



## **Enabling Leadership in the Disability Community**

It goes without saying: society depends on leaders. Leadership development is paramount in order to provide continuity of ideas, fresh approaches to move agendas forward, even to maintain progress made. The idea of leadership development within the disability community is not new. General discussion focussed on engaging new people in the movement began a number of years ago. An urgency to take action was felt, resulting in the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies (CCDS), the Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD) and Philia partnering in a project called "Creating Opportunity and Sharing Knowledge: Leadership Development in the Canadian Disability Community." Its purpose is to "strengthen the leadership of the Canadian disability movement."

The "Leadership Project" is funded by the Office for Disability Issues, Government of Canada. In the proposal the authors state, "The disability community in Canada is at a leadership crossroads." The project will address this concern in three phases: "Gathering our wisdom and learning from our experiences"; "Creating new opportunities for knowledge development"; and "Evaluating pilot projects and sharing new knowledge about leadership development."

Jim Derksen, Executive Director of the Province of Manitoba Disabilities Issues Office and Chair of the CCD Human Rights Committee spoke enthusiastically about this initiative, "A lot of persons with disabilities are able to access education, transportation and other services because of the work done over the last 20-30 years, yet they seem unaware of the struggle that gave them this access. We are now seeing the environment being transformed by new technologies that have the potential of creating new barriers. We need to remain vigilant; we need to guard against losing ground. It is vital that new leaders emerge to carry the torch."

"This is a timely and positive initiative that will help us to move beyond bemoaning the present situation to action that will help bring people into the movement" said Laurie Beachell, National Coordinator of CCD. "This is the first concrete national initiative of its kind. Efforts are being made at the local level, and this is a new opportunity to look nationally at how we move forward," he added. "This is not simply an issue of the disability movement; other groups are also struggling with the issue of an aging leadership" said Beachell.

The Leadership project's first phase, begun in January 2004, is focussed on research. Four pilot projects make up Phase Two. The first will initiate a dialogue designed to motivate newer and more established leaders in various sites across the country. Intensive mentorship of potential leaders will make up the second pilot project in which these potential leaders will participate; they will then be matched with an organization and a role. Young people with disabilities will be interned to various disability organizations in the third project. In the fourth, current leaders will be given opportunity to move temporarily to a different organization. Phase three will evaluate the project and transfer the knowledge gained.

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