

Employment and Social Development Canada

Report: IIDL Learning Exchange, Ottawa - Gatineau

November 29 – November 30, 2016

Prepared by the Office for Disability Issues

Overview

From November 28 to December 2, 2016, International Initiative on Disability Leadership/Sponsoring Countries Leadership Group (IIDL/SCLG) members met in Ottawa, Canada, for a Learning Exchange and SCLG meetings. In attendance were representatives from Australia, New Zealand, the United States of America, and Canada. The Learning Exchange ran from November 29-November 30 and the SCLG meetings from December 1-2. The Office for Disability Issues, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), hosted these events.

The learning activities were themed as follows:

- **Accessibility and Leadership in Employment;**
- **Youth;**
- **Medical Assistance in Dying and Vulnerable Persons Standard;**
- **Government of Canada initiatives promoting accessibility and inclusion;**
and
- **Australia's National Disability Insurance Scheme.**

The objective of the learning opportunities was to highlight innovative and adaptable practices that were improving the lives of persons with disabilities in both Canada and Australia.

Learning Exchange Activities

Accessibility and Leadership in Employment: Delegates attended a panel discussion on Leadership in the Employment of Persons with Disabilities. Larry McCloskey, Director of Carleton University's Paul Menton Centre (PMC) for Students with Disabilities (more information at: <https://carleton.ca/pmc/>), hosted the discussion. Panelists included representatives from Carleton University and three Canadian disability organizations: Ready Willing & Able, LiveWorkPlay, and the Neil Squire Society.

Don Gallant of Ready, Willing & Able (RWA), expressed the need for a shift toward inclusiveness on a systemic and cultural level. As an employer focused initiative, with national reach, RWA demonstrates to employers the economic benefits associated with inclusive hiring practices for persons with intellectual disabilities, without the need for the creation of "special" jobs. RWA finds that employers need direct and coordinated access to this untapped labour pool and works with employers and community agencies at the local, provincial, and national levels to provide the necessary connections and support. RWA sees this approach as quite adaptable as employers all over have the same need (more information at: <http://readywillingable.ca>).

Cheryl Colmer of the Neil Squire Society (NSS) shared how NSS was using innovation and technology to provide online employment services to persons with disabilities, and helping them stay connected. Cheryl noted that the most beneficial aspect of the

online learning platform is that it allows for individualized services, meeting the unique needs of each participant, and its ability to reach remote and rural Canadians who might not have access to such services otherwise. Challenges include the difficulty in ensuring people are also accessing support or social activities in their community to bridge the gap in human connectedness missing from the online learning environment.

Cheryl also shared information on a new hardware the NSS has developed, called “LipSync”. LipSync allows people with little or no hand movement to use a touchscreen device through a joystick mounted to the wheelchair, desk, or bed. A key element is that a LipSync can be built for a relatively low cost (CDN\$300). For more information about the Neil Squire Society and the LipSync, please visit: www.neilsquire.ca.

Julie Kingstone of LiveWorkPlay focused on social enterprise and how this can be used to integrate, not isolate, persons with disabilities. Julie highlighted work being done by LiveWorkPlay with teachers, families, employers, and most importantly young job-seekers, mainly with intellectual disabilities. The initiative focuses on getting job seekers to develop career objectives, and building employment profiles to match those objectives. LiveWorkPlay leverages its huge network of employers and businesses to make the right connections between employers and job seekers, resulting in very successful job outcomes and relationships. Information about LiveWorkPlay is available at: <http://liveworkplay.ca>.

Dean Mellway spoke to Carleton University’s Accessible Career Transitions (ACT) program, which provides students with individualized counselling services to support their academic and professional careers. More information about ACT is available at: <http://carleton.ca/career/act/>.

Randy Lewis, creator of a program that helped Walgreens to successfully integrate a large number of workers with disabilities, was in Ottawa for a separate engagement and made a surprise appearance at this event. He voiced the need for cultural change to increase the employment of persons with disabilities.

Youth: Site visits to Carleton University allowed delegates to witness first-hand how innovative and technological practices offer opportunities for improving the experiences of students and others with disabilities. Among locations visited was the **McIntyre Exam Centre** which is designed to provide various accommodations for students with disabilities. Such accommodations range from private rooms and quiet space for examinations with non-florescent and natural lighting, to computers with the latest software to accommodate various disability requirements (more information at: <https://carleton.ca/ses/mcintyre-exam-centre/>).

Delegates also visited the **New Sun Joy Maclaren Adaptive Technology Centre** which provides specialized technological services that address the various needs of students with disabilities. These include large screen monitors, adjustable-height computer tables, voice recognition, and screen reading (more information at <https://library.carleton.ca/services/services-students-disabilities>). Delegates felt that

many of the services offered by both the Exam and the Adaptive Technology Centers could be adopted more broadly by universities in their own countries.

At the **Advanced Biomechanics and Locomotion (ABL) Laboratory**, delegates were given presentations and demonstrations on how robotic systems were being used as assistive rehabilitation devices. These included an overview of how work robots are used in studying balance in walking, learning and optimal controllers, and a discussion on the future development of artificial limbs. The work of ABL is closely followed by the medical community and could significantly impact the lives of persons facing mobility challenges whether from illnesses or accidents (more information on ABL is available at: <https://carleton.ca/mechatronics/about/>).

Medical Assistance in Dying and Vulnerable Persons Standard: In June 2016 some recommendations from the proposed Vulnerable Persons Standards (VPS) were adopted in legislation on Medical Assistance in Dying Act (Bill-C14). The VPS is a demonstration of the strength of advocacy groups in Canada as it reflects many recommendations put forward by the disability rights community to safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities (<http://www.vps-npv.ca/readthestandard>). The VPS set out specific requirements aiming to ensure that medical assistance in dying is available without jeopardizing the lives of vulnerable persons.

Michael Bach, Executive Vice-President of the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL), provided delegates with an overview of the work done by CACL in advocating for safeguards in the VPS for persons with disabilities (more information about the CACL available at: <http://www.cacl.ca>). Delegates were appreciative of the information shared and of learning about the efforts of CACL in pushing for a balanced legislation that promotes personal autonomy while protecting the rights of persons with disabilities.

The Government of Canada had actively engaged disability rights organizations, nationally and internationally, in the development of the legislation on medical assistance in dying. A report on the consultation process is available at <http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/other-autre/pad-amm/pad.pdf>).

Government of Canada initiatives promoting accessibility and inclusion

Video Relay Services (VRS): Delegates visited the Canadian Administrator which provides Video Relay Services (VRS) across Canada. The VRS which was launched in Canada in September, 2016, uses state-of-the art technological to create a communication bridge between people with and without hearing disabilities. A significant feature of the VRS is that it can be accessed from smartphones, tablets, laptops, and computers. Further, it simulates, as closely as possible, a conversation between two hearing people.

VRS services are provided free to all Canadians, in both English and French, and would particularly impact the lives of Canadians who are Deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired. The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications

Commission (CRTC) funds the program and estimates that it will benefit as many as 20,000 Canadians. For more information on the VRS visit www.srvcanadavrs.ca.

Accessible Elections: In a visit to Elections Canada, the country's national elections administration agency, SCLG delegates were provided information on innovative practices being adopted by the agency to make elections more accessible.

Delegates were given a first-hand look at the voter information cards which contain detailed information about the accessibility of each polling place and the services available to electors; the accessible checklist against which polling places are accessed; and election material in alternate formats such as large print and Braille. Delegates were also allowed to test out several accessible voting technologies, such as Braille ballot templates and magnifying glasses.

Elections Canada noted that as a result of these measures electors with disabilities voted in greater numbers in the 2015 general election than in the 2011 general election. Based on an assessment of the process and feedback received, Elections Canada continues work on building awareness of alternative voting methods; online services and tools at voting locations; and additional sensitivity training for election workers. For more information about election accessibility in Canada, please visit: <http://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=abo&dir=adv/agdi&document=index&lang=e>

Age-Friendly Communities (AFC): In 2005, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), jointly with the World Health Organization, pioneered the "Age-Friendly Communities Initiative," a project that quickly spread to hundreds of cities on all the world's continents. Community engagement is a key element in the success of this initiative, which focuses on outdoor space, social participation, and transportation (more information available at <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/afc-caa-eng.php>).

The main objective of this initiative, as highlighted in a presentation to delegates by PHAC's Executive Director Stephen Bent, is the establishment of services that support active and healthy aging. Initiatives showcased included the application of innovation and technology in making public spaces more adaptable. These ranged from simple adjustments to park benches, community gardens and transit shelters to the use of technology in community buildings.

More than 1,000 communities across Canada are presently focused on becoming age-friendly as measured against indicators in the Age-Friendly Communities Evaluation Guide at: http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2016/aspc-phac/HP35-57-2015-eng.pdf. Funding for AFC projects is provided by the provincial and territorial governments.

Delegates were interested in the easily adaptable features of the initiative and agreed that it was demonstrative of a collaborative effort between all levels of governments, academics, and non-government organizations.

National Disability Insurance Scheme

Eddie Bartnik and Anne Skordis also made a series of presentations on the NDIS to ESDC employees. These were attended by participants from ESDC headquarters as well as those from the regions who participated by WebEx.

The presentations highlighted key aspects of the NDIS, the implementation process, and key outcomes.

- The Australian NDIS is a new way of providing disability support. It takes a lifetime approach, investing in people with disabilities early to improve their outcomes later in life.
- The NDIS is built on three key pillars of insurance approach, choice and control, and community and mainstream delivery.
- The NDIS began in a number of trial sites around Australia from July, 2013, and from July, 2016, is being rolled out gradually around the rest of Australia. By 2019, the NDIS will support about 460,000 Australians with disabilities.
- The NDIS is being introduced in stages to ensure it is successful and sustainable because it is a major change.

For more information about the NDIS, please visit <https://www.ndis.gov.au>.

Attendees engaged the presenters in discussions and shared their perspectives around program and policy transformation and stakeholder collaboration, which will help inform current and emerging thinking on disability supports.

Conclusion

The Learning Exchange program allowed SCLG members, Canadian officials, program participants and other stakeholders to not only share knowledge on innovative approaches and leadership initiatives aimed at advancing the inclusion of persons with disabilities, but also learn from each other and add to the growing body on intellectual knowledge on disability.

Photographs



Prof. Mojtaba Ahmadi, left, gives a tour of the Advanced Biomechanics & Locomotion Lab, Carleton University. In picture are Lorna Sullivan, New Zealand, right, and Lynnae Rutledge, USA.



Dean Mellway, right, leads a tour of Carleton University. Others in picture, from left; James van Raalte, Director General, Office for Disability Issues, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC); Anne Skordis, General Manager, Scheme Transition and Integrity, National Disability Insurance Agency, Australia; Lorna Sullivan, Director Disabilities Services, Uniting Care Communities, Queensland; Michael Kendrick, Kendrick Consulting; Lynnae Ruttledge, International Disability Policy Consultant, USA; Siobhan Flurry, Office for Disability Issues, ESDC; and Cheryl Colmer, Regional Manager, Neil Squire Society.