



**Students with Disabilities:
Transitions from Post-Secondary Education to Work**

PHASE TWO REPORT

Canadian Centre on Disability Studies
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Students with Disabilities: Transitions from Post-Secondary Education to Work: Phase 2 Report

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Executive Summary

Abstract

This longitudinal study examines the experiences of university and college students with disabilities in Canada as they make the transition from post-secondary education to employment. The first phase of the study (January 2002 to June 2003) documented the post-secondary education experiences of 40 college and university students with disabilities who were in the last year of their programs and graduated in 2002. Phase 1 also documented the experiences of 9 service providers at disability resource centers within colleges and universities and 9 career and/or employment advisors who advise students with and without disabilities.

The purpose of this Phase 2 of the study (mid-2003 to mid-2004) is to document the transition experience from post-secondary education to work of 30 of these same graduates as well as 49 other recent graduates who have graduated within three years of the study. Research staff also asked employed participants for permission to contact their current employers, and unemployed participants for permission to contact employers from whom they sought, but did not obtain, employment. The report also documents the experiences and opinions of 19 past, present, or potential employers of the graduates. 70% of the graduates were employed either full or part-time.

In describing their transition experiences, respondents outlined the challenges and successes inherent in the transition process. Those who located employment felt fortunate that the job search yielded positive results, however both the employed and those who were continuing to look for work, experienced frustration with the numerous obstacles they encountered. **Facilitators (as defined by students and professionals)** for transition to employment included having a post-secondary degree; having certain personal qualities; having flexibility in the workplace; having experience gained from volunteer, paid-work and internships; having experience living with a disability; having strong social networks; having support from disability organizations and other government services; having an physical and communication accessible environment and having a transportation accessible environment. **Obstacles to employment** included attitudinal barriers of employers; geographical location and lack of transportation; inaccessibility of the built and communication environments; lack of access to interpreters and attendants; lack of education level; lack of work experience and internship opportunities; uncertain futures due to the nature of the disability and lack of confidence and feelings of discouragement.

The 19 employers interviewed included six men and 13 women who were located in many Canadian provinces. These employers held various positions in a variety of organizations. The employers provided their perspectives on recruiting, screening, hiring



and retaining employees with disabilities. In contrast to the findings from the graduates who were interviewed, many employers believed their companies' employment equity policies offered an effective strategy enabling them to achieve an inclusive workplace. Larger employers had policies and strategies in place and often actively recruited persons with disabilities.

Employers offered suggestions for providing more inclusive environments for employees with disabilities including:

1. Having a interpersonally supportive environment including good communication between employee with disability and management, teamwork atmosphere and professional development programs.
2. Having an atmosphere that was disability-aware including hiring others with disabilities and disability awareness training.
3. Being willing to accommodate for the needs of persons with disabilities including determination on the part of the employer and having flexibility in job accommodation.
4. Having policies and practices in place.

The report concludes with a discussion of lessons learned, recommendations for enhancing transition support to graduates with disabilities and directions for future research.

Research Objectives and Methods

The goal of this project is to document the transition from post-secondary education to work of people with disabilities. Recent graduates with disabilities were asked about:

1. Their current employment status.
2. The factors that led them to choose their present fields of employment.
3. Whether their disabilities influenced employment choices.
4. About their experiences in disclosing their disabilities.

Interviewees also discussed the factors that contributed to successful employment, the reasons for success, the obstacles encountered, the roles of career and disability services in facilitating employment-related accommodations and institutional supports. Participants described their experiences in transitioning from post-secondary education to work. Respondents willingly shared their perspectives and provided a wealth of information to enrich the report.

As well, current, past, or potential employers of recent graduates with disabilities were asked:

1. About their experiences in hiring persons with disabilities.
2. Whether or not they provide disability accommodations in the workplace, and if so, how they identify what accommodations are needed.



3. Whether they provide disability management services.
4. Their opinions about service gaps in offering assistance to employees with disabilities.

Research Questions

The specific research questions the study addresses fall into two main categories and six issue areas:

Employment Outcomes of Graduate Students with Disabilities

- Reasons for successful transition to employment;
- Obstacles to transition to employment;
- The role of the workplace or other support services in enabling transition;

Measures taken by employers to ensure they are an equal opportunity employer

- Recruitment, screening and hiring practices
- Accommodations and services offered by employers;
- Measures taken by employers to retain employees with disabilities.
- Obstacles faced/perceived by employers to hire employees with disabilities

Specific Factors Identified in the Study Included:

- Factors which assist students with disabilities to become successfully employed following graduation from college or university;
- Obstacles to employment experienced by students with disabilities during the transition from post-secondary education to work;
- Actions for career and employment service providers to provide more effective supports to graduates with disabilities and/or employers;
- Actions for employers to enable them to increase their employment of students with disabilities following graduation from post-secondary education.



Respondent Characteristics

Regarding the majority in every category for the graduated students:

- 30% were from Ontario
- 71% were female
- 59% were between ages 25-34
- 49% had mobility disabilities
- 56% were single
- 52% were employed full time
- 42% were employed in a field of their choice
- 67% graduated from a university
- 27% graduated from a field of study of social work, human services, psychology and related fields
- 42% reported their sole source of income was through employment
- 45.5% reported personal income level of \$10,000 to \$24,999

There were 19 employers, with the majority located in Ontario and only 21% being for-profit organizations.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both participant groups. Graduates were asked six open-ended questions while employers were asked eight open-ended questions along with suggested probes for additional details. Both telephone and in-person interviews were conducted with participants. Most interviews were approximately 1 to 2 hours in length. 67 interviews were conducted over the phone while 12 were in-person interviews

Summary of Major Findings

The employment rate of 70% (full-time and part-time combined) compares to that of the PALS Survey (2001) where nearly half (56%) of working age adults with disabilities were either unemployed or not in the labour force, compared to less than a quarter (24%) of working age adults without disabilities. This percentage is higher as the study was targeted toward college/university graduates. However, it was clear that obstacles were a major factor along the way or that had blocked several participants from employment entirely. Obstacles included attitudes of employers, lack of accessible transportation to the employer, lack of physical and



communication accessibility of the employer, and lack of resources for needed supports. From this study it is clear that attitudinal factors on the part of potential and actual employers is an essential component to future hiring. Attitudinal factors on the part of the student with a disability is also an important factor for them to maintain the course when faced with obstacles along the way. It is clear that having adequate education and work experience is seen important to both the graduates and the employers. Both groups also describe the need for determination and communication in providing an accommodating workplace. Both groups describe the need for adequate supports to achieve employment goals including financial and personnel resources. Generally the graduates did not feel that supports were adequate from university and career/employment services and do not feel that supports are adequate with employers. Generally employers felt that what they offered was adequate while the graduates felt there were gaps. This study showed both obstacles and facilitators to employment. It is important particularly to determine factors that facilitate successful employment.

In summary our study showed the following factors that graduates with disabilities perceive as needed to become successfully employed following graduation from college or university:

- A Post-Secondary Degree
- Certain Personal Qualities: (determination, perseverance, optimism, honesty, self-confidence and stubbornness)
- Flexibility in the Workplace (Reduced/modified hours, being self employed, having accommodations)
- Experience gained from volunteer, paid-work and internships
- Experience living with a disability
- Strong Social Networks
- Support from Disability Organizations and Other Government Services
- A physical and communication accessible environment
- Access to a transportation accessible environment

This study does not provide an indication of the particular contribution of any of these factors to success.

The graduates described obstacles to employment they experienced in their transition from post-secondary education to work. Obstacles were described both by those employed as well as those who were not employed. In summary these included:

- Attitudinal Barriers of Employers
- Geographical Location and lack of Transportation



- Inaccessibility of the Built and Communication Environments
- Lack of Access to Interpreters and Attendants
- Lack of Education Level
- Lack of Work Experience and Internship Opportunities
- Uncertain Futures due to the nature of the Disability
- Lack of Confidence and Feelings of Discouragement

Again, this study does not provide an indication of the particular contribution of any of these factors to success.

Graduates were asked about their experiences with university and career and employment service providers. Generally they discussed their negative experiences and their perceptions of what would be needed to provide more effective supports to graduates with disabilities and/or employers:

- University Supports
 - Need more training regarding people with disabilities
 - Need financial resources to run better programs
 - Need to do outreach to students with disabilities
 - Need to encourage work opportunities for students
- Employment and Career Services
 - Need to provide services to those entering professions not only unskilled work
 - Need to have more training regarding people with disabilities
 - Need to be more user friendly
 - Need to make people aware of their services
 - Need to be located in accessible buildings
- Disability-Related Employment Services
 - Need to make people aware of their services
 - Need to have a selection of services: some people only need help finding jobs, and do not need services after
 - Need more training regarding people with disabilities
 - Need to provide services for people seeking employment in higher skill levels
 - Need to provide “real” services, real outcomes
 - Need more people working in these services that have personal experience with disability
- Financial Supports



- People with disabilities need transitional financial support so that there are financial supports still available when they start working a few hours a week
- People with disabilities need more support for disability-related expenses
- Need to make people aware of financial support programs such as targeted wage subsidies

One unique aspect of this study was that it examined employment factors and disability both from the graduate (employee) perspective and the employer perspective.

Employers' were asked their perceptions of what was needed to create an inclusive environment for employees with disabilities. These are summarized:

- **Having an interpersonally supportive environment**
 - Good communication between employee with disability and management
 - Teamwork atmosphere
 - Professional development programs
- **Having an atmosphere that was disability-aware**
 - Hiring others with disabilities
 - Disability awareness training
- **Being willing to accommodate for the needs of persons with disabilities**
 - Determination on the part of the employer
 - Flexibility
- **Having policies and practices in place**
 - Having the resources: financial and personnel

Although the employers in many cases were able to provide ideas for situations needed to create an inclusive environment, they were often restricted due to financial constraints that they recognized or by their own attitudes as reflected by the graduates' discussions.

Comparison to Previous Studies

This study finds commonality with other studies (Frank, Karst and Boles 1989; Getzel and Kregel 1996; Kennedy and Olney 2001; In Unison 2001) that have shown obstacles to employment including attitudinal barriers such as discrimination and lack accessibility. This study, however, goes further than many studies as it provides a more in-depth examination of both obstacles and facilitators from the graduate perspective. It also provides an employer perspective where many studies do not provide both. This study is also unique in that it also provides more evidence of facilitators for successful employment. Also, while many other studies focus on learning disabilities, this study has cross disability focus.



Recommendations

University/Career Services

Enhance the effectiveness of university/college career services
Career services take a lead in developing internships and volunteer experiences for students with disabilities as a first step in the transition process.
Provide training for students: communication with employers

Employers

Provide disability awareness training for employers and potential employers
Create educational information packages specifically for or by employers, service providers and the general public that include tips on how to create an inclusive workplace including suggestions for increasing awareness of disability issues and providing opportunities to meet people with disabilities who are positive role models and who are successfully employed in a variety of fields. This information could also be posted on a website
Develop resource/incentive programs for employees/employers
Bring employers, employees with disabilities, university and career counseling, students, policy makers together in a forum to discuss issues and develop solutions

Persons with Disabilities

Create resources and supports for persons with disabilities to create their own employment opportunities
Convene forums to enable people with disabilities and employers to openly discuss employment issues and disability: Topics could include: employer attitudes, employment equity and ways to accommodate people with disabilities in workplaces.

Directions for Future Research

In examining the study findings, it is evident that the employers perceived their companies' employment equity policies as effective strategies enabling them to successfully hire, supervise and retain employees with disabilities. However, the experiences of the graduates conflicted with those of the employers. The graduates were of the opinion that even if companies had strong employment equity policies,



the ways of interpreting and implementing these policies varied widely. They felt that the company's success in hiring and retaining employees with disabilities was highly contingent upon their comfort level with disability, their knowledge of how to remove systemic barriers and create an inclusive environment, as well as their ability to access the necessary resources to attain adequate accommodations. Further research needs to more closely examine this dichotomy of perceptions and address the reality of the situation, where a high percentage of persons with disabilities remain unemployed or underemployed. There needs to be more correlational studies of graduates and employer outcomes. Unger, D. (2002) conducted a literature review and revealed that there have been a number of methodological issues with many studies. For instance, Kohler and Chapman (1999) state that more research is needed on transition-related interventions that include an analysis of post-school outcomes and more rigorous evaluation of model programs. Thus more rigorous studies are needed.

Other suggestions include:

Study larger numbers of graduates and employers

Study more for-profit employers

A study to determine the contribution of factors leading to successful employment

Longitudinal studies of student transitions and following with them through work for several years

In depth studies of employers: correlation studies, prospective studies, retrospective studies

Lessons Learned from the Transitions from Post-Secondary Education to Work Phase Two Study

The suggestion of this study is that attitudinal barriers and discrimination regarding people with disabilities are still very prominent in the world of work. Additionally the study suggests that students with disabilities face many barriers in the road to employment and also during employment, and that they must have a strong desire and willingness to work to stay the course. At the same time some employers appeared to be willing to accommodate persons with disabilities. The employers that made accommodations either have employment equity policies and procedures in place or have a strong determination themselves to accommodate. Lack of adequate resources including financial and personnel are often barriers to needed accommodations. To ease the process, graduates often seek large employers with



employment equity policies in place or non-profits such as disability organizations, which are more likely to accommodate their needs.

Next Steps

It would be beneficial to continue this longitudinal study with these same graduate respondents to follow their path through employment over several year intervals and study their obstacles and facilitators. CCDS will seek funds to continue a longitudinal study as well as to continue research and education in the recommended areas.



CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

This longitudinal study examines the experiences of university and college students with disabilities in Canada as they make the transition from post-secondary education to employment. The first phase of the study (January 2002 to June 2003) documented the post-secondary education experiences of 40 college and university students with disabilities who graduated in 2002. Phase 1 documented the experiences of 40 students with disabilities in the last year of their programs as well as 9 service providers at disability resource centers within colleges and universities and 9 career and/or employment advisors who advise students with and without disabilities.

The purpose of this Phase 2 of the study (mid-2003 to mid-2004) is to document the transition experience from post-secondary education to work of 30 of these same graduates as well as 49 other recent graduates who have graduated within three years of the study. Research staff also asked employed participants for permission to contact their current employers, and unemployed participants for permission to contact employers from whom they sought, but did not obtain, employment. The report also documents the experiences and opinions of 19 past, present, or potential employers of the graduates

Summary of Phase I

During the first phase of this study, a demographic questionnaire and qualitative interviews were used to collect data on the post-secondary experiences of 40 students with disabilities who graduated from a wide variety of programs at universities and colleges in Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, and Halifax in 2002. In addition to the data about their post-secondary experiences, this phase also collected the following employment-related information about participants:

- Immediate employment goals
- Long-term career ambitions
- Use of post-secondary career services
- Employment experiences as students (e.g. summer jobs, internships, co-op placements)

This introductory chapter presents background information on the study and the field and an overview of the research design. In Chapter 2 we provide an overview of characteristics of the respondents. Chapter 3 provides findings on reasons for successful transition to employment; Chapter 4 describes the respondents' reasons



for employment choice; Chapter 5 describes the respondents' descriptions of obstacles to employment; and Chapter 6 provides the respondents' experiences with university and career/employment supports. The perspectives of the employers are presented in Chapter 7. Finally Chapter 8 presents a summary, discussion of the findings and implications for future research.

The Research Team

This project was conducted by a research team from the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies (CCDS) located in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. CCDS and its staff have conducted extensive research on employment and disability. Additionally qualified people with disabilities who are recent graduates or current students were given preference in recruiting for project positions.

The research team worked in consultation with an advisory committee composed of students with disabilities, disability service providers, career and employment service providers, and employers. During the first phase of the study, the Canadian Association of Disability Service Providers in Post-Secondary Education (CADSPPE), the National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS), and the Canadian Association of Career Educators and Employers (CACEE) each nominated members. Employers and additional students with disabilities were added to the Advisory Committee for Phase 2 of the study.

Background

Persons with disabilities in Canada face significant barriers to employment and are less likely to be employed than persons without disabilities. (In Unison, 2000) Statistics Canada's 1991 Health and Activity Limitation Survey (HALS) found that only 48 percent of persons with disabilities between 15 and 64 were employed, compared to 73 percent of persons without disabilities in the same age group (Statistics Canada, 1993). More recently, the Statistics Canada's Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) 2001 showed over half (56%) of working age adults with disabilities are either unemployed or not in the labour force, compared to less than a quarter (24%) of working age adults without disabilities. The unemployment rate for people with disabilities (26%) is over five times higher than the unemployment rate for people without disabilities (5%).

People with disabilities who have higher levels of education are more likely to be employed (Disability, Education, and Labour Force Participation, 2001), but analyses of data from the National Graduates Survey (NGS) have found that university and college graduates with disabilities have consistently lower labour force participation and employment rates than graduates without disabilities (Lavallée et. al., 2000).



Persons with disabilities have a lower rate of employment as well as a lower participation rate in the labour force than those without disabilities. According to the “In the Unison” report, (2000) more than one million adults with disabilities in Canada are unemployed or outside the labour force. People with severe disabilities are less likely to be employed; however 26% of this group does participate. Women with disabilities are less likely to be employed than men with disabilities. In the USA, only 29% of those with disabilities of working age are employed full or part-time as compared with 79% of those who do not have disabilities. (National Organization on Disability, 1998). This compares to 56% and 25% in Canada. Full employment of people with disabilities can save billions of public dollars that are now used to support unemployed people with disabilities (Profit from Our Experience, 1995).

During the 1990s, numerous studies confirmed that persons with disabilities in Canada experience barriers to obtaining post-secondary education (Killean and Hubka 1999; Hubka and Killean 1996; Fichten 1995; Wannell and Caron 1994). Many of those barriers remain, but the proportion of students with disabilities enrolled in and graduating from Canadian universities and colleges, as well as the overall educational attainment of people with disabilities, increased throughout the 1990s (Lavallée et al. 2000; HRDC 2000; CADSPPE 1999; Hill 1992).

Persons with disabilities in Canada who have graduated from universities and colleges are more likely to participate in the labour force and be employed than persons with disabilities who have lower levels of education (Human Resources Development Canada 2000; Fawcett 2000; Fawcett 1996; Statistics Canada 1993; Roeher Institute 1992; Ross and Shillington 1990). Nevertheless, a gap between persons with and without disabilities remains even at the highest levels of education. That is, university and college graduates with disabilities have lower labour force participation and employment rates than university and college graduates who do not have disabilities (HRDC 2001; Lavallée et al. 2000; SIAST 1999a and 1999b; Fawcett 1996; Wannell and Caron 1994; Statistics Canada 1993). Fawcett writes, “...while higher education for persons with disabilities eases their entry into the labour force and narrows the difference in participation rates compared to persons without disabilities, it cannot, by itself, eliminate the employment disadvantage stemming from the disability” (1996: 34).

Despite the numeric evidence that university and college graduates with disabilities do not have the same employment rates as their non-disabled peers, we know very little about the experiences of graduates with disabilities as they make that transition. This multi-year study will begin to fill that gap in our knowledge.



Overview of Research Objectives and Methods

The goal of this project is to document the transition from post-secondary education to work of people with disabilities. Recent graduates with disabilities were asked about their current employment status, the factors that led them to choose their present fields of employment, whether their disabilities influenced these choices and about their experiences disclosing their disabilities. Interviewees also discussed the factors that contributed to successful employment, the reasons for success, the obstacles encountered, the roles of career and disability services in facilitating employment-related accommodations and institutional supports. Participants described their experiences in transitioning from post-secondary education to work. Respondents willingly shared their perspectives and provided a wealth of information to enrich the report. Many respondents were followed-up from the Phase 1 study.

Current, past, or potential employers of recent graduates with disabilities were asked about their experiences in hiring persons with disabilities, whether they provide accommodations in the workplace, and if so, how they identify what accommodations are needed. They were also asked whether they provide disability management services and their opinions about service gaps in offering assistance to employees with disabilities.

Research Questions

The specific research questions the study addresses fall into two main categories and six issue areas:

Employment Outcomes of Graduate Students with Disabilities

- Reasons for successful transition to employment;
- Obstacles to transition to employment;
- The role of the workplace or other support services in enabling transition;

Measures taken by employers to ensure they are an equal opportunity employer

- Recruitment, screening and hiring practices
- Accommodations and services offered by employers;
- Measures taken by employers to retain employees with disabilities.
- Obstacles faced/perceived by employers to hire employees with disabilities



Specific Factors Identified in this Study Include:

- Factors which assist students with disabilities to become successfully employed following graduation from college or university;
- Obstacles to employment experienced by students with disabilities during the transition from post-secondary education to work;
- Actions for career and employment service providers to provide more effective supports to graduates with disabilities and/or employers;
- Actions for employers to enable them to increase their employment of students with disabilities following graduation from post-secondary education.

Recruitment

The researchers attempted to make contact with the 40 participants from Phase I of the study. Thirty-five persons were interested in participating again; one was not interested, and four could not be contacted. During the course of the study, an additional 5 participants from Phase 1 dropped out, primarily due to difficulties they encountered in scheduling interviews with research assistants. Thus **30 participants from Phase 1 were included**. In order to recruit new participants, an advertisement for the project was sent out to schools, listservs, interested individuals, and community organizations across Canada. A large number of people expressed interest but did not qualify as they either had graduated too long previously or had not yet graduated. **Forty-nine new participants** (who graduated between 1 and 3 years previous) were recruited. Each person was sent a demographic questionnaire, a qualitative interview guide and a consent form. The researchers were able to recruit a total of **79 participants**: 30 Phase 1 and 49 new participants.

Employers were recruited through the original 30 Phase I participants. These participants were asked to submit names of current, potential, or past employers. Twenty-three names were submitted. The researchers were able to contact and interview **19 of these employers**.

Ethics Review

A demographic questionnaire; semi-structured qualitative interview guides for both graduates and employers; and consent forms were developed and submitted with the organization's ethical review application, to the CCDS Ethics Review Committee and approved. The project advisory committee also reviewed these documents.



Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both participant groups. Graduates were asked six open-ended questions while employers were asked eight open-ended questions along with suggested probes for additional details. Both telephone and in-person interviews were conducted with participants. Most interviews were approximately 1 to 2 hours in length. 67 interviews were conducted over the phone while 12 were in-person interviews.

Data Analysis

Each interview was audio taped and submitted for transcription. Once completed, the transcriptions were reviewed and analyzed by the research assistants in collaboration with the participants. Researchers analyzed the data by drawing out key themes emerging from the interviews, following which they prepared their reports. Preliminary results and conclusions were then compiled into a draft report and verified with the Advisory Committee, graduates and employers. Members of the CCDS Board of Directors also provided feedback on the current report.

Some of the data collected were quantitative (e.g. the demographic questionnaire) while other data were qualitative (e.g. interviews). Findings from the quantitative data are presented with descriptions of numbers and/or percentages of responses, while the findings from the qualitative data are presented with the following broad indications of numbers or prevalence of responses:

- A few = 2 to 5 participants
- Many = more than 5 participants
- Most = more than half (i.e. the majority) of the participants
- All = all participants

To protect the anonymity of the study participants, some personal pronouns (e.g. he/she, her/him, his/her) in the presentation of the findings have been changed (i.e. a participant described as “she” or “her” may or may not be female). Names of universities/colleges, organizations, etc. are not included in the findings and have been edited out of the participant quotations.



CHAPTER 2 : RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

In this chapter, we provide background information to create a context for the results discussed in subsequent chapters. We describe the characteristics of the respondents in the Transitions: Phase 2 Study. There were 79 students who had graduated and 19 employers in the study. **Regarding the majority in every category for the graduated students:**

30% were from Ontario
71% were female
59% were between ages 25-34.
49% had mobility disabilities
56% were single
52% were employed full time
67% graduated from a university
26.5% major field of study: Social work, human services, psychology and related fields
52% graduated in 2002
42% reported sole source of income was through employment
45.5% reported personal income level of \$10,000 to \$24,999

Regarding the employers: the majority were located in Ontario and only 21% were “for-profit”.

Graduate Characteristics

The majority of the respondents were female. 71% (56) were female while 29% (23) were male.

The age ranges of the respondents included:

Under 25 years of age	8	10%
Range 25-34	47	59%
Range 35-44	12	15%
Range 45-54	9	11%
Range 55-64	3	4%
Range 65 and over	0	
Total	79	

See Figure 1 page 10-19



The location of the respondents included:

• Ontario:	24	30.4%
• Manitoba:	18	22.8%
• Nova Scotia:	12	15.2%
• British Columbia:	10	12.6%
• Alberta:	7	8.8%
• Saskatchewan:	3	3.8%
• Newfoundland	3	3.8%
• Quebec:	1	1.3%
• Nunavut:	1	1.3%

The most common self-identified disabilities reported by participants were:

• Mobility	39	49.3%
• Visual	19	24%
• Learning	17	21.5%
• Health-related	16	20.2%
• Mental health	16	20.2%
• Hearing	13	16.4%
• Chronic pain	3	3.7%
• Speaking	1	1.2%
• Other	23	29.1%

See Figure 2 page 10-20

Respondents also identified chronic pain, speaking and other unspecified disabilities. The percentages add up to over 100 percent, indicating that many interviewees reported multiple disabilities. The prevalence of various disabilities among participants is consistent with the prevalence of these disabilities in the general population. (Government of Canada, 2001).

In terms of relationship status, the majority of participants (44 or 56%) were single, 17 (21.5%) were married, 12 (15.1%) lived in common-law relationships, two (2.5%) were divorced, three (4% were separated and one person (1.2% was a widow. 72 of the 79 respondents (or 91%) had no children under 18 years of age at home while seven (or 9%) stated they had children under the age of 18 who lived with them. See Figure 3 page 10-21.

Current Employment Status

A majority of participants were working full time, (33 in their chosen field of study),



- 51.8% (41) were employed full-time
- 9% (15) were employed part-time.
- 6.3% (5) were working casual or sporadically
- 22.8% (18) were not working for pay
- 70% were employed full time or part-time combined.

In addition to being employed, many participants remained involved in post-secondary education in order to advance their career and employment possibilities.

Of those who were working full time or part time many were either in school, planning to attend school or had returned to school post-graduation.

)Table 1: School-Work Relationship

Relationship to School	Paid Work Full Time (n=41)	Paid work Part Time (n=15)	Total working FT or PT N=56
Returned to School post Graduation	12 % (5)	26.6% (4)	16%
Currently in School	7.3% (3)	20% (3)	11%
Planning to return to school in Fall	9.8% (4)	N/A	7%

For example, one woman had completed an undergraduate degree and was accepted into a masters program. Another was completing Ph.D. coursework. A third participant held three part-time jobs as she completed her second undergraduate degree. A fourth interviewee worked occasionally as an independent contractor while enrolled in a masters program. One self-employed participant was using his part-time employment as a supplement until his business was successfully established. Another was working in a field of her choice while training to move into a field she felt would better accommodate her disabilities and alleviates stress. A third was pleased to continue working within the field in which she was currently working.



)Table 2: Work and Student Status

Paid Work Full-time	41	51.8%
In field	33	
Returning to school in fall	4	
Returned to school post-graduation	5	
Currently in school	3	
Paid Work Part-time	15	19%
In field	13	
Returned to school post-graduation	4	
Currently in school	3	
Paid Work Casual or sporadically	5	6.3%
In field	2	
Returning to school in fall	1	
Not working	18	22.8%
Not in school	11	
Returning to school in fall	2	
Full-time student currently	1	
Just finished school	1	
Taking self-employment training course while on EI	1	
Work placement for school	1	
Full-time volunteer work	1	



Education Status

Respondents graduated from either University or community college or a combination. The majority graduated from university.

- University 53 67%
- College 19 24%
- Combination 4 5%
- No response 3 3.7%

The year of graduation varied with the majority graduating in 2002.

)Table 3: Graduation Year

Year of Graduation	#	%
2002	41	52%
2003	17	21.5%
2001	12	15.2%
2004	4	5.1%
2005	2	2.5%
2000	1	1%
Hadn't officially graduated due to human rights complaint against university	1	1%
No response	1	1%
Total	79	

One individual did not respond and another had not yet officially graduated because of an ongoing human rights complaint against the post-secondary institution he was attending.

The participants graduated from several provinces:

- Ontario: 21 26.6%
- Manitoba: 16 20.2%
- British Columbia: 9 11.4%
- Nova Scotia: 7 8.8%
- Saskatchewan 2 2.5%
- Alberta: 2 2.5%



- Newfoundland: 2 2.5%
- Unspecified: 15 19%

The place of graduation was not specified for 15 interviewees.

Participants graduated from many **fields of study**. These included:

)Table 4: Field of Study

Field of Study	#	%
Social work, human services, psychology and related fields	21	26.5%
Business, computers, commerce, human resources, sales & marketing and related fields	12	15%
Education and related	11	14%
Unknown	10	12.6%
Environmental studies, biology, geography	8	10%
Communications, journalism, translation, broadcasting	5	6%
Engineering	3	4%
Political science	3	4%
Fine arts	2	2.5%
Law & legal administration	2	2.5%
Theology	1	1%
Reflexology	1	1%
Total		

See Figure 4 page 10-22

Two studied in other areas and nine participants did not specify the fields in which they had studied. Over one-quarter of those specified (26.5%) graduated from social work or other human services.

Some participants were returning to school post-graduation or indicated they would be resuming education in the fall of 2004.



Income Status

Thirty-three participants (42%) reported that they had employment income while 27 individuals (34.1% indicated they received income from employment combined with another source. 19 (24%) reported that their income was not from sources of employment. The most common sources included: Employment Insurance, Canada Pension Plan, provincial government income assistance programs, private insurance benefits, student awards and family supports. The remainder of respondents reported their incomes were derived from a variety of sources. These included: Employment Insurance, Canada Pension Plan, private insurance, Worker's Compensation, provincial government income assistance, provincial government income assistance combined with private insurance, RRSPs, student awards and grants and family supports.

)Table 5: Sources of Income

Source of Income	#	%
Employment	33	42%
Employment and another source (CPP, EI, family support, provincial government income assistance, private insurance, student awards, Society for Manitobans with disabilities, Veteran Affairs)	27	34%
Provincial Government Income Assistance	5	6.3%
Student awards, grants, etc AND provincial government income assistance	3	3.8%
Employment Insurance	2	2.5%
Provincial government income assistance AND other (private insurance, Worker's Compensation Board)	2	2.5%
Canada Pension Plan	1	1.3%
Private Insurance	1	1.3%
Student awards, grants, etc AND provincial government income assistance AND Worker's Safety and Insurance Board	1	1.3%
RRSPs	1	1.3%
Worker's Compensation Board	1	1.3%
Support from spouse	1	1.3%
Manitoba Public Insurance AND small honorarium for volunteer work	1	1.3%
No response	0	
Total	79	

Many study participants had low personal incomes. 23 respondents (29.1%) reported that their incomes were under \$10,000 while 36 persons (45.5% indicated their earnings were between \$10,000 and \$24,999. 14 individuals (18%) earned



between \$25,000 and \$49,999. Four people stated their incomes were higher than \$49,999 and two did not respond to the question. See Figure 5 page 10-23

Household incomes were more dispersed than personal incomes. Only one individual (1.2%) reported a household income under \$10,000, 22 persons (28%) lived in households with earned income of between \$10,000 and \$24,999 while 20 respondents (25.3%) stated their household incomes were between \$25,000 and \$49,999. 12 persons (15.1%) lived in households with incomes between \$50,000 and \$74,999, while the same number reported household incomes of \$75,000 and over. Three individuals did not respond. See Figure 6 page 10-24

Comments on the Findings of the Graduates:

The predominance of women in this study is consistent with general trends found in the National Graduates Surveys (NGS) conducted by Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada. Amongst students who graduated from Canadian post-secondary institutions in 1995, 57 percent were women, with a peak of 61 percent at the Bachelor's university degree level (Taillon and Paju, 1999). The 2001 PALS survey indicated that more women than men have completed college or university in the non-disabled population (42% versus 37%, a 5% differential), as well as in the population of people with disabilities (32% versus 25%, a 7% differential).

The employment rate of 70% (full-time and part-time combined) compares to that of the PALS Survey (2001) where only half (56%) of working age adults with disabilities were either unemployed or not in the labour force, compared to less than a quarter (24%) of working age adults without disabilities. This percentage is higher as the study was targeted toward college/university graduates.

It was interesting to note that a number of participants who remain unemployed are individuals that have visible disabilities, whereas individuals who have invisible disabilities were more often employed. However, this was not always the case. This confers with studies by Horn, Berkold & Bobbit (1999) and Madaus, Foley, Mcguire and Ruban (2002) who found high rates of employment of student with learning disabilities. Burkhauser, Daly, Houtenville, & Nargis (2001) examined the rate of employment and the household income of the working-age population (aged 25-61) with and without disabilities over the business cycles of the 1980s and 1990s using data from the March Current Population Survey and the National Health Interview Survey. In general, they found that while the employment of working-age men and women with and without disabilities exhibited a procyclical trend during the 1980s business cycle, this was not the case during the 1990s expansion. During the 1990s, the employment of working-age men and women without disabilities continued to be



procyclical, but the employment rates of their counterparts with disabilities declined over the entire 1990s business cycle.

The majority (45.5%) personal income level of \$10,000 to \$24,999 compares to the PALS survey (2001) where eighty per cent (80%) of women with disabilities and 63% of men with disabilities reported income of less than \$30,000. Forty-four per cent (44%) of adults with disabilities in the labour force make less than \$15,000 a year compared to 30% of people without disabilities. The study also shows that nine per cent (9%) of adults with disabilities have a total income of over \$50,000, compared to 20% of the non-disabled population. Of the adults with disabilities who have incomes over \$50,000, 14% of men have a total income of over \$50,000, compared to 5% of women.

Employer Characteristics

19 employers were included in the study.

Types of employers:

University/College	3	
School Board		3
Government Province	2	
Government City/town	2	
Non-Profit	5	
For-Profit	4	(21%)

Of the for-profit organizations, two were owner-operator organizations. One was a retail chain and one was a large corporation.

Location of employers:

Ontario	8	42%
Manitoba	5	26%
Nova Scotia	5	26%
Alberta	1	5.2%

Most of those interviewed were in senior positions and included two owners, two directors, and six whose jobs related to human resources in the organization.



CHAPTER 3 : REASONS FOR SUCCESS

It is important to identify and understand reasons for successful transitions to employment for students with disabilities. Very few studies have examined this in depth. We asked the respondents in the Transitions Phase 2 report a broad open-ended question: "What do you think are the main reasons you have been successfully employed?" One person who had a positive experience described it as:

"It's been very empowering, it's given me a lot of confidence when thinking about the fact that I have a disability and I want to work. I have worked and I know other people with disabilities who haven't had that, so I just feel very fortunate"

From the interviews there emerged a number of factors that were identified as contributing to successful employment.

These factors included:

- Having a post-secondary education
- Personal qualities such as self-determination, perseverance and motivation,
- Flexibility in the workplace and other accommodation strategies,
- Experience gained from volunteer work and internships or work placements,
- Experience living with a disability,
- Strong networking skills, and
- Support from family and disability organizations.

These factors are described in more detail below and are listed in no particular order.

Having a Post-Secondary Degree

Education was a major factor in leading to employment. Some felt that having a post-secondary education made all the difference for them in finding employment.

One interviewee stated:

"It definitely comes down to education. I have a Masters Degree, which most people in my job don't have, so it sort of gives me an edge over the other candidates going into the interview process."



Several participants discussed this point. One participant was completing her Masters degree after returning to school for a second undergraduate degree. Another respondent had acquired a disability while finishing her post-secondary education and was contemplating returning to school since she had been job-hunting for over a year and was disillusioned by her experiences. Another interviewee talked about how she worked extra hard for an honours degree to give her that extra edge.

Higher levels of education seem to indicate that students with disabilities will have a higher capacity to obtain the jobs they desire. Bowman and Marzouk (1992) found that employed graduates with disabilities had higher levels of education than did those who were unemployed. In fact, employment rates for persons with disabilities show a stronger correlation between level of education and employment rate than is observable for the general population (Stodden 1998). Research exists to suggest that postsecondary education is a vital component of the success of ethnic minorities and women as well (Hackett and Betz 1981; Bowman 1993; Hawks and Muha 1991). Stodden (N/A) argues that changes in the labor market over the past twenty years have increased the necessity of postsecondary education for the population as a whole. In order to be able to compete in an ever-changing job market, people must learn the higher order thinking and technical skills that a postsecondary education can provide.

Mitchell and Krumboltz (1990) identify *task approach* skills, the skills, values, work habits, and feelings brought to new tasks or problems, as one of the main factors that influence a person's career-related beliefs Carroll and Bown (1996) have found that for individuals with disabilities, attendance of a postsecondary institution may constitute the first experience with independence from the home and family. Like women and ethnic minorities, the transition to the adult world may be more difficult for students with disabilities, as they often have not had the same opportunities to develop decision-making and independent living skills as their peers.

Some participants found that receiving education and training in more than one specialty positioned them in a unique niche in the marketplace.

"I got lucky because music and French music is a field with a lot of demand. So I was lucky because they had no choice. If it was between me and a sighted person, they would have probably hired the sighted person. But there wasn't that choice. So I guess I picked a field that was very specific and that really got me where I wanted to go."

Some pursued graduate degrees because of the limited opportunities afforded them by their undergraduate education. For example, one participant pursued a Masters degree and trained as an industrial designer and an engineer. This combination of knowledge and skills gave him an edge over others.



Having Certain Personal Qualities

Most respondents mentioned personal qualities such as **determination, perseverance, optimism, honesty, self-confidence and stubbornness** as important to their successful transition. Several comments highlight these qualities: "I didn't give up...not breaking any rules but finding ways around some of them." Some individuals stated they had to be absolutely unrelenting in their efforts of looking for work. For them, **persistence** paid off. "I was persistent in looking for a job. I didn't give up, and I used every available resource I had including family and friends." One person articulated the importance of taking personal responsibility for identifying needs and requesting accommodations. He suggested that a **positive, assertive attitude** made a difference for people.

"I know a lot of people with disabilities work and there's some that are successful and there's some that aren't. When I look at it and go, okay why is this person successful as opposed to this other person who isn't, and the first thing that comes up is attitude. You can't get frustrated and you can't go in there on the defensive, demanding this and demanding that, because all you're going to do is get people's backs up and you're going to get a bad reputation... You have to just say these are my needs, will you be able to accommodate them."

Another said: "I just try to be very **proactive**, addressing anything that I think that they might be thinking, that way we deal with things before they have to ask, which could make them uncomfortable." Still others felt **self-advocacy skills** were essential. A third participant acknowledged that there were obstacles and that she was able to get around them through a lot of very **hard work**:

"I managed to get around these barriers, but whoa, it's not easy...and that's why I'm just giving myself a break, because it's just been one fight after another... I just felt that I had to be bigger, better, brighter, faster, stronger, and stronger than anyone else, and then I would just have to see if it would work out."

Some mentioned the importance of **self-confidence** and having a **positive attitude** in addition to an education. "It's because of self-confidence...I have a very strong educational background, and I'm enthusiastic and a **hard worker**." One person said that what makes her successful is how much she loves the work she does, that she does not do it for the pay. She knows her limits but is **passionate about work**. She continues to do what she does for the joy of doing it. She says she does what she is good at, that she has a thirst for knowledge and a love for learning. "I really do love the field. A lot of people don't necessarily have that passion."



Participants also noted they had to **work extra hard** in order to prove their capabilities and to accommodate their disabilities:

“...if I didn’t work that hard I wouldn’t be where I am because I have to work that hard and I’m sure a lot of people do with disabilities, they have to work that much harder. I’m not saying that people that are normal don’t work hard but I’m saying that with a learning disability you have to work extra.”

The suggestions by participants of this study that personal qualities are important to the success of their transitions from school to work are of special interest as there has not been a great deal of research on this topic. According to Enright (1996), self-doubting beliefs are learned and can be unlearned, which is important to the development of career decision-making skills and self-efficacy. The transition to postsecondary education may be the first time the individual with a disability holds the responsibility for identifying themselves as disabled to faculty and administrators. It becomes important for the student to be able to describe their disability and identify and ask for necessary accommodations (Adelman and Vogel 1990). Lack of self-understanding was found to be a dominant characteristic of learning disabled adults, interviewed by Blalock (1981/82), who were not successfully employed. Many students with disabilities were aware that they are having problems, but had not yet developed the capacity to understand how their specific deficits affected their difficulties (Adelman and Vogel 1990; Hitchings et al 1998). According to Babbitt and Burbach (1990, p. 102), “disabled individuals tend to have lower self-concepts and are more likely to be confused about how their needs and assets interface with career options.”

The suggestions of participants in the present study may relate with Benz et al (1997) who found that training in job search skills was predictive of employment, however the interviewees in the present study were not asked specifically about these previous training experiences. Several authors have observed a correlation between, disability and career beliefs, which are formed throughout the lifespan, and career indecision (Enright 1996; Allen and Cohen 1980; Biller 1988; Glover-Graf and Janikowski 2001). Increasing the range of the individual’s experiences from an early age provides the opportunity to receive positive reinforcement regarding their abilities and skills, building up the individual’s self-confidence (Enright 1996).

Having Flexibility in the Workplace

Some interviewees selected certain career streams because of the flexibility afforded them by particular fields of work. Flexibility factors discussed included:

- The number of hours worked
- Self-employment
- Contract work



- Ability to control the environment
- Having accommodation strategies in place

For example, some fields such as social work and engineering allowed a few people to work full or part time in a variety of institutional and community settings. In some cases it was assumed that flexibility would become possible once employers viewed and valued them as skilled employees. Some individuals who were working part time expressed satisfaction with their employment because they felt the **number of hours** they worked were appropriate due to the nature of their disabilities. One person who returned to teaching on a part time basis explained:

"There's a big obstacle just finding an employer that is lenient enough or flexible enough to let me do what I need to do to keep my pain at a tolerable level...Being at work is number two. If my pain is intolerable, I can't be at work, I can't do anything at home, and I can't take care of myself. So I have to find an employer that will understand that, they're not number one when I'm at work. Neither is the customer, neither are my fellow employees. Number one is my pain management."

Another respondent said she prefers to work **on call** so that her hours will remain flexible. She also finds this a good strategy to avoid burn-out.'

"I'm working casually because ...I wanted the flexibility... so that's why I'm working full-time hours and I'm working casually in six different places." She gets called every day asking if she wants to work. "I like that because first of all it was for school and then those times when I wasn't in school I realized that if I was to work part-time hours out of one place I'd really start burning out, so that's why I decided to just work casually even though I'm working for two dollars an hour less than I would if I was working in a position, like I'd still rather do it that way, just because it keeps me stable."

Some respondents chose **self-employment** or **contract work** from home as a flexibility method to gain greater control over their work environment and address specific accommodation needs. Self-employment offers the flexibility that many needed. One person talked about his need to minimize noise and distraction in the workplace and thought self-employment would be the most effective way to accommodate these needs. At the time of the interview, he was seeking employment to gain the benefit of supervision from a senior engineer and to meet some of his social needs that were not currently being addressed within his home-based business.

Shur, (2002) found that temporary employment, independent contracting and part-time employment are almost twice as likely among worker with disabilities as among



those without disabilities. However, Shur found that non-standard workers with disabilities receive lower pay and fewer benefits both to the types of job they hold and the disability gaps within job types, which contribute to their high poverty rates. They also found that they work fewer hours than non-standard workers without disabilities and are concentrated in lower-paying occupations.

One respondent, who is a translator, found that it was better for him to work as an independent contractor rather than trying to find an employer who would pay for accommodations.

“...Because it’s a private company I use a private computer, like I supply the JAWS (computer screen reader program) and the Braille display and things like that because of course he didn’t want to invest money, and I was on a three month probation contract, ... so he didn’t want to invest money, and I don’t blame him because it would have been very, very expensive, probably. But now that I’m working from home that’s not an issue, I use my own equipment and that’s good.

Some respondents who were self-employed also had to supplement their income with other employment. One participant said that she intentionally pursued self-employment as well as working part time as an employee. Her rationale for doing so was that this strategy allows her to pursue a field of self-employment about which she is passionate while at the same time creating a creating financial security by working part time for another company.

Having Experience Gained from Volunteering, Paid Work and Internships

Several respondents noted the value of previous **work experiences** including part-time work while attending school, volunteer work and internships in facilitating successful employment. Work experience assisted participants in applying their skills in practical settings. In addition, it fostered the cultivation of relationships with others in the same fields and the development of on the job work skills. For one interviewee, an internship played a major role in her success.

Many described that they initially got their feet in the door through **volunteering their services to the prospective employer** and taking part time work, with the hopes that once they demonstrated their capabilities, they would be offered full time employment. One individual was hired on a casual basis and eventually, was recruited to a term appointment after six months of volunteering. At the end of her internship, she worked an extra month "for free" just to prove herself further.

While this process can sometimes be long and laborious, it has proven to be even more important and effective for persons with disabilities who have difficulty getting



employers to consider hiring them. A few respondents mentioned how being involved in a **co-op-work experience** contributed to expanding their network of contacts, and ultimately led to more permanent attachments to the labour force.

This study finding supports the limited evidence in the literature that having **previous work experience** is a predictor of successful employment outcomes. Pre-graduation employment was found to be a factor that can affect successful transition to post-secondary education (Frank et al 1989; Getzel and Kregel 1996; Glover-Graf and Janikowski 2001; Hitchings et al 1998). Prior work experience gives students with disability first-hand knowledge of how to request and use accommodations in the educational setting or workplace. It is especially helpful for these students to have experienced and explored several different career tracks prior to postsecondary education so that they can practice learned skills in an actual work environment, identify areas of interest that may help them choose a major area of study, establish post-school career objectives, and develop a record of successful work experience, like a resume or list of references (Getzel and Kregel 1996).

Benz et al (1997) enlisted a regression model and found that two or more work experiences during school were related to competitive employment. Fourqurean, Meisgeier, Swank and Williams, (1991) found that employment success for male students was related to several factors including employment during high school. Skills can be enhanced by opportunities for job shadowing, coaching, and participating in internships and mentoring programs, providing invaluable learning, socialization and work experiences for both students with disabilities (Adelman and Vogel 1990; Babbitt and Burbach 1990; Carroll and Bown 1996; Enright 1996; Getzel and Kregel 1996; Ochs and Roessler 2001; Ohler et al 1996), for women (Hackett and Betz 1993), and ethnic minorities (Bown 1993; Hawks and Muha 1991). These opportunities may help increase a student's self-confidence, which may enhance their ability to reason logically, resulting in better career-decisions later in the lifespan (Enright 1990). Enright (1990) has observed that students with disabilities are likely to prefer occupations for which they have experienced success in tasks related to that occupation. Observing role models being positively reinforced for such tasks may also help (Enright 1990). All of these experiences can enhance the student's capacity to choose their own careers.

Having Experience Living with a Disability

For certain jobs, and programs, living with a disability was a prerequisite. These positions were located within the government, non-profit, and private sectors. This made it much easier for some interviewees to obtain employment. While some felt that living with a disability **limited the potential** to be employed outside the disability community, they believed there are **positive effects** resulting from this experience. One person recounted how having personal experience with a disability increased



his understanding of disability and the ability to be more empathetic when working with and providing services to people with disabilities. He put it this way: "having been marginalized myself gives me a lot of empathy for the people I work with."

Similarly, a woman working with children with special needs said, "the families kind of connected with seeing somebody with a disability that was working, that was doing something." Another mentioned that the patience she'd acquired as a person living with a disability led to her being able to be patient with others, which in turn led to her success in finding employment: "I guess I'm fairly patient with people, in having to deal with myself in being patient with myself it's helped me to learn to convey that to others"

Even though participants recognized that having personal experience with disability was valuable for certain positions, some individuals felt it was very important to **de-emphasize their disabilities**. They wanted employers to understand that although they have disabilities, this fact did not define who they were or what they could do. One respondent endeavored to put people at ease with his disability. He said, "I don't identify with my disability... [I'm] not letting my disability run my life." Another stated: "[I will] not allow myself to be consumed by my disability. People don't want to be bothered with you if you are ill." Later in Chapter 5 "Obstacles to Employment", several participants discuss being defined by a disability as an obstacle.

Thus the findings show that having a disability can either be positive or negative factor related to employment.

Having Strong Social Networks

Networking is important in assisting students with and without disabilities in locating employment, but it can be particularly helpful to those with disabilities. Many of the participants stressed the importance of creating and maintaining strong social networks with potential work colleagues and peers to foster employment or self-employment. Several participants attributed their success to being in the right place at the right time. One stated that, since many jobs are not advertised, it is only through social networks that individuals stand a chance of securing gainful employment. A deaf participant noted that networking provided the key to her employment:

"...Networking is best to find a job, cause they see you, talk to you and your portfolio and they see how disabilities may not be a problem where they work, etc."



Having Support from Disability Organizations and Other Government Services

The support of disability resource centres and specialized employment programs for those with disabilities within the government sector was also important for some, but certainly not for all as will be discussed in Chapter 6. In describing the support received from a disability resource centre within a college setting, one person related: "Just remarkable people ... I would have been lost without them, and I don't think I would have finished. I wouldn't have stuck it out." This type of comment is consistent with the results and conclusions noted during **Phase 1 of this study**. A participant in a government program said:

"[There's no way I will walk out of here...without a job. My boss won't allow that, that would make her stats look really bad. When I walk out of here I'm going to have a job, cause ethically the program is supposed to put you somewhere where you'll be able to grow and continue on."

Summary

The key findings regarding reasons for successful transition to employment are listed below.

- Having a Post-Secondary Degree
- Having Certain Personal Qualities
- Having Flexibility in the Workplace
- Having experience gained from volunteer, paid-work and internships
- Having experience living with a disability
- Having Strong Social Networks
- Having Support from Disability Organizations and Other Government Services

Previous research reviewed did not show specific agreed upon reasons for successful employment of graduates with disabilities. Kohler and Chapman (1999) conducted an extensive review of the literature and found that no body of evidence existed that unequivocally confirmed any particular approach to transition, nor was there any strong evidence to support individual practices. They found that most studies placed details on specific interventions and practices and few investigations directly tested the **contribution** made by specific practices. This study in the same way was not designed to demonstrate the contribution of each of the possible reasons for success provided by the respondents.



This study was different from the Kohler & Chapman (1999) review, in that they examined factors before obtaining work such as building partnerships between the educational institution and businesses and community and supportive services such as those provided by local rehabilitation agencies. In this study we identified factors related to successfully finding and retaining employment. In this way, this present study was unique. From this study we do not know the specific contribution of each factor discussed to successful employment. Further research is needed to determine success factors



CHAPTER 4 : REASONS FOR EMPLOYMENT CHOICE

Participants outlined a number of factors that led them to their current employment choices. These included:

- Taking any job due to financial need
- Choosing Type of Employment to Accommodate the Disability
- Choosing Employers who had Strong Employment Equity and Accommodations Programs

While the factors listed below are not in any particular order of importance, financial need was mentioned most often.

Taking Any Job Due To Financial Need

Several people discussed how they were forced to accept work based on their financial needs rather than suitability of the work. One person explained:

"Yes that was determined by economic needs because I graduated from university in 2002 and I looked for work from early 2002 and April 2003 I still hadn't had a job offer, not anything. So when this job offer came along it was necessity, I really needed to have a job."

Choosing the Type of Employment to Accommodate the Disability

Choice of work for most participants was largely dependent on interest, but their own disability was often a major consideration. Either they chose employment that would allow for **flexibility**, (as described in Chapter 3) or they chose organizations that were **disability specific** that would have a better understanding of their issues. For a few individuals, the presence of disabilities limited the types of employment they could pursue. Some took on sedentary jobs that required little standing. Others needed flexible hours to accommodate issues such as fatigue, chronic pain or the unpredictability of mental illness. One person stated:

"I get sort of a sideways glance sometimes when I say I have some difficulty getting around, but you know I have difficulty standing for long periods of time and working in front of a computer for long periods of time, and it's challenging to be able to emphasize that without feeling like you're over-emphasizing it, and at the same time, because it tends to be ignored."

Another person altered his career choice due to his disability:



"Growing up ... I always came back to wanting to be a teacher. But when I [acquired my disability at a young age]...I didn't see how I could be able to observe a class of twenty-five kids and make sure they weren't cheating on tests or actually be able to read their assignments, and so I was in limbo. When I graduated from high school...I did a personality test and it said I would make a great teacher. Then someone suggested becoming a rehabilitation teacher. I've always liked working one on one better than with groups, so it seemed the ideal opportunity, and so I just started examining whatever I needed to do."

Some people decided to work for disability organizations to better accommodate them. However, one respondent expressed a concern about working for disability organizations. He felt accepting employment in the disability community created a risk of being stereotyped and limited to only working in positions that employ mental health consumers. It was important to him that he develop transferable skills that could be applied in different work settings. He stated: "I am conscious about being ghettoized and I don't want to stay in the mental health field for the next twenty years so to speak."

Alternatively, one interviewee who felt more comfortable in a disability related job articulated:

"I think disability was the biggest factor. Working in the disability industry, I **feel safe**. I was automatically an expert because [I have] a wheelchair, so oh, you must be a disability expert..."

Several people chose to work in the non-profit sector (not necessarily disability related). They believed that **non-profit organizations** are primarily concerned about social purpose rather than maximizing production and profits. One participant said: "Working in the not for profit sector...they don't care about my disability [disability] really because they're not there to make the most money out of me."

Some participants talked about how they chose a career that would enable them to support other people who live with similar disabilities to their own. For example, one person went into special education because of her own difficult experiences attending the public school system and living with a disability. She spoke of wanting to prevent other students from going through the same experience she had as a child.



Choosing Employers who had Strong Employment Equity and Access to Accommodations Programs

A number of people talked about how their disability influenced their decision to work for the government. One person said that given the government's employment equity policies, he felt he would have a much greater chance of securing employment in that sector, as well as receiving the accommodations necessary to fulfill their job-related responsibilities.

"I really wanted to get into the government because a person with a disability doesn't exactly have a lot of opportunities to get into the private sector. There are opportunities but in the government they have certain numbers that they have to meet to employ people in different equity groups and there's more equal opportunities in the government. Where the private sector they may say 'well you know it will cost us twenty thousand dollars to give you a computer when I could just get somebody who doesn't have a disability a regular computer and not spend the extra money'. Where [as] in the government they have these initiatives to try to employ people from different equity groups and they have lots of money to be able to provide the proper accommodations that are required by a person with a disability. That was my goal, because I knew that my work life would be less stressful and I would have all the equipment that I would need to be able to do my job successfully."

Similarly, another person talked about how working for the government enabled him to avoid stereotypical attitudes about the cost of disability accommodations.

"...when I initially applied to go work for government, disability was a factor in the sense that it's tough to find a job in the private sector, there's still the old stereotypical attitudes because it's about billable hours and making money and profit, they're not as accommodating for people with disability and I've heard that from colleagues that I knew that worked there and just general vibes that I got off of inquiries, so I got the impression that working for the government would be much more open to hiring people with disability."

One person described his experiences in obtaining disability-related accommodations in the banking industry and contrasted these with being accommodated during his years of post-secondary education.

"All the way through school and working at the bank, I always felt like, you know, half the battle was being out there dealing with my visual impairment, now I feel like, you know, that weight is sort of off my shoulders and I can just totally concentrate on doing my job."



Summary

The key findings regarding reasons for employment choice are:

- Choosing Type of Employment to Accommodate the Disability
- Choosing Employers who had Strong Employment Equity and Accommodations Programs
- Taking any job due to financial need

The findings indicate that to ease the process, many graduates sought employment with large firms who had employment equity policies in place or in non-profit organizations (such as disability organizations), which are more likely to accommodate their needs. Seeking out employment that offered flexibility to accommodate disability was also an important theme.



CHAPTER 5 : OBSTACLES TO EMPLOYMENT

Introduction

A number of respondents expressed frustration in their transition from university to employment. Many stated they were unable to find work due to obstacles. Participants who were unemployed outlined a variety of reasons for negative experiences and expressed general dissatisfaction with their current situations. Both employed and unemployed participants discussed their perceptions of the obstacles they had faced.

Identified Obstacles Included:

1. Attitudinal Barriers and Discrimination by Employers
2. Geographical Location and lack of Transportation
3. Inaccessibility of the Built and Communication Environments
4. Lack of Access to Interpreters and Attendants
5. Lack of Education Level
6. Lack of Work Experience and Internship Opportunities
7. Uncertain Futures due to the nature of the Disability
8. Lack of Confidence and Feelings of Discouragement

The experiences of the respondents in relationship to these obstacles are discussed in more detail on the following pages.

1. Attitudinal Barriers of Employers

Attitudinal barriers of employers were identified frequently by participants who identified that these included:

Discrimination

Stereotyping

Lack of expectations to perform work and discouragement of doing certain work.

Reverse-Discrimination

a. - Discrimination

Some participants stated they had faced blatant **discrimination** during the interview process. One person with a visible disability recounted a harrowing experience during an interview.

“I had someone that was actually, if you can believe this, looking under the table up my skirt to see what was happening with my legs in the wheelchair.”



Another participant recounted a similar experience:

"They obviously didn't tell me; oh we're not interested because you're in a wheelchair, but just the tone of the voice, ... I just felt like they just don't want a person in a wheelchair... They told me ... it's not going to work out because we are not accessible."

Another participant believed her invisible disability (which results in restrictions in physical activity) could sometimes lead to **attitudinal barriers**. She explained that co-workers tend to just look upon her as being "lazy" because her disability is not obvious. She stated that in once situation a manager would not hire her because her prospective employers feared the negative reaction of able-bodied clients.

"...If I apply for a job, I become very nervous because my speech isn't perfect and also hearing people are afraid to approach me, and afraid to try and work with me, because hearing people tend to not have the patience... but so many companies are not comfortable hiring deaf people. I've been **discriminated** against when I hand resumes in. First I tend to phone and ask if there is an opening... and [if] they say yes... then I go and talk to them face-to-face and [the interviewer] is shocked that I am deaf and right away they say, no, no, part-time jobs available, so that's a major barrier right there."

Discrimination caused a great deal of stress for a few participants. One person who works with young children said when she disclosed to her boss regarding her learning disability, her employer insisted on evaluating her. She stated:

"...All this came out afterwards...because I didn't speak the way that she wanted me to speak, or write the way that she felt I should write, all this was held against me, and she recommended that I be terminated. Fortunately for [me, my] union representative stepped in."

Though the issue was eventually resolved in the interviewee's favour, the incident left a significant emotional scar. In another situation, an individual described her experiences of applying for jobs:

"As soon as I walk in for an interview with an [oxygen] tank [they think] I can't do it, people get this mentality or whatever that I can't do it, can't do the job."

The same participant recounted the mixed messages she received from a prospective employer, which she felt was a case of **blatant discrimination**:



“I left the interview and he said you are right up at the top, you’ve got the experience, you’ve got the knowledge, you’ve got everything we’re looking for, and I never heard from him again. I phoned them about a month later and they said we’re not hiring any more, but it just doesn’t sit right.”

In the following example, a respondent describes the extra effort people with disabilities have to expend to **prove that they are capable** and that living with a disability can be more of an obstacle to obtaining employment than for people without disabilities.

“...People are ignorant. In a lot of cases **they’ve never dealt with a person with a disability before**, so they’re not really sure, [they are thinking] oh my God what am I going to do with this person, can they do the work that I need them to do. It is quite tiring when you first start a job because you spend all your time, not only do you have to **prove yourself** as a new employee, but you have to prove yourself as a new employee that has a disability, and that’s where the real challenge lies.”

Another person talked about her struggle to secure an interview. If she reveals that she has a disability too early in the process of applying for a job, she will not even be invited to an interview. Therefore she does not often disclose until after she submits her application. Because she is visually impaired, getting to the interview is challenging. Once she arrives, she finds that people are so shocked that they physically move away from her.

"It was very hard, because I don't like to divulge before the interview that I'm visually impaired because a lot of times that ends the interview right there. But at the same time when I ask them where are you located, I find that people are very vague; oh we're at [address], and where exactly is that? I'm asking directions such as cross streets, and which corner are you on, you know northeast, southeast, but people don't think about those things when they can see... I like to take a bus so I can prove to them that I am mobile and I can get there. I usually find my way there no problem, but then once I get there, they're shocked. People seem to be very afraid of losing their sight and I've actually had people literally, physically move away from me because they're scared it's catchy, and then they ask stupid questions like, so how would you get here everyday. Well how is walking for you...so they're more concerned about what I can't do as opposed to what I can do."

Reverse Discrimination

A separate issue related to disclosure became apparent when a respondent relayed that a supervisor disclosed her disability to a new supervisor without her consent. Not only did this violate the participant's privacy but also this situation caused some mixed feelings because the disclosure **made her job easier**, in fact so much easier



that she wondered whether going to university was a worthwhile experience. Beyond betraying confidentiality, this issue shows how employers sometimes **over compensate the disability.**

"...At my very first position...they were afraid to give me work, I guess they didn't realize my abilities. They probably thought since I had a disability I didn't know how to get certain things done. I guess you could call it a little of an attitude problem there."

One woman who was in the process of launching her own business, expressed frustration around the issue of obtaining honest feedback about her work: a case of reverse-discrimination. She shared an example of what happened while participating in a self-employment training program. Participants were asked to present their ideas to their peers with respect to branding their businesses. They were also requested to choose appropriate names for their companies. She felt that the class was reluctant to honestly critique her work because she lives with a disability.

"...Something that I constantly have to fight with is...am I being challenged, am I going in the right direction because people won't challenge me. I find that I have to build a stronger network of people...in my field of study [to find out if] I'm going in the right direction, because I'm not getting that in the able-bodied community."

b. Stereo-Typed Attitudes: Lack of Expectations

Another issue that respondents discussed were stereotypical attitudes including lack of expectations of people with disabilities. The following comment offers a clear example of how readily some people define persons with disabilities according to their disabilities and have difficulty seeing them as college graduates.

"Even my audiologist is so amazed at what I do for a living, amazed that I went to college and I graduated. I'm like you shouldn't be amazed that the fact that I graduated, you should be happy that I graduated. So it's just **changing people's perceptions.**"

Similarly, participants expressed frustration that **many positions are only available within organizations in the disability community.** In part, this could be due to disability-related restrictions. As well, jobs in the disability community are more often available to persons with disabilities, which again restricts them to being defined by these disabilities.

One woman shared that,



"I don't want to be defined by my disability, and I'm really finding that working in the disability sector...my disability is a huge part of what I'm doing... and I don't like that...I used to be so much more... Sometimes I feel like that gets lost, and I don't want to be lost."

Other interviewees described the **assumptions** people make based on what they believe to be true about **invisible disabilities**. In these cases, participants found they were forced to continually educate their coworkers. One said: "...it was much harder for people to understand, because I look normal, I don't use a cane and I can see, especially close up, but at a distance, like I can't read phone numbers in a phone book and that was harder...I had to keep reminding people..."

One participant talked very personally about her own struggle in the disability field. While she felt very safe working in the disability community, she indicated it could also be very **easy to use a disability as an excuse not to achieve certain goals**. In her experience, **no one would hold her accountable**.

"Working in the disability industry, I felt safe. I was automatically an expert because [I use a] wheelchair. It was also really helpful to have coworkers and people working with me who I knew accepted my disability and I hate to say it but where I could get away with using my disability as an excuse, like if I say, oh I'm sorry I didn't make that deadline but my [disability] is acting up, they wouldn't hold me to it, they wouldn't challenge me on that, and if they did, well you're a disability organization that doesn't seem very caring. At that point my self-esteem was pretty low when I started... I wasn't stretching myself, it was a nice place to go."

Some respondents also talked about the **lack of expectations placed upon them from the disability community** due to their perceived limitations and the stereotypes society attaches to people with disabilities. These same views were felt to be present within the disability community by some. One interviewee opined:

"I battled with a lot of things and in the end I was the one who had to pick myself up and stand on my own two feet, and it's really hard to be in a culture where nobody will do that, and they won't even entertain the possibility; they're not at that stage yet...it's hard enough to motivate myself. Some days...I don't have the energy to spend motivating others."

Another person who has a well-paying job in the for profit world commented, "it can be hard for me to work outside the disability sector. And frankly I have not managed to do so."



c.) Fear of Negative Attitudes and the Decision To Disclose or Not to Disclose

With respect to disclosure of disability, responses were mixed and this topic proved to be quite a complicated issue. For those that **did disclose** responses varied from receiving the needed help, to employers being overly helpful, to facing discrimination. Those that did not disclose did not receive necessary accommodations.

One interviewee expressed mixed feelings about disclosure. On the one hand, it can be helpful to disclose if the company you are applying to be committed to employment equity. On the other hand, disclosing early in the process can also be used against you.

" Well usually I put it down on the application, cause sometimes they'll ask if you have a disability. Sometimes it's in your favour... because of Employment Equity... People are often favoured if they have a disability. So I've often thought it helps, but sometimes I don't know if it helps or hinders." She adds: "You don't know whether they're going to look past [the disability] and look at the person or they're just going to stop right there and take into consideration someone else."

Others felt uncomfortable disclosing their disabilities. One individual expressed discomfort in disclosing his disability to his employer but indicated he would do so if the situation warranted this:

"...I don't want them to know because I want to be able to make this on my own. If I did tell them when I was hired they might treat me differently and I want to be treated like everyone else, like the other teachers would be."

Another felt she had lost her interview because she had disclosed:

"I remember applying for a language school and I said okay well the interview will be tomorrow at eight thirty, or ten or something, and they called me at about eight thirty and said the jobs already taken, but I had said to the lady I'm blind etc. etc. so I'm wondering...we'll never know for sure, but I'm wondering if that might have been an obstacle in the sense that knowing I was blind they could have said well we'll hire somebody else."

For one respondent, early disclosure allowed him to feel more relaxed:



"I felt best with them knowing right up front that I was visually impaired. ... Then I could relax and not have to worry about the stress of okay what happens when they realize that I'm visually impaired, this way they know what they're getting into before they even meet me."

Some people decided whether to disclose **based on their needs for accommodation**. A majority of those with **invisible disabilities did not disclose** because they felt employers or coworkers would discriminate against them and a fear of being stigmatized or discriminated against. or they believed they did not require employment-related accommodations. For those with more visible disabilities, most felt that they did not have a lot of choice about disclosure and that it was important to disclose their disabilities sooner rather than later.

Many felt that disclosure was inevitable. While some preferred disclosing in the cover letter of resumes or on applications, **others waited** until they were called for interviews. One interviewee did not disclose to employers but told immediate supervisors about her disability, since she required some on-the-job accommodations. When one participant disclosed this fact to an interviewer, she was told "that there are places for people like her:"

"My first job, and it was a waitressing job, nothing to do with my field, as I was in the interview I disclosed my disability to the person interviewing me, and he informed me that they had places for people like me in the back."

Alternatively, while some participants believed it was important to be up front about their disabilities, they also placed certain **parameters around disclosure**. They felt specific information should be provided only when employers had relevant questions or concerns. One respondent explained:

"Because I didn't have to, I said well if they ask me a question like what happened to you or what is this or what is that, I will answer the questions, but I didn't have to."

Others did not feel the need to formally disclose because their disabilities were visible and self-explanatory in terms of possible accommodation requirements. However, a few people chose to **hide their visible disabilities**. One respondent described how she accomplished this, but faced some consequences in doing so:

"I actually normally walk with a cane, but when I've gone for job interviews I have actually gone without the cane...because I have chosen to move around without my cane, that's been difficult, especially when you have buildings where you've got four flights of stairs to get up. Because I take narcotics for pain management it's been really challenging to try to schedule pain management with interviews."



One person summed up the advantages of disclosing versus not disclosing his disability by saying: "The sociologist in me sort of compared the number of interviews I got when I listed that I had a disability, and the number that I got when I didn't list it, and I found that I got more interviews when I wasn't listing that I had a disability."

2. Geographic Location and Lack of Transportation

In some cases, geographic location and transportation issues were closely related. In these instances, participants contained their job searches to the regions in which they lived because it was not financially feasible to travel to and from work outside of their cities or towns. One participant lived in a rural setting outside of a city. Thus, applying for jobs was difficult. She primarily applied for jobs through the mail. Without regular employment, she could not afford the cost of transportation. One person articulated how people with disabilities are doubly disadvantaged in rural areas where there are limited opportunities for the general population, and even fewer opportunities for people with difficulties with mobility who require certain accommodations. In certain parts of the country, inclement weather compounds these issues.

One person said:

"There's always that problem in the **winter time** of traveling and getting out. It's hard enough for somebody with two feet to get around in some of the conditions we have around here, never mind somebody in a wheelchair."

One major hindrance facing many of the interviewees was **an inability to drive**, or to have access to reliable, affordable, and **accessible public transportation**.

"I've attempted to get my driver's license, but I'm not able to currently, so that affects my mobility. I'm very limited in the fact that I can't go anywhere outside the metropolitan area. Commuting would be a problem, and also living in an isolated community where...not even a taxi service might be available."

One participant **targeted employers that were accessible through public transit or located directly on the subway line**. Another indicated that **not being able to drive** hindered her job prospects and explained that her disability required her to learn driving through a program that accommodated her disability. This in turn posed an additional barrier because it cost more for the driving lessons. Another who was unable to get her license due to her disability said that relying on the transit system was not a viable option: "Basically my employment means that if I have to be somewhere for ten o'clock I have to leave my apartment at 8:30."



Still another person spoke about how being available to travel is an important expectation of the industry for which she is qualified. Therefore difficulties in accessing reliable transportation presented major barriers to becoming successfully employed.

“...Transportation is a huge issue...because transportation plays so big a role in the type of work that I'm looking into and having access to [it] will allow me to be available... I'm using [a specialized transportation system] right now and that's just not possible so that's a big issue.”

An interviewee who has a visual impairment shared that,

“You know I applied to a lot of different positions on line, but a lot of what you need to do is meet people in person, and it's difficult to do that when you don't know where you're going. You can't just hop on a bus and find a place.”

Another person was **forced to rearrange her work schedule** so that she could get transportation to and from work. This meant negotiating later start and end times to her workday. Being forced to change one's schedule also has implications for individuals who must coordinate attendant services and manage energy levels.

3. Inaccessibility of The Built and Communication Environments

Some participants identified difficulties with accessibility in workplaces as major obstacles. Three participants spoke of their experiences with some organizations that claimed to be equal opportunity employers and their insufficient knowledge of workplace accommodations:

“...Overall with employers I find there's a **very, very low level of awareness** and knowledge about how to accommodate an employee...”

Some interviewees discussed the stresses they experienced when attempting to obtain accommodations. One said:

"I was obviously very worried about my accommodations because...there's a whole process and package that you have to fill out before you get accommodations or get funding for accommodations, and I was really worried because of the area that I was targeting (non-profit organizations). I know they're supposed to be inclusive and they're supposed to provide accommodations, but non-profit organizations are the ones who struggle the most for funding. **My accommodations are very expensive.**"



a. Lack of Access to the Built Environment

The issue of building accessibility was pertinent, especially in older cities.

"Buildings are not accessible, and because a lot of them are considered historic sites and buildings, what you can do in terms of accessibility is very limiting. Sometimes I look in the paper, and you can see the address of the business and you can say well **this is not going to be accessible, so I just won't apply.**"

A few interviewees were required to visit clients in their homes or workplaces but, in many instances, these facilities were inaccessible. This made it virtually impossible for these individuals to fulfill their work-related responsibilities.

One person was unable to work in her field of social work where she would be required to visit clients in their homes. Most homes are inaccessible, thereby rendering her unable to undertake the work. No offers of accommodations were forthcoming from prospective employers. Since graduation she had worked in the field of rehabilitation training, but knew that she really preferred to work as a social worker. She is currently enrolled in a Masters program that will enable her to work in hospital settings. Since hospitals are accessible, they will not create the barriers to employment that she previously experienced.

One participant told of being locked out of her workplace because of a practice of locking the elevator to discourage people from coming up to the office at certain times. The elevator was her only access point. When she was locked out she would have to phone up and ask someone to let her in. Another person commented on how the office she works in is wheelchair accessible. However, the type of lock installed on the door makes it virtually impossible to access the workplace independently:

"There is wheelchair access to the place... It's got an old door that's locked from the inside, and you have to pretty much call ahead and get them to open the door so you can get in that way."

Another person living in a small town shared her thoughts about the lack of accessible buildings: "Even if I wanted to work at [big box store]...their offices are upstairs."

b. Lack of Communications Access

Computer access was another relevant issue for participants, one respondent stated:



"Well adaptive software is very expensive and a lot of companies don't want to buy it... They don't have to pay for adaptations, even though it is a tax write off... They don't want to have to go through all the red tape of even getting the funding that is out there."

Some wheelchair users had difficulty because laptop computers were not readily available, again compromising their ability to perform work-related duties. The inaccessibility of office files and related information was an issue for one participant with a visual disability.

"I think due to the filing system in the organization, a lot of things are on paper...I can't just go and look for things myself, and even if I find them then I've got to find somebody to read them because they're usually photocopies or bad printouts, so you can't really scan them. The same with the library; a lot of the books that are in the library are not scan able."

Regarding one woman's internship, she commented: "I must point out that a government agency that funded the internship, didn't provide accommodations for technology." When asked to comment further on this situation, she said,

"I guess if they're looking at hiring people with disabilities, they should be aware that there's going to be other expenses incurred other than just transportation, and there should be some type of **a fund** for interns to utilize to get the appropriate technologies that they need."

While some people were able to access adaptive technology, they were unable to maintain this equipment because there was no **ongoing budget** for this. One person stated:

"...They'll give you these accommodations at home but they don't give you **accommodation maintenance** or computer maintenance through the year. So anything can happen to your technology or it could become more outdated and you don't really know how to upgrade it."

Communication issues were a challenge for several persons with learning disabilities. One individual expressed frustration regarding job requirements on line.

"A lot of sites that I was on, I couldn't read them, or I'd misread them and think I was qualified for the job, and then once I'd gone through and written the cover letter and gotten halfway through...my resume, I'd realize okay, this position, I'm not qualified for it. So I'm wondering how many out there I was qualified for and I was passed over because I didn't think I was

For her, ads written in plain language would have made her task much easier.



A number of people expressed concern about the tendency for employers to use formal tests as a mechanism for screening out unsuitable candidates. For many people with disabilities, standardized or written tests do not enable them to demonstrate their strongest assets. In many cases, tests have the opposite effect and expose areas where accommodations are needed. One person stated:

“Writing, obviously, yeah. Testing, like if an employer at the interview phase wants to do testing, especially written, ... not right in any of these job interviews, but I’ve experienced that in the past... You’ve been found out.”

A person with a learning disability found it difficult to communicate with her employers in written form. However, she forged a relationship where her employers would come to her for clarification. She solved her communication challenges by writing her reports on her home computer.

4. Lack of Access to Interpreters and Attendants

Access to interpreters was identified as a financial and administrative barrier for persons with hearing disabilities, whether they were seeking employment or currently employed.

A few participants described attendant care as an obstacle. One woman recounted:

"I've had challenges like finding an attendant. They (employers) had eventually just agreed to pay for my attendant. Originally I'd spent quite a few hours trying to find a source of sponsorship for me having an attendant at work, and there were none to be found... I was in a complex where there are attendant services provided.... Those attendants aren't allowed to leave that complex. Attendants usually are funded at work...because people [sometimes] have direct funding, which means they pay for their own attendants to come in. It's very easy to get an attendant to come in, but since I didn't have that service, it was pretty much impossible for me."

It appears from the comments made by the participant that unless the person has direct funding the provincial medical system does not help with providing attendant care at work. This challenge was eventually resolved when her employer, offered to pay for her attendant.

Another person said: "It's hard to try and look for work when you don't have the proper care to begin with...As it stands now... my attendants sometimes are showing up at ten, twelve thirty to get me out of bed... I don't know what jobs to look for, that



would allow me to show up at two in the afternoon on Sundays." The "government doesn't see this as medically necessary... after all it's free."

5. Lack of Education Level

A few respondents found that an undergraduate degree still did not qualify them for the kinds of work they were pursuing. Therefore, they expressed a desire to return to school to further their education. However, they found that pursuing a graduate degree was not a straightforward process. For many people with disabilities, the cost of graduate programs prohibits them from obtaining an advance degree.

[I have found that my experience at] "work and looking for work is not a high enough level of education. So they want more than just a degree. They want a Masters as opposed [to an undergraduate degree]... The way our funding goes for schooling, I can't afford to go for my Masters until I get a job. So I can maybe take it part-time, so it's kind of a vicious cycle going on there."

For some participants the challenge was not finding the work, but rather being accepted into post-secondary education. Such was the case for a participant with learning disabilities pursuing a teaching career. She found that looking for work did not pose any obstacles, but rather getting into a Bachelor of Education program at a local university, which was a prerequisite to entering the field, presented the biggest challenge.

6. Lack of Work Experience and Internship Opportunities

In the literature reviewed, a reason for successful transition from school to work was previous work experiences. Likewise, lack of these experiences posed obstacles to employment. Lack of work experience presented barriers for a number of respondents. This lack of experience occurred for several reasons including lack of physical accessibility of workplaces, and/or difficulty in working with a disability. The challenge was compounded for short-term employment where physical accommodations were seen as too costly for the term commitments

One person indicated that school was all that she could physically handle. She indicated that going to school and working at the same time was not physically possible for her given her disability. Although she was aware that work and volunteer experience were important for her to become successfully employed, she stated that she was not able to manage both at the same time. As a result, she felt that it was hard for her to secure employment upon graduation



Another respondent suggested that people did not want to hire someone with a visible disability for retail positions. She said:

"The primary one was probably the lack of experience due to...I couldn't work. A lot of employers are hesitant to hiring people with disabilities if they're going to be face to face with customers. When you're in university, everybody is pretty much working retail or getting experience that way, so I couldn't do that."

Another person agreed saying:

"Lack of work experience was a big key especially when I started out. I couldn't work while I was in high school, I couldn't have the little part-time jobs the ones [other] people have, and then didn't end up having summer jobs."

In discussing her experiences trying to get part time work while in school, one woman observed:

"It's hard for me to get 'Joe' jobs... A lot of my friends ... (when they couldn't find something that was full-time) they could do jobs like waitressing and stuff like that. I couldn't ever do that type of stuff, so that was a bit tougher; but again, I've got government assistance though, so that made it a bit easier on me."

Another person stated:

"For a person with disabilities, it's very hard because we can't go to a regular place, you know we can't go to [big box store], we can't go and flip burgers...but post-secondary education is so important ... they say on average it takes a sighted person ... or an able-bodied person three months to find a new job, well triple that for a person with a disability."

Another interviewee with a visual disability who required adaptive technology talked about the challenge of finding short-term employment:

"I've got that added worry because if I don't make it then I have to look for a job and then I've got that added barrier [that] other students don't have. They can just pick up a job. For me it will cost them \$5,000 to hire me."

In a similar vein, another noted the difficulty she had obtaining summer employment in her field of study because of the cost of providing accommodations.



"I found most people who went through university had summer jobs in their fields ... a summer job to me, it was harder to find something. Why would you buy a huge computer that would be able to read to me when I'm only there for four months?"

A woman who was unsuccessful in locating a practicum placement in her community and instead had negotiated the placement at her college agreed saying:

"I think that I wished that there would have been a little bit more preparation and I wished I would have been able to get something to do in the practicum out in the community. Because I felt that I was kind of cheated out of that."

An individual who located a practicum placement commented:

"The biggest barriers that we have, or that I had and that I recognized ... is a résumé that is just blank for five years or ten years. The educational opportunities have been missed, so a person's out there...not only with no real skills but no work history either, and that is a huge barrier."

7. Uncertain Futures due to the Nature of the Disability

a. Fear of Leaving a job due to uncertain futures

A majority of those who were employed wished to continue working at their current places of employment. However, due to the nature of non-profit organizations and their term contracts, several were uncertain of their futures. Because of this uncertainty, most were looking for work while continuing in their current jobs.

One individual expressed the added burden of fear experienced by persons with disabilities vis-à-vis leaving any job. Even though they were unhappy in their current positions, they felt they had no other choice but to stay in these jobs due to the amount of discrimination faced in the labour force. One person articulated her concern about this issue:

"You can't be assertive in what you're choosing, and a lot of [persons with disabilities] are staying in positions that are not really for them, but they say well gee...I've got to stay here and finish this out, and wait for them to sort of lay me off or terminate my employment, because who knows when my next pay cheque might be? It might take me another five years or another three years to get another full-time position."

Several respondents mentioned the changeable nature of some disabilities and that accommodating for these unpredictable situations can be difficult if not impossible.



This is often true in situations where disabilities are assumed to be static conditions. One participant referred to the unpredictability of her hands as a "Charlie Chaplin routine". One minute her hands may be able to turn a door handle but are unable to do so at another point in time. She described this reality as "jogging in mud".

One participant was recovering from surgery, and was looking to involve herself in volunteer activities as a means of gauging how much work and stress she could handle while managing her disability. Another person was dealing with physical and emotional complications resulting from terminal illness.

8. Lack of Confidence and Feelings of Discouragement

Face with a plethora of obstacles, including discriminatory hiring practices and a lack of accommodations, many respondents in this study began to lose their sense of confidence.

"I would say confidence is probably the biggest one, thinking how can I compete in a world full of able-bodied people. If somebody could hire somebody who can do what I can do and walk and file in a high filing cabinet and see, ... why wouldn't they pick them over me?"

The same participant added:

"When I was in school I could compete with everyone. I got good grades so I had that affirmation. When I entered the work world that was all gone, and I didn't feel like I could compete, so I was lost." She expanded by saying that, in school, "I was an equal. When I handed in my paper, when I handed in my tests, its marked based on my ability. When you get to the job part, they don't really want that anymore it seems. You become a person with a disability trying to find a job and you become an equity case or you become...a member of those other class sets and that's hard."

Many of those who remained unemployed despite having completed their post secondary education expressed feelings of disillusionment and despair. Finding permanent employment is a challenge for people without disabilities but presents even greater challenges for those with disabilities as we see in this study. In this study many of the participants could not locate employment in their fields of choice. One person explained:

"I'm trying to remain hopeful but it is somewhat discouraging. It's really slow and I do wish sometimes that things would move faster" and didn't present so many complications.



One participant who graduated at the top of his class and received an award for being a successful student described his experience this way:

"I'll tell you that after a year of looking around it's been a very, very, very stressful, very depressing type of thing, and I'm not one to get **depressed** at all...I'm usually very positive. I'm usually very outgoing and happy and all this. This has been a thoroughly unpleasant experience and for the first time in my entire life, it's been a **roadblock** for me that really it's been almost impossible to get around because of my vision...and I'm not used to that."

The same interviewee explained further: "going to interviews with this constant stress of trying to act as 'normal' and competent and not make any mistakes... that's a lot of stress to deal with when you're trying to sell yourself." Two people expected to have a much easier time getting work once they had completed their post secondary education. One expressed deep **disappointment** that even though he has completed his formal education, he has been unable to get work.

"Right at the moment I am unemployed. I try to work temp[orary] when necessary but there haven't been too many phone calls, I'm getting a bit **discouraged**. ... I had the high expectations that when graduating I would get this big job and it just never happened. I've submitted out all kind of resumes and didn't get an answer though."

Another individual stated:

"I got an honors degree and a graduate degree and still couldn't find work that I was able to do. I did not have any financial support and was not eligible for EI (employment insurance) when I graduated. I was not eligible for disability and the only way I could support myself was by taking out a student loan and going back to school. My experience stemmed out of a **sense of hopelessness** and then like others into a sense of integrity to pursue a means to secure future employment when opportunities are not currently available, through continuing education, choosing a graduate program that does have internships, and trying to break through some of the **barriers** that can hamper someone with a disability from getting a job."

Comparison of this Chapters' Findings to the Review of Literature

Students with disabilities are at a significant disadvantage compared to non-disabled peers. According to Frank, Karst and Boles (1989) students with disabilities **face**



social as well as physical barriers to full and equal participation in the workforce. Fifty percent of the disabled graduates they interviewed believed they were denied employment because of their disability, either as a result of discrimination or a lack of needed services, supports, or accessibility in the school or workplace (Getzel and Kregel 1996; Frank, Karst and Boles 1989). Depending on the type of disability, many different forms of discrimination exist. For example, Babbit and Burback (1990, p. 98) note, "In addition to the idiosyncratic constraints that others face, the physically disabled are subject to stereotyping and prejudicial attitudes and have special problems in establishing and maintaining their personal identities." A survey of 1,000 Americans with disabilities conducted by the National Organization on Disability in 1998 showed that only 29% of persons with disabilities, ages 18-64, work full or part time, compared to 79% of the non-disabled population (N.O.D. 1998).

The *In Unison* (2001) report describes a number of factors that discourage persons with disabilities from seeking work. These include:

- Losing their current income (21%),
- Problems with training (16%),
- No jobs available (15%),
- Fear they would lose additional supports (13%);
- Family responsibilities (10%),
- Discrimination (7%); and
- Lack of accessible transportation (7%).

According to the same report, the three accommodations most often identified by people with disabilities not in the labor force as required for them to work are:

- Modified/reduced hours (33%);
- Job redesign (27%); and
- Accessible transportation (14%).

In another study, by Kennedy and Olney 2001, an overwhelming majority of participants cited obstacles encountered while looking for employment. These broke down into issues around transportation, challenges related to their disabilities, discrimination, inaccessibility of buildings and communication barriers. In addition, there were difficulties around lack of work experience.

Discrimination

Depending on the type of disability, many different forms of **discrimination** exist.



For example, Babbit and Burbach (1990, p. 98) note, “In addition to the idiosyncratic constraints that others face, the physically disabled are subject to stereotyping and prejudicial attitudes and have special problems in establishing and maintaining their personal identities.” Individuals with mental disabilities experience more discrimination than other disability groups, according to Kennedy and Olney (2001). Certain barriers are common to all people with disabilities, regardless of type.

Kennedy and Olney (2001) found that nearly one-tenth of all adults with disabilities who were in the workforce during the five-year period immediately following the passage of the American’s with Disabilities Act experienced some form of discrimination. While it is certainly true that people with severe disabilities and visible physical disabilities are at a higher risk of experiencing discrimination based upon their disability than are people whose disabilities may not be as visible, stereotypical assumptions about life with a disability affect all people with disabilities. Discrimination and stigma as identified in the focus groups were barriers that most consumers felt that they had encountered.

Studies have shown that students with disabilities face attitudinal barriers, such as lowered expectations and discouragement from family members, faculty and staff (Kroeger et al 1990; Evenson and Evenson 1983; Getzel and Kregel 1996; Silver et al 1997; Ochs and Roessler 2001; Kiernan and Brinkman 1988). A study by Silver, Strehorn, and Bourke (1997) survey 47 students at postsecondary institutions, 15 (37.9%) of who said they were discouraged from pursuing a certain major. Interview data in a study by Robinson (2000) supported the importance of paid employment to self-esteem and quality of life and at the same time showed high levels of frustration in the individual’s search for work. Burgstahler (2001) reported that obstacles to employment in high-skill positions for people with disabilities include lack of encouragement from individuals with whom they interact, inadequate support systems and accommodations and lack of access to technology that can maximize independence and productivity.

Disability is often a factor in the development of career choice, but it is alarming that 17% of students were discouraged from pursuing a particular career track because of their disability (Silver et al 1997). This is problematic because much of the research exploring the development of career maturity in students with disabilities stresses the importance of self-advocacy and decision-making skills (Ochs and Roessler 2001; Ohler et al 1996; Benshoff 1987/88). Freedman & Lynch Fesko (1996) also found in their interviews that several consumers were told they could not do particular jobs because of their disabilities and some felt they were held back from assuming new responsibilities or from seeking promotions.



The suggestions of the participants in this study regarding the impacts of Negative Attitudes and Discrimination find support in previous studies.

The suggestions of the present study support findings in the literature. The literature review revealed that the area of disclosure was one of the most highly researched in the topic of transition to work for students with disabilities.

The transition to postsecondary education may be the first time the individual with a disability holds the responsibility for identifying themselves as disabled to faculty and administrators. It becomes important for the student to be able to describe their disability and identify and ask for necessary accommodations (Adelman and Vogel 1990). As Gerber (1997) describes, “Beyond school, there is a world unlike anything experienced by individuals with learning disabilities during their school age years. It is a world that holds many challenges not previously confronted ... it is a complicated and complex world **predicated on profit and efficiency**” (p.3).

Many studies in this area of disclosure are related to learning disabilities. Grenbaaum, Grahm and scales (1996) conducted phone interviews with 49 people who had received LD support services while at a particular university. Although 80% of the respondents indicated that their LD affected their work (including problems with memory, reading, writing, and mathematics), only 20% self-disclosed during the job application process. The primary reason for not self-disclosing was fear of discrimination-specially that they would not be hired. This study compares to a similar study by Silver, Stehorn and Bourke (1997) who found that only 14.9% of the 47 graduates studied reported self-disclosure to their employers, 33.3% disclosed to their supervisor and 37.8% disclosed to coworkers. However of the 47 interviewees, **only one had requested and received accommodations**. Witte, Philips and Kakela (1998) also reported low workplace self-disclosure rates in a sample of 72 college graduates with LD at 5%.

Kakela and Witte (2000) reported on the lack of data related to specific factors influencing the self-disclosure process. A more recent study by Madaus, Foley, McGuire and Ruban (2002) indicated that of respondents that did chose to disclose, **most disclosed to supervisors (66.6%) and/or to coworkers (55.6%)**. The reason cited was to enable use of technology (18.5%), a need for additional time (11.1%) and a need fro more detailed directions (7.4%). Of the 66.3% who did not disclose, 20.2% cited a potentially negative impact on the relationship with a supervisor, and 13.5% cited a fear of negatively affecting the relationship with coworkers. Moreover, 12.4% cited a concern for job security as the reason for non-disclosure. Lack of self-understanding was found to be a dominant characteristic of learning disabled adults, interviewed by Blalock (1981/82), who were not successfully employed. Many students with disabilities were aware that they are having problems, but had not yet developed the capacity to understand how their specific deficits affected their



difficulties (Adelman and Vogel 1990; Hitchings et al 1998). According to Babbitt and Burbach (1990, p. 102), “disabled individuals tend to have lower self-concepts and are more likely to be confused about how their needs and assets interface with career options.” If transition programs developed for the transition from secondary to postsecondary educational setting focus on the development of self-concept through the honing of these skills, students will learn to anticipate problems and have the opportunity to develop and try out different compensatory strategies. These skills and abilities, strengthened throughout the postsecondary experience, will also help the student with the transition to work (Getzel and Kregel 1996; Keim et al 1996).

For students with learning disabilities, issues surrounding the decision to self-identify as having a disability affect the transition process more than they would for students with physical or severe mental disabilities for whom non-disclosure is not an option. These students must make the decision to disclose the nature of their disability to support staff, as well as to employers, in order to be provided with adequate supports and accommodations.

Friehe and Leuenberger (1996) report that many students with disabilities are not able to effectively request accommodations from employers and fear disclosing their disabilities because of perceived stereotypes and tokenism from employers. Beiff (1998) describes the world in which these individuals must live a work, that “unlike the protected experiences of the school environment, the employment world represents a social system that is barely knowledgeable about the issues of disability. Negative perceptions and misinformation are rampant” (p. 314). Roffman (2000) concluded that there are “no right or wrong answers when it comes to this issue; decisions should be based upon an individual’s specific circumstances and the nature of the position being sought” (p. 263).

The findings in the present study are consistent with research by Fraser and Shrey (1986) and Kiernan and Conley (1989) Freedman & Fesko (1996) who cited negative attitudes and perceptions of employers, professionals, and families as obstacles to employment for people with disabilities. While some consumers expressed general awareness of their rights, there was still overwhelming concern and fear about addressing disability issues with employers. Consumers seemed to feel isolated and on their own in deciding whether to inform current or potential employers of their disability and how to ask for accommodation.

Geographic Location and Transportation

The findings from the current study are consistent with the findings of Freedman and Lynch Fesko (1996) who found that job search to work sites as limited by availability



of accessible transportation. Getting to work in inclement weather was also another factor in determining choice of employment.

Comparison to the Literature Summary

The findings of this study were compared to the findings found in the literature. The comparison in the following table demonstrates that the present findings support the findings in the literature except for the area of lack of confidence, which was an added finding in this study.

)Table 6: Obstacles to Employment: Comparison Between this Study and Literature

Literature Review	Author	Found in Present Study
Discrimination	Frank, Karst, Boles, 1989, Getzel & Kregel, 1996, Babbit & Burbach, 1990, Kennedy and Olney (2001), Unison Report (2000), Unison (2000)	Yes
Lack of Services or Supports	Frank, Karst, Boles (1989), Robinson (2000), Burgstahler, 2001	yes
Inaccessibility of buildings	Kennedy & Olney (2001),	yes
Transportation	Kennedy & Olney (2001), Unison (2000)	Yes
Challenges related to disability: need for flexibility	Kennedy & Olney (2001), Unison (2000)	Yes



Communication Barriers/ lack of access to technology	Kennedy & Olney (2001), Burgstahler, 2001	Yes
Lack of Work Experience	Kennedy & Olney (2001),	Yes
Attitudes of Employers & Others: Including lower expectations, lack of encouragement	Robinson (2000) Burgstahler, 2001	Yes
Problems with Training or Education Level	Unison (2000)	Yes
		Lack of confidence

The table shows that the results from the present Transitions Phase 2 study compare favorably with previous research. Each factor is described in more detail in the following pages. The experiences described provide further evidence that persons with disabilities continue to experience major obstacles to obtaining and maintaining employment.



CHAPTER 6 : RESPONDENT'S EXPERIENCES WITH SUPPORT SERVICES IN TRANSITION TO WORK

Participants described their perceptions and experiences with support services as they transitioned from school to work. They provided suggestions for facilitating this process. Most of the participants did not find university services adequate in preparing them for the transition to work. As well, most participants expressed a certain level of frustration when attempting to access support through career and employment services. They felt that these services were essentially ineffective when it came to assisting persons with disabilities in making the transition to work. Participants found they had to engage in extensive assessments to meet eligibility criteria. Once eligibility was determined, they found that the services were geared primarily to entry level, non-professional positions. These were not the kind of jobs that graduates were seeking; rather, they were looking for positions where they could apply the knowledge and skills they had gained through post secondary education. They were looking for positions that would enable them to achieve their long-term career goals. Once individuals found employment, some utilized specialized employment services to negotiate their accommodations.

Participants felt that financial supports were inadequate and that employment equity as a support served as a double-edged sword with the potential of both positive and negative results. The following pages provide a more detailed look into the participants' perceptions of these supports.

University Support

In discussing services at universities and colleges to assist students with transition planning and support, one individual stated:

"I think that, at least in my experience, the universities and colleges are poorly equipped to provide assistance to persons with disabilities in the transition from school to work. They're not trained to deal specifically with disabilities, you know, to talk about disclosure, or to talk about if I disclose, when should I disclose... things that maybe would be important for people with disabilities... As far as the resume writing and that kind of stuff, it's not really been an issue. I've gone to career services for that kind of stuff, but it's when you get into the when do I disclose ... that I don't feel that they're a very good resource."



Another talked about early intervention and the need for outreach services to students saying:

"The perfect set up...would be if the universities actually had dollars ... but [also did] outreach to students with disabilities when they get to the latter year of their undergrad, or closer, when they're in graduate school. They're not getting them to come in and start thinking about careers. Theory is not enough. There's got to be someone talking to students, encouraging them to, if they had to, take one course" or less "to get the experience they need, or volunteer or something. They really need to start getting students thinking about working at least two hours a week or something, because we're so busy struggling to try to make it through university or college [and get] accommodations, we're not thinking about the end thing. I knew that if I didn't volunteer, or if I didn't have an end goal to accomplish ... I wasn't going to get a job."

One participant stressed how effective information sessions were for him in receiving job offers. By working in a small group he was able to display some of his skills to prospective employers without the stress associated with one-on-one interviews. He said that he could be himself.

"Determination, [is] a big one. Getting my hands on tons of career counselors through here and getting my name out that I'm looking for something because I had seven different people looking for jobs for me."

Employment and Career Services

Some participants had utilized career services but indicated these services were not helpful. In the words of one participant: "I used career services when I first started looking for employment. I signed up for everything I could think of to sort of help me and then in the end I found my own employment, so those sort of career services I've never really been that satisfied with their outcome."

This same respondent commented on the employment support in his province: "I found their employment supports were counter productive, bound in red tape and just not user friendly." A few expressed frustration about not qualifying for services and having to explain too many things about their disabilities to determine their service eligibility. One individual was over-qualified for the services she tried to access because their offerings were not geared to professionals.

"Neither one of them [employment services] actually were able to do anything for me because they provide services like helping you build your resume or doing an inventory on your skills and putting you through interview tests and



getting you ready for an interview. All the pre-employment skills, and they looked at everything that I had been doing and they said that I was better qualified to do that for them than they were for me. The agencies aren't geared to handling what was an experienced professional."

Those who did not use community based, government funded employment services cited various reasons for this. Many were unaware of these services or did not understand the range of services they could access. Others said they did not require support. Some believed these services to be unhelpful or encountered negative experiences; in other cases, these services were housed in inaccessible buildings. One interviewee said:

"I find...they're not focusing on higher skills, post-secondary level ... people with disabilities who feel like they've got the knowledge and confidence...we're not high school students or people who need training on hygiene like they used to do and they still do, teaching people that kind of stuff. It's insulting."

For one individual, the services she accessed discouraged her from seeking employment because staff did not feel she could become gainfully employed:

"I think they assume that if I'm not able to even do these things then I would never be able to work anyways so they're not going to put the money into rehabilitating me, that's kind of the attitude."

When describing his distrust of employment services, one person stated:

"They seem...like they're not working to get people [jobs], they're just working to help people, [as] opposed to some placement agencies or something, they're working, their business, they're looking for the best employment, or obviously if you have something that's a hindrance, you're at the bottom of the pile [as] opposed to somebody else."

When questioned further on his experience, he noted that he had kept the nature of his disability quiet:

"I have a learning disability. When you approach those kind of groups, because it's very competitive, ... so you have to keep things quiet about learning disabilities."

Two interviewees indicated that a particular employment agency with a mandate to serve persons with disabilities, constantly phoned them to pass on information about jobs they were unable to do. A third participant distrusted this same organization for



a different reason. She wondered if the association and similar groups had "access to the really good jobs."

Disability-Related Employment Services

A majority of participants indicated they did not use disability services to assist in obtaining workplace accommodations, citing a variety of reasons for this. Individuals were either unaware of these supports, did not require assistance or lacked confidence in what could be provided. Others stated they did not need disability services because their accommodation needs were addressed in-house. Many felt they were fully capable of requesting their own accommodations and highlighted the fact that they needed disability services to help them find jobs and not to step in after they secured employment. One participant relayed how the disability service initially helped disclose her disability to her employer and assisted with setting up the accommodations she required. Other interviewees told of less positive experiences.

"They don't really help. You're sort of led on your own to do this part of the process. They're very happy when they place somebody but it's really not them that placed me because they didn't even help me find a job, so they should help people more and you know to tell you the truth. I don't think these accommodations people are actually very competent. They don't necessarily have a background in dealing with disabled people."

Another participant said:

"Right now I find a lot of the disability organizations are...helping people with disabilities find jobs for small little six-month training courses but I'm not really interested in taking a training program." She added, "sometimes I find the disability organizations...haven't caught up to speed with the higher skill levels and I don't know why, like they're still focusing on getting us jobs at [big box store] and that's just ridiculous."

Still another person described her experiences with being over-qualified for the services she accessed. She felt that she was just another statistic for them to count although they knew there was not much they could do for her. Therefore, she did not access services to assist in obtaining accommodations. She felt she was the best person to know what she required and compared her experiences with career services in the mainstream and employment services provided through a disability program.



"...I was just another name that looked good on their contract but that was about it. I did then volunteer my time also at these resource centres in the hope of trying to actually snare employment opportunities that did come up, but nothing worked. So then I stopped that in frustration."

One person said that, in her experience, disability organizations seemed to be offering a lot of lip service and were very ineffectual in providing any real services.

"Well what I ran into doing this job search was I got a lot of lip service and what seemed to me was a lot of role playing about how interested they were in accommodating and how there was so much potential to bring persons with disabilities [in], how they recognized that they had so much to contribute, etc. etc. etc. There's a lot of words and there's no action. They put a lot of money into advertising so that the public has a perception that they are working hard at helping persons with disabilities get into the public service and when it comes to actually doing [something], it just is not going anywhere."

She continued on to say that she would like to see more people who have personal experience with disability working in these organizations.

"One of the things that I encountered while I was going through these agencies and going for all these interviews and doing the rounds is I met a lot of other persons with disabilities and we all seemed to be on the same merry-go-round, being passed from one agency to another, getting put in databases, being told oh yeah this is what we're going to do and this program is set up specifically for you people and nothing was ever done. The other thing I would like to see and this is a personal bias... I would like to see more disabled people working in these agencies."

One person told of her experiences with case managers. A change in case managers reduced her ability to access needed resources. Peers were her primary source of information about services. She voiced a strong dissatisfaction with the services provided by her recent case managers. She pointed to discrepancies between what her case manager said was available and the support received by some of her friends.

Financial Supports

All students experience financial challenges while seeking employment, but these are compounded for those with disabilities who face additional disability-related costs. Several participants noted financial challenges in looking for work and difficulties with the income and social support systems. In discussing her search for work while receiving disability benefits, one woman talked about the need for social policy and associated services to provide more support for individuals who are



working, but are underemployed and just surviving. There is no commitment to helping people make a transition to a more sustainable livelihood because the goal is just to get people off social support systems. Even if they are underemployed, they are no longer entitled to any further supports that would enable them to break out of the cycle of poverty. This is an issue that has a greater impact on persons with disabilities because of the costs of accommodations, such as attendant services.

"I find that very often...it's sort of an all or none thing. Either you're totally unemployed and there are supports for you in that...or your completely and fully employed. They don't pay much attention to that middle range of people who are employed but just barely...that is a little frustrating because there isn't really a safety net for you in that case."

Another participant described the difficulties she would encounter in earning sufficient monies to pay her disability-related expenses:

"[It's my wheelchair expenses...my drugs, my dental, my glasses, my hearing aid, all of these other things So by the time I actually work it out I would have to clear about five thousand a month just to break even...unless I were to work for the government, I would not be able to get any benefits because of my disability. I can't afford to go to work."

Still another person talked about how her financial needs are such that she has no choice about working full time, she feels she has to work whether she is sick or not.

"My concern is can I work full-time and the thing is it's not going to matter because I don't have the kind of finances where I can work part-time solely. So I'm going to have to work full-time and if I'm sick, I'm sick."

A majority of interviewees indicated they did not access financial resources to pay for accommodations, because they did not require this type of support. Several recalled receiving some financial assistance for accommodations while attending school, but did not seek financial support for the workplace. Many were unaware of institutional supports such as targeted wage subsidies. Some knew about these supports but did not require them. Participants employed by government had access to internal services to assist with workplace accommodations. Some individuals worked for financial institutions or not-for-profit organizations and had access to institutional supports but did not require them. Their employers utilized internal services to accommodate their disability-related needs.

One interviewee looked negatively on initiatives such as wage subsidies. She said:



"I don't like the idea of getting support because you have a disability [it seems] paternalistic; it's saying that you can't compete in the world...I don't like the idea of being the "employment equity kid." To me that's incredibly demeaning, saying really we're hiring you because we need to meet our employment equity quota, because you have a disability. No, they should be hiring me because of my skills

Employment Equity as a Support

For persons with disabilities, employment equity policies seem to be somewhat of a double-edged sword. While these types of policies have enabled some to get their 'foot in the door,' others have found the policies only serve to further stigmatize them. One person felt that, given the number of obstacles a person experiences due to living with a disability, she is justified taking advantage of employment equity policies.

"So what if I got the job because I have a disability, we've got enough things to deal with, we shouldn't have to deal with not getting a job, and if it's going to help, why not you know, so I did that, and of course I'm totally blind and have a guide dog."

One participant with a physical disability chose not to disclose because he felt it limited him. He said, "I had a bad experience using it [his disability], so I really only use it when I have to." He was accused by co-workers of using affirmative action for a position when he actually hadn't. He sensed a great deal of resentment from his co-workers. Another interviewee expressed similar sentiments:

"Well, because Employment Equity [is] for all...they see persons with disabilities, and [it is assumed] you can apply for all this money and all these programs, and because you're a person with a disability you'll be employed, you don't have to worry. Or they see that this is a [title of position] position, so this person didn't necessarily have to go through a screening process like everyone else. They see that it's a placement. Like when I finish this contract, I won't have to wait to be called again."

On another note, one person questioned the commitment of employers to employment equity and their meaningful knowledge of this concept. This individual was of the opinion that some employers who claim to be equal opportunity employers are only giving lip service to the initiative.

"I find in job ads that it says we are an equal opportunity employer and they have no idea what that means. They have no idea what legislation it falls under. They have no idea what it means to be an equal opportunity employer and see it more as an attitudinal pain in the neck than a welcoming agent.



They're only putting that there because they want to sort of like a cover your butt treatment."

A participant who was unable to locate work in an internship placement outlined his frustrations, and said that he did not need employment equity policies, just opportunities to enter his chosen field and a chance to demonstrate his knowledge and skills. He said:

"[A] placement would have been awesome and even an internship would have been good and I don't need the playing field evened, I just need an opportunity to show I can do the work, just access to the field."

In the case of one participant, disclosure helped him take advantage of equity opportunities at a major bank. "It was actually a prerequisite." He targeted his job search specifically to banks knowing about their regulatory commitments to hiring people with disabilities.

Other Suggestions to Facilitate the Process

Several people suggested ways of facilitating the transition process. One respondent said: "In my mind there's a real gap from where I'm at to where I'll have to go, so if somebody could help me with that gap, it would be really helpful, somebody like a job coach."

Another noted: "I guess what I would see as the biggest obstacle for me is just getting that first job...because people with disabilities are often sort of forced to work with a small pool of potential employers. It would be nice to see a little more assistance there. I know there are a few programs around now that aim to help people to get into the workplace but from what I've seen in job ads a lot of them are very short-term, temporary, minimum wage jobs, which traditionally don't evolve into anything else, you know you go to work in a call centre, well guess what, ...there's no career path out of it...if there was some attempt to emphasize jobs that might actually have some potential that would be wonderful."

Comparison to the Literature

Several studies indicate the importance of supports for students with disabilities to effect positive employment outcomes. Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff (2000) reported that career-related work experience (particularly paid work experience in the community in the last two years of high school) and completion of student-



identified transition goals were highly associated with improved graduation and employment outcomes. Posthill and Roffman (1991) found from interviews that the most important support for these students were their family, followed by psychotherapy and consultations with their advisor. Unfortunately, according to Kolher and Chapman (1999) they did not investigate the extent to which forms of support were predictive of particular outcomes.

Morgan and Hecht, 1990 found that 32% of the students in their study received services from the Department of Rehabilitation Services and 62% sought assistance from their parents. However in an extensive literature review by Kohler and Chapman (1999) they did not find any studies that provided direct evidence of the impact of family involvement practices on transition outcomes. The main issue they cite is problem with research design.

Several studies have discussed supportive training for students such as self-awareness and self-advocacy training as important. (Aune, 1991; Durlack et al., 1994; Kohler, 1994; Posthill & Roffman, 1991, Wehmeyer & Lawrence, 1995). However, Aune, 1991 found that a large proportion of students were uncomfortable approaching others to ask for accommodations, despite being in such a training program. Training in work skills can assist the transition to employment. Adelman and Vogel (1990) found that several students in their study mentioned using the same compensatory strategies for work assignments that they used while completing schoolwork.

Freedman and Lynch Fesko (1996) reported on consumers' view of supports including their perception that their cases were closed too quickly by rehabilitation agencies once they were placed in a job, the experience of agency "run-around", and inadequate information on availability of services.

The present study indicates inadequacy in many of the current support services. These findings generally support the literature findings although there were differences in the variables examined in most cases.

Summary

The key findings regarding respondents' perspectives of support services and transition to employment are listed below.

The main findings include:

- University Supports



- Need more training regarding people with disabilities
- Need financial resources to run better programs
- Need to do outreach to students
- Need to encourage work opportunities for students

- Employment and Career Services
 - Need to provide services to those entering professions not only unskilled work
 - Need to have more training regarding people with disabilities
 - Need to be more user friendly
 - Need to make people aware of their services
 - Need to be located in accessible buildings

- Disability-Related Employment Services
 - Need to make people aware of their services
 - Need to have a selection of services: some people only need help finding jobs, and do not need services after
 - Need more training regarding people with disabilities
 - Need to provide services for people seeking employment in higher skill levels
 - Need to provide “real” services, real outcomes
 - Need more people working in these services that have personal experience with disability

- Financial Supports
 - People with disabilities need transitional financial support so that there are financial supports still available when you start working a few hours a week
 - People with disabilities need more support for disability-related expenses
 - Need to make people aware of financial support programs such as targeted wage subsidies

Adequate disability training is clearly an issue that was identified by the respondents with respect to university supports, employment and career services, and disability-employment services. It was also clear that people with disabilities need to be made aware of the services that are offered. Finally, people with disabilities need to have more financial supports during the transition from school to work as well as while employed to cover their disability-related expenses.



CHAPTER 7 : EMPLOYERS' PERSPECTIVES

The employers provided their perspectives on recruiting, screening, hiring and retaining employees with disabilities. The interview questions focused on four main areas:

- What are employers current practices regarding recruiting, hiring and accommodating employees with disabilities?
- What obstacles do employers face regarding hiring employees with disabilities?
- Do the employers feel they are doing enough?
- What is needed to create an inclusive environment for employees with disabilities?
-

The 19 employers interviewed included 6 men and 13 women who were located in Canadian provinces. The majority (eight) were located in Ontario.

Location of employers:

Ontario	8
Manitoba	5
Nova Scotia	5
Alberta	1

Types of employers:

University/College	3
School Board	3
Government Province	2
Government City/town	2
Non-Profit	5
For-Profit	4

Of the **for-profit organizations**:

Two were owner-operator organizations

One was a retail chain

One was a large corporation.

These employers held various positions in the organizations. Most of those interviewed were in senior positions.



- Two provided direct services to clients in non profit organizations,
- Two were Directors
- Two were owners
- Six whose job related to human resources in the organization
- Two worked in organizations offering services to people with disabilities.
- 10 were employed in supervisory/management roles and
- **Three were persons with disabilities themselves**

Recruitment, Screening and Hiring Practices

There were differences in recruitment, screening and hiring practices between larger and smaller employers,

Large organizations generally:

- Had affirmative action or employment equity policies.
- Actively recruited and
- Give priority to persons with disabilities.

Small organizations generally:

- Had no official employment equity stipulations, but informally considered equity policies to be an important part of the hiring process.
- Did not treat persons with disabilities differently and ability to carry out the job was the most important criteria for employment selection
- Would not give priority to a person with a disability

A human resource representative at a large organization indicated that they had an active outreach process with a designated person to recruit persons with disabilities. In terms of recruiting and screening, the director of federal government department explained:

“ . . . We have policies in place about recruiting people with disabilities...if we receive an application with somebody with a disability and they self-identify then we automatically would give them an interview ... in a competition process. . . and automatically those people would get interviewed. They're not automatically hired of course.”

In some large organizations there was an active process to hire people with disabilities. One respondent who works for a large department in the Federal



Government stated: “If we had two candidates that were of equal abilities, we would really try to hire the person who had the disability”

Employers stated that the most important consideration for hiring persons with disabilities was the ability of the applicants to meet job requirements. Employment equity was an important issue for nearly all small employers, but many stated they would not necessarily give priority to job applicants solely because of their disabilities. For example, one employer, who works for a disability organization, stated:

“I mean . . . that I don’t think that if you have a sighted person and a visually impaired person and the sighted person is more qualified, I don’t believe that they would hire the visually impaired person over the sighted person.”

As well, the Executive Director of a service and support centre explained:

“..Basically we advertise a position and if somebody with a disability applies, we treat them like any other applicant as far as what the qualifications are to do the job.”

Overall, employers were willing to make accommodations so employees could meet job-related requirements, but they believed people who had certain disabilities could not do some jobs. For example:

“Depending on the disability . . . because there are some requirements for the job like physical requirements that would have to be met, like if somebody was disabled and they couldn’t walk, it depends what job”

However, many employers also saw hiring persons with disabilities as a potential asset to their organizations. An employer with a disability indicated the presence of her own disability was a contributing factor in obtaining her current job as she was more likely to understand other people with disabilities.

Accommodations and Services Offered by Employers

The employers interviewed stated they were willing to make accommodations in their workplaces. There were variations in how accommodations were provided according to the employers:

- Larger employers were obliged to do so and had official procedures
- Smaller employers were often limited financially as to how much they could offer
- Some waited for the employee to ask for accommodations



- Some asked up-front in the interview

Some employers mentioned that their collective agreements, or other contracts stipulated that the organization **MUST** do everything possible to meet the accommodation needs of employees with disabilities. The majority of employers who worked with or managed, smaller organizations/companies stated there were limits in terms of the amount of accommodations that could be provided. Financial constraints sometimes meant that some accommodations could not be provided. If employees disclosed the presence of disabilities, some employers directly asked those employees if they needed accommodations. Other employers waited for employees with disabilities to ask for the accommodations they needed.

At many organizations, employees needed to go through various processes to obtain accommodations. These varied from the need to write an official request for accommodations through the Human Resources department, obtaining official medical documentation, undergoing a physical demands analysis or similar analysis. One organization had a “special needs department”.

Some organizations asked **upfront** if accommodations were needed but also encouraged employees to **request their own accommodations, while others waited for the employee to make a request.**

“It’s a bit of both. We’ll ask up-front is there anything we need to be aware of or that we can help you with. Sometimes they’re in the job for a couple of months before we’ll get a call asking for one of the occupational health people to come and do a work environment assessment. Until the employee notifies us, we might not be aware of the need. We ask upfront for disclosure but if anything happens in the term of employment, we hope that the employee would bring that to our attention.”

One Human Resource worker stated that all potential employees are asked whether they need accommodations, because “Everybody needs to have that question asked cause you just never know. There are a lot of invisible disabilities out there.” She also said:

“The accommodations are identified through a couple of different methods. When we interview the individual I ask them if they require accommodation for the workplace ... We also have a web site internally for Diversity and Workplace Equity, which talks about accommodation and the obligation of the organization and the funding. We have affinity groups for the people with disabilities. They ensure that our environment is accessible. If they see anything that isn’t, they let us know and we do something about it.”



Most of the employers within larger organizations (especially organizations with HR departments) noted that disability management services were available. These included a variety of programs including employee assistance programs, occupational health and safety specialists, early assistance programs, employee relations departments and union reps. **However, it appeared from the interviews that the responses centered on programs related to work-related injury programs rather than relating to people coming into the establishment with an existing disability.** Most organizations that were non-profit or had few employees, did not operate management services, however some did contract out services of this nature.

Some employers mentioned their organizations provided basic employee supports but nothing specific for persons with disabilities. For example, one employer said: "...[We] have employment assistance program, but that applies to anybody who needs counseling and that's department wide."

The employers of **smaller organizations** (especially those run independently) did not have management services. They typically expressed a willingness to consider offering services if the need arose, especially if those services would benefit both employer and employees.

One organization stipulated a "matrix" of disability management services. Some of these services were provided within the organization while others were offered through external sources.

Employers Perceptions of Obstacles To Employing People with Disabilities

Employers either said they had found no obstacles to employing people with disabilities or discussed one of three points:

- Economic obstacles: to provide assistance and equipment
- Difficulty in making changes to the job to offer flexibility
- Not being fully aware of the needs of people with disabilities
- **Conflict Between Employees Rights, the Job Demands and Flexibility**
- **Need for more training for employees with disabilities in some cases**

No Obstacles

Some employers indicated they have not encountered obstacles to employing people with disabilities. One employer pointed out she experienced no obstacles to



supporting people with disabilities because presenting issues were not viewed as barriers.

Economic Obstacles

However, some viewed **economic limitations** as significant obstacles within organizations employing people with disabilities. One employer with a prominent disability organization indicated that insufficient support staff (due to economic limitations) presented an obstacle for many employees with disabilities. She stated that,

“Its crucial for the organization, especially when you have a significant amount of visually impaired staff to have enough clerical support and I think that that is an obstacle because when they’re looking at cutbacks, they try to find where they can cutback and they don’t want to cutback on the direct staff, so it tends to be the clerical and the admin staff that go, which leaves us with a problem with how do we get our files read if there’s nobody here to read them to us if they’re not [in alternate formats.] I mean obviously you can’t keep files in Braille format or whatever. So I think sometimes still, access to information is a bit of a barrier.”

A small business owner noted that a **tight budget** sometimes prevented him from supporting his staff with disabilities.

“We’re not a wealthy operation beyond a certain point and so there probably are other things that we could do if we had more [money].”

Even large organizations pointed to funding issues. An employer with a Government of Canada department indicated: “Funding is always an obstacle; always have to fight for funding, for salary dollars and to accommodate people.”

Conflict Between Employees Rights, the Job Demands and Flexibility

An employer with a school board explained that, “The most difficult thing we come up against is balancing the **employees right** against the students right to their education.”

She further recounts:

“One of the obstacles that we’ve come up against, because most of our employees are teachers, we have had some employees who have requested



to do a gradual return to work, and sometimes that's difficult on the school end of things because parents want consistency in their children's classroom, they want the same teacher there as much as possible, they don't want disruption, they want continuity, so that's sometimes difficult for us to deal with."

Another employer noted that working in a unionized environment was restrictive at times.

"We are a unionized environment and work within several collective agreements. This can decrease the amount of flexibility we have as an employer to get creative with how we may be able to modify a job for accommodations."

Some Felt More Training needed for People with Disabilities

Other employers indicated that providing specialized or more thorough training could be advantageous to persons with disabilities.

"...You need to train...people with the disabilities first, and whether it's a learning disability or dyslexia or whatever the problem is, you need to get those people using the equipment and the stuff first because the amount of time it takes for the transition is certainly a little bit more. Unfortunately that's not what happens..."

Did the Employers Perceive they were Providing Enough Assistance for Employees with Disabilities?

When employers were asked whether they thought they, and/or their companies/organizations, could "be doing more to assist employees with disabilities to maintain employment", about **half (9/19) said "no"**.

Many felt they were doing enough. One employer stated: "We recognize the duty to accommodate and we really do go out of our way to make that happen.". Another said: "I don't see any gaps in our organization" Still another noted: "Well just from what I know I think they're doing great"

A few employers felt their organizations were effectively supporting persons with disabilities however, they believed that improvements were indicated.

For those who said "no" they were not doing enough, they focused on the following areas needed for improvement:



- **Need more resources**
- **Need to be more aware of employees with disabilities needs**
- **Need to hire more people with disabilities**

Need more Resources

Some employers believed their organizations could provide **additional resources** tailored specifically to persons with disabilities. The executive director of a small, non-profit organization noted that he could foresee developing an official “affirmative action program” but only if the demand arose. Many felt they needed more **financial and personnel resources** to provide better accommodations. One employer stated it would be of value to....

“Probably have more resources available to them. Because we’re publicly funded we have limited resources, as well we don’t have enough staff in our department to give them the care and concern that they need, would be one thing, but that’s a financial issue.”

Need to be More Aware of their Employees’ with Disabilities Needs

A director of a small organization considered it his responsibility to pay more active attention to the needs of his employees with disabilities.

“...I guess I’m just thinking maybe I should somehow in their evaluations or something, maybe add something to make sure that I’m not losing or keeping in touch with their needs. I don’t have a mechanism to get access to that information on an ongoing basis.”

A few employers believed management should know more about, and/or devote greater attention to, disability issues. One woman who works for a disability organization noted incredulously that,

“They need to be more aware and I mean to be quite honest with you I think at this point with an organization especially around the accommodations for visually impaired people, I shouldn’t have to tell the managers what they need to do, it should be coming from them, but you still do, you still do, you still need to remind them oh yeah what about the people who are visually impaired...”



One employer noted that her department met the needs of persons with physical disabilities, but could do more to attend to the needs of persons with “mental disabilities”.

“I think it depends on the disability. If it’s a physical disability, I don’t think the city could do more because I already think it does a lot, but if you’re dealing with mental disabilities, I think there is more extensive training that should be given to managers to recognize employees who may have mental disabilities. Sometimes you don’t recognize them until you’ve got a crisis, and I think people need to be given more training to recognize the problems.”

Need to Hire more People with Disabilities

Some employers thought their organizations should hire more people with disabilities. One stated that “[her organization] would like to do more proactive recruitment”

Employers’ Perceptions of Support for Employees with Disabilities How to create an Inclusive Culture at Work for Persons with Disabilities

Four main themes emerged regarding the employers’ perceptions of how to support employees with disabilities. These included:

- **Having an interpersonally supportive environment**
- **Having an atmosphere that was aware of disability**
- **Being willing to accommodate for the needs of persons with disabilities**
- **Having policies and practices in place**

Having an interpersonally supportive environment

Under this theme, three sub-themes were apparent:

- Having good communication between the employee with the disability and management
- Teamwork atmosphere
- Involving the people with disabilities in professional development

Most employers mentioned that creating a comfortable, interpersonally supportive environment was especially important in supporting employees with disabilities.



Some employers felt working in a supportive environment was important for ALL employees.

“...Maybe because it’s a small office and everyone’s accommodating and accepting and there’s a lot of teamwork that goes on here and it doesn’t matter who it is, I mean if anyone of us has, on any given day or have a challenge of whatever, then others pitch in to help and so I think there’s that sensitivity around, we all have good days and bad days and sometimes we’re overpowered by things and it doesn’t matter whether you have a disability or not, there’s a lot to do and we get it done.”

One employer considered it important to be comfortable in the workplace and to “be appreciated for what you are and who you are.”

Team Atmosphere

One employer mentioned several factors that provide support including teamwork, accommodations and policies:

“They receive the support both from a technical operational point of view, but also moral support because they form **teams and form relationships**...so I think that that is where their main support comes from, then there are the other supports that I had mentioned, **like accommodating their needs**...so that they can to the best of their abilities work and have a reasonable lifestyle, a source of income and ... **the policies** that are quite clearly in place. We have a local employment equity committee that has special events associated with equity issues.”

One employer simply stated that hiring persons with disabilities was supportive. “In what ways? I guess by hiring them.”

One employer explained that teamwork is an essential part of the work environment,

“...The self-policing is a big way that we just keep on, make sure that we’re looking around and we’re looking for the obstacles first before they become barriers, and keep working in a team to get things done.”

Involving employees with disabilities in professional development

Many employers stated that their organizations/companies did what was necessary to enable employees with disabilities to gain more experience/knowledge to help them in their jobs. Some of the larger organizations regularly provided skill



development sessions to all employees. These included: Workshops, meetings, seminars etc. Employees with disabilities generally participated in these sessions. One employer mentioned that the opportunities,

“ . . . Would be the same professional development activities but they would make sure that they (people with disabilities) are accommodated and included.”

Another employer stated:

“I know that all the in-services are open to everyone and I’m not sure what accommodations are made for people with disabilities, but I’m sure there are some, I’m just not aware of it. I can’t imagine there not being some accommodations in place for people with disabilities.”

One employer, who works as an employment facilitator for people with developmental disabilities mentioned that the services provided to her clients are also available to employees. Another employer emphatically stated that any, and all, opportunities are offered to persons with disabilities at her organization. Changes were not implemented because “all of our barriers have been identified and broken down and if there’s any that we don’t know about, all we have to do is be advised and we tear it down.” A few employers mentioned that a rapid staff turnover limited the necessity for professional training. However, they indicated the organization **would provide training if there was a demonstrated need.**

Some employers felt that they could not adequately answer this question. They were unaware of employment and professional development opportunities that may or may not be available at their organizations and could only speculate as to whether their associations would offer such support.

Having Good Communication between the employee with the disability and management

An employer with a disability organization stated that communication and advocacy were valuable tools in overcoming employment obstacles.

“You just keep talking and talking. I think that that’s one of the other things as an employee who has a disability, you constantly have to advocate, not just for yourself but its always reminding people you need to have large print, you need to have Braille, if you’re going to produce it, you need to make sure its in equal access format for everybody. . . .We have now a committee that has been formed to kind of look at the environment and staff satisfaction and they



do certainly help with some of the disability issues, at least bringing them to the management's attention."

The small business owner considered it important to openly communicate his financial limitations to his employees, and attempted to work out an acceptable compromise.

"Well it's more of a question of okay, what do you need and they appreciate to a certain extent the economics and what they suggest tends not to be terribly expensive and it is important to them and ... we try to make sure that it happens."

Another employer stressed the importance of communication.

"Well we work with the school administration as best we can. We tell them that the students have a right to quality education but the employee has a right to their job and it usually does work out in the end, but we have had some cases where parents were upset with the arrangements that we made." Many employers considered strong, supportive interpersonal communications to be a great asset to their organizations.

A store manager stated:

"I think that well one of grandiose things when one says one tries to be a family and supportive of everyone and as long as you have a sense that the other person is working hard and working well and contributing to the welfare of the family then you go out of your way to help. And I think the people we have work on that basis. We've been very fortunate that way."

An HR coordinator considers communication to be the most important part of supporting employees with disabilities. She said:

"First would be that awareness and working towards increasing that. Being open and honest with people coming in, in terms of it's often we've offered the job then we ask what accommodation, if any, do you need... So it's the value of the individual first and then what do we need to do as an employer to help support that individual. I think that's an important difference in approach.

Another employer noted that using proactive communication skills seemed to prevent obstacles from occurring. She stated:

"I think there's so many things that could be obstacles and don't even have to become obstacles if you're communicating properly or openly with the person."



Having an atmosphere that was aware of disability

- **Hiring people with disabilities generally**
- **Providing sensitivity training in the workplace**

One participant noted that making the effort to employ a substantial number of people with disabilities created a supportive environment.

“I guess by just continuing to bridge that gap and employ people with disabilities, continue to bring them in and on-board...[we] have committed to a diverse workplace, they have to have the representation, they have to be moving the needle because it’s part of their performance.” One man, who is self-employed, has a disability, and employs a person with the same disability. He stated that he finds working with a person with a disability to be mutually supportive. An employer who works as an employment facilitator for persons with developmental disabilities noted that being knowledgeable about disabilities helped create a supportive atmosphere.

“I think that the staff is very highly trained in the areas of a lot of disabilities. We don’t just accept clients with physical disabilities, mental disabilities, intellectual disabilities, its all disabilities, and so the staff needs to be on top of things all the time, so in that way the staff is highly trained and it’s a family atmosphere which makes it very easy for clients to disclose any problems that they’re having.”

Some employers also mentioned their organizations provided **disability awareness/sensitivity training**: related to the impacts and unacceptability of discrimination toward people with disabilities. For example, one employer who works for a disability organization stated:

“One of the things that [name of organization] has done to make the workplace more sensitized, is we have impact training [that is] designed for new staff...to have a day where they are introduced to a variety of different social, emotional and physical needs of people with disabilities. We have a day where there’s no bars held, they talk about disability, they talk about what are the needs of the staff and the clientele. The impact training is giving the staff an opportunity to be exposed but also to ask questions and how to be able to ask questions with sensitivity later on.”

Another employer, who works at a university, said:

“I think we are made more aware of things, we have a teacher that is deaf hearing impaired and they’ll have hearing impaired week and how many signs



can you learn from our Intranet site, that type of thing, so we're made more aware of all the employees and all the differences."

An employer with a university mentioned that awareness campaigns encourage people to be more inclusive towards persons with disabilities. While these campaigns are directed toward university students, employees at the university also participate in them. Many of the employers who worked at smaller organizations stated that they did not provide such opportunities but would be willing to consider doing so if there was a demonstrated need. An employer who owns his own business stated that he did not specifically offer any opportunities for development. Another employer of a small (non-profit) organization stated: "nobody has actually requested anything yet."

Being willing to accommodate for the needs of persons with disabilities

- **Determination needed on the part of the employer**
- **Need resources to provide accommodations**

Many employers also mentioned that **willingness to accommodate** was an important mode of support for employees with disabilities. A manager within a large organization described his workplace as:

"...The kind of place that would bend over backwards for its employees and would do whatever possible within reason to accommodate anybody that would need special attention with a disability or something like that."

Some employers considered a willingness to accommodate to be an important source of support for employees with disabilities. One employer stated that at her company, "...we try and go the extra mile so that everything we do is striving towards being as helpful and as accommodating as we can."

Another employer explained:

"I think [my organization is] inclusive from the point of view where the employer can adapt a job or adapt the tools, or change the tools to...you know so that the person with the disability can do the work."

When dealing with bureaucratic policies and procedures, some employers found that **determination** was a necessity to overcoming obstacles. One employer states,

"...We had to really work hard to get assistance for [two employees] and the money had to come from the central budget in [name of city] and it's always difficult to shake that tree, get the money, but eventually we did it. So you



know, it takes determination and reminding the central department that we have these policies and we're going to implement them."

Another employer said: "A lot of it is just to keep trying, persistence; sometimes it does take awhile to find the right opportunity."

One employer discussed how she put **an extra effort** into hiring people with disabilities and pointed out that official policies on employment equity do not necessarily guarantee a supportive environment, or even an equal chance of employment, for persons with disabilities.

"I'm very conscience of identifying people with disabilities and really taking very seriously about how I can get them into the organization...**I guess if I weren't committed myself to employment equity and didn't feel that that was an important thing, I suspect that [the employee with a disability] wouldn't be hired right now, frankly.** But because I pushed the envelope and got people to really consider whether or not they could hire her, you have to think of all the costs involved, the salary, the accommodation costs, the assistant costs and so on...And unless you have somebody whose prepared to do that, you can have all sorts of policies but the policy is just a piece of paper, you know unless you have people who are actually prepared to do it. So in terms of my relationship with the department and employment equity, particularly with people with disabilities...I'm prepared to go out for people with disabilities."

Having Policies and Practices in Place

Many employers (especially those that worked for large organizations) considered employment equity to be a valuable support tool. Some felt a comprehensive health plan was of great benefit to supporting persons with disabilities. A HR representative of a school board noted:

"I think we certainly accommodate people wherever necessary. I think that in many cases we've gone beyond what we're required to do with legislation but you know we want them to continue working with us and value them as employees so we have done things that we might not otherwise be required to do. We've sent employees for retraining where we've paid for their training, we've offered them different positions that they were not necessarily entitled to through the collective agreement, but that position could accommodate their disability."



Some employers (especially those in HR departments) pointed to specific policies and departments to ensure equality and inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workplace.

One HR coordinator stated that in his company,

“We have, one of our coordinators title is Race Relations, Cross-Cultural and Human Understanding and that position deals just with things like visible minorities, physical disabilities, racism, sexual discrimination, all those types of issues, so if people have a problem with any of those issues including the disabilities they would contact that coordinator and she would spearhead their case for them.”

Another HR coordinator explained:

“Well I think we certainly are, policy would reflect an inclusive environment. I think as an employer our beliefs and mandates are clear in our policies that we have an inclusive workforce...”

Comparison with the Literature

Employers play a critical role in addressing the high unemployment rate experienced by persons with disabilities. A number of researchers have identified employer attitudes toward people with disabilities as an important factor in the staggering unemployment rate of persons with disabilities (Blanck, 1998; King, 1993; Smith, 1992). Although employers' attitudes toward individuals with disabilities have been studied extensively, the research has produced inconsistent findings. Factors identified as positive attributes by some employers (e.g., attendance, safety, productivity) have been cited as concerns by employers in other studies (Nietupski, Hamre-Nietupski, VanderHart, & Fishback, 1996). According to Unger, (2002) because of inconsistency in methodology, it is difficult to compare and derive conclusions based on the results of previous research. A plausible explanation for these mixed results is that employers were not categorized by characteristics that might influence their perceptions of people with disabilities in the workforce.

Robinson (2000) reported on a consumer led initiative, which aimed to gather information from 500 companies with more than 20 employees. Evidence of obstacles to employment included a lack of understanding about the capability of disabled people, lack of knowledge about financial and technical assistance and undifferentiated approaches to access and accommodation.

In more recent studies employers have not only expressed more **favorable attitudes** toward employing persons with severe disabilities in the workplace but



also viewed workers with severe disabilities as dependable, productive workers who can interact socially and foster positive attitudes on the part of their coworkers (Levy et al, 1993). Almost three-fourths of (74.4%) of the employers believed that the productivity rates of worker with severe disabilities can be as high as those workers who are not disabled. **Employers who have had previous experiences** with individuals with specific disabilities, (Phillips, 1975), (Gibson & Groeneweg, 1986; Gruenhagen, 1982), (Gade & Toutges, 1983 (Diksa & Rogers, 1996), also reported more favorable attitudes toward hiring applicants with the same disability. Employer ratings have indicated that workers with disabilities have average or above-average performance (Blanck, 1998; Du Pont, 1993), safety records (Blanck; DuPont; Shafer et al., 1987), and attendance. (Blanck; DuPont; Shafer et al., 1987).

In another study, drawing from a sample of Fortune 500 companies, McFarlin et al. (1991) found that the **more exposure respondents** had with employees with disabilities in their own workforce, the more positive their attitudes. Two studies that focused on employers' attitudes and preferences for hiring individuals with severe disabilities reported similar findings (e.g., Levy et al., 1992; Levy et al., 1993). Findings have consistently demonstrated that **employers who have previous experience** with workers with disabilities are more willing to hire persons with disabilities (Diksa & Rogers, 1996; Gade & Toutges, 1983; Gibson & Groeneweg, 1986; Gruenhagen, 1982; Levy et al., 1992; Marcouiller et al., 1987; McFarlin et al., 1991).

However, in conducting face-to-face interviews with 170 randomly selected employers located in a large metropolitan area, researchers **failed to identify a relationship between employers previous experience** with hiring individuals with disabilities and attitudes toward individuals with disabilities in the workforce. (Kregel & Tomiyasu, 1994)

Many studies suggest that there is an increased likelihood of larger employers being more willing to include people with disabilities in their workforce because of the variety of jobs available and greater personnel and economic resources (Blanck, 1998, Collignon, 1986; Kemp, 1991) Yet findings in the area of employer size and perceptions of persons with disabilities have been fairly inconsistent. Kregel & Tomiyasu, 1994 report no relationship between employer size and attitudes toward person with disabilities. Similar inconsistencies exist in investigations of the relationship between the type of industry and employer attitudes toward persons with disabilities in the workforce. (Ehrhart, 1994; Gade & Toutges, 1983; Kregel and Tomiyasu, 1994)

The present study does not directly correlate the employer with the graduate to determine outcomes. This study differs from previous literature in that it has asked



employers to discuss what they are currently doing in this area and what they feel is needed to create an inclusive environment.

Summary

The key findings regarding employers' perspectives of employing persons with disabilities are listed below.

What are current practices regarding recruiting, hiring and accommodating employees with disabilities?

- Large organizations
 - Have specific policies and procedures
 - Actively recruit
 - Give priority to persons with disabilities
 - Obligated to provide accommodations and have specific procedures
- Smaller organizations
 - Have no employment equity stipulations
 - Do not treat persons with disabilities differently
 - Ability to carry out the job was most important hiring criteria
 - Limited financially as to how much accommodations they can offer
- Accommodations
 - Some wait for the employee to ask for them
 - Some ask up-front in the interview
 - Some have special departments/services to deal with this

What obstacles are faced regarding hiring employees with disabilities?

- Some found no obstacles
- Economic obstacles: to provide assistance and equipment
- Difficulty in making changes to the job to offer flexibility
- Not being fully aware of the needs of people with disabilities
- Conflict Between employees rights, the job demands and flexibility
- Need for more training for employees with disabilities in some cases

Do the Employers feel they are doing enough?

- Half said no, they are doing enough



- Need more resources
- Need to be more aware of employees with disabilities needs
- Need to hire more people with disabilities

What is needed to create an inclusive environment for employees with disabilities?

- **Having an interpersonally supportive environment**
 - Good communication between employee with disability and management
 - Teamwork atmosphere
 - Professional development programs
- **Having an atmosphere that was disability-aware**
 - Hiring others with disabilities
 - Disability awareness training
- **Being willing to accommodate for the needs of persons with disabilities**
 - Determination on the part of the employer
 - Flexibility
- **Having policies and practices in place**
 - Having the resources: financial and personnel

Many of the employer perspectives correlate with the graduate perspectives. Determination and willingness as well as good communication were key findings that both the employers and the employees seem to need for success. Both felt more disability-related training was needed for employers and service providers. Both expressed the need for better preparation of students to come to the workplace. Both felt flexibility was important, although the employers expressed that this was sometimes difficult to achieve due to the job demands constraints, or union constraints. There was often a conflict between the employee with a disability's rights and the job requirements.

In contrast to the findings from the graduates, many employers believed their companies' employment equity policies and services offered an effective strategy enabling them to achieve an inclusive workplace. This was especially true of the larger companies. However, these larger organizations were often referring to services for people who were injured on the job rather than people who have long-standing disabilities. While all employers said they would provide accommodations in the workplace, those employed with smaller companies expressed concern about **limited financial resources** and their actual capacity to do so. The same was true of disability management services, and professional development opportunities.

Many of the lessons learned from the employer perspectives can be used for recommendations and for future research.



CHAPTER 8 : SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Canadian Center on Disability Studies hopes to continue to address the question of how to achieve successful employment outcomes for college/university graduates with disabilities. This Transitions Phase 2 Report provides a detailed picture of the transition to work for the graduates (mid 2003 to mid 2004) one to three years post graduation. The report is based on interviews with 79 graduates from across Canada, which included questions about facilitators and obstacles in their transition to employment. In addition, it draws on in-depth interviews with 19 employers or potential employers from across Canada. It compares the findings with previous studies in the literature. In this final chapter, we present the key findings from this Phase 2 research and discuss recommendations for this field. In addition, we highlight new areas for research suggested by our findings.

In terms of the study findings, the experiences of those with visible disabilities rather than those with invisible disabilities tend to dominate the discussion. This is due to the fact that (despite assurances of confidentiality) those with invisible disabilities appeared to be more cautious in their disclosure than those with visible disabilities. Thus, it is more difficult to elaborate on the experiences of people with invisible disabilities.

In describing their transition experiences, respondents outlined the challenges and successes inherent in the transition process. Those who located employment felt fortunate that the job search yielded positive results, while those who were continuing to look for work experienced frustration with the numerous obstacles they encountered.

Summary of Major Findings

In this section, we summarize the findings from the data collection, focusing on the key study domains: employment outcomes, facilitators to employment, obstacles to employment; role of supportive services and employers' perspectives.

The employment rate of 70% (full-time and part-time combined) compares to that of the PALS Survey (2001) where only half (56%) of working age adults with disabilities were either unemployed or not in the labour force, compared to less than a quarter (24%) of working age adults without disabilities. This percentage is higher as the study was targeted toward college/university graduates.

However, it was clear that obstacles (such as employer attitudes, inaccessibility of employer's facilities, geographical location) were a major factor on along the



way or that had blocked several participants from employment entirely. From this study it is clear that attitudinal factors on the part of potential and actual employers is an essential component to future hiring. Attitudinal factors on the part of the student with a disability are also an important factor for them to maintain the course when faced with obstacles along the way. It is clear that having adequate education and work experience is seen important to both the graduates and the employers. Both groups also describe the need for determination and communication in providing an accommodating workplace. Both groups describe the need for adequate supports to achieve employment goals including financial and personnel resources.

Generally the graduates did not feel that supports were adequate from university and career/employment services and do not feel that supports are adequate with employers. Generally employers felt that what they offered was adequate while the graduates felt there were gaps. This study showed both obstacles and facilitators to employment. It is important particularly to determine factors that facilitate successful employment

Opportunities for Internships and Networking

When it comes to applying for job openings, people with disabilities face a dilemma. For the most part, these jobs require previous work experience. Yet, those with disabilities have insufficient work experience because of the many obstacles they face to accessing the labour market. It is evident then that there is a need to create more opportunities for persons with disabilities to gain work experience in order to be seriously considered for permanent positions. This can be achieved through setting up internships for individuals post graduation. Creating more opportunities to network with potential employers would serve several purposes, including educating employers about ways to remove various obstacles to hiring persons with disabilities.

Career and Employment Services

Most participants expressed a certain level of frustration when attempting to access support through career and employment services. They felt that these services were essentially ineffective when it came to assisting persons with disabilities in making the transition to work. Participants found they had to engage in extensive assessments to meet eligibility criteria. Once eligibility was determined, they found that the services were geared primarily to entry level, non-professional positions. These were not the kind of jobs that graduates were seeking; rather, they were looking for positions where they could apply the knowledge and skills they had gained through post secondary education. They were looking for positions that would enable them to achieve their long-term career goals. Once individuals found



employment, many utilized specialized employment services to negotiate their accommodations.

Institutional Supports

Only a few participants stated they utilized institutional supports. Some accessed these supports in the form of wage subsidy programs through Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (formerly HRDC). Several respondents indicated that financial assistance should be available to facilitate the transition to employment. They wished that finances were available to encourage work experience and placement as an extension of schooling.

Self-employment

A few interviewees found accommodation solutions through self-employment or working from their homes. In some cases, self-employment alleviated the need to disclose their disabilities to clients. In other situations, self-employment enabled them to take some time to present their work and create a positive first impression, after which they disclosed their disabilities. Even with the high risk of failure of small businesses and the challenges of being isolated as entrepreneurs, self-employment is advocated by Federal and Provincial Governments as a primary solution to unemployment for persons with disabilities. Underpinning this thinking is the implicit assumption that all people with disabilities are suited to self-employment. However, this is not the case.

While there are many benefits to being self-employed, as attested to by some of the participants, it is not a panacea. Being self-employed requires a considerable amount of self-determination, strong organizational skills and a certain level of business acumen. Moreover, some individuals find working for an employer in a more structured environment offers a kind of security that you do not necessarily achieve with self-employment.

Access and Accommodation Issues

Although individuals encountered obstacles in the workplace, many found creative ways around these barriers. Adaptability was a key theme. Participants who sustained their employment mentioned that having one person responsible for accommodations contributed significantly to their success. They found that having one person available to coordinate access and accommodation needs was also beneficial to the company in that it resulted in consistency in staff and service provision.



Most participants employed full-time with larger organizations were reasonably well accommodated in the workplace. For the most part, they did not require support from external agencies because their employers had internal systems for meeting their needs. The participants who were employed with larger organizations indicated their needs were met through a separate department responsible for arranging accommodations for employees with disabilities. For larger companies with internal supports, respondents found it most helpful when individuals responsible for employment equity worked collaboratively with the managers or directors who finance the accommodations.

However, for individuals working for smaller companies, the challenges to addressing access and accommodation issues remain difficult. Employers cite limited financial and other resources as the biggest obstacles. In many cases this is an accurate assessment of the current situation. Job seekers still face major attitudinal barriers from prospective employers. There is a need to educate employers about the oft-held stereotypes associated with persons with disabilities.

For many individuals, lack of accessible transportation, limited attendant services and restricted finances continue to pose the largest systemic barriers to employment.

In summary our study showed the following factors that graduates with disabilities perceive as needed to become successfully employed following graduation from college or university:

- Having a Post-Secondary Degree
- Having Certain Personal Qualities
- Having Flexibility in the Workplace
- Having experience gained from volunteer, paid-work and internships
- Having experience living with a disability
- Having Strong Social Networks
- Having Support from Disability Organizations and Other Government Services
- Having an physical and communication accessible environment
- Having a transportation accessible environment

This study does not provide an indication of the particular contribution of any of these factors to success.

The graduates described obstacles to employment they experienced in their transition from post-secondary education to work. Obstacles were described



both by those employed as well as those who were not employed. In summary these included:

- Attitudinal Barriers of Employers
- Geographical Location and lack of Transportation
- Inaccessibility of the Built and Communication Environments
- Lack of Access to Interpreters and Attendants
- Lack of Education Level
- Lack of Work Experience and Internship Opportunities
- Uncertain Futures due to the nature of the Disability
- Lack of Confidence and Feelings of Discouragement

Again, this study does not provide an indication of the particular contribution of any of these factors to success.

Graduates were asked about their experiences with university and career and employment service providers. Generally they stated that their experiences were negative. Their interviews provided their perceptions of what would be needed to provide more effective supports to graduates with disabilities and/or employers

- University Supports
 - Need more training regarding people with disabilities
 - Need financial resources to run better programs
 - Need to do outreach to students
 - Need to encourage work opportunities for students
- Employment and Career Services
 - Need to provide services to those entering professions not only unskilled work
 - Need to have more training regarding people with disabilities
 - Need to be more user friendly
 - Need to make people aware of their services
 - Need to be located in accessible buildings
- Disability-Related Employment Services
 - Need to make people aware of their services
 - Need to have a selection of services: some people only need help finding jobs, and do not need services after
 - Need more training regarding people with disabilities
 - Need to provide services for people seeking employment in higher skill levels



- Need to provide “real” services, real outcomes
- Need more people working in these services that have personal experience with disability
- Financial Supports
 - People with disabilities need transitional financial support so that there are financial supports still available when they start working a few hours a week
 - People with disabilities need more support for disability-related expenses
 - Need to make people aware of financial support programs such as targeted wage subsidies

One unique aspect of this study was that it examined employment factors and disability both from the graduate (employee) perspective and the employer perspective.

Employers’ were asked their perceptions of what was needed to create an inclusive environment for employees with disabilities. These are summarized:

- **Having an interpersonally supportive environment**
 - Good communication between employee with disability and management
 - Teamwork atmosphere
 - Professional development programs
- **Having an atmosphere that was disability-aware**
 - Hiring others with disabilities
 - Disability awareness training
- **Being willing to accommodate for the needs of persons with disabilities**
 - Determination on the part of the employer
 - Flexibility
- **Having policies and practices in place**
 - Having the resources: financial and personnel

Although the employers in many cases were able to provide ideas for situations needed to create an inclusive environment, they were often restricted due to financial constraints that they recognized or by their own attitudes as reflected by the graduates’ discussions.



Comparison to Previous Studies

This study finds commonality with other studies (Frank, Karst and Boles 1989; Getzel and Kregel 1996; Kennedy and Olney 2001; In Unison 2001) that have shown many obstacles to employment including attitudinal barriers such as discrimination and lack accessibility. Building on these findings this study provides a more in-depth examination of both obstacles and facilitators from the graduate perspective. It also provides another perspective by hearing the voices of employers.

In the present study one of the unique features is the inclusion of evidence for successful employment facilitation. While many studies have looked at the barriers and obstacles to employment for persons with learning disabilities the present study focuses on cross-disabilities and thus provides a broader perspective from which to begin successful intervention strategies.

Recommendations

University/Career Services

- Enhance the effectiveness of university/college career services
- Career services take a lead in developing internships and volunteer experiences for students with disabilities as a first step in the transition process.
- Provide training for students: communication with employers

Employers

- Provide disability awareness training for employers and potential employers
- Create educational information packages specifically for employers, service providers and the general public that include tips on how to create an inclusive workplace including suggestions for increasing awareness of disability issues and providing opportunities to meet people with disabilities who are positive role models and who are successfully employed in a variety of fields. This information could also be posted on a website.
- Develop resource/incentive programs for employees/employers
- Bring employers, employees with disabilities, university and career counseling, students, policy makers together in a forum to discuss issues and develop solutions



Persons with Disabilities

- Create resources and opportunities to support persons with disabilities to create their own employment opportunities
- Convene forums to enable people with disabilities and employers to openly discuss employment issues and disability: Topics could include: employer attitudes, employment equity and ways to accommodate people with disabilities in workplaces.

Directions for Future Research

In examining the study findings it is evident that the employers perceived their companies' employment equity policies as effective strategies enabling them to successfully hire, supervise and retain employees with disabilities. However, the experiences of the graduates conflicted with those of the employers. The graduates were of the opinion that even if companies had strong employment equity policies, the ways of interpreting and implementing these policies varied widely. The company's success in hiring and retaining employees with disabilities was highly contingent upon their comfort level with disability, their knowledge of how to remove systemic barriers and create an inclusive environment, as well as their ability to access the necessary resources to attain adequate accommodations.

Further research needs to examine this dichotomy of perceptions in order to develop an effective a model that addresses the reality of our society, where a high percentage of persons with disabilities remain unemployed or underemployed. In order to do this effectively a research cluster representing the needs of both graduates and employers, as well as policy makers and education institutions needs to be developed.

Additionally a literature review conducted by Unger, 2002, revealed that there have been a number of methodological issues with many studies. For instance, Kohler and Chapman (1999) state that more research is needed on transition-related interventions that include an analysis of post-school outcomes and more rigorous evaluation of model programs. Thus more rigorous studies are needed.

In order to ensure that studies are developed using effective methodology the research cluster must bring together social, educational and economic



researchers all committed to the full inclusion of persons with disabilities into the Canadian economy. Other suggestions include:

- Study larger numbers of graduates and employers
- Study more for-profit employers
- A study to determine the contribution of factors leading to successful employment
- Longitudinal studies of student transitions and following with them through work for several years
- In depth studies of employers: correlation studies, prospective studies, retrospective studies
- Study the economic impacts of successful school to work transitions for persons with disabilities – including the inimitable contributions they make to society as a result of their unique vantage point (including, but not limited to, contributions towards new technologies, new ways of providing services and new communication functions).

Lessons Learned from the Transitions from Post-Secondary Education to Work Phase 2 Study

Attitudinal barriers and discrimination regarding people with disabilities are still very prominent in the world of work. Students with disabilities face many barriers in the road to employment and also during employment. They must have a strong desire and willingness to work to stay the course. At the same time some employers are willing to accommodate persons with disabilities. Those that do either have employment equity policies and procedures in place or have a strong determination themselves to accommodate. Lack of adequate resources including financial and personnel are often barriers to needed accommodations. To ease the process, graduates often seek large employers with employment equity policies in place or non-profits such as disability organizations that are more likely to accommodate their needs.



CHAPTER 9 : REFERENCES

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CHAPTER 10 : APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethical Reviews - Statement of Intent

Title of Project: Students with Disabilities: Transition from Post-Secondary Education to Work – Phase Two

Principal Investigator: Dr. Michelle Owen, Royal Bank Research Chair, CCDS

An ethical review may be required depending on the nature of the study which you intend to undertake. Guidelines, which will assist you in determining if your study requires ethical review, are set out below:

First, an ethical review is required for studies that involve work with participants in which data is gathered through direct and indirect contact with people where these data have an impact on their lives.

Second, studies that involve the use of data collected from people where such data are commonly available to the public (e.g., newspapers, databases, archives, Statistics Canada) do not require ethical review.

Third, studies that have already undergone an ethical review and have received approval from reputable research or academic institutions do not require ethical review.

Please indicate below the category into which your proposed study fits. Please note that those investigators whose studies require an ethical review must complete an Ethical Review process. Those investigators whose studies do not require full ethical review should complete and sign this form and then forward it to the Ethical Review Sub-Committee.

1. This study does not involve data collection from participants. This study involves the analysis of data obtained from participants where such data are commonly available to the public (that is available from public archives and previously published material). (No Ethical Review Required)
2. This study involves the analysis of data obtained from participants where such data are collected through direct and indirect contact with people where the data can have an impact on their lives. (Ethical Review Required)

This study requires an ethical review.



3. An Ethical Review has been completed for this study through a reputable institution. Please give the title of the project and the name of the institution:
Attach supporting documents.

Signature of The Principal Investigator(s)

Date



Appendix B: Ethical Review Guidelines

To be completed by Principal Investigators for all studies which involve work with participants, and/or the analysis of data collected from individuals where such data are not commonly available to the public.

The Questions on this form are of a general nature designed to collect pertinent information about potential ethical problems that may arise with the proposed research project. Please provide the CCDS Ethical Review Sub-Committee with the project proposal and your consent form.

Title of Project: Students with Disabilities: Transition from Post-Secondary Education to Work – Phase Two

Principal Investigator: Dr. Michelle Owen, Royal Bank Research Chair, CCDS

1. Objectives of Study

This study will document the post-secondary transition and employment experiences of approximately 40 students with disabilities and 40 recent graduates with disabilities and 20 employers. This study is the second phase of a longitudinal study that will track the school-to-work transition and employment experiences of the 80 students/graduates one and two years after graduation.

2. Data Collection

What data are being collected? Biographical data (lived experiences in employment or barriers to accessing primary health care, etc.)

Data concerning transition and employment experiences will be collected from (1) people with disabilities who are recent graduates of post secondary education, (2) employers of students/graduates with disabilities.

How will the data be collected? (Focus group, survey, questionnaire, structured interviews, unstructured interviews, participant observation, interview guide, other (e.g. journal or diary, personal narrative), etc.

Semi-structured interviews using interview guides with approximately eight broad questions and suggested probes for additional detail.

3. Procedures Please outline procedures to be followed in data collection:

How will informed consent be obtained?



Prior to being interviewed, participants will receive a consent form (print or electronic) describing the benefits and risks of participating in the study. At the beginning of each interview, the interviewers will orally review the form with the participants and provide clarification if necessary. Interviewers will forward the signed consent forms to the research project data manager. The forms will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at CCDS.

How will you make it clear to participants that their participation is voluntary and that they may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty?

The consent form includes a statement indicating that participants may withdraw from the study at any time by informing the researchers verbally or in writing.

Who will have access to the gathered data and how will this be communicated to participants?

At the beginning of each interview, the interviewers will explain to participants that the audiocassette recordings and interviewer notes will be mailed to the Data Manager following each interview. The Data Manager will be responsible for the secure storage of this data. The Principal Investigator, Project Manager and Research Assistants will have access to the interviewer notes and transcriptions of the audio recordings during data analysis.

How will confidentiality be maintained?

No participants will be named in any reports or other public documents from the study. Findings and/or quotations of participant comments that include information that could possibly identify a participant will be edited to alter or conceal the potentially identifying information.

How will data be recorded? (Instruments, notes, etc.)

Interviewers will take notes and record interviews. The recordings will be transcribed.

How will data be stored? (For how long, when will it be destroyed, etc.)

The audio recordings will be erased after being transcribed. The transcripts will be stored for one year following the completion of this study (until September 1st, 2004). They will be stored in a locked filing cabinet or in sealed archive boxes. If there are subsequent phases of this study beyond September 1st, 2004, the data from this phase will be stored for one year following the completion of the final phase of the study.



What are the plans for future use of data as part of this study or future projects?

We hope to acquire funding to conduct a third year of follow-up data collection following the completion of this study. If successful in acquiring that funding, the data from this study would be compared to data collected one and two years after the students with disabilities graduate.

Will participants be paid for time spent taking part in the research study?

The students with disabilities who participate in the study will each receive a \$50 honorarium for taking part in an interview. They will also receive another \$50 honorarium for reviewing and commenting on a report on the preliminary findings. What are the potential benefits to participants from being involved in the research?

The interview experience may provide some students with new insights about their post secondary education transition as well as their employment experiences. Their participation in the study will lead to recommendations about changes required to provide more effective supports and accommodations to post-secondary students and employees with disabilities.

(a) What are the costs to participants (e.g. monetary, time, inconvenience, effort)?

Interviews will last 1-2 hours. They will be scheduled at the convenience of study participants.

(b) Is there a risk to participants from being involved in the research? If yes, what is the nature of the risk?

Some students may offer critical evaluations of the disability-related supports and accommodations provided or not provided at the college or university they attended or in their workplace.

Because on-campus disability service providers will assist research staff in circulating information about the study and recruiting potential study participants, there is some risk that some disability service providers and employers may have knowledge of students/employees who received recruiting information about the study. As a result, some disability service providers/employers could recognize specific comments of particular students/employees quoted anonymously in the report. The risk to the study participants is that disability service providers/employers could withhold or alter accommodation support or other services.

What actions do you plan to take to minimize risks?



Participants and employers will be recruited as a follow up from the first phase of the project. The follow up participants will be familiar with the research process, and in particular, the precautions taken to protect confidentiality.

New students with disabilities who are recent graduates will be recruited from a broad range of sources, including advertisements in Abilities magazine and campus newspapers, public service announcements on campus radio stations, and mailings to all eligible students registered with on-campus disability services providers.

As noted in Question 3(D), participant comments that include information that could possibly reveal a participant's identity will be edited before being included in the report. Editing will alter or conceal the potentially identifying information.

Signature of the Principal Investigator(s)

Date



Appendix C: Ethical Certificate

Project Title: Students with Disabilities: Transition from Post-Secondary Education to Work – Phase Two

Principal Investigator(s): Dr. Michelle Owen, Royal Bank Research Chair, CCDS

Ethical Review Sub-Committee Members:

Chairperson

This certificate is completed in light of relevant Canadian Centre on Disability Studies' policy guidelines for ethical review and, where appropriate, the standards specified by certain external funding bodies.

This is to certify that the above noted Sub-Committee has examined this research project and concludes that it meets the accepted professional standards for conduct of research within CCDS, including appropriate standards of ethical acceptability.

Signature of Chairperson

Date

Ethical Review Sub-Committee

Do further revisions to this research need to be made in order to conform with CCDS ethical review guidelines? Yes _____ No _____

If yes: What revisions need to be made?

Signature of Chairperson

Date

Ethical Review Sub-Committee



Appendix D: Cover Letter for Participants

Dear Potential Study Participant,

Thank you for your inquiry about our study of Canadian university and college students with disabilities who have made the transition from post-secondary education to employment. This is the second phase of a three-year study that will document the school-to-work transition and employment experiences of approximately 80 students with disabilities who have recently graduated from university and college programs in several sites across Canada.

If you agree to continue to participate in the study, your confidentiality will be protected. We will not tell anyone you are participating in the study. We will not include your name, personal characteristics, or any other information that could reveal your identity in any publications without your written permission. You will receive a \$50 honorarium for each interview and a \$50 honorarium for reviewing and commenting on a preliminary report. Given that this is the second phase of a longitudinal study, if funding is obtained for a third phase, we would like to interview you again two years after your graduation for post-secondary education.

A demographic questionnaire, two copies of the consent form and the interview guide is enclosed. The consent form provides more information about the study and your rights if you agree to participate. Please read and sign the consent form and complete the questionnaire. A CCDS Research Assistant at CCDS will be contacting you to schedule an interview shortly. If you arrange to meet to do the interview in person, bring one copy of the consent form and the completed questionnaire to the interview. If you do the interview by telephone, please return the consent form and questionnaire by mail in the enclosed stamped envelope.

If you have any questions about the consent form, the questionnaire, or the interview, please e-mail me at research1@disabilitystudies.ca or call at (204) 287-8411 ext. 28.

Sincerely,

Jennifer deGroot
Data Manager



CANADIAN CENTRE ON DISABILITY STUDIES
56 The Promenade, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 3H9
Tel. (204) 287-8411 TTY: (204) 475-6223 Fax: (204) 284-5343

Students with Disabilities: Transition from
Post-Secondary Education to Work Phase 2

Appendix E: Project Information and Consent Form

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to document the post-secondary education experiences of students with disabilities who graduated in the past year. This study is the second phase of a longitudinal study that will track the school-to-work transition experiences of students/graduates with disabilities one and possibly two years after graduation.

Who is conducting the study?

This research is being conducted by the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies (CCDS) and is funded by the federal government's Office for Disability Issues, which is part of Human Resources Development Canada.

What information will be collected?

Participating in the study means that you will be interviewed about your experiences as a person with disabilities who has attended a college or university and either is currently making a transition to employment or has already made a transition to employment. The interview will last approximately one to two hours. You will be asked questions about the reasons you successfully made a transition to employment what obstacles you encountered, how you were able to overcome such obstacles, the impact of work place or other support services for employees with disabilities, and the impact of institutional financial supports (targeted wage subsidies). Later in the study, you will also be asked to review and comment on a preliminary report of the findings.

How will the information be handled and your confidentiality protected?

The interview will be tape recorded to allow the researchers to review and transcribe your answers. The audiocassette will be erased after your interview has been transcribed. Your name, personal characteristics or other information that could reveal your identity will not be included in the research report or other publications without your written permission.



Can you withdraw from the study?

Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time by writing to the researchers at the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies. You may also refuse to answer any questions. During the interview, you can also tell the researchers that you wish to withdraw.

Will you be paid for your contribution to the study?

You will receive a \$50 honorarium for being interviewed and a \$50 honorarium for reviewing and commenting on a preliminary report of the findings of the study.

What if you have questions?

If you have any further questions about the study, you can contact the researchers at CCDS. The Principle Investigator is Dr. Michelle Owen, and the project manager is Cathy La France. You can reach them at the phone number and address at the top of this form.

If you have ethical concerns about the project, you can contact the Chairperson of CCDS' Research Committee. CCDS' contact information is listed at the top of this form.

I, _____ (*print name*) agree to take part in the research project entitled "Students with Disabilities – Transition from Post-Secondary Education to Work – Phase 2."

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

DATE

MAILING ADDRESS

CITY

PROVINCE

POSTAL CODE

RESEARCH ASSISTANT SIGNATURE

DATE



CANADIAN CENTRE ON DISABILITY STUDIES

Students with Disabilities:

Transitions from Post-Secondary Education to Work – Phase 2

Appendix F: Demographic Questionnaire

Please complete this questionnaire either by (1) hand-writing your answers on a printed copy or (2) entering your answers into the document file on a computer and printing it when you are finished. A research assistant at CCDS will collect this questionnaire from you.

1. Are you ___ female or ___ male?

2. How old are you?

- ___ under 25
- ___ 25-34
- ___ 35-44
- ___ 45-54
- ___ 55-64
- ___ 65 or older

3. What is your relationship status?

- ___ single
- ___ married
- ___ common-law
- ___ divorced
- ___ separated
- ___ widowed

4. Do you have children under the age of 18 who live with you?

- ___ yes (If yes, please list their ages: _____)
- ___ no

5. From which of the following sources did you receive personal income in 2003

(check as many as apply)

- ___ employment
- ___ student awards, grants, fellowships, etc. (not loans)
- ___ provincial government income assistance
- ___ Canada Pension Plan



___ private insurance
___ other (describe _____)

6. In 2003, what was your gross personal income from all sources?

___ under \$10,000
___ \$10,000 to \$24,999
___ \$25,000 to \$49,999
___ \$50,000 to \$74,999
___ \$75,000 or over

7. In 2003, what was your gross household income from all sources?

___ under \$10,000
___ \$10,000 to \$24,999
___ \$25,000 to \$49,999
___ \$50,000 to \$74,999
___ \$75,000 or over

8. What is/are the name(s) of your impairment(s) or medical condition(s) that is/are associated with the disabilities you experience? (e.g. blindness, chemical sensitivity, diabetes, dyslexia, mental health, multiple sclerosis, quadriplegia, stroke)

How does your impairment(s) or medical condition(s) affect your life?



Canadian Centre on Disability Studies

Students with Disabilities: Transitions from
Post-Secondary Education to Work – Phase 2

Appendix G: Interview Guide - Student Graduates

1. Current employment status

Are you currently employed? Yes ___ No ___

1.1.1 If yes, do you:

Work full time: (Please describe type of employment, hours worked etc.)

Work part time: (Please describe type of employment, hours worked etc.)

Unpaid work: (Please describe type of work ie. volunteer, domestic work, hours worked, etc.)

If no, what are your current career plans? (For example: Have you returned or are you considering returning to school? Are you continuing to look for work?)

What were the major factors that led you to pursue this type of employment?

1.3 Was disability a factor in your choice? Yes ___ No ___

Please explain. Prompt: Were there any other factors that influenced your choice? For example gender, race, family status, or other)

1.4 Did you formally disclose your disability or disabilities to your employer or co-workers? Yes ___ No ___

1.4.1 If yes: Can you tell me a bit about your experiences disclosing your disability?

1.4.2 If no: what were the reasons you didn't disclose your disability?

Do you expect to continue working at your current place of employment?

Yes ___ No ___

If yes: Please go to question number 2.



If no: What are your career goals?

Prompts: Do you plan to pursue other work? Do you plan to return to post-secondary education or other training?

2. Reasons for Successful Employment

2.1 What do you think are the main reasons you have been successfully employed?

3. Obstacles

Did you encounter any obstacles related to your disability (ies) while looking for work? Yes ___ No ___

If yes: What were the obstacles you encountered? For example, were there other obstacles you encountered? (race, gender, family status, etc.)

Have you encountered any obstacles related to your disability (ies) while at your current place of employment? Yes ___ No ___

Probe: Have you encountered obstacles related to physical accessibility, technological barriers, attitudinal barriers, access to human supports and other accommodations, access to financial resources, transportation, etc.

3.4 Do you currently need any workplace accommodations that are not being provided right now? Yes ___ No ___

If yes: What accommodations do you need?

Have you talked to your employer or anyone else about getting your accommodation needs met? Yes ___ No ___

If yes: Who have you talked to?

What have been the results of those discussions?

Have you used any career services to assist you in negotiating the accommodations you require in the workplace? Yes ___ No ___

If yes:

Who provided these services?



Have these services helped you? If so, how?

Have they hindered you in any way? If so, how?

Would you like to see anything done differently? Yes ___ No ___

If yes: What would you like to see done differently?

If no: What are the reasons you haven't accessed these services?

4. Disability Services

4.1 Have you made use of any disability support services to assist you in negotiating the accommodation services you needed in the workplace?

Yes ___ No ___

If yes:

Who provided these services?

Did these services help you? If so, how?

Did they hinder you in any way? If so, how?

Would you like to see anything done differently?

Yes ___ No ___

4.1.2 If yes: What would you like to see done differently?

5. Institutional Supports

5.1 Have you received any institutional financial supports to assist you in remaining in your current place of employment? (For example, funding for assistive technology, wage subsidies) Yes ___ No ___

5.1.1 If yes: What impact did these supports have on your being successfully employed?

5.1.2 If no: Did you encounter any obstacles to obtaining institutional supports because of your disabilities? Yes ___ No ___

5.1.3 If yes, what obstacles did you encounter?

6. Are there any other comments you would like to add?

7. Wrap-up



Thank you for taking the time for this interview. During the spring, I will be analyzing the data from all of the interviews I do. Other researchers in Calgary, Winnipeg, and Halifax will be doing the same. In the summer, the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies (CCDS) will contact you about reading and giving them comments on a preliminary report of the findings of this second phase of the study. If this phase of the study is successful, CCDS expects to receive funding to do follow-up interviews with all of the study participants approximately one year from now. You will receive a \$50 honorarium cheque in the mail within four weeks.



Canadian Centre on Disability Studies

Students with Disabilities: Transitions from
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Appendix H: Interview Guide: Employers

1. Tell me about the history of recruiting, screening and hiring persons with disabilities at [name of company]. For example, what measures have you taken to ensure that [name of company] is an equal opportunity employer?

2. If an employee does disclose that they have a disability(ies), does [name of company] ask the employee whether they need any accommodations in the workplace that will enable them to participate fully and fulfill their responsibilities in the workplace? Yes__ No__

2.1 If yes:

How are the necessary accommodations identified?

3. Has [name of company] made any changes to make employment and professional development opportunities more accessible to people with disabilities?

4. Does [name of company] offer any on-going disability-management services for employees with disabilities? Yes__ No__

4.1 If yes: Please describe the disability management services you offer?

4.2 If no: Do you refer employees elsewhere for these services?

Yes__ No__

4.2.1 If yes, to which types of organizations do you refer them?

5. In what ways do you think [name of company] does a good job of supporting employees with disabilities to retain their employment with your company?

6. Do you encounter any obstacles that make it difficult for you to support employees with disabilities to retain employment with your company?

Yes__ No__

6.1 If yes: What obstacles have you faced?

6.1.1 Have you found any solutions to address these difficulties?

Yes__ No__



6.1. 2 If yes: What solutions have you found most helpful?

7. Are there any ways you think your company should be doing more to assist employees with disabilities to maintain employment with your company?

Yes__ No__

7.1 If yes, please describe.

8. In what ways, if any, do you at [name of company] work together to continue to create an inclusive culture for employees with disabilities?



Figure 1: Participant numbers by age

Participant numbers by age

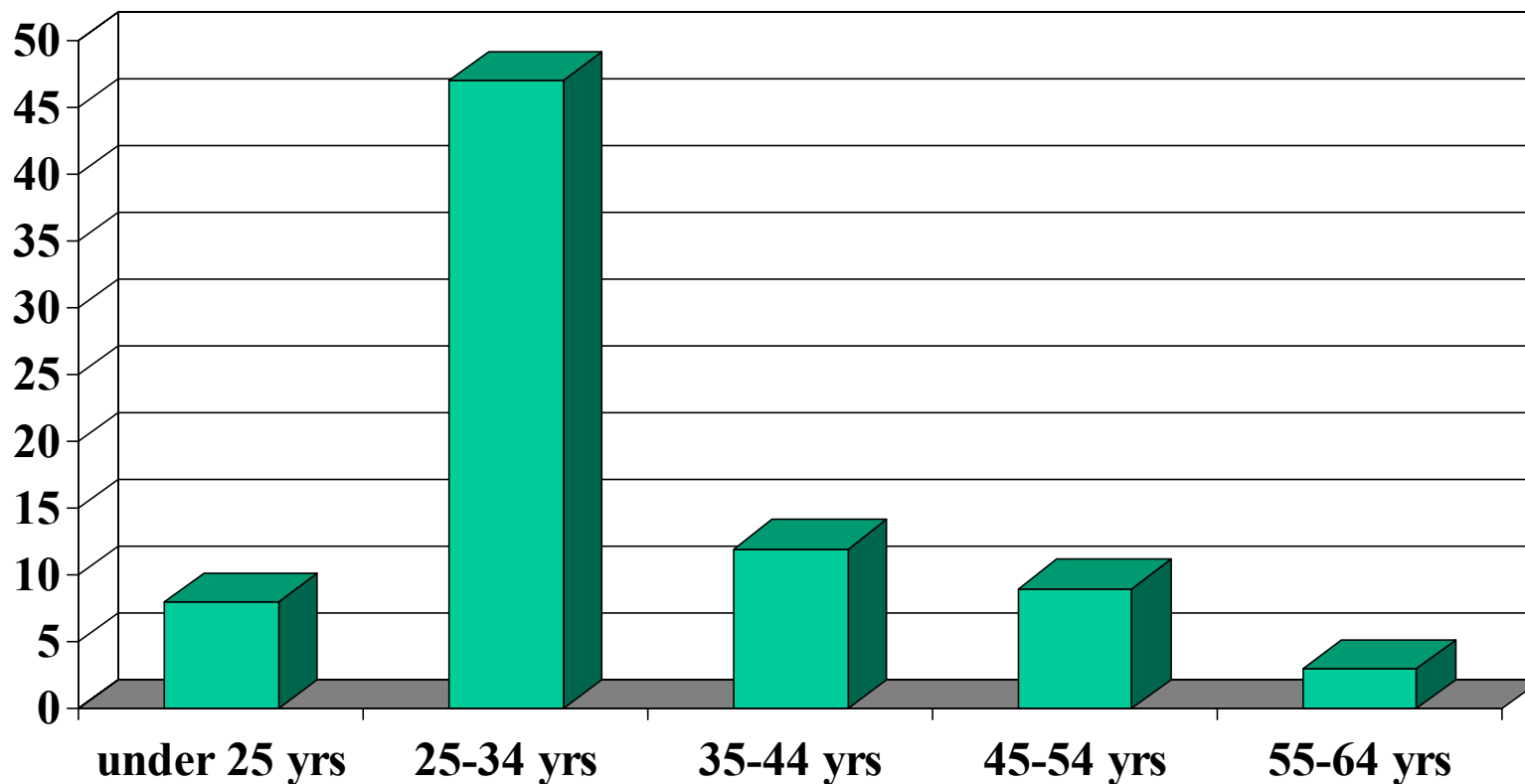




Figure 2: Self-identified disabilities

Self-Identified Disabilities

79 participants – numbers & percentages add up to over 100% because numerous participants reported multiple disabilities

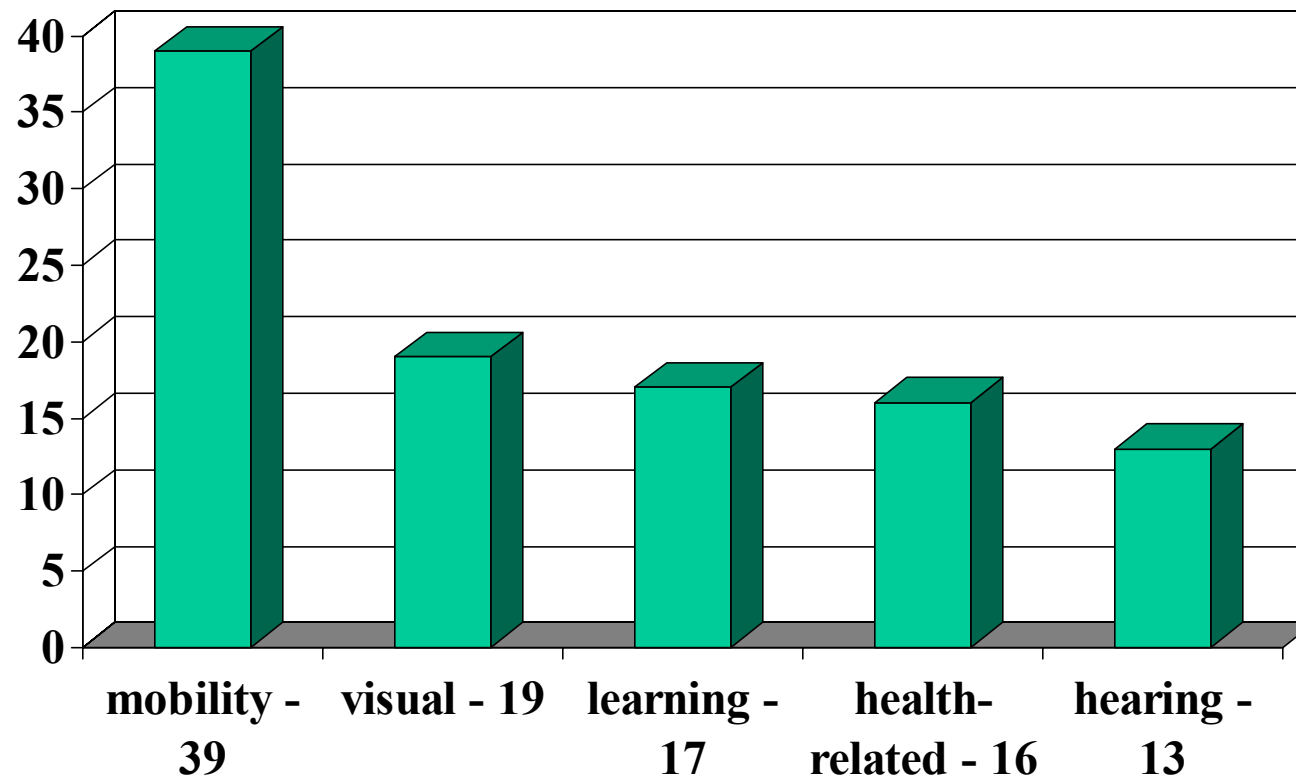




Figure 3: Relationship status

Relationship status - 79 participants

72 – no children under 18 at home, 7 – children under 18 at home

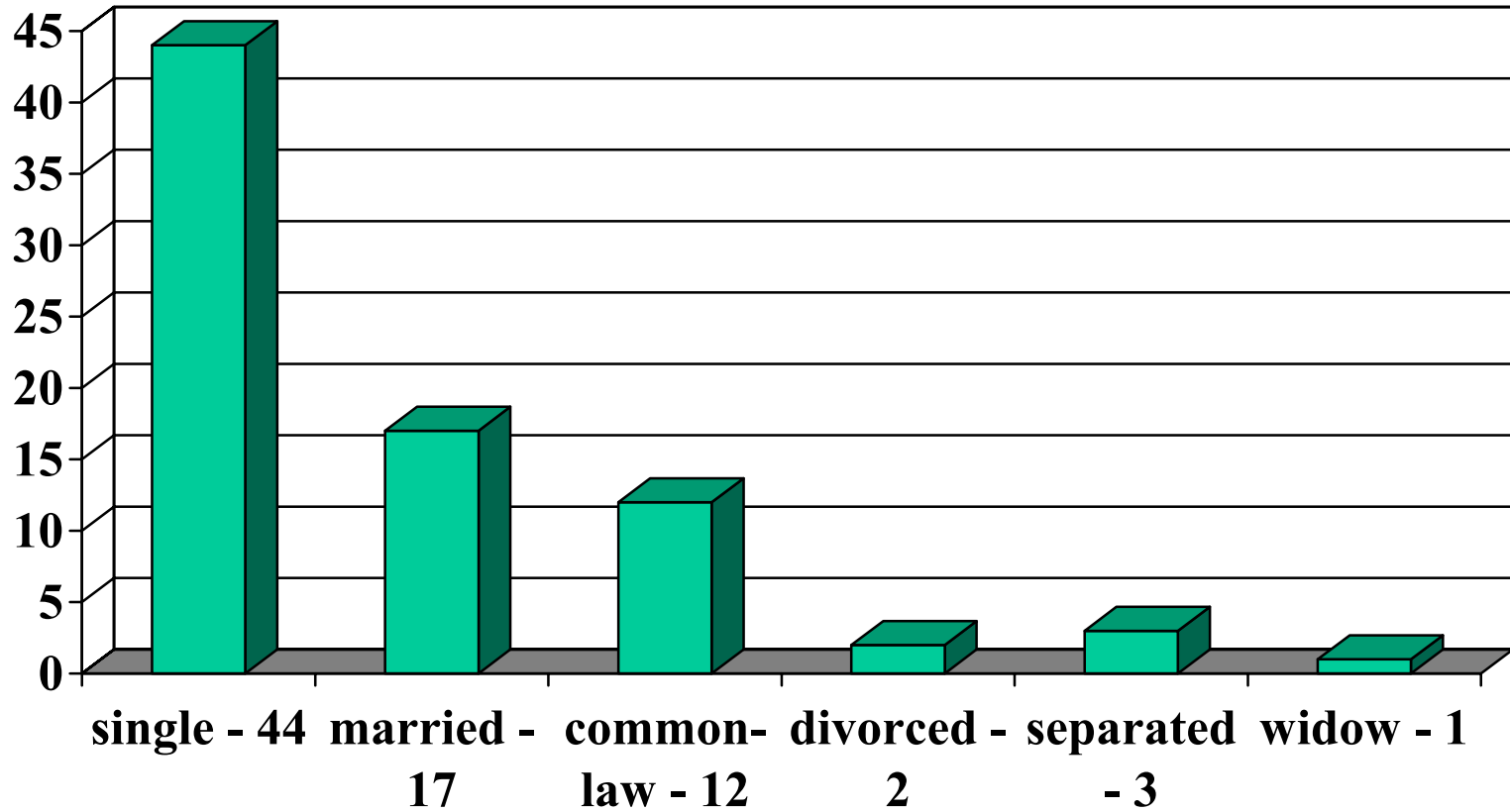




Figure 4: Fields of study

Fields of Study

79 participants

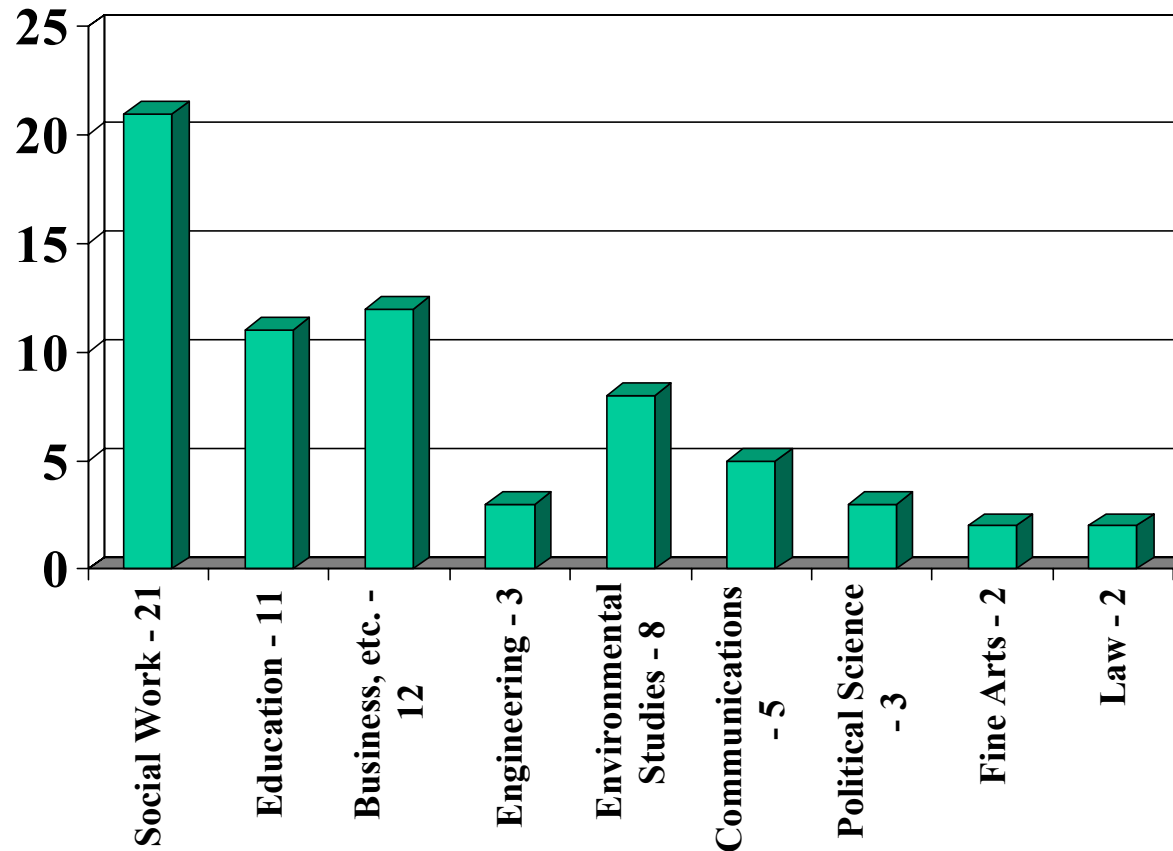




Figure 5: Personal incomes

Personal incomes

79 participants

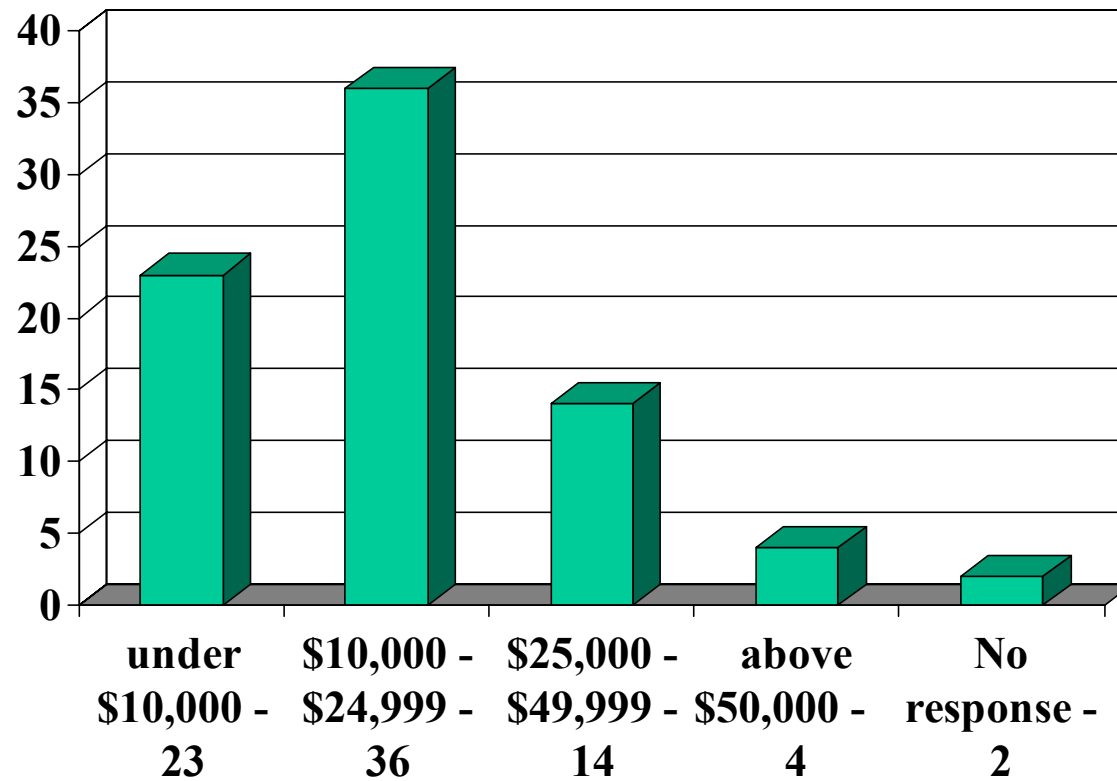




Figure 6: Household incomes

Household incomes

79 participants

