



IN OUR SHOES

Practical Strategies for Disability Inclusion



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Introduction

This book is divided into seven sections – education, employment, retail, social, recreation, hospitality and health care. These categories represent environments within which barriers to accessibility are often encountered. Please know that each and every story included here is based on an actual event that was reported to us, the personal experience of one of our team members or that of one of our family members living with disability.

Digging much deeper than disability legislation can, our stories convey heart and spirit, while humanizing the realities of life with disability and the barriers we face within our society.

While we all agree that it's vital to have laws that mandate the removal of those barriers, our hope is that these stories will leave an even greater impression on you. We want you to understand how this legislation can truly impact real lives, explained on a very human level.

So, we thank you for reading our book. We hope that it helps you become more familiar with the wide spectrum of different disabilities that you may encounter at work and in the community, the types of barriers that people with disabilities routinely face and the range of potential solutions that support inclusion and accommodation.



Chapter 1

Implementing EDUCATIONAL Inclusion

Everyone has a right to an education. Physical limitations, sight or hearing impairments, emotional or mental challenges, or developmental disabilities such as autism or learning disabilities; all of these types of disabilities need to be accommodated so children and adults can learn. This presents a challenge for our school systems and universities. It also presents an opportunity to foster growth in compassion and understanding of differences in people.

Having raised three children with learning disabilities myself, I learned the difference between the letter of the law and the spirit of the law.

My children were in school in the 1970s only 10 years after the bill to educate all children with disabilities was enforced in the United States. While they did try to accommodate my children's learning differences, often common sense and compassion were lacking. Most of the accommodations were made on my children's part. They were the ones that spent extra time on buses

going to special schools. They were the brunt of jokes on the playground and bus stops simply because they were in one of “those” classes. Schooled in dark, damp basements, they missed important skills because of scheduling conflicts between their regular and “special” classes, expectations lowered because of their “labels” were only some of the attitudinal barriers they encountered.

I now have a grandson who has autism. My daughter is active in the autism community and they are now doing a better job with some of the barriers to inclusion. But there are still lowered expectations and misunderstandings, all of which continue to create attitudinal barriers for children with disabilities.

A great illustration of this is a story of a little boy that has both autism and cerebral palsy. The teacher tells the mother not to let him wear his leg braces to school when he’s wearing shorts. Her explanation is that it would make the other children feel uncomfortable.

Not only is it illegal for the teacher to make such a request but she is missing an important educational opportunity with the rest of the students.

At one point I worked in a private school setting where preschoolers with disabilities and average children learned side-by-side. All the children were seen as equals. If any questions arose about anyone's difference, it was treated matter-of-factly. These children not only learned their academics but tolerance and acceptance as well, a lesson the children in the above story missed.

The following section represents a collection of situations where accommodations may not initially be

obvious, but speak of the challenges in our educational systems. With care, compassion and acceptance, accommodations can be achieved and children and adult students with disabilities can learn, grow and maximize their abilities.

EDUCATIONAL Scenario #1

Is She Blind or Isn't She? Not Always Black and White

Scenario

A bout with illness in childhood left Rita *legally blind. Although she has some sight, her central vision is extremely weak, and she cannot see the printed word. With corrective glasses however she can see very large print. Relying on people who read to her, an accessible computer with screen magnification software, the recent addition of screen reading software, and electronic access to textbooks, she successfully graduated high school. Accepted to a local college, she is in the process of adapting to her new surroundings.

She is getting around without a cane or guide dog, but is more comfortable when she is familiar with her environment. It's the last few days before school begins and she is familiarizing herself with her new school and dorm with the help of an orientation and mobility specialist.

One of her stops is to the "Office of Student Support," to discuss accommodations. They provide a letter for her professors validating her needs and suggesting the appropriate support. As classes begin, she speaks to her professors arranging specific accommodations such as using her computer in class, recording lectures, sitting close to the front, etc.

After several weeks of school, Rita's English professor sees her playing frisbee with some friends. His first

instinct is to be irritated, believing she is exaggerating her need for accommodations. In subsequent classes, he seems to intentionally make life harder for her. Feeling frustrated and misunderstood, Rita wonders if she will be able to finish his course.

Questions

Is the professor out of line? How could he have handled his doubts?

Should the college be responsible for his "attitude?"

Possible Solution

The teacher is reacting based on his incorrect assumptions about Rita's degree of vision loss. If he has doubts about the validity of her need for accommodations, he needs to address these concerns with the school's Office of Student Support.

They will be able to educate him about the various degrees and manifestations of vision loss. They will also educate him about his obligation to provide reasonable accommodations to his students who have a disability.

Rita may take the opportunity to "teach" her teacher perhaps by inviting him to play frisbee with her and asking him to use simulator glasses that distort his vision, thereby allowing him to see how she sees. Or this simulator experience could be part of the "education" on disabilities the college will be conducting.

It's the responsibility of the teacher or professor to learn about how a particular student is impacted by

their disability and respond to the student's individual needs. Student support offices can be of help to him. A non-judgmental dialogue with the student would be helpful.

About The Term *Legally Blind

A person who has significant vision loss (or is "legally blind") is often harder to understand and accommodate than someone who is "blind". Various types or degrees of vision loss present uniquely from person to person in what they can see and what they cannot see. This causes an entirely different set of difficulties and challenges for each person with vision loss and often for those around them. Rita for instance has more peripheral than central vision and is able to see a large red frisbee. If it was another colour, she might not be able to play. Reading a printed page presents a very different visual requirement, a difficult one for her. Only about 10% of people who are blind are actually completely blind, not able to see anything at all. The other 90% are able to see varying degrees of light and shadow, peripheral and central vision as well as colour distortion.

EDUCATIONAL Scenario #2

Rushing to Judge

Scenario

Happily enjoying the hope and promise of a new semester, busily setting up her classroom, Juanita is startled when a colleague from the resource department walks in.

"Hi Juanita", says Mr. Peters. "Just want to speak with you about a new student that may need some accommodations.

"Oh, does he have a learning disability?" Juanita asks, remembering several students she has had with dyslexia. "No, I wouldn't say that. Juanita, he has autism, *Asperger syndrome to be precise."

Oh no, thinks Juanita, now "they" are making their way into college.

What's next, teaching high school material at the college level? She is clearly irritated.

"I don't think he's going to need much help Juanita, but I would appreciate it if you would keep an eye on him. Please direct him to us if he needs any accommodations, such as untimed tests or a quiet place to take them. I would also appreciate it if you would get back to me in a week or two to let me know how he is adjusting."

On the first day of classes the young first year students file in. Making a disruption as he pulls his chair close to

her desk, it is obvious which one is Tim. Many of the other students begin to snicker at his odd behaviour.

Great, thinks Juanita, this is going to be some year. Now I have to baby-sit.

Questions

Have you ever rushed to judge when someone appears to be out of step or different?

What might Juanita's next step be if she's motivated to accommodate Tim and understand his needs and challenges?

Possible Solution

It is normal to be "taken aback" in the face of things we don't understand. Fear of the unknown is a natural reaction. Juanita chose to put her judgment aside, did some research on Asperger syndrome and took part in seminars on disability awareness at the resource department. As a result of her attitude adjustment, she learned more than Tim did this semester. He became her teacher of the appreciation of people for who they are. It turned out that Tim was her most intelligent and eager student. She came to respect his gifts and tenacity while encouraging him and the other students to interact.

About *Asperger Syndrome

Asperger syndrome is a neurological disorder that, like others on the autistic spectrum, is marked by difficulties in communications and social interactions.

Children with Asperger syndrome find it hard to identify and express their feelings making it challenging for them to connect with others. Eye contact is often difficult, which also makes it tough to interpret the expressions and behaviours of others. In most cases, there is sensitivity to various stimuli, from sounds to clothing and foods.

EDUCATIONAL Scenario #3

Who Has the Problem?

Scenario

Adopted at the age of three from an orphanage in China, Huang has adjusted well to his new family and his new country. No small feat as Huang was born with a *missing limb - his right arm.

His new family is amazed at how well Huang can do things. He dresses himself, puts on his own shoes and socks and ties his own shoes. With the use of his left arm, he accomplishes most tasks well.

When he needs two hands, he has learned to use his foot. He runs and plays and enjoys the jungle gym like any other five-year-old. When other children ask him about his missing limb, he is very matter-of-fact about the situation and is overheard saying, "I don't have one."

His parents have had an artificial limb made for him, but he does not like it. After much discussion and consultation with doctors, they decide not to force him to use the prosthesis. They decide to wait until, if at some point, he indicates a desire or need for one.

He enters kindergarten this year and at the first parent-teacher conference, the teacher says he is having difficulty printing.

"Oh, we think he uses his left hand pretty well to print his name," his mother says.

“He does,” the teacher replies, “but when he prints he puts his leg up on the desk to hold the paper in place. I keep telling him that he can’t do that and I even tried putting a heavy object on the desk for him to use.

Frankly, it makes the other children uncomfortable. I even had a few of them try to put their feet on their desks. I think if you had a prosthesis made and he was taught to be used to it, he wouldn’t be having these problems.”

Questions

“No feet on desks” is a spoken and unspoken rule in most schools. Should Huang be made to adhere to this rule?

Is it the teacher’s place to decide what kind of accommodations Huang should have, i.e. prosthesis?

Possible Solution

Huang should be applauded for his ingenuity and not be made to feel different or strange because he uses his foot like a hand. Often when children are born with a missing limb, as in Huang’s case, their ability to adapt is so efficient that the introduction of a prosthesis is often not needed or wanted.

Huang’s parents met with the special needs team and established some accommodations for Huang, at which time it was decided the use of his foot for many tasks was not only needed but acceptable.

It is not up to the teacher to decide what the accommodations should be. Rather, it is up to her to

see that they are carried out. It is also a wonderful opportunity for other children to come to appreciate differences and courage.

About *Missing Limbs in Children

Some children are born with congenital deficiencies that can result in a missing limb and often the *in utero* cause is unknown. However, there are some known causes, such as the use of the drug thalidomide in the 1960s, which caused malformation *in utero*, or amniotic band syndrome.

Injuries leading to emergency amputations account for approximately 70% of all pediatric limb loss and affect children of all ages. There is a wide variety of causes, including motor vehicle accidents, lawn mower or power tool accidents, electrical or chemical burns, to name just a few. Amputation may also arise as a result of a disease such as bone cancer.

EDUCATIONAL Scenario #4

Test Level Of Knowledge, Not Level Of Disability

Scenario

Recently graduated from college, Jessie acquires a position in her chosen field of occupational therapy. Helping children with special needs is a dream come true for her. She begins as an assistant until she passes her licensing exam, at which time she will become a fully qualified occupational therapist.

Coming home from a long day at work, she sees a letter from the national licensing agency and eagerly rips open the envelope. Her heart drops as she reads the test results;

"You have not passed the exam. You may sit for it again in six months. Following is a list of places where the test will be held." It may as well have been written in big red ink with pulsating letters. Sitting down in defeat, wondering if she should just remain an assistant, she is on the verge of giving up completely.

This is the second time she did not pass the test. Graduating with high grades and successfully completing two internships, plus having taken a national refresher course, what is holding her back?

Jessie has had a hard time with standardized tests throughout school. She was diagnosed at age 7 with a learning disability. Her particular disability took the form of *auditory processing. The learning disability affects her ability to block out background noise, having

to take some extra time to process and formulate answers into words.

Throughout school, she was allowed to take tests untimed in a quieter environment, frequently wearing a headset to block out background noise and recorded lectures. Clearly, arriving at a test site at 8 a.m. after taking a train to New York City, sitting in a classroom with the street noise coming in the windows and being timed during the exam was working against her.

Questions

How might Jessie's learning disability be accommodated the next time she takes the test?

Does giving a person with a learning disability a specific accommodation provide an unfair advantage?

Possible Solution

For her third attempt at the licensing exam, Jessie arranges through the college's special needs department to take the test in a quiet room without being timed. Ultimately, she passes with high honours and is now a fully licensed occupational therapist. Without accommodations, testing situations often gauge a person's (or child's) level of disability rather than their level of knowledge.

About *Auditory Processing Disorder (APD)

Also known as central auditory processing disorder (CAPD), this is a complex problem whereby the brain doesn't always process the information it receives.

Something is adversely affecting the way the brain recognizes and interprets sounds, especially speech.

Often people with APD learn how to use visual clues to support their knowledge of the world; however it takes some accommodation and adaptation. Children are put in demanding situations in schools and universities, making it more difficult for them to learn to adapt. They should be given accommodations so they can develop their potential. Often it cannot be diagnosed until the child is 8 or 9, at which time a sense of defeat about engaging with the world may already be present.

Some strategies used to help with APD are:

1. Asking a child (or person) to repeat what he hears to be sure he got it right;
2. Use of earplugs or headsets to block out background noise;
3. Testing in quiet environments;
4. Recorded lectures;
5. Paying attention to where they sit in class, the closer to seeing visual clues from the teacher or blackboard the better;
6. Speech therapy; and
7. Special listening programs.

Our objective for writing this valuable business text is to provide real life examples of how barriers to inclusion for people with disabilities can be identified, removed and prevented in the future.

"It's well written, easy to read and understand. The situations are realistic and appropriate while the solutions suggested are practical and reasonable. I love how the authors weave their own personal experiences with barriers throughout the book while maintaining a sense of humour and staying solution-focused."

~ Gail Mores, Director, National and Provincial Programs, March of Dimes Canada

"The book is easy to read, not cluttered with jargon and the use of real-life examples tells a story. Asking questions at the end of each section encourages buy-in to the solution to removing barriers to persons with disabilities."

~ Karen Sinclair, President,
SNA Accessibility Consulting

"Well done. Real stories are always impactful and help us to fully understand why the AODA was created in the first place. I loved it - it made me more aware of what people with disabilities go through."

~ Edie Forsyth, Corporate Director,
Accessibility Experts Ltd.

"This book is great at highlighting the invisible nature of many disabilities and how their varying degrees of symptoms can impact someone in the workplace. I believe the included scenarios will be very beneficial to the reader as they draft their accessibility policy and take into consideration that they are addressing the needs of real people even if their conditions are unseen."

~ Wayne Connell, Founder & President, Invisible Disabilities Association



Trish Robichaud is a multiple award winning Disability Awareness Coach, Maximum Life and Business Coach, Author, Advocate and Motivational Speaker. She is a woman with a disability but definitely NOT a disabled woman. As a subject matter expert on disability, accessibility and disability legislation-related issues. Some of her recent projects have included providing content development for a number of training video for the Province of Ontario.