop or purchase sensitivity training to meet compliance for AODA
<b>Technology</b>	Not known	Recommend the use of W3 accessibility standards for their website in addition to consulting with CNIB for an accessibility web audit to test current level of access

**Additional Notes:** Current building that is being used is an older building and flow of work space has several physical challenges due to the age of the building and the current use of space. Interaction with the public is minimal, primarily walk-in inquiries. A move for the company is pending for August 15, 2009 where additional physical access has been developed into the new space. Respondent has approximately 40+ employees and is currently under expansion. The nature of their work is IT related which has stressful working conditions. No EAP program or work/life balance program was identified to help staff deal with work related stress/employee wellness.

## Initial Recommendations for Individual Accessibility Assessment

<b>Respondent D</b>		
<i>Area of Concern</i>	<i>Barrier Identified</i>	<i>Potential Solution</i>
<b>Physical Space &amp; Built Environments</b>	<p>Snow removal in ramp area and designated parking needs more diligence</p> <p>Has automatic door openers but were not operational the day of the visit</p> <p>++*Newer building, has excellent accessibility features</p> <p>Reception Counter has no wheelchair height counter space that is 'assigned' or readily available</p>	<p>Indicate in RFP process or with contracts with vendors the importance of the accessibility, etc.</p> <p>Remind maintenance to periodically check panel operation systems</p> <p>Improve signage for customers with mobility issues of where the counter is and have chairs or respite area set up close by</p>
<b>Attitudinal</b>	<p>No specific barriers identified</p> <p>++Re: Wellness and work life balance, resources are provided to encourage staff to maintain wellness in the workplace, stress management etc in addition to having an occupational health nurse available</p>	<p>Continually build capacities of staff by offering resources and opportunities to become more aware and exposed to disability and accessibility issues</p>
<b>Communications</b>	<p>Availability of large print and alternate format not readily available</p> <p>Not known if they have a TTY available for emergencies or communication from deaf community</p>	<p>Develop a 'request only' strategy among departments for large print or alternative format requests</p> <p>Management team to formulate requests for sign language or assistive devices. A system in place for disruption of service notices, etc.</p>
<b>Recruitment &amp; Retention</b>	<p>No specific policy or strategy in place that recruits persons with disabilities or addresses accommodation request pre-hire for the interview stage, etc</p> <p>Minimal concern for retention – volume of retirees will be over the next 5-10 years</p>	<p>Encourage sourcing sample policies from HRPAO for diversity integration</p>
<b>Customer Service</b>	<p>No specific customer service or sensitivity training available for AODA customer service with persons with disabilities</p>	<p>Develop or purchase sensitivity training to meet compliance for AODA</p>
<b>Technology</b>	<p>Not known</p> <p>No TTY available on site</p>	<p>Recommend the use of W3 accessibility standards for their website in addition to consulting with CNIB for an accessibility web audit to test current level of access</p> <p>Recommend buying a TTY</p>

**Additional Notes:** Newer building with several accessibility features. Ample parking and well lit, etc. Has a large volume of clientele due to the merger of smaller utility companies into one company. Due to this they likely have a high number of customers with disabilities within their client pool. Awareness training and sensitivity training when dealing with customers with disabilities will be crucial to the AODA compliance and success of the corporation. Further discussion should occur within management re: their responses to AODA compliance, meeting customer service standards, their response process to interruptions in service and their feedback or complaint process.

## Initial Recommendations for Individual Accessibility Assessment

<b>Respondent E</b>		
<i>Area of Concern</i>	<i>Barrier Identified</i>	<i>Potential Solution</i>
<b>Physical Space &amp; Built Environments</b>	No automatic door opener for wheelchair access washroom	Apply for funding to improve access
	Table with chairs and newspapers potential hazard for those with mobility issues	Remind resource staff to place chairs in and keep area clear of any clutter etc.
	Ramp space in parking lot – no clear markings	Needs to be painted, clearly identified
	No curb cut where main doors are located	Request curb cut for parking area
<b>Attitudinal</b>	None identified – staff are knowledgeable of several disabilities due to the nature of the work	Improve capacities of staff via professional development opportunities as the need arises
	Goal to work towards would be recruitment of people with disabilities for their labour pool	(I.e. Assistive device training, sign language basics, etc.)
<b>Communications</b>	Availability of large print and alternate format of documents or resource area not available	Large print signage to request assistance if needed for accessing print information/ alternate format, etc.
<b>Recruitment &amp; Retention</b>	Not discussed as HR function is located at another campus	N/A
<b>Customer Service</b>	All staff to be trained in the summer of 2009 for specific sensitivity and awareness of individuals with disabilities	N/A
<b>Technology</b>	No additional accessibility devices available in the resource centre	Purchase of Zoomtext or electronic magnifier system for a designated resource computer  Recommend the use of W3 accessibility standards for their website in addition to consulting with CNIB for an accessibility web audit to test current level of access
	Limited technology available on website to use in conjunction with screen readers, magnifiers, voice software, etc.	Recommend a focus group with users of various software to test website and make further recommendations, etc.

**Additional Notes:** Area was well lit and had sufficient natural light. Staff were knowledgeable of several disability types and welcoming at the front desk. Reception desk had alternate counter level for individuals with mobility issues/wheelchair users. Exterior doors were automatic with appropriate panel type push buttons to open. Chairs available if needed at the front for those with agility or mobility disabilities. Respondent intends on conducting customer service training for sensitivity/staff development. Teletypewriter (TTY) for the deaf is available on site (behind the counter) to communicate with the deaf. Clients have access when needed to the TTY, as per management/staff.

## Initial Recommendations for Individual Accessibility Assessment

<b>Respondent F</b>		
<i>Area of Concern</i>	<i>Barrier Identified</i>	<i>Potential Solution</i>
<b>Physical Space &amp; Built Environments</b>	<p>Increase visibility of wheelchair designated parking</p> <p>Ramp space – no clear markings</p> <p>Reception Counter has no wheelchair height counter space</p> <p>Nursing area/Student Infirmary not accessible</p>	<p>Increase signage, add to brick wall for north west corner lot</p> <p>Needs to be re-painted, painted yellow to identify curb cut/grading for entrance area</p> <p>When/if counter is replaced, incorporate universal design principles to add a sit/stand component of the desk</p> <p>Re-locate to a more accessible location on campus with a no-step entrance</p>
<b>Attitudinal</b>	<p>Front desk staff – unsure of how to assist and unsure of where to turn wheelchair door back on</p> <p>(*Door not functioning day of visit, cleaning staff had turned off by accident)</p>	<p>Encourage regular maintenance checks of wheelchair doors and include awareness training for staff development</p>
<b>Communications</b>	<p>No availability of large print or alternate format documents</p>	<p>Communications/corporate dept to develop as needed</p>
<b>Recruitment &amp; Retention</b>	<p>No specific diversity policy for HR to use</p> <p>No goal to incorporate persons with disabilities into their labour pool</p> <p>*Retention was not an issue</p>	<p>Develop diversity policy and recruit job seekers with disabilities</p> <p>Incorporate community opportunities if desired for job trials, community inclusion, co-op students, etc.</p>
<b>Customer Service</b>	<p>No specific customer service or sensitivity training available for AODA customer service with persons with disabilities</p>	<p>Purchase training to meet compliance for AODA January 2010 deadline</p>
<b>Technology</b>	<p>Not known for public – student technology available as required via individual laptops</p>	<p>Recommend the use of W3 accessibility standards for their website in addition to consulting with CNIB for an accessibility web audit to test current level of access</p>

**Additional Notes:** Location was unique as it is a sprawling private school campus with several buildings that have been primarily built between 1926 and 1960. Elevator was available but would require assistance for operation. (a key is required)

Athletic Center where a majority of public functions occur has no automatic door. The use of student volunteers to act as greeters or door openers for the public is strongly recommended.

Theatre area is under construction and will be renovated over the next 5 years. Recommendations for this area include an accessible wheelchair seating area (by the removal of theatre seats or rows) and the purchase of an amplified listening system to accommodate sound/listening devices for hearing aid or hard of hearing users, etc. Having sign language interpreters available for certain public performances would also be recommended or offered by request.

When renovating areas of various buildings the respondent is encouraged to seek out contractors familiar with universal design and ‘visit-ability’ principles and to add this to any RFP proposal outlines to encourage full accessibility and inclusion. Certain historical areas of the campus will be exempt from pending accessibility legislation. Staff should be encouraged to develop an accessibility working group or task force to meet compliance issues in a reasonable timeframe.

### Initial Recommendations for Individual Accessibility Assessment

<b>Respondent G</b>		
<i>Area of Concern</i>	<i>Barrier Identified</i>	<i>Potential Solution</i>
<b>Physical Space &amp; Built Environments</b>	Snow removal in ramp area and designated parking needs more diligence ++*Newer building, has excellent accessibility features ++Reception Counter has no wheelchair height counter space	Indicate in RFP process or with contracts with vendors the importance of the accessibility service standards, etc.
<b>Attitudinal</b>	Offers accommodation for hiring process, additional resources may be needed to shift ‘attitudes’ re: what positions may be applicable for diversity hiring (May be limiting to entry level customer service, mail room/imaging, etc.)	Opportunities be provided for capacity building to increase disability based knowledge for expanding recruitment to include <u>skilled</u> job seekers with disabilities
<b>Communications</b>	Availability of large print and alternate format not readily available	Develop a request only strategy among departments
<b>Recruitment &amp; Retention</b>	++ Offers accommodation for applicants who identify that there is a need for interview process	Continue to encourage and incorporate disability into diversity hiring practices
<b>Customer Service</b>	No specific customer service or sensitivity training available for AODA customer service with persons with disabilities	Develop or purchase sensitivity training to meet compliance for AODA
<b>Technology</b>	Not known  No TTY available on site	Recommend the use of W3 accessibility standards for their website in addition to consulting with CNIB for an accessibility web audit to test current level of access  Recommend buying a TTY

**Additional Notes:** Print materials are available in an alternative format through the HR department. Front desk staff were very friendly and comfortable with interacting with customers with disabilities. Due to the level of interaction with the public, professional development is suggested for front reception to further enhance their skills in relation to increasing knowledge of sign language, communication devices, and the use of service dogs, etc. The corporate team was unsure if there was a TTY available for the deaf to communicate. Retention was not a concern. Currently the corporation has an EAP program and a Life/works program onsite to encourage work life balance and wellness in the workplace. Job Accommodation is in place for workers who return from injuries or illness.

## Interview Questions Used for Employer Participants/HR Staff for YSSTAB Study

### ***Physical Space & Building Environment***

- Is your location wheelchair accessible?
- Do you have automatic door openers in appropriate areas?
- Is there a wheelchair ramp? Is it clearly identified and kept clear of snow and debris/waste?
- Are there sufficient wheelchair designated parking spots?
- Are hallways and aisles clutter free for individuals with mobility issues and/or an individual with physical aids? (Wheelchair, walker, walking cane and/or sight cane, seeing eye dog, etc.)

### ***Print Material and Communications***

- Are print materials offered in an alternative format? If yes - is it by request only and is there a policy or system in place to accommodate an individual and/or special request?
- Is plain language used in communication materials?
- Are signs easy to read and in large tactile or raised print
- Has the website (if applicable) been tested for accessibility by users of assistive devices or accessibility software?
- Does advertising/marketing represent the whole community? (Including those with disabilities)
- Does your office location have a TTY phone for the deaf?
- Is there sufficient audio equipment and listening devices for public and/or employee meetings? (I.e. – FM system available, other audio devices for hearing aid users, etc)

### ***Entrance Ways/Reception Area and Washroom Facilities***

- Is there a wheelchair accessible restroom area that is publicly available?
- Is the reception area clearly marked with appropriate signage?
- Is the counter or writing surface set up to accommodate someone in a standing position only, or does it also include an area for those in a seated position?
- Do entranceways or reception areas offer a respite area for those with mobility disabilities? (Seating area or respite bench available)

**Customer Service & Public Relations**

- Do “front line” staff feel comfortable serving the needs of customers with various disabilities?
- Can services be provided “differently” with ease?
- Are staff trained in sign language or familiar on how to recognize someone who communicates differently? (I.e. Individuals who may be deaf, hard of hearing or orally deaf, non-verbal, using communication devices, etc.)

**Recruitment Practices**

- How do you currently recruit for new employees?
- Do your e-recruitment sources offer accessibility features or alternatives for diversity recruitment?
- Do you have a specific recruitment strategy that incorporates diversity?
- Would you consider recruiting specifically from organizations that assist job seekers with disabilities? If yes – what supports would you require to do this?
- Can job training be offered in an alternative format?

**Retention Practices**

- Have you identified any trends or concerns regarding employee retention?
- Do you have an employee wellness program or EAP program available?
- Is work life balance or work related stress a concern in your industry?

**Policies and General Practice**

- Does your establishment have a formal accessibility plan?
- Do you have a job accommodation policy for employees?
- Does the company consider the needs for diversity/disability when planning new initiatives?
- What policies are in place for interviewing someone who would require job accommodation or an accommodation to complete an interview process?

*\*Note – These questions were developed specifically for the YSSTAB community study and are not an endorsement for any specific disability product, disability service or community agency, nor is it a comprehensive complete list of items that would be required for a business to be considered “Accessible”.*

## Definitions/Acronyms used for the YSSTAB Community Study

Definitions listed below have been taken from the Guide to the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07 – Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)

**A barrier** – is defined as anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of the disability.

**A disability** – is defined as any degree of physical disability including, but not limited to diabetes, epilepsy, brain injury, paralysis, amputation, lack of coordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or wheelchair or appliance, mental impairment or developmental disability; learning disability or dysfunction in understanding or using symbols or spoken language; mental disorder; or injury for which benefits under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 were claimed or received.

**Principle of Dignity** – Policies, procedures and practices that respect the dignity of a person with a disability are those that treat them as customers and clients who are as valued and as deserving of effective and full service as any other customer. They do not treat people as an afterthought or force them to accept lesser service, quality or convenience.

**Principle of Independence** – In some instances, independence means freedom from control or influence of others – freedom to make your own choices. In situations, it may mean the freedom to do things in your own way.

**Principle of Integration** – Integrated services are those that allow people with disabilities to fully benefit from the same services, in the same place and in the same or similar way as other customers.

**Principle of Equal Opportunity** – Equal opportunity means having the same chances, options, benefits and results as others. In the case of services it means that people with disabilities have the same opportunity to benefit from the way you provide goods or services as others. They should not have to make significantly more effort to access or obtain service. They should also not have to accept lesser quality or more inconvenience.

**Service Animals** – Service animals are used by people with many kinds of disabilities. Service animals include dogs used by people who are blind, hearing alert animals for people who are deaf or hard of hearing and animals trained to alert an individual to an oncoming seizure and lead them to safety.

**Support Persons** - Some people rely on support persons for certain services or assistance, such as using the washroom or a person with speech impairment may use a support person to facilitate communication. A support person may be a paid professional, a volunteer, a family member or friend of the person with a disability.

**Additional Definitions or Acronyms used in the study from various sources include:** (In alphabetical order)

**AODA** = Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005)

**CNIB** = Canadian National Institute for the Blind

**EAP** = Employee Assistance Program, a common program available in various workplaces through their employee benefits programs, that are offered to employees to encourage health and wellness to their workforce.

**MCSS** = Ministry of Community and Social Services

**MTCU** = Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities

**OHRC** = Ontario Human Rights Code

**Politically Correct** = Being perceived as being overly concerned with such change, often to the exclusion of other matters related to social change in areas of historical oppression. For this report it was used in context with the use of language/wording and the level of an individual's behaviour and interaction.

**RFP** = Request for Proposal

**Stakeholder** = Interested party/individual/group with an interest to work towards a common goal in the same community.

**TDSB** = Toronto District School Board

**TTY** = Teletypewriter for the deaf, an assistive device that is used in place of an auditory hearing phone.

## Accessibility Resource List & Web Related Learning Links

### **Access-ability, York Region's Sixth Accessibility Plan (Publication) 2009**

Access to this online publication is available at [www.york.ca](http://www.york.ca) > click services and then Accessibility Planning

### **AccessOn**

[www.AccessON.ca](http://www.AccessON.ca)

Site by Ontario government for employers to assist in making their sites and workplaces accessible

**AccessOn, Breaking Barriers Together** – Accessibility for all Ontarians (Publication)

### **Accessibility Directory**

[www.accessibilitydirectory.ca](http://www.accessibilitydirectory.ca)

One stop resource of service providers in Ontario that can help make your business accessible. Categories include: assessment, design, direct services, equipment, recreation, resources and training.

### **Accessibility: Its Impact on Small and Medium Sized Businesses**

[http://www.cfdlearn.ca/courses/pwd\\_module/index.shtml](http://www.cfdlearn.ca/courses/pwd_module/index.shtml)

Three free learning modules are provided through this website to increase awareness, understanding and knowledge of the AODA and its impact on the business world. Work at your own pace. Made available through the Enabling Change Project.

### **Assistive Technology Links At-Links**

[www.at-links.gc.ca](http://www.at-links.gc.ca)

Learn about assistive technologies, programs and services. Extensive information also available on a range of disabilities and devices in addition to the Accessible Procurement Tool Kit.

**Business Takes Action:** Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, Ontario Division

[www.ten20action.ca](http://www.ten20action.ca)

- Various hand outs, print material of power point slides presented at Workplace Accessibility Forum, Employment of Persons with Disabilities July 2008.
- Reviewed Business Takes Action 60 page Information Publication/Guide Book for orientating yourself to the new AODA, understanding terminology, links to surveys and quizzes to assist in inclusion planning and checklists for continued best practices/excellence.

**Disability & the Duty to Accommodate:** Your Rights and Responsibilities, Ontario Human Rights Commission (Brochure Publication) Additional information also available at [www.ohrc.on.ca](http://www.ohrc.on.ca)

**Doing Disability at the Bank:** Discovering the Work of Learning/Teaching done by Disabled Bank Employees, Ryerson University & Royal Bank (Public report, publication) 2007

**Employment Equity – Myths and Realities** (Publication) Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2004

**Goodwill: Community at Work** (Print Material)

A brief history and pictorial overview of the agency that has been providing opportunities to marginalized people since 1935.

**Ministry of Community and Social Services**

[www.mcscs.gov.on.ca/mcss/english/pillars/accessibilityOntario/index](http://www.mcscs.gov.on.ca/mcss/english/pillars/accessibilityOntario/index)

Ontario government website detailing policies, procedures, explanation about new Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act 2005 including information on accessibility standards in the 5 key areas: Customer Service, Transportation, Information and Communications, Built Environment and Employment.

**Ministry of Small Business and Enterprise**

[http://www.sbe.gov.on.ca/ontcan/sbe/en/about\\_pubs\\_access2006\\_en.jsp](http://www.sbe.gov.on.ca/ontcan/sbe/en/about_pubs_access2006_en.jsp)

The Ministry of Small Business and Enterprise website with their published 2006-2007 accessibility plan with the completed items thus far in relation to build best practices and inclusion within their Ministry.

**Paths to Equal Opportunity, Business Case for Accessibility** by Bill Wilkerson, **How Accessibility Awareness Strengthens Your Company's Bottom Line**, 2001

Retrieved from [www.equalopportunity.on.ca](http://www.equalopportunity.on.ca)

**Removing Barriers** - York Regions Third Accessibility Plan York Region 2006 (Print Copy) Also available at [www.york.ca](http://www.york.ca)

**Resource Guide of Organizations Serving Persons with Disabilities in York Region, Bradford and West Gwillimbury** (Printed list of various agencies and resources available, circa 2003)

**Statistics Canada**

[www.statcan.gc.ca/pub](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub)

A government resource available to source out various statistics in relation to Canada, and in relation to health, participation and limitation.

**Tapping the Talents of People with Disabilities**, a Guide for Employers, the Conference Board of Canada, 2001

**Universal Design Professional Development Series**

<http://www.dx.org/universal/>

A universal design series and interdisciplinary workshops presented annually by the Design Exchange to introduce design industry and other professionals the concepts of "Universal Design".

**W3**

<http://www.w3.org/WAI/>

The Web Accessibility Initiative webpage develops resources, strategies, and guidelines to help make the World Wide Web accessible. WAI provides support through various tools and materials to help understand and implement web accessibility.

**Working together: An Employer's Resource for Workplace Accommodation**

(Publication) Future Abilities and Creative Employment & Human Resources Development Canada 2003

\*Report Available in alternate format.