



CANADIAN CENTRE ON DISABILITY STUDIES

research and education on issues that affect us all

<http://www.disabilitystudies.ca>

Building Bridges between the Corporate Sector and the Disability Community

Final Report
March 2001

Canadian Centre on Disability Studies

Table of contents

Executive Summary	3
Acknowledgements	5
Section 1 -- Introduction.....	6
Section 2 – Literature review	7
Introduction	7
Rising Needs For Corporate Contribution	7
Volunteerism	8
Monetary Donations	8
Corporate responses to giving	9
Addressing Disability Needs	9
Disability Issues and The Workplace	10
Efforts Implemented That Address Disability Needs	11
Conclusion	12
Section 3 – Analysis of survey data.....	13
Methodology	13
Summary of Survey Results.....	13
Who responded?.....	13
How did they incorporate people with disability in their workforce?	13
Employees with disabilities	14
Corporate disability policy	15
Willingness to hire and accommodate people with disabilities	15
Contributions to disability organizations and disability issues	16
Barriers to involvement with disability issues	16
Recommendations for developing productive relations with corporate sector.....	17
Significance of survey results.....	17
Addressing disability within corporations.....	17
Corporations addressing disability in the broader society	19
Section 4 – Recommendations.....	19
References	21

Executive Summary

Approximately 4.2 million Canadians identify themselves as having a disability, most of them adults. This is a significant consumer population and labour force for the private sector in Canada. While there has been an increasing interest in strengthening the relationships between the corporate sector and the disability community, there remain a substantial number of social, economic and systemic barriers preventing many persons with disabilities from fully participating in the Canadian economy. One of the key barriers continues to be negative attitudes towards and stereotyping of persons with disabilities.

The Canadian Centre on Disability Studies (CCDS) received funding from Human Resources Development Canada to undertake a project exploring the relationships between corporations and disability. The project analyzed the opportunities for and barriers to building bridges between the corporate sector and the disability community in two key areas -- corporations' internal employment practices related to people with disabilities and their practices addressing disability in the broader community. CCDS undertook an extensive literature review of academic, policy, business and popular sources. In addition, CCDS surveyed corporations about their recruitment record, policies and practices related to the employment of people with disabilities, their contributions to disability organizations, and the barriers they saw to addressing disability issues. The 20 companies that responded (4.5% response rate) included primarily larger businesses, with national and provincial activities. They represented the manufacturing, communications, transportation, real estate, insurance, consulting, retail, banking, grocery, agriculture and utility sectors.

This project demonstrated that the corporate sector is becoming an essential partner in identifying opportunities to enhance the economic participation of people with disabilities. For example, volunteerism, monetary and in-kind donations, and recruiting persons with disabilities as employees are some of the ways in which the corporate sector is participating in the disability community. Corporations are increasingly recognizing their social responsibility, which includes company accountability for community development, and leadership on social responsibility issues. In the CCDS survey, thirteen companies indicated they made donations to disability organizations. Yet this project illustrated that companies understood their giving as charity to what they described as "helpless", rather than a means to support the self-reliance or strengthen the full economic participation of people with disabilities.

Some corporations realize that contributions for the support of the employability of people with disabilities are a good marketing strategy rather than simple gestures of charity. In the CCDS survey, sixteen companies said they had hired persons with disabilities and had made their workplaces more accessible through reasonable accommodation. When employers did hire people with disabilities and made the necessary accommodations, they found there was little difference between employees with and without disabilities.

Despite these initiatives and the fact that most job-site accommodations cost very little, the percentage of people with disabilities as a proportion of corporate work forces remains very low. A significant barrier to employment for people with disabilities continues to be the attitudes of society, including employers. Some of the responses to the CCDS survey perpetuated these negative stereotypes of people with disabilities.

The project highlights recommendations for strengthening the relationships between corporations and disability organizations and for further research on the relationship between corporations and the disability community.

Acknowledgements

This project was truly a team effort of the various staff, students and volunteers associated with the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies. The research team included (in alphabetical order): George Hamilton, David Kehler, Neil Okumura, Eveline Sabourin, and Deborah Stienstra,. Other CCDS staff involved in various aspects of the report include: Gary Annable, Cathy Archibald, Terril Chessell, Henry Enns, Zephania Matanga, Robb Nickel, and Colleen Watters. Advice on this project was given by Yude Henteleff, Greg Findlay, David Gardave, Lynda White, members of the CCDS Fundraising Committee and the CCDS Board. We appreciate their guidance and support. Cathy Archibald deserves our deepest thanks for her continuing support in so many ways. Final thanks go to our funder, Human Resources Development Canada, for their confidence that this work was important and would be completed.

Section 1 -- Introduction

While there has been an increasing interest in strengthening the relationships between the corporate sector and the disability community, little has been written about this relationship. The Canadian Centre on Disability Studies received funding from Human Resources Development Canada to undertake a project exploring these relationships. The project was to achieve the following objectives:

- to identify the needs of the corporate sector related to disability issues;
- to research what corporations have contributed to disability issues;
- to identify the impact of corporate giving on disability organizations; and • to prepare a report analyzing the opportunities for and barriers to building bridges between the corporate sector and the disability community.

To address these objectives, the Centre undertook an extensive literature review of academic, policy, business and popular sources. The results are discussed below in Section 2. In addition, a survey on corporate employment policies and practices related to people with disabilities, corporate giving and other involvements with the disability community was distributed to corporations across Canada. The methodology, survey results and their significance are discussed in Section 3. Recommendations following from this are outlined in Section 4.

Section 2 – Literature review

Introduction

Ongoing economic growth combined with decreasing unemployment rates may benefit many members of Canadian society. Yet people with disabilities continue to lag behind in employment rates and fail to benefit from economic growth to the same degree as other Canadians. According to the Royal Bank of Canada “individuals with disabilities have participated in this upswing only to minor extent. Deep inequalities continue to exist that result in people with disabilities generally suffering from missed opportunities throughout their lives” (McCallum and Holt 2000, p1). These inequalities and other impediments create barriers for persons with disabilities that result in increasing demands on social services, employment and insurance benefits and government spending. The private sector is an essential partner to identify opportunities to enhance the economic participation of people with disabilities. This literature review addresses corporate awareness of disability issues, corporate contributions, and how these contributions to disability issues impact the lives of persons with disabilities.

The 1991 Statistics Canada Health and Activity Limitations Survey reports that there are approximately 4.2 million Canadians who declare having a disability, most of them adults (Fawcett, 1996). As people age, they are increasingly likely to have a disability and, as a result, become poor. Disability does not come from the differences in people’s bodies or minds, but in the ability of societies to accommodate these differences. People are disabled when they are unable to function fully within society, not necessarily as a result of their bio-medical condition. Disablement may occur in response to a wide range of conditions that affect mobility, sight, hearing, speech, learning and mental health. Persons with disabilities are less likely to have access to employment with higher income rates and benefits or pensions that lead to income security in the later part of the lifecycle. About 12 percent of persons with disabilities between the ages of 15 and 64 had no personal income from either earnings, pensions, disability income support programs, investments or other sources (Fawcett, 1996 p148). This in turn increases their dependency on social programs and services and places a greater burden on the taxpayers and governments.

Despite the richness of Canadian society in resources and modern technology, there remains a substantial number of social, economic and systemic barriers that prevent many persons with disabilities from exercising their rights to full citizenship and full participation in the workforce. The value we place on individualism and independence has greatly influenced the creation of these barriers. In addition, we often fail to recognize a person’s abilities and focus instead on their disabilities. This encourages economic dependency for persons with disabilities who are deemed unable to compete with the rest of society.

Rising Needs For Corporate Contribution

Corporations are increasingly recognizing that the global economy establishes new challenges for profit-making and capital gain. Corporate social responsibility, which includes company accountability for community development, and leadership on social responsibility issues, is identified as an important factor contributing to recognition for distinctiveness among competitors. A recent supplement of The Globe and Mail entitled “A New Agenda for Corporate Citizenship” states “employees have repeatedly shown they prefer to work for

companies that are involved in community; they themselves often want to be involved in community; and they want the community benefits and result from such engagement” (“A New Agenda”, 2000). Volunteerism, monetary and in-kind donations, and recruiting persons with disabilities as employees are some of the ways that corporations can improve community well-being and community relations.

Volunteerism

On average, Canadian citizens donate \$3,000 per person per year in voluntary services (Picard, 1997 p3). Many organizations develop volunteer programs and encourage their employees to participate. They share their skills with charitable organizations and agencies that depend on these efforts in order to meet their goals. Lloyd Mackey (1994 p20) commends several businesses for their efforts. Businesses such as the Body Shop, allocate some of their employees’ paid time toward volunteering a minimum amount of hours per month; and the Guilford Store organizes fundraisers for a transition house and counselling services (Mackey, 1994 p29). Corporations in British Columbia get together annually for the 24-Hour Relay for the Kids to raise money for the British Columbia Lions Society for Children with Disabilities (Mackey, 1994 p29). These are but a few of the many ways that corporations and businesses have contributed to the needs of those who are increasingly disadvantaged in contemporary society.

Monetary Donations

Many companies have joined the Canadian Center for Philanthropy’s Imagine Corporate Program and have allocated 1% of their pre-tax profits to charitable and nonprofit organizations (Mackey, 1994). Other corporations will take advantage of tax incentives, such as the Ontario Workplace Child-care and Accessibility Tax Incentives. Under these incentives taxes may be reduced by up to 30% for accommodations related to employees with disabilities (Human Resources Adviser Newsletter, 1999). A survey by the Conference Board of Canada (Nieuwenhuis and Rostami, 1998) identify different contributions within the corporate sector:

- Cash donations.
- Gifts in kind
- Non marketing sponsorships
- Employee matching gifts fund
- Scholarship program.
- Corporate contribution to the community service program (volunteerism).

In 1996, the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy noted that corporate donations primarily go towards education and health (Hall and Macpherson, 1996 p2). Studies by the Centre also show that the bulk of corporate donations go to charities that declare high revenues, over 500 thousand to 1.5 million dollars (Hall and Macpherson, 1996 p2). This leaves many organizations competing for a smaller piece of the pie and struggling for depleting resources. André Picard (1997 p13) adds that “corporate Canada gives only about \$1.2 billion of the \$10.5 billion donated to Canadian charities annually and that the five big banks gave less than 1 percent of their profits”. However, Janet Rostami (1997 p1) concluded that corporate donations increased by 8.9 per cent in 1995, by 6 per cent in 1996, and estimated a growth of

another 7 per cent by 1997. These figures suggest that more businesses are becoming increasingly aware of their civic duties and responsibilities to the well-being of society as a whole, and that their contributions can improve and benefit community relations. (Rostami, 1997 p1). Little has been written specifically on corporate giving in disability issues. Further studies are needed on corporate awareness of disability issues, contributions and identification of barriers that persistently slow down the process of acquiring full employment and increased economic competitiveness for persons with disabilities.

Corporate responses to giving

As 'social marketing' becomes a new concept in the corporate world, more and more corporations are realizing that monetary, in-kind, and/or voluntary based contributions for the support of the increased employability of people with disabilities are good marketing strategies rather than simple gestures of charity. Investment in the developing the capacities of people with disabilities will provide longer term savings. "Studies have shown that for every \$1 invested in an at-risk child, \$6 can be saved down the road" (Picard, 1997 p24). Subsequently, an increase in corporate community investment in Canada has become of utmost importance as "an integral aspect of corporate social responsibility, community investment strategies and activities that played a key role in the strengthening of relationships with stockholders" (Nieuwenhuis and Rostami, 1998).

Key players in the development of initiatives that promote increased corporate participation in funding programs and services for those in need include Martin Connell, co-founder of Imagine. Connell, who believes in teaching by example, allocates at least 10 per cent of profits from his business (the Ace Bakery in Toronto) to charitable organizations (Picard, 1997 p9). The director of Imagine, Chris Pinney, explains that corporations are more willing to donate people, time and money to charitable organizations and agencies as their awareness of civic duty and social responsibility becomes an important factor in the bottom line (Picard, 1997 p9). John Cleghorn, Chairman and CEO, Royal Bank of Canada, could not have been much more convincing when he argued "If a company helps and partners with Canada's education, research and community institutions, Canadians can achieve better lives, become better citizens, better investors, better employees and, yes, better customers. Everyone benefits" ("A New Agenda", 2000 p12). Nonetheless, corporations have been slow to fill the gap which occurred when government began to cut funds to voluntary groups. "Between 1991 and 1995, a period when governments started cutting grants to the voluntary sector in earnest, corporate donations fell from about 1.4 per cent of profits to 0.8per cent" (Picard,1997). To compensate for this, the private sector would have to give much more: "for every one per cent in government cuts, corporations would have to increase giving by 50 per cent" (Picard, 1997,p9).

Addressing Disability Needs

Governments across Canada have recognized that they can foster the employment of people with disabilities through employer incentives, including tax breaks and assistance with accommodation costs. While these will improve the quality of life of people with disabilities, they fail to address the greater economic problem of high unemployment among people with disabilities. The needs of persons with disabilities essentially shift from increased employment

opportunities to accessible education, training, and work skills and back to employment depending on the market forces and the development of technology.

In response to the growing concerns of the rights of persons with disabilities, Human Resources Development Canada initiated a roundtable on corporate values in relation to social responsibility, participation in community development and how corporate ethics influenced consumer behaviour (Khoury, 1999 p1). The Canadian CEOs that attended left with greater insight and awareness on issues that demand “corporate citizenship activity” (p1). Rostami (1997 p1) confirmed that keeping the corporate community informed on contributions and donations of other companies from across the country was a great incentive to keep in line with one’s social duty.

Other means of ensuring inclusion of persons with disabilities is by increasing their opportunities for participation in research, education and work. Kari Krogh suggests that developing Partnership Agreements Framework would be one solution, as long as all partners are perceived as capable stakeholders who are proactive in the process of decision-making, policy development, and community planning (Krogh, 1998). Partnership agreements would help to identify the needs of persons with disabilities and how those needs can best be met. Implementing these may pose specific challenges for the private sector. They require a rethinking of how we engage with people with disabilities and enable them to become equal partners in decision-making. The appropriate steps need to be taken to accommodate any disadvantages that a partner with a disability may experience and cultural differences among the participants need to be taken into consideration during the process of discussion and development of agreements (Krogh, 1998).

Such partnerships would begin to address some barriers towards the full participation of persons with disabilities and their ability to be active in the Canadian economy. Krogh (1998) also argued that stereotypical attitudes and discrimination towards people with disabilities remain prominent in Canadian society. Without redressing the inequalities people with disabilities face, it will be difficult to ensure that people with disabilities are full participants in the Canadian economy.

Disability Issues and The Workplace

In contrast to popular belief, most persons with disabilities do not perceive themselves as unemployable, but merely as individuals who may require various forms of accommodation and services that would allow them to contribute and be competitive socially, economically and politically along with the rest of society (Ministers of Social Services, 1998). In 1991 the number of persons with disabilities who participated in the workforce remained very low: only 56.3 percent of people with disabilities were part of the workforce as opposed to 80.9 percent of those who did not declare a disability (Fawcett, 1996 p19).

For most of society, employment opportunities increase as education levels increase. For people with disabilities, unfortunately, education holds two challenges. People with disabilities have more difficulty attaining a higher level of education. McCallum and Holt (2000 p2) demonstrate that only approximately 5 percent of persons with disabilities are represented in the category of workers with 4 years or more of post-secondary education. For those people with disabilities who are able to access post-secondary education, significant obstacles remain in obtaining employment. As Fawcett (1996, p79) suggests, “while education certainly reduced the likelihood that a person (with disabilities) would be unemployed, it did not create a ‘level playing field’ between persons with and without disabilities. At each level of education, persons with disabilities had higher rates of unemployment than those without disabilities.”

In a study of employment issues for people with disabilities in the United States and the United Kingdom, Bruyere (1999) reports that “continuing barriers to employment and advancement for persons with disabilities were in the areas of lack of related experience and lack of the requisite skills and training in the applicant or employee”(p4). Another barrier that was identified in the study is lack of awareness on how to accommodate by supervisors and co-workers (Bruyere, 1999 p4). This, she claims, may stem from ‘social attitudes and stereotyping’ of persons with disabilities (p4). One half of respondents in Bruyere’s (1999 p5) study had made changes in the workplace, including ensuring equal pay and benefits, creating flexibility in the performance management system, modifying the return to work policy, and adjusting medical policies.

Employers who are willing to give a worker with a disability a chance are tapping into an invisible workforce. Most job-site accommodations cost very little while others are as simple as moving a piece of furniture such as a filing cabinet or desk (Solomon, 2000 p2). Len Murdock (who is deaf) works as a software engineer for Cisco Systems in San Jose, California. He communicates mostly by e-mail and only required an interpreter for the initial job interview (Shapiro, 2000 p3). Inclusiveness and providing opportunities for people with disabilities to contribute to the social and economic development of a community are not necessarily an economic burden for employers, and increase their self-esteem, mental health, and general well-being.

Efforts Implemented That Address Disability Needs

Necessary funding and resources are not available for everyone who needs them. In the aftermath of government cutbacks on social transfers and government funded programs, many of the responsibilities for the caring of persons with disabilities have been gradually downloaded onto family, friends and the community (Human Resources Development Canada, 1998 p1). If persons with disabilities are going to be able to compete economically on a level playing field with the rest of society, they must have access to the necessary tools that will enable them to challenge the systemic and institutional barriers that still persist.

There are a number of legislative frameworks to ensure support for people with disabilities. For instance, the 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees equality before and under the law and the right to accommodation. The 1977 Canadian Human Rights Act reinforces the ‘duty to accommodate’ in order to ensure that the appropriate programs and services are made available so that all Canadians are able to reach their full potential. The promotion of increased opportunities for persons with disabilities is also evident in the 1986 Employment Equity Act. This act was created to encourage employers under federal jurisdiction to provide improved employment opportunities for people with disabilities, women, aboriginal peoples and members of visible minority groups.

In 1997 the Minister of Human Resources Development created a task force to develop recommendations that would improve partnerships between the government and the private sector; partnerships that would work toward the improvement of services and programs for persons with a disability (Human Resources Development Canada, 1998 p1). One of the recommendations was to replace the Vocational Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons program with the Employability Assistance for People with Disabilities program . The new initiative was devised to help people with disabilities participate more fully in Canadian society and to assist them overcome the employment challenges they often face and help them get jobs.

In order to further enhance the employability of persons with disabilities governments at the federal, provincial and territorial level agreed to joint efforts for the implementation of the

necessary disability support systems. In Unison (Ministers of Social Services, 1998) resulted from these government efforts as a building block for the improvement of the lives of the most marginalized and disadvantaged in the social, economic, and political milieu.

Canadian businesses and corporations are also becoming more aware of immediate and future economic benefits related to the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Corporations are increasingly recognizing the need for 'disability management programs' as a cost-benefit effort to override the side effects of limited government spending and cost sharing. Nolan and Felix (1997) outline some of the contributing factors that have attributed to this increase in corporate concern:

- contingency stress acquired disability costs caused by staff shortages when an employee is ill or becomes disabled as the burden is shifted to remaining employees,
- an aging baby boom population which may result in increasing demands on social services,
- more inclusive definitions of disabilities which in the future will increase the boundaries of what qualifies as a disability,
- and an increasing demand for lower taxes and therefore fewer government funded programs and services made available.

As a result of this new awareness among the corporate sector, many businesses have integrated within their mandate policies and procedures that provide a framework for the management of disability benefits and the reintegration of employees who are disabled within the workforce. Watson Wyatt Canada claims that simple strategies that aim at decreasing disability related costs are effective, and a recent survey reports that costs may be reduced by as much as 16% (Nolan and Felix 1997 p3). The rising cost of disability benefits demands that employers look at ways that they can improve workplace safety and how persons with disabilities can be reintegrated in the workforce. Jeffrey Gandz (1998 p2) explains that "there is increasing evidence that the emphasis on diversity pays off on the 'bottom line' in the form of corporate profits or greater taxpayer satisfaction with government".

Conclusion

The situation of people with disabilities in the economy continues to be fairly bleak. Only limited numbers are involved in the work force, and those without work must rely on government or private pension plans or income assistance programs for their income. With the cuts to government programs throughout the 1990s, there has been an increased call for the private sector to become more responsive in addressing these needs. When addressed together with people with disabilities, corporations can contribute in significant ways to alleviate this situation, specifically through volunteerism, monetary or in-kind donations, or by incorporating people with disabilities as part of their work force.

Section 3 – Analysis of survey data

Methodology

To identify corporate practices and policies related to people with disabilities, CCDS developed a survey asking for information on characteristics of corporations, recruitment record, policies and practices related to the employment of people with disabilities, contributions to disability organizations, and barriers to addressing disability issues. (The survey is included in Appendix One.) Organizations were promised confidentiality when submitting the survey. The survey and its dissemination strategy were reviewed by an advisory group including representatives from corporate management, human resources and law.

In June 2000, surveys were distributed by electronic mail to the Human Resources offices of 300 national businesses, chosen from the Globe and Mail's Report on the top 1000 companies in Canada. Very few surveys were returned initially and a second email request was submitted. With continued limited response, the dissemination strategy was reassessed. CCDS decided to target its efforts on Manitoba companies and undertake substantial follow-up of the survey. In September 2000, 40 companies were chosen from the Manitoba government's business database. The survey was distributed to these by fax, with a follow-up copy mailed. In November and December 2000 follow-up telephone calls were made to the recipients. By January 2001, 20 surveys were completed and returned,¹ a response rate of 4.5%. The results summarized below are based on these responses.

Summary of Survey Results

Who responded?

The companies that responded included primarily larger businesses, with national and provincial activities from a variety of sectors. Of the 20 respondents, 15 represented businesses with over 100 employees and 5 of under 100 employees. Five of the 20 identified themselves as in manufacturing, 4 in communications, and 2 in transportation. There were also companies representing mining, real estate, insurance, consulting, retail, banking, grocery, agriculture and utility. Eight of those who answered the longer survey identified their activities as both provincial and national in scope, 4 said they were exclusively provincial, and only 1 identified their company activities as exclusively national in scope.

How did they incorporate people with disability in their workforce?

We asked for several indicators of their company's commitment to the inclusion of people with disabilities in their own work force, including the number of employees with disabilities, the existence of a specific disability policy and their willingness to hire and accommodate people with disabilities. While most of the companies said they hired people with disabilities, all but one company had representation significantly lower than the percentage of people with disability in the Canadian labour force.² Women with disabilities were under represented in almost all companies that responded.

Employees with disabilities

The majority of firms indicated they had employees with disabilities in their labour force (14/20). Unfortunately, 4 of these 14 did not indicate how many people with disabilities they employed. The percentage of people with disabilities as part of the total workforce ranged from .9% to 7.8%.

Among the four companies who provided a breakdown by sex, only one company (in the retail sector) had women with disabilities outnumber men with disabilities. In the other three companies, the number of female employees with disabilities was significantly lower (or zero) compared with the number of male employees.

Eight companies indicated the types of disabilities their employees experienced. Half of the responses included the full range of disabilities, although mobility disabilities were identified in seven of the eight companies, visual disabilities in six, and auditory and learning disabilities in five.

Of the six companies that indicated a reason for their inability to hire people with disabilities, three said they had had no applicants with disabilities, one said it was a result of not having appropriate qualifications, one said certain disabilities became a bona fide occupational restriction, and finally, one indicated they were unable to accommodate requirements.

The three employers with the highest percentage of people with disabilities in their labour forces were in banking, retail and communications and they ranged from 4.8 % to 7.8%. It is interesting to note that at least two of these employers were in sectors covered by the federal employment equity legislation. The 1999 report on the federal Employment Equity Act notes that the banking sector included people with disabilities as only 2.28% of their workforce, transportation only 1.83% and communications only 2.42 %.

-
1. Four companies submitted a shorter version of the survey. Several questions were eliminated to assist in attaining a higher response rate.
 2. People with disabilities constituted 6.5% of the general labour force in 1998 (Human Resources Development Canada 1999).

Corporate disability policy

Of the 20 companies, only 6 said they had “a corporate policy, rule, test or practice with respect to persons with disabilities”, 12 said they had none, 1 indicated their policy was not public and one did not reply. When we probed further as to their practices, 7 firms who had said no initially, indicated they did have a corporate practice. Two of those who identified their company as having a policy -- as well as two of those identified as having a practice -- indicated employment equity was the policy or practice. Other practices identified included incorporating it into long-term disability, policies on absentee management, performance management, and harassment policies. Some indicated they keep in contact with employment agencies for persons with disabilities or would employ people with disabilities if they were able to perform the required tasks. Of those companies who replied they had no policy or practice towards people with disabilities, only one indicated an interest in creating a policy.

Willingness to hire and accommodate people with disabilities

The survey asked if companies had increased the number of employees with disabilities over the previous five years and what more could be done by their firm. Of the 15 companies who answered this question, 11 said they had increased their numbers. Measures to improve their hiring record included: overcoming negative stereotypes concerning people with disabilities; better understanding the “business case” surrounding a diverse workplace; hearing from people with disabilities with the qualifications required; increasing contacts; making the entryways accessible; partnering with associations supporting people with disabilities and using them as a source of recruitment; being more proactive; working with Workers’ Compensation Board through the vocational rehabilitation program; advertise on specific web sites targeted to people with disabilities.

The majority of companies indicated a willingness to provide training for a person with disabilities if they did not have the specific training for a job, although a few qualified their willingness on the situation. In addition, almost all the firms indicated they were willing to accommodate that person. The two companies that did not answer yes, offered a qualified yes, accommodation based on the level of accommodation and where possible given the demands of the job.

Eighteen of the 20 firms indicated they have been involved to some degree with disability in their organization. Sixteen said they had hired a person with disabilities and had made the workplace more accessible through reasonable accommodation. Seven said they provided sensitivity training and awareness training for staff on disability issues and provided internships for persons with disabilities. Six indicated they developed services for persons with disabilities. Three companies said they provided financial support by sending an employee with disabilities back to school. Some other initiatives identified included: developing language in union agreements to support on the job training and employment and diversity events.

The majority of companies (15/20) indicated they had invested some money in addressing disability in their workplace through training or retraining employees with disabilities; changing the nature of work; modifying or purchasing new equipment; or building modifications. Three companies indicated they spent between \$5,000 - \$10,000 on these adaptations, and an additional three companies said they spent more than \$10,000.

Contributions to disability organizations and disability issues

We asked companies to indicate the nature of their corporate contributions to disability outside of their workplace. Specifically, we asked about financial donations, volunteer time, and material contributions to disability issues and organizations. We also asked about the benefits they received and impacts they believe these contributions have made.

Thirteen of 20 companies indicated they did make donations to disability organizations. Of the nine companies that completed a long questionnaire and indicated they had made a contribution to disability related issues, four said they volunteered time and five said they contributed physical assets. Most thought their donations made an average impact or had no idea what impact they had made.

Some of the benefits companies identified as a result of their contributions included: access to job ready applicants, expertise to help meet their objectives; and a positive impact on their community. A number of responses indicated that the companies hoped that their donation would be well used by people with disabilities.

Barriers to involvement with disability issues

The survey asked companies to identify any barriers that prevented them from addressing disability within their own organizations and that discouraged them from supporting disability causes. Few barriers were identified either within organizations or in response to broader aspects of disability issues. Within companies, the most frequently mentioned barriers were those linked to occupational requirements, costs and incentive or interest in disability.

Thirteen companies indicated they had encountered no barriers to addressing disability in their organizations. Of those that had met barriers, six said the attitudes of supervisors were a problem, three indicated the attitudes of employees were the problem and two said the attitudes of executives were a problem. In addition, three companies indicated that the lack of proper examination of bona fide occupational requirements; the costs of accessibility; and lack of incentive were barriers. Two employers identified disinterest as a barrier. Single employers also indicated that lack of policy; lack of training in order to provide reasonable accommodation; costs of assistive technologies; costs of training or retraining; access to information; access to expertise or support were all barriers. One employer also identified the preference of an employee to be on benefits as a barrier.

Barriers were not identified by most companies as a discouragement for contributing to disability causes. Only two companies identified barriers including: outside of mandate; reluctance to attach themselves to advocacy groups; and difficulty in prioritizing among competing groups within society.

Recommendations for developing productive relations with corporate sector

Several companies provided recommendations for disability organizations to assist in developing productive relationships with the corporate sector.

Disability organizations can assist corporations by providing stronger supports to employers and workers in employment searches. These may include: work experience placements, communications regarding workplace requirements, job analysis prior to placement, preparing workers with disabilities to obtain marketable skills; and presenting to employers candidates with useful skills either as interns or in full-time employment. Disability organizations can also increase disability awareness and visibility with corporations.

But disability organizations are also important partners with companies. This means first of all recognizing the needs of business and showing them how to succeed in addressing disability. It can also mean involving companies by pitching to them, involving them in sponsorships, or advisory committees. It could also involve creating a directory of resources for companies.

Significance of survey results

The results from the CCDS survey reinforce some of the key findings of the literature search and identify some important areas for further work.

Addressing disability within corporations

The results of the CCDS survey indicated that the percentage of people with disabilities as a proportion of corporate work forces is very low. This is in keeping with the results Statistics Canada regularly finds in its labour force data. Many companies which are regulated by the federal Employment Equity Act have better rates of representation, although not all. In our survey, two companies in the transportation sector had some of the lowest representations of people with disabilities in their work force. Women with disabilities are doing worse than men in this sample. This is in keeping with Fawcett's (2000) research on women with disabilities in Ontario which indicates this population is the last in line to get jobs.

While a large number of the companies which returned our survey indicated they hired people with disabilities, not all of these had either a corporate policy or practice on disability related issues. This raises the interesting question of why companies develop their disability policies. Is it in relation to specific situations of their employees? Is it a response to external mandates such as human rights legislation or employment equity programs? Or is it a response to a broader corporate perceived need to address diversity, including disability in the work force? The greatest number of the respondents who answered this question indicated that their policy framework was employment equity, for some through the federal government Employment Equity Act, for others through provincial human rights legislation. This suggests that programs like employment equity provide a useful framework for corporate involvement in disability issues within their own workplace. We were unable to assess the development of policies to any greater extent, largely because most companies were unwilling to share their policies with us or had no policies or practices.

Most of the respondent companies indicated they made some attempt to deal with issues of disability within their work places. However, they dealt with disability primarily through legislated requirements (e.g. duty to accommodate) or measures targeted to the situations of

individual employees (e.g. assistive technologies). Only one-third of the respondents addressed either attitudinal issues related to disability through sensitivity training or disability awareness measures, or diversity events. This suggests that the respondents saw disability as something related primarily to the individuals with the bio-medical conditions, not necessarily as a broader responsibility of societal or workplace attitudes. Only a few companies seemed to recognize that it was as important to ensure that a worker could access their work as it was to have their co-workers understand and be open to disability issues.

Our survey confirmed that the costs of accommodating workers with disabilities is not necessarily very expensive, as noted in the literature review. The majority of accommodations, including assistive devices and training or retraining, cost less than \$10,000.

One surprising result of this survey was the failure of respondents to identify barriers to addressing disability in their work places. Most (13/20) said they saw no barriers that prevented them from addressing disability issues. Yet, their answers to the rest of the questions suggests they did encounter barriers, perhaps including lack of interest or incentive. The literature review (Krogh, 1998; Bruyere 1999) suggested that a significant barrier for many employers was societal attitudes towards disability. Several companies indicated that the attitudes of managers and supervisors were significant barriers. We noted that even some human resources people who responded to the questionnaire reflected stereotypical attitudes towards people with disabilities in their answers.

- One commented that employees with disabilities were less productive than other employees as they “are not able to work a full 8 hour day, have permanent restrictions”. This suggests that there is only one way to work, and indicates an unwillingness to create work arrangements that may better accommodate an employee’s requirements.
- Another suggested that they didn’t need to have a written policy on disability because “Our building is set up for handicapped employees/students”. This answer indicates the perception that all disabilities can be accommodated by ensuring physical or mobility access. It fails to recognize that there may be sensory disabilities (including blindness, deafness), learning disabilities, mental health issues among other disabilities.
- Several respondents suggested they did not have a policy on disability because they had no disabled employees. This suggests that businesses without employees with disabilities have no responsibility for addressing disability within their workplace. It also fails to see any link between lack of policy and lack of success in hiring people with disabilities.
- One indicated that the biggest barrier was that the employees with disabilities prefer to be on benefits. This answer fails to recognize the complexity of living with disability within our society. Many people with disabilities have significant medical costs associated with their disabilities that may be covered when they are on benefits, but are not covered when they are employed. This illustrates a significant disincentive to obtaining paid work.

The CCDS survey also reaffirmed the results reported by Bruyere (1999) who suggested that there were continuing barriers to employment for people with disabilities because they did not have the right training or skills for the job. At least one-quarter of the employers in the CCDS survey indicated that they were unable to hire people with disabilities because they did not have the right qualifications, because no one with disabilities applied or because the employer was unable to accommodate the persons with disabilities.

Yet the CCDS survey also confirmed that when some employers did hire people with disabilities and made the necessary accommodations, there was little difference between them and other employees. One employer noted there were positive as well as negative differences between employees with and without disabilities. The negatives were that employees with

disabilities were “slower, (had) more sick days, (were) less able to communicate”, but on the positive side, they worked “more hours to get job done, more flexible at job tasks”. Many of the employers in the CCDS survey indicated that they were interested in hiring more people with disabilities and were hoping to do so in the coming years. For some, they hoped to use partnerships with disability organizations to recruit new employees, or to provide support for people with disabilities in their work force. One employer noted that they would like disability organizations to do a “job analysis prior to placement and match of the person; increased follow-up, ie frequency and length” and ask how they can meet the needs of the company.” Yet when we consider these descriptions of partnerships in light of the partnership agreement frameworks (Krogh 1998) outlined in the literature review, we do not find the necessary level of equality between corporations and disability organizations. For corporations to address the needs of people with disabilities and create partnerships with disability organizations, there needs to be the development of equitable relationships with the organizations in decision-making, not using them just to provide support or services.

Corporations addressing disability in the broader society

The CCDS survey also confirmed some of the key areas for work identified in the literature review around corporate giving. Most notable from both of these sources is how little we know about corporate giving in general, and giving related to disability issues specifically. Few of the respondent companies said they gave to disability issues either in terms of time, money or in-kind donations. Those that did, did not give details about the scope of their giving. But what was notable from the CCDS survey was that most of the giving discussed was based on a charity model, rather than an understanding of corporate service to develop the capacity of the community. Companies saw their donations as money, goods or time to help what they called “the helpless”, rather than as a means to support self-reliance or strengthen the citizenship of people with disabilities. People with disabilities were seen as needy and un-able, rather than underutilized and capable. Thus the problem to solve through corporate donations was to help them cope with their disability, not to create a world in which their disabilities would be less important than their capacities. Respondents said they expected their donations to disability organizations would “help them to overcome their disability, communicate to outside people”; “expect the money to be properly utilized to assist those with disabilities”; “expect that the money is well utilized by the people who need it”; “that our donations benefit the disabled”. Part of the shift in attitudes that is needed to address disability in our society, is needed at the level of corporate giving.

Section 4 – Recommendations

The results of the Building Bridges project undertaken by CCDS suggest areas where corporations and disability organizations can strengthen their capacities to deal with each other and promote better responses to disability. One of the key gaps is in information shared between the corporate sector and the disability community. Without this shared information, it is difficult to build bridges between these two communities.

1. Disability organizations with an expertise in employment issues can assist corporations by providing strong supports to employers and workers in employment searches.

2. Disability organizations can assist corporations to increase disability awareness and visibility within corporations and act as resources for corporations work.
 3. Disability organizations can involve companies, not only by pitching ideas for funding to them, but also involving them in sponsorships or advisory committees.
 4. Corporations can better address attitudes towards disability within their organizations by working with disability organizations to create diversity and disability awareness sessions; sharing successful stories; creating incentives for supervisors to undertake proactive searches for people with disabilities; creating on-going links with disability organizations to hire students, do job placements, make longer-term employment available; and identifying and publishing jobs that could be held by a person with disabilities.
 5. Corporations can establish and disseminate written policies on disabilities within their organizations and involve local disability organizations, such as the centres for independent living, as resources for drafting and implementing these.
 6. Corporations can rethink the basis and directions of their own corporate giving towards disability issues and organizations and ensure that their corporate giving supports capacity-building and creating an economy that uses the capacities of people with disabilities.
- The study also indicates several areas for further research, particularly because so little is known about the relationship between corporations and the disability community.
1. More and better quality research is needed around corporate involvement in disability issues. This could involve specific case study research highlighting success stories and best practices. A stronger statistical analysis of key factors is also needed for better quality research.
 2. Stronger research relationships need to be developed between the disability community and the private sector. These need to involve development of guidelines for equitable research partnerships with people with disabilities; financial support from corporations for disability research; and development of an ethical framework for this research.
 3. The disability community should work with existing research and economic analysis institutes, such as the Conference Board of Canada, the C.D. Howe Institute, the Economic Council of Canada and others, to strengthen their capacity to undertake research related to people with disabilities. This research should proceed as well from the basis of developing equitable research partnerships with people with disabilities.
 4. The Canadian Centre on Disability Studies should host a corporate think tank on disability research. Its goal should be to identify priorities for disability research related to the private sector in the next five years and to develop stronger research relationships with businesses.
 5. Further research agendas related to disability should be sectorally based with the possibility of cross-sectoral comparisons. These agendas should address more than employment issues.

References

- Anthes, Gary. "The Invisible Workforce" Computerworld, 05/01/2000.
- Bruyere, Suzanne. "A Comparison of the Implementation of the Employment Provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act [ADA] in the United States and the Disability Discrimination Act [DDA] in Great Britain". Program Employment and Disability School of Industrial and Labor Relations-Extension Division. Ithaca, New York. October, 1999.
- Butterworth, John; Pitt-Catsoupes, Marcie. "Employees with Disabilities: What HR Managers, Supervisors and Co-Workers Have to Say" Employment in the Mainstream (Winter 1997).
- Fawcett, Gail. Bringing down the barriers: The labour market and women with disabilities in Ontario. Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development, 2000.
- Fawcett, Gail. Living with Disability in Canada: An Economic Portrait. Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1996.
- Gandz, Jeffrey. A Business Case for Diversity: Executive Summary. The University of Western Ontario. Fall 1998. URL: <http://www.equalopportunity.on.ca/enggraf/gandz/gandz.html>
- Hall, Michael H.; Macpherson, Laura G.. What Types of Charities are Getting Corporate Donations? Canadian Centre for Philanthropy Research Bulletin. Vol.3, No.4.Fall 1996, pp. 1-7. URL: http://www.ccp.ca/information_research/rb62.htm
- Harlan, Sharon L; Robert, Pamela M. "The Social Construction of Disability in Organizations" Work and Occupations, 25, 4 (November 1998), p. 397 - 436.
- Human Resources Adviser Newsletter Ontario Edition, 1999 p2-3.
- Human Resources Development Canada. 1999 Employment Equity Annual Report. Ottawa: 1999. URL: http://info.load-otea.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/~weeweb/LEEP/Annual_Reports/99Report/toce.htm
- Human Resources Development Canada. "Agreement boosts employment prospects for people with disabilities". News Release. April 17, 1998. URL: <http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/common/news/9833.shtml>
- Khoury, George, "Corporate Social Responsibility: Turning Words into Actions". Ottawa: Conference Board of Canada, 1999.
- Krogh, Kari. "A Conceptual Framework of Community Partnerships: Perspectives of People with Disabilities on Power Beliefs and Values." Canadian Journal of Rehabilitation Vol.12 No.2, 1998 pp123-134.

- Mackey, Lloyd. "The Kindness of Strangers: Unsung corporate heroes are making life a little brighter through their charitable undertakings." BC Business 22, 5 (May 1994), pp. 19-27.
- McCallum, John; Holt, Derek. "Outlook for people with disabilities...Cautious optimism on a mounting 21st century social challenge". Royal Bank of Canada: Current Analysis. April, 2000.
- Ministers of Social Services. In Unison: A Canadian Approach to Disability Issues. Ottawa, 1998. URL:http://socialunion.gc.ca/pwd/unison/unison_e.html
- "A New Agenda for Corporate Citizenship: A Special Marketing Supplement for: Imagine". The Globe and Mail Friday December 15, 2000 pp11-19.
- Nieuwenhuis, John and Rostami, Janet. Corporate Community Investment in Canada: Survey Results. Ontario: The Conference Board of Canada, 1998.
- Nolan, Caroline; Felix, Sonya. "Staying at Work: Canadian Employers Learn to Manage Disability [Special Report]". Benefits Canada, 21(9) October 1997 pp35-60.
- Picard, André. Call to Alms: The New Face of Charities in Canada. Ottawa: A Special Report. Toronto: Atkinson Charitable Foundation, 1997.
- Rostami, Janet. "Canadian Center for Business in the Community: Corporate Community Investment in Canada 1997". Conference Board of Canada, 1997. URL: <http://www2.conferenceboard.ca/ccbc/reports-pubs/ccic97.htm>
- Shapiro, Joseph P. "The Overlooked Labor Force". U.S. News & World Report, 11/06/2000, Vol.129 Issue 18, p68.
- Solomon, Melissa. "Hiring the Invisible Workforce: Who is He?" Computerworld, 08/07/2000, Vol.34 Issue 32, p54.