

# Closing the Gap

## Notes on Speaker Presentations

### ***France Tolhurst: Executive Director, Coalition for Persons with Disabilities***

#### **1. Factors constraining participation of persons with disabilities in the workforce**

The problems that persons with disabilities face in the workforce are a reflection of the failure of key systems in society, namely the failure of the education system and the employment system.

Deficiencies in Education System:

- Money is not well spent
- School system does not give persons with disabilities the education and training they need
- Persons with disabilities are guided away from many education courses because of the costs of accommodation

Deficiencies in Employment System

- Employment system does not give persons with disabilities what they need to compete
- Educational institutions, service agencies and employers all have a role, but operate in silos, not as part of an integrated system
- Not enough being done to ensure that persons with disabilities understand an employer's requirements

#### **2. Mobility and transportation**

- Mobility and transportation are enormously important as part of solution
- Example: France would prefer to sell her house than have to forgo her van

#### **3. Accessibility and accommodation**

- Accessibility is not just a process of physical accommodation
- Needs managers and coworkers with open minds
- Needs capacity to think out of the box
- Existing persons with disabilities in the workforce should be used as a resource to help with accommodation issues for existing and new employees
- Recognize that persons with acquired disabilities have gone through a distinctive experience that needs unique accommodations: i.e. have suffered a loss; process is analogous to a process of mourning

#### **4. Managing persons with disabilities**

Managers should manage persons with disabilities as they would any other employee: i.e. as individuals; not as a different category of employee

#### **5. Key Message**

If persons with disabilities have access to the right resources at the right time, the likelihood will improve for them of becoming and staying productive members of society.

***Tim Collins: President,  
Staff Link Solutions Ltd.***

**1. Staff Link's services to employers**

- Helps employers to identify position needs
- Searches for applicants: maintains database of potential candidates; also identifies persons with disability candidates through partnerships with service organizations
- Puts candidates through four-part interview process, including telephone interview of potential candidates, face-to-face behavioural interview, and technical skills evaluation.
- Provides background and credential checks on candidates

**2. Emerging labour force demographics**

- Good talent is in high demand
- Organizations are looking to new sources of skills and talent, which opens opportunities for persons with disabilities

**3. Business benefits of a diverse workforce**

- Diversity brings new ideas and skills to the organization
- Contributes to higher retention rates
- Contributes to shareholder value
- Provides new sources of entrants for workforce
- Helps organization build better relationships with customers/suppliers and community

**4. Factors contributing to success of persons with disabilities in workforce**

- Ensure persons with disabilities have opportunity to acquire education and skills that are in demand
- Respond to the individual needs of persons with disabilities.
- Hire responsibly: ensure that persons with disabilities meet the core job requirements (i.e. have what it takes to be successful)
- Promote an inclusive working environment

***Tony Silli: Sales Consultant,  
Frontier Computing***

**1. Frontier Computing's Services**

Frontier Computing sells equipment and provides technical support for people who are blind, have low vision or a learning disability. It has offices in Ontario and Nova Scotia.

**2. Developments in hardware and software**

- The evolution of hardware and software means that it is now easier and cheaper to find good adaptive solutions
- Clients are using off-the-shelf equipment
- Equipment is configured to work out of the box
- Miniaturization is contributing to smaller, more portable and less costly equipment
- Software is becoming cheaper
- Standardized interfaces

**3. Challenges**

- Need to work with the user to get systems configured right for their specific needs
- Frontier Computing is often brought in after the fact to help remedy problems, rather than at front end to anticipate them

**Baruch Chai: President,  
Microcomputer Science Centre Inc.**

**1. Microcomputer Science's Services**

MSC provides equipment, training and technical support for a range of special needs individuals including those who are blind or have low vision, people with learning disabilities, those who are deaf or hard of hearing, and people with developmental disabilities.

**2. Successful solutions**

Finding the right solution involves 3 steps:

- Needs analysis: this is 90% of the solution. If done properly, the right solution will be found
- Adopt appropriate technical solution
- Ensure training and support

**3. Role of adaptive technology in schools**

- Start early: ensure that young people with disabilities get access to appropriate adaptive technology
- Key element in developing employable skills
- Use adaptive technology as part of the solution of keeping them in school until they attain the level of education and skills to be employable

**4. New developments**

- New devices facilitate learning on-the-go
- Trend to inclusive education, rather than segregated

**5. Payback to employers and society from increasing employability of persons with disabilities**

- More loyal workforce
- Harder working employees
- Persons with disabilities with jobs pay taxes