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COMMUNIQUÉ

**A publication of the
Premier's Council on the
Status of Disabled Persons**



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Chairperson's Greetings

New Chairperson Appointed for Premier's Council

Laura Peters of McLeod Hill, N.B. was appointed as the new Chairperson of the Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons for a three year term beginning March 2, 2006. She replaces Barry Freeze of Saint John who will be staying on the Council as a regular member as Past Chairperson.

Gary Comeau, Assistant Executive Director conducted the following interview with Laura Peters so our readers could get to know her better:

Q&A with the Premier's Council Chairperson Laura Peters

1. *How did you first become involved in the disability community?*

- a. I was approached by an organization to create a public awareness campaign regarding hearing loss and its effect on communication. Since I've always enjoyed a challenge, and this was certainly going to fit that category, I accepted the offer



2. *Being Chairperson of the Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons must take up a lot of your time, but you also have another separate full-time job. Can you please tell our readers about your "other" job?*

- a. In my "other life" I am the Executive Director of South-East Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services Inc. We provide services, programs and advocacy to Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing adults and their families.

3. *How did you get involved with the Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons?*

- a. I received a phone call from the Office of the Premier to ask if I would be willing to accept a nomination to Council. Having been a participant in many Premier's Council events, I was aware of the mandate of the Council and felt I had something to offer, so I accepted the nomination.

4. *What are some positive developments that you have been involved with over the years that you're most pleased about?*

Definitely educating private business and government concerning the need to use qualified Sign Language interpreters rather than "Signers" would be the single most important accomplishment to date. As well, working to establish the Deaf Literacy Program here in New Brunswick. This program is so important as it allows Deaf adults to enter post secondary studies.

5. ***What are some of challenges that still remain outstanding for persons with disabilities that you'd like to see resolved during your tenure as Council Chairperson?***
- More affordable & accessible housing, ensuring accessible transportation (especially in rural areas), and of course, inclusion for all students in the school systems including students with disabilities
6. ***Who has been a positive role model or a source of inspiration for you in your professional and volunteer career in the disability community?***
- Definitely Anne Smith. Anne was a devoted advocate for the Deaf community. She never missed an opportunity to teach people about deafness, and truly made a difference in their lives. Anne passed away in 1995, but left behind a legacy of kindness and generosity.
7. ***Can you explain about the Deaf Literacy Pilot Programs being carried out in Saint John and Bathurst?***
- These programs are designed specifically to teach academic subjects to Deaf adults. The most important aspect of this program is that it is taught in Sign Language, recognizing the unique cultural aspects of deafness making it fully accessible to Deaf participants.
8. ***Inclusive Education has been a hot topic recently; can you tell us why you think it's important to have inclusion in the schools?***
- Everyone –students, teachers & parents – benefits from inclusion. Every student has the right to feel part of the education system and to experience that feeling of belonging that will be so important to his/her success in life. Learning to interact with others, whether they have a disability or not, is part of becoming a mature adult. The schools are the perfect venue to learn to accept persons with “different abilities”.
9. ***What do you like best about working with the disability community?***
- My colleagues working in community agencies and on the Premiers Council for their supportive outlook. They inspire me to accept new challenges and to consider all types of disability. Everyone works to their capacity to ensure appropriate services and programs are in place to assist persons with disabilities. Of course the clients themselves are a pleasure.
10. ***What hobbies or other activities do you enjoy doing outside of work and volunteering when you have some free time?***
- Gardening in summer & spending time with my family. I can never get enough of either.



Executive Director's Message



As usual, the Premier's Council is involved in a wide variety of activities that aim to improve the status of persons with disabilities.

The discussions around inclusive education in the public schools generated by the MacKay Report have shown that we must not take inclusive education for granted. The Premier's Council will continue to be heavily involved in this debate and have also been asked to serve on the Ministerial Steering Committee on Inclusive Education.

We will be trying to find ways to improve options in New Brunswick around accessible and affordable transportation as outlined in our report on this topic completed in October of 2005.

We serve as well on the Interministerial Employ-Ability Action Group working with key government departments and community stakeholders to expand training and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

2006-2007 is the second year of the two pilots in the Fredericton and Edmundston regions to try out a different assessment and delivery model for a Disability Supports Program for adults with disabilities! We will be part of the evaluation process to determine if the initiative should be expanded across the province.

I remind our readers that more information about our activities are available on our website at www.gnb.ca/0048 or through our publications such as the annual report.

We want to thank our supporters who have helped move disability issues forward already and we hope we can count on further support as we build a better future of community inclusion for persons with disabilities.

Randy Dickinson, C.M.
Executive Director

“Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.” – *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

N.B. Disability Awareness Week 2006

We are pleased to report that Disability Awareness Week was once again very successful thanks to our many partners. The theme was around education and the slogan was “Inclusive Education... Learning Together”.

Official partners included the Department of Education; both the Anglophone and the Francophone teachers’ associations; Pfizer Canada; N.B. Workplace, Health, Safety and Compensation Commission; Aliant; Wal-Mart Canada; Government of Canada, Muscular Dystrophy Canada and Scotiabank.

A number of provincial contests, special events, awards, media campaigns and local celebrations involved thousands of participants across the province.

Special awards were presented to Sheila Rogers of Bathurst, the University of New Brunswick and United Parcel Service in Fredericton and Moncton.

Muscular Dystrophy Canada, with federal project funding was able to hire several workers with disabilities to organize Walk and Roll events at more sites than ever before.



Plans are already starting for 2007. For more information on Disability Awareness Week please go to the Council website at www.gnb.ca/0048 and click on the link to Disability Awareness Week.



Premier's Council Library By Geb Bernard

The Premier’s Council on the Status of Disabled Persons is also home to a library that has been divided into three distinct parts. Each of these parts furnishes information on a wide variety of disability-related topics.

The Publications Section is updated on a regular basis with documents from various disability organizations, while the Main Library is updated with both documents contributed by various sources as well as documents purchased by the Council. Both of these sections are open to the public who would like to do some research on a given topic.

The third area of the library, the Handouts Section, is committed to documentation which the Council can distribute to interested parties at no cost and can range from brochures to booklets of information.

New or updated submissions from organizations focused on disability issues are welcome at any time.

While there is no cost to use any section of our library, the Council does have a small fee for photocopying, which can be explained on site. Calling ahead to make an appointment to use any of the library’s facilities is recommended.

Improvements to the 2006 *Directory of Services Offered to Persons with Disabilities in New Brunswick*

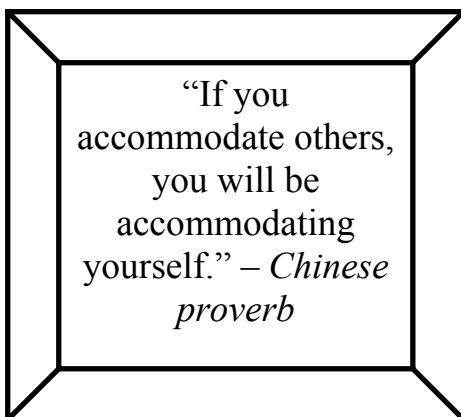
The Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons has been producing a free annual *Directory of Services Offered to Persons with Disabilities in New Brunswick* since 1984. It contains information on programs and services offered by government and community groups. The volume of information in the *Directory* has grown steadily over the years with recent editions numbering well over 200 pages.

For the 2006 edition, the Premier's Council staff decided that some changes could make the *Directory* more user friendly. An effort will be made to consolidate multiple entries to reduce unnecessary duplication of information.

The most significant addition for 2006 will be the introduction of an index by general subject. This will be in addition to the traditional alphabetical index, which will remain an important part of the *Directory*. **The subjects we have indexed will be: children; counselling; education and learning; employment; funding and financial assistance; housing and residential services; professional associations; recreation, sport and active living; rehabilitation equipment and services; respite; seniors; support groups and hot-lines; transportation; and a generic category of disability groups offering multiple services.**

We encourage the groups and government departments listed in the *Directory* to contact us should they have any feedback regarding the new index format.

As printing and shipping costs have increased we hope to encourage more use of the electronic access to our *Directory*. The 2006 edition will be the final year for sending unsolicited copies. Users will be encouraged to access the online version of the *Directory*, which is always the most up-to-date. PDF versions will also be available on the Council's website and we can even mail a *Directory* CD. **Hard copy print versions will still be available upon request for those who cannot access the electronic versions.**



The *Directory of Services Offered to Persons with Disabilities in New Brunswick* remains the most popular resource distributed by the Council and we are happy to continue to provide it free of charge. Other valuable resources available from the Premier's Council include: *Directory of Financial Assistance for Students with Disabilities in N.B.*; *Sources of Funding Assistance and/or Rehabilitation Equipment Loans Programs*; *Directory of Career Counseling and Job Placement Services*; *Funding Sources for Barrier-Free Access*; and the *Transportation Directory for Persons with Disabilities and Seniors*, which are all available at the Premier's Council website at www.gnb.ca/0048.

Prime Minister Announces Agreement to Compensate pre 1986-post 1990 Hepatitis C Victims



Prime Minister Harper announced that the federal government has agreed to provide compensation to persons infected with Hepatitis C before January 1, 1986 and after July 1, 1990. This expands coverage that was previously restricted to cases infected between 1986 and 1990.

Home Heating Rebate in N.B.

Consumers can claim a new rebate on electricity and other home heating fuel bills from July 1, 2006 to recover the eight percent provincial portion of the HST. You receive application forms by calling 1-800-669-7070 or visiting any Service NB outlet. You must have receipts for claims to be made in November 2006 and/or April 2007.



Disabled Parking Fine Raised in Fredericton

Fredericton City Council has increased the municipal fine for violators of designated spaces for persons with disabilities. The fine goes from \$75.00 to \$125.00 effective May 1, 2006.

We urge other municipalities to follow this example. Fines can also be issued under the Provincial offences Act but those tickets must be issued by police officers and not municipal by-law enforcement officers.





New Fetal Alcohol Test Developed in Canada



A new test developed by researchers at the University of Toronto provides a new means for doctors to detect fetal alcohol syndrome among newborn infants. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is estimated to cost Canadian society as much as \$4 billion a year. Mothers who consume alcohol while pregnant are putting their babies at considerable risk for brain damage, birth defects and other developmental problems. About one percent or 4,000 babies in Canada each year are affected.



Bicycle Safety

The bicycle riding season is in full force. Please know and follow the road rules. Wear your helmet, stay off the sidewalks unless you are walking the bike, use hand signals before turning, follow the flow of vehicle traffic and respect traffic lights and crosswalks. Drivers of other vehicles should be careful and respectful of the bicycle's users.

We urge police officers to enforce the rules and develop a policy of zero tolerance with any bicycle riders not wearing their required helmets. After an accident, it will be too late to prevent the brain injury or other serious consequences regardless who was at fault. Safety, courtesy, and common sense should be your guide.

New Affordable/Accessible Housing Projects in N.B.

A number of new housing units for low income persons have been approved this year under the Canada-New Brunswick Affordable Housing Agreement. Some are specially designed for accessibility for persons with disabilities. For more information, contact your local office of the Department of Family & Community Services and ask to speak to someone from Housing Services. This Department has taken over responsibilities for the former NB Housing.



Stan Cassidy Centre for Rehabilitation Opens New Facility

The new 28 million dollar Stan Cassidy Centre for Rehabilitation was officially opened in late June. This provincial tertiary rehabilitation is now located next door to the regional hospital in Fredericton but continues to serve the full province.

Rehabilitation professionals, disability advocates, consumers and the families of those needing such services were thrilled to see the new Centre finally be completed.

The larger space will increase capacity and reduce wait times.

The Premier's Council is proud to have been an active participant in the advocacy for this project.



Action Plan Status Report Available

The final status report on recommendations contained in the 2001 *Action-Awareness-Accountability* Disability Action Plan Report is now available on the Council website or by contacting our office for a hard copy.

Irving Oil Fuel the Care Program

Families in New Brunswick who have to travel to treatments for their children may be eligible for financial assistance for the cost of gasoline for those trips.



Simple applications are available through the social work departments at hospitals in Atlantic Canada that treat children with disabilities.

Consumer Advocate for Insurance

The position of Consumer Advocate for Insurance was created by the Government of New Brunswick to act as a watchdog over insurance company practices and to serve as an advocate for consumers.

Ronald Godin can be reached at 1-888-283-5111 or by email at nb@cai-dma.ca.

IMPORTANT SAFETY NOTICE!



THE RULES OF THE ROAD FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES USING WHEELCHAIRS, POWER WHEELCHAIRS AND DISABILITY SCOOTERS

Please be aware that under the *Motor Vehicle Act of New Brunswick* such users of disability wheelchair mobility devices are legally considered to be pedestrians and must follow the same rules as other pedestrians on foot. The issue has been discussed with police forces, the Department of Transportation and the Department of Public Safety. They agree with our interpretation.

Section 174 (1) of the Act also states-- “Where sidewalks are provided, it is unlawful for any pedestrian to travel along or upon any adjacent roadway.”

Section 174 (2) of the Act further states - “Where sidewalks are not provided, any pedestrians traveling along or upon a highway shall when practicable, travel only on the extreme left side of the roadway or its shoulder, not more than two abreast, facing traffic which may approach from the opposite direction and shall give way to traffic approaching on the roadway.”

Wheelchair, power wheelchair and scooter users have been observed operating their mobility devices following bicycle rules along the traffic lanes moving illegally in the same direction as the flow of cars. Others have been observed illegally traveling in the actual traffic lane as if they were a car or other licensed motor vehicle. **This must stop before someone else gets killed or seriously injured which has already happened.**

There are legal advantages to being considered as a pedestrian. Most persons with disabilities prefer to travel on the sidewalks. It is safer on the sidewalks when they are cleared of obstructions and have the necessary curb cuts. Otherwise you should go along the roadway on the left side facing oncoming vehicle traffic to give you the best chance to see and be seen to avoid being struck. You are able to cross streets at the crosswalks and drivers are given a higher duty to yield right of way to a pedestrian. As a pedestrian, you do not have to license, obtain insurance coverage or have annual safety inspections for your mobility device as do operators of regular motor vehicles. Bicycle users require use of helmets, reflectors and a headlight able to be seen certain minimum distances at night.

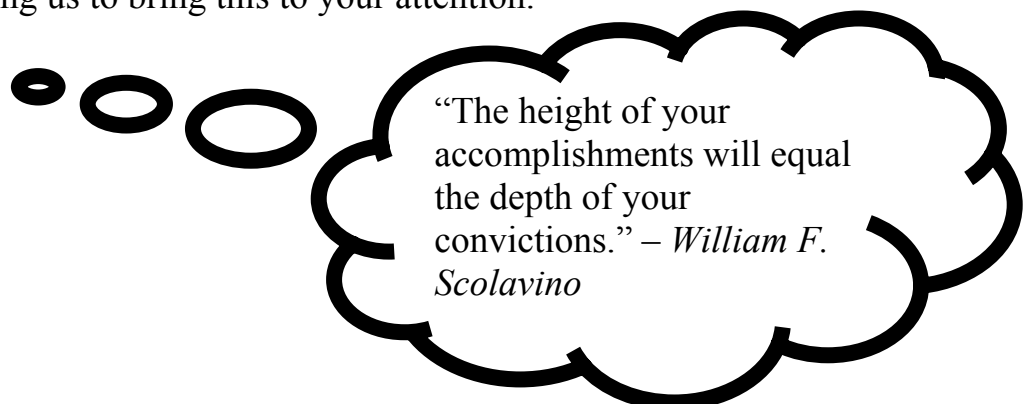
Not all wheelchairs, power wheelchairs or scooters have reflectors, headlights or turn signals but even those that do are not allowed in the traffic lane as a motor vehicle.

Violators are not only acting illegally but are creating a road hazard for regular drivers who do not know which rules are being followed by that particular person with a disability. Operators not following the pedestrian rules are subject to fines and other penalties under the *Provincial Offences Act*. We need to see consistent behaviour and the same rules being followed by all of the persons with disabilities who use these disability mobility devices.

Some users may not have understood the correct rules in the past while others have knowingly violated the law for their own convenience. Others seem to follow different road rules at different times. However, we are issuing this statement to avoid any confusion in the future and to urge everyone involved to respect the law and to use their common sense when operating these necessary mobility devices.

We will be looking to all equipment providers and users to understand and follow the law and we will expect police to equally enforce the traffic laws for the protection of all members of the public.

Thank you for allowing us to bring this to your attention.



Eye-opening experience: Wheeling to work

By Nicholas Guitard

I have just learned a valuable lesson. Three kilometres, plus one hour, equals a world of understanding.

As a personal project for Disability Awareness Week, I wanted to understand how it feels to rely on a wheelchair to get around. I wanted to educate myself about the difficulties faced by people who use wheelchairs daily.

First, I needed a wheelchair. Doug Bridgman, policy advisor in the Workplace Equity Branch with the Office of Human Resources, was excited by my quest for awareness of mobility issues. Doug agreed to lend me his Quickie XTR -- a titanium alloy wheelchair worth approximately \$3,500. It's lightweight, manoeuvrable and expensive.

On a Sunday evening, I drove to my office at the finance department to pick up the wheelchair. I wheeled down the hall to the elevators and pushed the button several times, but the elevators wouldn't work properly. How would I get out of the building? What would Doug do?

I sat in the second-floor foyer, pondering. Then I simply stood up and carried the chair down the stairs -- a luxury Doug does not have.

On Monday morning at 7 a.m., I sat in the wheelchair in front of my home. I usually walk three kilometers to work, which takes about 20 minutes. The route is flat. All the sidewalks are relatively new and smooth, but there are slight declines and inclines at the intersections.

Could I do this? How would it make me feel? I know I'm strong and in good physical shape, but could I wheel from home to work?

I quickly realized that the challenge would not only be physical but mental. I needed to concentrate hard.

For example, crossing at intersections was dangerous. City engineers should be made to sit in a wheelchair and try to navigate an intersection. Who said cobblestone sidewalks are nice? They aren't attractive when you must wheel across them. Sidewalk bistros are great except when you have to wheel around them.

I wondered if Doug has to concentrate on all these details, or does it become an everyday routine? Would the need to be aware of my surroundings recede as I became acquainted with my situation?

Every intersection seemed different. Which route was the safest? Would I tip over when I hit the ridge that divides the road from the sidewalk? I walk over these little ridges daily without a thought. Now the front wheel is stuck, and I had to use brute force to get up and over.

At the intersection of George and York streets, I needed help to get up the incline. I am whole body with plenty of dexterity and strength, but I was stuck because of the ridge and steepness of the incline. I asked a young woman to help but, when she reached for the front of the chair, I barked at her. If she grabbed there, the wheelchair might flip backwards.

Falling was constantly on my mind. What would happen if I tipped over? I became so aware of the dangers of head injury. I know that engineers want a slight grade to facilitate the flow of rainwater off sidewalks, but I had to compensate to keep wheeling straight on the uneven sidewalks. It added difficulty to my task.

One of my morning routines is the purchase of a cinnamon bun and a coffee. I discovered that, where I usually walk into the building, there is no wheelchair access. No direction sign to the nearest accessible door either. I wheeled around to the front door and couldn't find the button. I asked someone for help.

I purchased the cinnamon bun and had to ask the server to carry my coffee to the side table. I double-cupped and doubled-lidded the coffee, placed it between my knees and set off.

Was it just me, or were people staring? When I looked at them, they averted their gaze. Some took a wide berth around me. At first, I struggled with this reaction. Then I realized we were looking at life from different perspectives. Maybe they weren't staring but wondering what it's like to be disabled.

After getting stuck one more time and overcoming the problem myself, I reached my office 50 minutes after leaving home. Not surprisingly, my arms were tired. My legs were sore from sitting in one position. When I stood up, the blood rushed through my legs. I felt unsteady.

As I sit here now, looking at Doug's wheelchair, I wonder how difficult it must be for people to cope constantly with an environment not engineered for people with physical disabilities.

I learned many things during my one-hour journey. People will help if you ask. When engineering accessibility, look at things from a different perspective. I know I feel more aware and educated.

Doug Bridgman, I have gained a whole new level of respect for people with disabilities. Thank you for your help with my project.



Confucius said: “A long journey starts by taking the first step.” For all of us, the journey starts with awareness, education and respect. We need to consider it year-round, not only during Disability Awareness Week in June.

A Case for Barrier Free Access

The Royal Bank reported in 2001 that the Canadians with disabilities have access to a combined annual disposable income of \$25 billion, making this a spending group with significant clout.

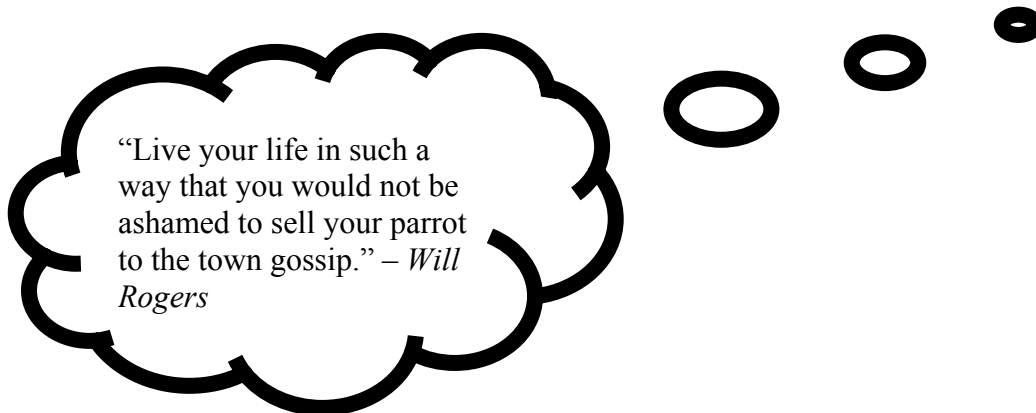


People with disabilities are often accompanied by friends, family and/or coworkers when they shop, travel or eat out. The most accessible establishments will have an advantage when competing for these customers' business.



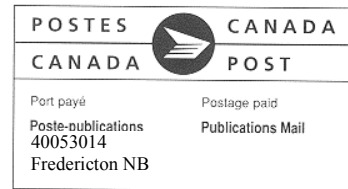
Physically accessible buildings for persons with mobility problems also benefit parents with strollers, senior citizens, delivery people and many others.

Please remember to also include adequate lighting, proper signage and emergency strobe lights for persons who have low vision or who are Deaf or hard of hearing.





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Is your name and address correct? If a change is necessary or if you know of anyone who is not on our mailing list but would like to receive the *Communiqué*, please write or call and let us know.

We welcome submissions for our newsletter on any topic relative to persons with disabilities. This newsletter is available on cassette, in Braille and in French. Please circulate the Communiqué within your office and with friends.



NOTICE

The new 2006 edition of the *Directory of Services Offered to Persons with Disabilities in New Brunswick* will be available this fall. If you wish to receive a copy, please fill out the following and return to our office by fax or mail.

Name: _____

Organization: _____

Address: _____ Postal Code: _____

Telephone: _____ Fax: _____

E-mail: _____ Language: English _____ French _____

Return to: Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons
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 Fax: (506) 444-3001 E-mail: pcsdp@gnb.ca

Updates are available upon request throughout the year