



**International Initiative for Disability Leadership**

*A full life for all people with a disability*



# Report: IIDL 2017 Learning Exchange, Canada

October 17-18, 2017

Prepared by the Office for Disability Issues, Employment and Social Development Canada

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## Overview

From October 17 to October 20, 2017, members of the International Initiative on Disability Leadership/Sponsoring Countries Leadership Group (IIDL/SCLG) met in Gatineau, Quebec, for a Learning Exchange and Governance Meeting. Representatives from Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, the United States of America and Canada attended. The series of events were hosted by the Office for Disability Issues (ODI), Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC).

The theme of this year's Learning Exchange, which was held on October 17 and 18, 2017 was "Advancing Inclusion and Leadership through People Centered Innovation". Learning Exchange activities were organized in Gatineau and Montreal and had two key elements. The first, showcased innovative practices and initiatives in Canada that support the inclusion of persons with disabilities in society. The second, highlighted innovative disability programs and services in two IIDL member countries.

Learning activities included panel discussions, presentations, and a site visit and were grouped under the following headings:

- Accessible Technology Initiatives;
- Community Engagement and Development of Persons with Disabilities;
- Innovate Disability Support Programs
  - New Zealand Disability Support System
  - National Disability Insurance Scheme of Australia;
- Social Inclusion and Labour Market Engagement; and
- Accessibility and Inclusion.

The objective of the Learning Exchange was to showcase initiatives that were adopting innovative and unique approaches to programs and services, and adaptable practices that were improving the lives of persons with disabilities in Canada, and other IIDL member countries.

## Learning Exchange Activities

### Day 1: Gatineau, Quebec

#### Panel Discussion 1: Accessible Technology Initiatives

The panelists for the panel discussion on "Accessible Technology Initiatives" were Robin Syme, Executive Director, CanAssist, University of Victoria; Karen Magee, Eastern Regional Content Specialist of Accessible Media Inc.; and Jeffery Stark, Manager, Accessibility, Accommodations and Adaptive Computer Technology Program, Shared Services Canada. Krista Wilcox, Director General, ODI, ESDC hosted the session.

Robin Syme spoke of [CanAssist](#), which is a centre of excellence for disability accommodation based on the campus of the University of Victoria, British Columbia.

It engages faculty, researchers, students and community representatives to develop individually designed technologies to remove physical and cognitive barriers and to increase independence, inclusion and well-being of persons with disabilities. CanAssist does this by simplifying the interface of technologies so that they are practical, reliable, cost effective and accessible to many.

Much of CanAssist's work is informed by the community. It adopts a client-focused approach and responds to requests for customized technologies in situations where no commercial solutions exist. Its creations include a guitar strummer for a player with partial paralysis, a one handed chopping system for the kitchen, a device enabling an individual with a dexterity related disability to use a smartphone, and a phone application to support persons with disabilities in their day-to-day routines. CanAssist delivers 80 to 100 unique technologies to individuals and facilities each year and offers over 400 free software downloads annually.

Karen Magee focused her presentation on [Accessible Media Incorporated \(AMI\)](#). AMI is a not-for-profit Canadian media company, whose mission is to produce and bring television programming to Canadians who are blind, partially sighted, deaf or hard of hearing, and print restricted. AMI achieves this by advancing the use of open described video and closed captioning on all content, as well as audio service for print material. For all original or commissioned content, AMI uses Integrated Descriptive Video (IDV), which helps to improve the experience of the audience. AMI also works with other broadcasters to provide programs with consistent quality for viewers.

AMI has set world-class standards for media accessibility. It is recognized as a world broadcast leader in "described" programming of live events, and offers an accessible on-line player in North America that makes its audio and visual content available on-demand. It is currently developing a phone application for people to view AMI's content and to make its social media publications as accessible as possible. AMI's work benefits over 5 million Canadians as well as many others outside of Canada.

Jeffrey Stark addressed key aspects of Federal Public Service (FPS) of Canada's Accessibility, Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology (AACT) program, which is administered by [Shared Services Canada](#) and available to all federal public servants. The program's central focus is assisting in the integration into the workplace of employees with disabilities, injuries and ergonomic requirements. It does so by providing employees with access to suitable technology and computer resources and services, including video conferencing, remote desktop tools and remote training tools.

In 2012-2013, AACT was awarded Canada's Public Service Award of Excellence for fostering community across the federal government, ensuring that knowledge about accessibility and adaptive technology is readily available. AACT has also gained international recognition for the unique services provided to persons with disabilities.

## Panel Discussion 2: Community Engagement and Development of Persons with Disabilities

Panelists for the panel discussion on “Community Engagement and Development” were Kelly Mertl, Director, Community Initiative, United Way; Joanne Silkauskas, Executive Director, REACH Canada; and Brian Tardif, Executive Director, Citizen Advocacy of Ottawa (CAO). The session was hosted by Fernand Comeau, Director of Policy, ODI.

Kelly Mertl presented on the [United Way Canada](#) and [EARN](#)'s work to advance the employment of persons with disabilities. One innovative aspect of EARN's approach is that it brings together employers, disability employment service providers, persons with disabilities and other key stakeholders to improve employment supports and resources aimed at reducing barriers to employment for persons with disabilities. A key principle under which EARN member companies and organizations operate is that employees with disabilities must receive minimum wage or better and be compensated on the same basis as other employees.

As a community initiative, EARN is also a coordinated access point for education and expertise on employment, accessibility and workplace inclusion for both persons with disabilities and employers. It leverages its huge network of members and partners to identify job opportunities, build awareness, and promote best practices relating to the employment of persons with disabilities. One of its current key initiatives is working to expand education and awareness on the business benefits of employing persons with disabilities. EARN also works with the Mental Health Commission of Canada to support the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace.

Joanne Silkauskas focused her presentation on REACH, a non-governmental organization that helps persons with all types of disabilities obtain referral to a lawyer. [REACH](#)'s work is centered on two key areas: the first is to provide pro-bono legal referrals for persons with disabilities and their family members. The second area of REACH's work is public education on matters relating to disability. Topics for REACH educational programs are often determined by the calls received for legal assistance, such as substitute decision-making, end of life decisions, and responding to abuse. In addition to its community engagement approach, REACH's success relies on using local resources and fostering partnerships with different levels of government.

Brian Tardif spoke about [CAO's](#) work which is focused on integrating persons with disabilities into communities and helping them lead fulfilling lives. Much of its work is carried out by volunteers, referred to as ‘citizen advocates’, many of whom are friends and relatives of persons with disabilities. A key role of citizen advocates is to help program participants build self-esteem, self-confidence and supportive networks. CAO works directly with the people it supports, and by doing so it is able to closely assess the impact of its work at the individual and community levels and make adjustments more readily. An associated benefit of CAO's work has been a better sense of overall health for individuals in the program, which translates into less dependency and a reduction in the use of health and social services. CAO future initiatives include a program for long-term housing needs of family members with disabilities, as well as an employment support program for persons with disabilities.

## Presentation 1: New Zealand Disability Support System

Sacha O’Dea, System Transformation Lead, Ministry of Health, Gerri Pomeroy, President, Disabled Person’s Assembly, and Toni Atkinson, Group Manager Disability Support Services, Ministry of Health made a number of presentations on the transformation of [New Zealand’s Disability Support System](#). Presentations were made to IIDL delegates and to a number of federal government employees, including members of the Deputy Minister Task Force on Diversity and Inclusiveness.

The presentations provided attendees with first-hand insights into the co-design process and the Enabling Good Lives (EGL) initiative that were adopted in New Zealand (NZ)’s transformative approach to serving persons with disabilities. Key takeaways:

- A number of factors prompted the need for change in the system: the old system was not meeting individual needs and choices, support across government was fragmented and costs were increasing;
- The new approach focuses on the principle of co-design, which involved collaboration between government officials and community representatives to bring about a transformed system;
- The new system will provide more choices and cross-government seamless supports for persons with disabilities and their families;
- The new funding model will pool funds from a number of Ministries with disability related programs into one budget to support funding for disability support; and
- There will be a focus on capacity building in the community, increasing baseline data, and on evaluation.

The transformation of NZ’s disability support system is being done in phases. Lessons learned from each phase will be used to improve further roll out.

## Presentation 2: Update on Australia’s National Disability Insurance Scheme

Eddie Bartnik, Strategic Advisor, National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) and Anne Skordis, General Manager, Scheme Transition, NDIA provided an update on Australia’s [National Disability Insurance Scheme \(NDIS\)](#). The presentation highlighted achievements and provided key updates of the NDIS since its implementation in 2016, including:

- During the trial periods, 93% of participants rated the NDIS scheme as either “good” or “very good”;
- The NDIS had 90,638 people with an approved plan. The objective is to add 195,000 people during 2017-18. There is still a considerable way to go as it is estimated that around 460,000 Australians will be supported by the NDIS by 2020;
- In October 2017, the Productivity Commission released a [new report](#) on the costs of the NDIS and related issues;
- The very fast ramp-up of the program has created some problems including that of staffing;

- The NDIS has undertaken an extensive consultation to address emerging issues and to identify improvements that could be made in the system; and
- Except for some parts of Western Australia, the full roll-out of the NDIS across Australia is planned for June 2019.

## Day 2: Montreal, Quebec

### Panel Discussion: Social Inclusion and Labour Market Attachment

On October 18, delegates travelled to Montreal, Quebec where they attended a panel discussion on “Social Inclusion and Labour Market Attachment” that was co-organized by ODI, ESDC and the Office for Students with Disabilities of McGill University. The panelists were Camille Desforges, Rights Advocate, Confédération des organismes de personnes handicapées du Québec (COPHAN), Bonnie Brayton, National Executive Director, DAWN Canada (Disability Women’s Network of Canada), and Dr. Stefanie Blain-Moraes, Professor, School of Physical and Occupational Therapy, McGill University. The session was moderated by Professor Nandini Ramanujam, Associate Professor, and Executive Director and Director of Programs, Centre for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism Faculty of Law, McGill University.

Camille Desforges, Rights Advocate of [COPHAN](#), focused on her organization’s mission and experiences in advocating for community action for the defense of rights for persons with disabilities. As a body of more than 50 regional and national NGOs for persons with disability issues, COPHAN’s objective is to make the province of Quebec inclusive in order to ensure the full social participation of people with functional limitations and their families in society. The concept of universal accessibility is at the heart of the organization’s work.

It also highlighted COPHAN’s involvement in the international and national arena to bring awareness to the many issues facing persons with disabilities. Last year, COPHAN was part of a Canadian delegation to Geneva representing the Canadian civil society in the evaluation of the UN Convention of Rights for Persons with Disabilities and application of the UN Convention. COPHAN also participated in the recently concluded federal consultation on accessibility law and provided advice on accessible websites relating to Quebec’s *strategie numerique* consultation.

Bonnie Brayton of [DAWN Canada](#) emphasized the importance of intersectionality in advancing initiatives for self-determination and leadership development for women with disabilities. DAWN’s current focus is on Indigenous women with disabilities, given the Government of Canada’s role and focus on truth and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Ms. Brayton expressed concern that there is a lack of focus on the needs of girls with disabilities in educational program designed to increase leadership among Canadian girls. To help address this issue, DAWN is partnering with Canadian Women Foundation to provide girls with disabilities opportunities to develop confidence and leadership skills.

Ms. Brayton acknowledged that this was not a situation unique to Canada as women with disabilities around the world face similar systemic barriers. She stressed that it was important to have a violence prevention strategy by shifting responsibility for violence-prevention to the larger society. She also pointed to the continuing need to reduce the criminalization of women with disabilities and the un-gendering of persons with disabilities in policy development.

Dr. Stefanie Blain-Moraes from McGill University focused her presentation on ways [innovation](#) and new technologies could be harnessed to improve interaction and inclusion of non-communicative individuals. She highlighted her experience in developing technology to address the needs of non-communicative individuals and their care providers. Dr. Stefanie Blain-Moraes uses bio-music to tap into the autonomic nervous system to detect emotions and translate this into music. Recognizing the inter-dependency between caregivers and persons with disabilities, the study also tapped into caregivers for help with identifying the emotions of people under their care.

Dr. Blain-Moraes sees the study as important since people who have minimal physical ability to respond to the environment and without the ability to communicate are at a risk of loss of “personhood”. Dr. Blain-Moraes has teamed up with the Montreal Science Center to enrich her study which is based on self-reporting. The presentation also stressed the need for involving engineers in policy making as they are building technologies that have the potential to redefine what it means to participate and be included in society.

### **Special Discussion: Inuit Sign Language**

Over lunch at McGill University, Dr. Paige MacDougal, Director of Research at the [Canadian Deafness Research and Training Institute](#) in Montreal, Quebec engaged delegates in discussions of her research work with indigenous peoples and persons with disability in Canada and Mexico. Dr. MacDougal’s highlighted areas of her work in developing a dictionary on Inuit Sign Language. Viewed as ground-breaking, this project would help to address the lack of Inuit Sign Language Interpreters and improve access to education, justice and health care for Nunavut’s hearing Impaired. Dr. MacDougal shared samples of Inuit Sign Language flashcards with delegates.



## Presentation 1: Integration and Labour Market Engagement

Marussia Paradis, Development Officer from [SPHERE](#), discussed the key role of partnership in work integration process to improve employment opportunities for persons living with physical, mental or intellectual conditions. SPHERE works with partners to provide skills training and develop adaptive environmental solutions that remove barriers to employment and long term job integration of persons with disabilities. SPHERE is currently providing employment support to persons in the provinces of Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Alberta and British Columbia. It works with the business sector and community organizations in these provinces to address specific demands and labour issues particular to each region.

The presentation showcased SPHERE's Labourer Project initiative. The initiative engages various stakeholders to bridge the gap between organizations that provide employment and employers willing to provide internship opportunities to students with disabilities. The initiative emphasizes dialogue between participants and employers to provide customized training and integration support, which includes training adaptation, workshops on interpersonal skills, coaching and mentoring, and after placement follow-up. SPHERE views this initiative as a success in that 77% of project participants acquired integrated sustainable employment by its conclusion.



*Members of the New Zealand delegation following the SPHERE presentation, Montreal. From left: Toni Atkinson, Group Manager, Disability Support Services, Ministry of Health, New Zealand (NZ); Sacha O'Dea, Lead, System Transformation, Enabling Good Lives, NZ; and Gerri Pomeroy, President, Disabled Person's Assembly, NZ.*

## Presentation 2: Accessibility and Inclusion - Place Vauquelin Project and Site Visit

Delegates heard first hand about work related to the Place Vauquelin project. The project is part of the redevelopment initiative of public spaces around Montreal's City Hall. The presenters included Sophie Lanctôt, General Director of [Société Logique](#); Marie-Claude Seguin, Landscape Architect and Team Leader with Montreal's Urban Parks and Public Spaces Division; Julie Boiven, Architect under the City of Montreal's Heritage Division, Department of Land Enhancement; and Marie-Genevieve Lavergne who is an archaeologist with the City of Montreal's Heritage Division. Richard Berganon, City Councillor, Ville-Marie Borough, provided additional remarks on the project and accompanied the delegation on a tour of the Place Vauquelin site.

Sophie Lanctôt's presentation focused on Société Logique's approach for incorporating universal design in the Place Vauquelin project. The aim was to use Place Vauquelin as an exemplary outcome for universal design and accessibility. Société Logique is proud that the completed Place Vauquelin project is a [demonstration of practical application of universal design](#) and how this can enhance benefits to all users.

The City of Montreal team of experts highlighted key phases of the work done in the [redevelopment of the Place Vauquelin site](#), which is located in the heart of Old Montreal. A key objective of the project was the preservation and restoration of the formal characteristics of the administrative district. At the same time, it was important to create a place for exceptional experiences that is "welcoming, animated and accessible to all". These redevelopment objectives were achieved by adopting a number of factors, including: using quality materials and advanced technology and innovation; providing universal accessibility ramps in the area; and ensuring optimal flow between Champ de Mars and Place Jacques-Cartier. The next phase of the project is an accessibility flow between the Metro and Place Vauquelin.



*Delegates and City of Montreal representatives at the Place Vauquelin site, Montreal. From left to right: Fran Silvestri, President and CEO, International Initiative for Mental Health Leadership/International Initiative for Disability Leadership; Ola Balke, Senior Advisor, Swedish Agency for Participation, Sweden; Zineb Kamal, Junior Policy Analyst, Office for Disability Issues (ODI), Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC); Paulette Cornette, Policy Analyst, ODI, ESDC; Lorna Sullivan, Director, Disabilities Services, Uniting Care Communities, Queensland, Australia; Sylvie Hartfield, Acting Director, Programs, ODI, ESDC; Toni Atkinson, Group Manager, Disability Support Services, Ministry of Health, New Zealand (NZ); Sacha O’Dea, Lead, System Transformation, Enabling Good Lives, NZ; Michael Kendrick, Kendrick Consulting, Canada; Anne Skordis, General Manager, Scheme Transition and Integrity, National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), Australia; Roshelle Ann Wee Eng, Junior Policy Analyst, ODI, ESDC; Eddie Bartnik, Strategic Advisor, NDIA, Australia; Marie-Claude Seguin, City of Montreal; Gerri Pomeroy, President, Disabled Person’s Assembly, NZ; and Richard Berganon, City Councillor, Ville-Marie Borough.*

## Conclusion

The Learning Exchange program of activities allowed SCLG Members to learn about various innovative practices and programs that were improving inclusion of persons with disabilities in society. Through engagement with the various stakeholders from Canada in Gatineau and Montreal, Quebec, members were able to build networks and expand their knowledge of leadership practices that could be modeled and applied to many initiatives that are of interest to the SCLG.