

**Submission to the Commission on Post Secondary Education in
New Brunswick**

**New Brunswick Association for Community Living/Association du
Nouveau-Brunswick pour l'intégration communautaire**

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Introduction

The New Brunswick Association for Community Living/Association du Nouveau-Brunswick pour l'intégration communautaire (NBACL/ANBIC) is a provincial non-profit organization that works on behalf of children and adults with an intellectual disability and their families. The Association has been active since 1957 to build inclusive communities, in which persons with an intellectual disability can live, learn, work and actively participate in their communities as valued and contributing members.

NBACL/ANBIC has been active in promoting changes to policies and programs to maximize education, training and employment opportunities for people with an intellectual disability.

Persons with an intellectual disability are the most underrepresented disability group in the labour market. Traditionally, this group has not been able to access post-secondary education as most people with an intellectual disability would not meet the regular entrance requirements. This lack of opportunity for skills and job training has, in part, led to high levels of unemployment for people with intellectual disabilities. It also provided significant barriers to youth with intellectual disabilities who leave high school with little or no opportunity for further education and training.

Individuals with an intellectual disability, their family members, and other advocates have long been calling for greater opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities to have access to post secondary education and training. In 1996, the New Brunswick Community/Government Working Group on School to Work Transitions For Youth With Disabilities recommended that the then Department of Advanced Education and Labour make Community College seats available to individuals with intellectual disabilities (with the focus on enhancing the skills of youth with intellectual disabilities so that they are able to participate in the regular work force).

In 2001, the New Brunswick Community College and the New Brunswick Association for Community Living implemented a pilot project to test the feasibility of providing job training for persons with an intellectual disability. The NBCC/CCNB Connections Pilot Project was developed and implemented in

response to the historical lack of opportunity to access job training through post-secondary education for persons with intellectual disabilities.

The NBCC/CCNB Connections project pursued a number of objectives including:

- To determine the feasibility of providing students with intellectual disabilities with NBCC training that will lead to potential career path;
- To determine the capacity of campuses to include students with an intellectual disability.

During this initiative, over 50 students with an intellectual disability participated in college programs in a number of programs and campuses. Of those 50 students, 86% went on to obtain and retain employment. The Connections project ended in June 2005 and NBCC/CCNB moved to develop a service model for all students with disabilities. While the Connections project was deemed successful, NBCC/CCNB was still faced with the challenge of developing models whereby students with an intellectual disability have the opportunity to gain recognized post-secondary credentials and marketable job skills as part of the regular community college system.

Following the Connections initiative, a number of systemic barriers remained that limited the capacity to provide post secondary skills training to people with an intellectual disability across the college network:

- NBCC was still without formal processes to expand this service to all campuses. The Connections project did not provide a model for the provision of support to fully accommodate students with an intellectual disability in all programs and all campuses in order to transition them to meaningful employment opportunities.
- An effective process for assisting students with an intellectual disability make successful transitions to community college as well as to the labour market must be operational within the college system.
- NBCC did not have a formal accessible admissions process that allows for the consideration of person with an intellectual disability (or others that do not meet current regular admissions criteria).
- NBCC required mechanisms whereby formal individualized learning planning can take place within the regular operations of the mandate of the community college system.

In 2004, the NBACL/ANBIC published *A Labour Market Participation Strategy for Persons with Disabilities in New Brunswick*. This report was tabled on behalf of all disability organizations in New Brunswick and contains 30 recommendations designed to improve the position of persons with disabilities in the labour market.

Some of these recommendations are intended to promote a greater access to post-secondary education for persons with disabilities. The Government of New Brunswick has committed to implementing a labour market strategy for persons with a disability.

Inclusive Post Secondary Education and Human Rights Considerations

New Brunswick has over 20 years of experience of implementing inclusive education within the public school system. Inclusive educational environments are those that are designed in such a way so as to provide quality educational opportunities for individuals who represent a diverse range of abilities and who have different ways of learning. The goal of an inclusive educational institution is to provide opportunities for all students to maximize their potential within the context of regular education. Inclusive education institutions aim to:

- Foster life long learning
- Provide educational equity and equality
- Facilitate independent learning, thinking and information management
- Develop a positive self-concept, self-discipline, and responsibility
- Foster adaptation and decision-making
- Encourage living and learning in a community
- Develop academic and social competence
- Foster respect for diversity

The concept of inclusive post secondary education is now firmly in place. Over the past 10 to 15 years, community colleges and universities have increased their capacities to include students with disabilities in their programs. By and large, however, this increase reflects "students with disabilities who still fit the mold of a "traditional" college student" (Weir, Tashaie and Rossetti, no date). The inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities in post-secondary education is a fairly new idea. Recent efforts here in New Brunswick and other jurisdictions (such as Alberta, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, South Australia, New Zealand, and several American States) have demonstrated that post-secondary education institutions can successfully include students with intellectual (and other) disabilities. These initiatives are challenging some of the traditional roles of post secondary institutions. Although the shift is occurring slowly, post secondary institutions are increasingly providing education and training opportunities to a diverse group of adult learners.

In addition, policy makers are recognizing the importance of human rights considerations (particularly, equality rights) in the provision of quality, inclusive education.

Equality rights attempt to redress the historical disadvantages faced by various groups within society. Until very recently, people with intellectual disabilities have been virtually shut out of opportunities to access post secondary education

institutions. The disadvantage that people face becomes compounded when it is clear that without the skills people gain from a good education, they will be severely disadvantaged when they try to participate in the labour force. The lack of inclusive post secondary education opportunities translates clearly into economic exclusion for many individuals.

Equity and human rights requirements also mean finding ways to provide accommodations so that individuals can meaningfully participate in post secondary education. Reasonable accommodations must be provided to the point of "undue hardship" which must be clearly demonstrated. The NBCC/CCNB Connections project provided important accommodations for students with intellectual disabilities. These include the relaxing of the regular entrance criteria and the development of modified, individualized training plans within regular course programs as well as other needed supports such as assistive technology, tutoring, note takers, testing accommodations etc.

Providing these accommodations means that students with intellectual and other disabilities can participate in post secondary education in meaningful ways and develop significant job skills in a variety of career areas. This requires adequate resources to ensure that accommodations and supports are readily available throughout the post secondary education and training system. Unfortunately, this is not always the case presently as post secondary institutions argue that they do not have the necessary budget to provide these supports and accommodations. When this happens, students with intellectual and other disabilities may be denied access to post secondary education.

The Benefits of Inclusive Post Secondary Education

There are numerous benefits to developing and implementing an inclusive post secondary education and training system. In many respects these benefits represent a strong "business case" for ensuring that persons with a disability and other marginalized groups are fully included in our post secondary system. The benefits include:

- ***Meeting labour market demands by ensuring education and training to a diverse range of learners.*** New Brunswick's self sufficiency agenda will require a well trained and skilled labour force and the full participation of all individuals, including those from traditionally marginalized groups. As a province, we can no longer afford to leave people out of the labour market or our post secondary education and training system. This will require a concerted effort over a period of years to build a post secondary system that fully includes and supports all those who wish to improve their knowledge and skills.

- ***Providing relevant job related and employability skills training to persons with intellectual and other disabilities.*** For people with an intellectual disability, Community College programs are likely to provide better opportunities for learning job and employability skills. The NBCC/CCNB Connections pilot project demonstrated that specific job related skills could be achieved by individuals within their program areas. The project also demonstrated benefits for individuals in developing other employability skills such as time management, organization, study skills, following directions and communication.

Evaluations and studies of other similar programs have also reported benefits for individuals with intellectual disabilities in the area of job related and employability skills. A review of post-secondary education programs in Alberta has revealed that "students are able to develop and refine specific job skills in a chosen career path. They received individualized support while gaining these skills and learn about different work place expectations" (Weinkauf, 2002). The review also noted that individuals developed academic skills in the areas of reading, writing, comprehension and language skills through their participation in course work and study time.

- ***Enhanced employment outcomes for persons with disabilities.*** It is clear that access to post secondary education and training has a large impact in employment outcomes for persons with disabilities. The Canadian Council for Social Development has noted:

It is clear that, as the level of education increases, both persons with and without disabilities are increasingly more likely to be employed all year and increasingly less likely to be "not in the labour force" at all during the year. This relationship holds true for all age groups (CCSD, 2001).

The largest impact on employment outcomes for persons with disabilities occurs for those who are age 16 to 34. According to the Canadian Council and Social Development:

Perhaps the most drastic impact of education is seen among younger persons with disabilities, that is, those aged 16-34. Among persons without a High School diploma, over half (53.4%) of those with disabilities aged 16 to 34 were out of the paid labour force all year, compared to 14.7% of their counterparts without disabilities. Having a High School diploma improves this situation somewhat, as this percentage drops to 39.4% for those with disabilities (and 6.8% for those without disabilities). However, post-secondary education seems to bring about the most

dramatic improvement. Among persons with disabilities, post secondary graduates under age 35 were the most likely to have had some labour force participation during the year: only 13% were not in the labour force at all during 1998 - meaning that 87% were in the labour force at some point during the year. Not surprisingly, this group was also the most likely to be successful at holding a job all year (57.7%) (CCSD, 2001).

Positive employment results have also been demonstrated for individuals with intellectual disabilities. In a recent U.S. study, very positive employment outcomes were demonstrated for youth with intellectual disabilities who attended post secondary education versus those who did not. In a report entitled *Follow Up Study of the Post-Secondary Educational Experiences of Twenty Youth with Cognitive Disabilities*, it was noted:

Surveys have been completed on 20 students with significant cognitive disabilities and a matched cohort. Initial survey findings show that regarding variables associated with employment, statistical significance was found in a comparison of the two groups of students regarding competitive compared to sheltered employment. Comparing work settings, 100% of the students with post secondary educational experience who were working were in competitive employment compared to 42.9% for students without post secondary education who were working. Furthermore, 66.7% of the students with post secondary education in competitive employment used no work related supports (for example, job coach) compared 28.6% of students with no post secondary educational experience (Hart and Zafft, 2002).

Experience with the NBCC/CCNB Connections project also demonstrates important employment outcomes for project participants.

- **Overall improvement in the quality of post secondary education.** Inclusive educational institutions are characterized by their capacity to teach a diverse group of learners. Educators have the knowledge and skills to use specific strategies and practices for teaching students who have diverse learning styles, needs and sometimes objectives. Experience in the public school system has taught us that effective inclusive education creates a better education system for all students, including those who have a disability.

Developing effective inclusive post secondary institutions will require a commitment to on-going professional development of educators. It will also require knowledge of accommodations including the use of assistive technology, and many other strategies that support students to achieve their full potential.

- ***Other benefits for our society and communities.*** Inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities in post secondary education and training also has a number of real and potential benefits for our communities and society. There are a number of specific benefits that can be identified:
 - Individuals with intellectual disabilities will have greater opportunities for making positive contributions in their communities. Individuals are likely to take on valued roles as workers and volunteers as a result of the skills, self-esteem and confidence they gain through attending post secondary education.
 - Employers will increasingly see the benefits of including individuals with intellectual disabilities within their work forces. As people gain important job related and employability skills, they can fill job vacancies in some of the areas that may be facing labour shortages today and in the future.
 - Individuals with intellectual disabilities will rely less on the income support system and may, in fact, become tax contributors. Providing individuals with job skills and greater opportunities for employment will likely help to divert a number of individuals away from the income support system or, at least, decrease the need that people will have to rely on public income support benefits. For example, a young person with a disability who qualifies for benefits under the provincial Transitional Assistance Program would receive approximately \$5600 per year in income support benefits. If the same individual had to rely on the income support system for 40 years, that cost would total (in today's dollars) a quarter of a million dollars. There is a strong likelihood of cost avoidance by the provision of post-secondary education and training to youth with intellectual disabilities. Without these opportunities, there is a likelihood that individuals will become long-term recipients of income support benefits. Providing these opportunities soon after people leave high school offers the best chance for avoiding unnecessary long-term involvement in the income support system.
 - Providing opportunities for post secondary education and training may also help individuals avoid the need to rely on other types of social supports or services. As noted earlier, a U.S. study demonstrated that

approximately 67% of students with intellectual disabilities who had post secondary education used no work related supports when in competitive employment compared with approximately 29% of students with no post-secondary educational experience (Hart and Zafft, 2002). In addition, providing job related and employability skills training through post secondary education may also help to avoid the need for individuals to access other types of services such as day programs and mental health services.

Moving Our Post Secondary Education System Forward

Reform of post secondary education in New Brunswick must involve the development of a truly inclusive post secondary education system. This will require that government and post secondary education institutions do the following:

- Commit strongly to the concept of inclusive post secondary education.
- Demonstrate leadership and promote the goals of inclusive post secondary education at all levels.
- Provide appropriate professional training and development experiences for educators and others to enhance the capacity to implement inclusive education throughout the post secondary system.
- Provide for systemic reforms that reduce barriers to participation for persons with a disability and other marginalized groups (for example, entrance requirements, standardized curriculum, etc.).
- Provide adequate and stable funding to address the unique learning needs of students with varying abilities, including students with an intellectual disability.

From a long term perspective, building an inclusive post secondary education and training system will provide significant benefits to New Brunswick and its citizens. For people with an intellectual disability having an equal opportunity to access post secondary education will greatly enhance opportunities for employment and full citizenship.