“HIRE THE HANDICAPPED!”
DISABILITY RIGHTS, ECONOMIC INTEGRATION AND WORKING LIVES IN TORONTO, ONTARIO, 1962-2005

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN CONFORMITY WITH THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
GRADUATE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

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Abstract

This dissertation, “‘Hire the Handicapped!’: Disability Rights, Economic Integration and Working Lives in Toronto, Ontario, 1962-2005,” argues that work significantly shaped the experience of disability during this period. Barriers to mainstream employment opportunities gave rise to multiple disability movements that challenged the social and economic framework which marginalized generations of people with disabilities. Using a critical analysis of disability in archival records, personal collections, government publications and a series of interviews, I demonstrate how demands for greater access among disabled people to paid employment stimulated the development of a new discourse of disability in Canada. Including disability as a variable in historical research reveals how family advocates helped people living in institutions move out into the community and rehabilitation professionals played an increasingly critical role in the lives of working-age adults with disabilities, civil rights activists crafted a new consumer-led vision of social and economic integration. Separated by different philosophies and bases of support, disability activists and allies found a common purpose in their pursuit of economic integration.
The focus on employment issues among increasingly influential disability activists during this period prompted responses from three key players in the Canadian labour market. Employers embraced the rhetoric and values of disability rights but operated according to a different set of business principles and social attitudes that inhibited the realization of equity and a ‘level playing field.’ Governments facilitated the development of a progressive discourse of disability and work, but ultimately recoiled from disability activism to suit emergent political priorities. Labour organizations similarly engaged disability activists, but did so cautiously, with union support largely contingent upon the satisfaction of traditional union business first and foremost. As disability activists and their allies railed against systematic discrimination, people with disabilities lived and worked in the community, confronting barriers and creating their own circles of awareness in the workplace. Just as multiple sites of disability activism found resolution in the sphere of labour, the redefinition of disability during this period reflected a shared project involving collective and individual action.
Acknowledgments

I wish to extend my appreciation to an array of people who helped make this project possible. Ian Radforth was an exceptional supervisor. He was a rigorous reader with a critical eye and knew exactly when to intervene to keep the project on the rails and when to step back to allow my thoughts and plans to develop under my own steam. I owe him my sincerest thanks for his support during the production of this dissertation as well as his guidance at each stage of my graduate career. Thanks also to Geoffrey Reaume, Dan Bender and Ravi Malhotra whose critical commentary and supportive feedback strengthened the final product. Special thanks to Laurel MacDowell for her support and encouragement throughout my graduate years.

I would like to thank all the interview participants for taking the time to share their work experiences, thoughts and beliefs with me. Your personal narratives, taken individually and as a whole, greatly deepened my understanding of the bigger picture and illuminated new avenues not necessarily stored and secured in the archives. I also appreciate the generosity of Rob McInnes, Gary Annable, and Joanne Smith for entrusting me with the temporary care of their personal collections of documents and multimedia. Thanks are also due to the many archivists and privacy officials at Library and Archives Canada, Archives of Ontario, Archives of Manitoba, and Toronto Archives for helping me navigate through the process of locating and accessing restricted records.

Thanks to my peers and colleagues in the History Department at the University of Toronto for sharing your thoughts on different aspects of my research as it developed. Thanks also to fellow participants and new friends at other universities in Canada, the
United States, Israel, France, England, Scotland, Germany, Norway and elsewhere who attended conference discussions, helped organize disability history sessions and provided enthusiastic criticism on various papers that fed back into the research and writing process.

Financial support for this project came from the Ontario Government through the Ontario Graduate Scholarship Program as well as an assortment of grants and fellowships from the School of Graduate Studies and the Department of History at the University of Toronto. I am also grateful for my work as a Street Outreach Worker at the City of Toronto’s Streets to Homes program for providing the means to attend several conferences and helping me to learn directly about many of the realities of economic liminality.

Thank you to my friends and family for commenting on aspects of my research and, most importantly, allowing me to bounce new ideas off each other. I owe an insurmountable debt of gratitude to my parents, Sheri and Wayne. You supported me when I left a promising career in law enforcement to pursue a graduate degree in History, and enthusiastically listened as I shared each detail about my progress. You created the base of support upon which this dissertation rests. Special thanks to my sister, Azure-Lee, whose trials and successes turned me onto the study of disability issues. You have enriched the lives of others around you and have become a constant teacher in mine.

Finally, I wish to thank my partner Andreas Vatiliotou. His love, patience and dedication were matched by his writing and editorial skills, which he gave generously in times of need at various stages of the project. You motivate me to think more critically and write more clearly. I dedicate this work to you.
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## Timeline of Key Events

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>ONTARIO</td>
<td>Ontario Blind Workmen's Compensation Act passed</td>
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<td>1935</td>
<td>TORONTO</td>
<td>Society for Crippled Civilians established (later known as Goodwill Industries)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>TORONTO</td>
<td>Society for Crippled Civilians purchased storefront on George St to set up sheltered workshop for people with disabilities to collect, restore and sell donated goods</td>
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<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>INTERNATIONAL</td>
<td>American Federation of the Physically Handicapped (AFPH) established as America's first national cross-disability political organization and begins lobbying for end to job discrimination and passage of a National Employ the Handicapped Week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ONTARIO</td>
<td>Canadian Hearing Society (CHS) founded</td>
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<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>INTERNATIONAL</td>
<td>US Vocational Rehab Act amendments enacted in context of wartime labour shortages in recognition of need to bring neglected sector of population into labour market</td>
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<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>INTERNATIONAL</td>
<td>National Employ the Handicapped Week declared in USA by Presidential Committee (Truman) to create awareness of employment opportunities for physically handicapped; Week came about largely through lobbying efforts of Paul Strachan of the AFPH (American Federation of the Physically Handicapped); slogan: &quot;Hire the Handicapped--It's Good Business&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FEDERAL</td>
<td>Canadian Paraplegic Association (CPA) established</td>
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<td>1947</td>
<td>INTERNATIONAL</td>
<td>first meeting of Presidential Committee on National Employ the Handicapped Week: publicity campaigns, coordinated by state and local committees, emphasize the competence of people with disabilities and use movie trailers, billboards, and radio and television ads to convince the public that its &quot;good business to hire the handicapped&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ONTARIO</td>
<td>section 24 of the Employment Standards Act sets out procedure for authorizing payment to employed people with disabilities below minimum wage</td>
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<td>1948</td>
<td>INTERNATIONAL</td>
<td>UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>FEDERAL</td>
<td>Blind Persons Act passed</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FEDERAL</td>
<td>landmark National Conference on Rehabilitation of the Physically Disabled occurred which resulted in federal coordinator for vocational rehab within Department of Labour and introduction of federal-provincial cost sharing arrangements for vocational rehab grants for all disabled people</td>
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<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>INTERNATIONAL</td>
<td>President's Committee on Employment of the Physically Handicapped becomes permanent committee and replaces President's Committee on National Employ the Handicapped Week</td>
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<td></td>
<td>FEDERAL</td>
<td>Abilities Inc. founded in US as innovative job training and placement program for people with disabilities</td>
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<td>FEDERAL</td>
<td>Coordination of Rehabilitation of the Handicapped passed as order in council to coordinate federal-</td>
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<td>Year</td>
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<td>1953</td>
<td>ONTARIO</td>
<td>United Handicapped Groups of Ontario (UHGO) established (incorporated in 1964) in St Catharines to promote integration of people with disabilities in social and recreational areas. Ontario Association for Community Living (OACL) established (later renamed Community Living Ontario or CLO).</td>
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<td>1953</td>
<td>TORONTO</td>
<td>Metropolitan Toronto created by provincial statute to join thirteen borough governments into a federated council.</td>
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<td>1955</td>
<td>INTERNATIONAL</td>
<td>International Labor Organization (ILO) passes Vocational Rehabilitation (Disabled) Recommendation No.99 (marks shift in UN from social welfare/social protection to labour market integration). &quot;Steps and Stairs&quot; campaign by Paralyzed Veterans Association (PVA) began, continuing into early 1960s to advocate for accessible buildings. In a 1955 interview with the PVA's Paraplegia News, Everest (co-creator of the Everest and Jennings collapsible wheelchair) says that major impetus for invention of the wheelchair was the difficulty trying to earn a living in the community.</td>
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<td>1955</td>
<td>FEDERAL</td>
<td>Blind Persons Act amended to reduce eligibility for Blind Allowances to 18 years old.</td>
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<td>1958</td>
<td>FEDERAL</td>
<td>Canadian Association for the Retarded Children (CARC) established by group of concerned parents.</td>
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<td>1959</td>
<td>FEDERAL</td>
<td>Disability Pension introduced by Department of Welfare for unemployable disabled.</td>
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<td>1960</td>
<td>FEDERAL</td>
<td>Canadian Bill of Rights passed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>INTERNATIONAL</td>
<td>&quot;term &quot;affirmative action&quot; first used by JFK in executive order directing federal contractors to take affirmative action to ensure job applicants aren't treated differently on basis of race, creed, colour or national origin; term repeated by Lyndon Johnson and caught on as phrase of choice. Vocational Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons Act (VRDP) enacted under responsibility of Department of Labour, replacing Coordination agreements (orders-in-council for vocational rehab).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>INTERNATIONAL</td>
<td>Scope of US National Employ the Handicapped Week expanded to include all people with disabilities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>INTERNATIONAL</td>
<td>ILO Convention Concerning Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>INTERNATIONAL</td>
<td>Harold Russell appointed chairman of President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped (PCEH).</td>
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| 1965 | **FEDERAL**<br>-National Employment Service assimilated into Department of Labour  
**PROVINCIAL**<br>-University of Manitoba initiates pilot project for blind computer programmers  
**TORONTO**<br>-Goodwill acquires Rehabilitation Counsellor from Ontario government’s Rehabilitation Department and begins shifting focus to providing vocational rehab and training for integration with rest of workforce |
| 1966 | **FEDERAL**<br>-Department of Manpower and Immigration created  
-Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) introduced  
-Vocational Rehabilitation Services Act (VRSA) passed  
-Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW) established as national advocacy organization promoting rehabilitation and work reintegration for disabled Canadians; original founding agencies included Goodwill Industries, Jewish Vocational Services (JVS) Toronto, Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), and Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)  
**ONTARIO**<br>-Chairman of Minimum Wage Division, Ministry of Labour declared that sheltered workshops affiliated with Ontario Association for the Mentally Retarded were not considered employers as concerns application of Minimum Wage Act and Hours of Work and Vacations with Pay Act |
| 1967 | **FEDERAL**<br>-Department of Manpower and Immigration assumes responsibility for administering Vocational Rehabilitation for Disabled Persons (VRDP) |
| 1968 | **FEDERAL**<br>-Canadian Association for Retarded Children (CARC) changed named to Canadian Association for the Mentally Retarded (CAMR)  
**TORONTO**<br>-Rochdale College opens |
| 1969 | **INTERNATIONAL**<br>-Independent Living Movement takes off in the United States, quickly spreading to Canada  
**TORONTO**<br>-Injured Workers' Consultants (IWC) formed in Toronto |
| 1970 | **INTERNATIONAL**<br>-Disabled in Action organization founded in New York City; begin by demonstrating against unfair hiring practices and using litigation for disability rights  
**FEDERAL**<br>-federal Local Initiatives Program (LIP) first introduced  
-Canadian Association of Rehabilitation Personnel (CARP) established to regulate and promote professional accreditation of rehab workers  
-Commission on Emotional and Learning Disorders (CELDIC) released report entitled "One Million Children" which advocated integration of children normally educated in segregated schools  
-Canada Pension Plan for the Disabled (CPP-D) launched  
**ONTARIO**<br>-Ontario Federation for the Physically Handicapped (OFPH) established  
**TORONTO**<br>-City Council endorses policy to ramp thousands of sidewalks at intersections and crosswalks across the city; directs Public Works Department to implement policy |
| 1971 | **INTERNATIONAL**<br>-UN Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons  
-US Fair Labor Standard Act of 1938 is amended to bring people with disabilities other than blindness into the sheltered workshop system. This measure leads to the establishment, in coming years, of an
enormous sheltered workshop system for people with cognitive and developmental disabilities.

**FEDERAL**
- *Griggs v Duke Power* Supreme Court case broadened the legal concept of discrimination in employment
- Local Employment Assistance Program (LEAP) introduced
- Unemployment Insurance sickness benefit introduced

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<th>1972</th>
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<td></td>
<td>- first Centre for Independent Living (CIL) established at University of California Berkeley</td>
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<td><strong>FEDERAL</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Outreach program introduced by Employment and Immigration Canada to increase employability and access to employment for target groups</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Canadian Rehabilitation Council for the Disabled (CRCD) receives federal funding to organize an annual National Conference of Disabled Persons</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>TORONTO</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- group of citizens (professionals, community volunteers, and family) in Toronto come together out of mutual concern for &quot;plight of the disabled and elderly&quot; and &quot;angry and appalled&quot; by apathy shown toward this group; in response, mayoral candidate David Crombie pledges to act on their recommendations if elected</td>
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<td>- Mayor's Task Force on Disabled and Elderly initiated by Toronto Mayor Crombie</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- University of Toronto Accessibility Study carried out by Occupational Therapy students which covered all buildings on campus; report forwarded to Plant Internal Affairs, Plant Operations Division for implementation</td>
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<th>1973</th>
<th><strong>INTERNATIONAL</strong></th>
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<td></td>
<td>- US Rehabilitation Act passes with Section 504 non-discrimination provisions for people with disabilities</td>
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<td>- first self-advocacy conference was held in Victoria, British Columbia, titled &quot;First Convention for the Mentally Handicapped in North America&quot;</td>
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<td>- E.I. du Pont de Nemours and Co (&quot;du Pont&quot;) study on disabled workers released to wide readership</td>
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<td><strong>FEDERAL</strong></td>
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<td>- Federal government declares commitment to involving people with disabilities in policy discussions; it does this when it creates the Access Board, which is a federal agency to advise government on matters of accessibility (majority of members must have disability)</td>
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<td>- CRCD initiate national awareness campaign focused on architectural barriers and accessibility issues</td>
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<td>- group of self-advocates attend CRCD's National Conference of Disabled Persons to demand 50% representation of disabled people on its Executive Council but are rejected; subsequently form a group that coalesces into national coalition</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- responsibility for VRDP shifted to Department of Health and Welfare from Department of Manpower in order to integrate services with rehabilitation division of CAP</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>ONTARIO</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The World of One In Seven disability employment service established in Ontario by Manpower funding agreement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- group that would become United Handicapped Groups of Ontario (UHGO) begins transition from recreational activities to consumer advocacy</td>
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<td>- provincial government establishes interministerial Task Force on Employability of the Handicapped</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- PATH employment service for disabled launched in Hamilton with LIP financing, then Outreach funding from Canada Employment and Immigration Commission</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>TORONTO</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- City of Toronto Mayor's Task Force on the Disabled and Elderly releases report</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Metropolitan Toronto social services and housing committee submits report to Toronto Transit Commission entitled &quot;Pilot project for transportation on the physically handicapped&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<th>1974</th>
<th><strong>INTERNATIONAL</strong></th>
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<td></td>
<td>- People First, the nation's first and largest self-advocacy organization founded by the five who attended the 1973 conference in BC</td>
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<td>- Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act provides for affirmative action regulations to promote the hiring of disabled and veterans of the Vietnam War</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td><strong>FEDERAL</strong>&lt;br&gt;- Department of Health and Welfare requested Canadian Chamber of Commerce (CCC) to assist in developing report to determine employers' attitudes toward hiring of the handicapped&lt;br&gt;- CRCD organized Steering Committee of the Physically Disabled made up entirely of people with disabilities as outcome of 1973 conference&lt;br&gt;<strong>ONTARIO</strong>&lt;br&gt;- film &quot;The World of One in Seven&quot; produced by organization of the same name in Kingston&lt;br&gt;- revised Ontario Building Code passed with new standards on accessibility for disabled&lt;br&gt;- first affirmative action mandate issued&lt;br&gt;- Ontario Vocational Rehabilitation Services Act provided for subsidy to sheltered workshops of up to 80%, leading to major increase in funding of workshops over next 5 years (678%)&lt;br&gt;- Ontario passes Developmental Services Act, funding many more community-based services; takes jurisdiction of people with developmental disabilities away from <em>Mental Health Act</em> which governs people with mental health issues in psychiatric institutions&lt;br&gt;<strong>TORONTO</strong>&lt;br&gt;- Union of Injured Workers (UIW) formed in Toronto&lt;br&gt;- Report of the Mayor's Task Force on Disabled and Elderly endorsed and adopted in principle by City of Toronto and Metro Council as statement of policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td><strong>INTERNATIONAL</strong>&lt;br&gt;- Transbus group sues the city of Philadelphia to make public buses wheelchair accessible. The group is made up several advocacy organizations&lt;br&gt;<strong>FEDERAL</strong>&lt;br&gt;- Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped (COPOH) established as a leading national body of disability rights activists&lt;br&gt;- Employability of the Handicapped Seminar held in Toronto organized by Canadian Chamber of Commerce and CCRW&lt;br&gt;- Department of Health and Welfare and Ontario Government co-sponsored production of film &quot;A Worker Like Any Other&quot; re employability of handicapped for above conference and for general distribution&lt;br&gt;- Canada Works introduced, replacing LIP program&lt;br&gt;- Blind Persons' Rights Act passed</td>
</tr>
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</table>
- Public Service Commission and Department Manpower and Immigration undertake joint study re employment of people with disabilities (report released in 1978)
- CNIB report released "Vision Canada: unmet needs of blind Canadians"

**ONTARIO**
- Physically Handicapped Independent Advancement Community Services (PHIACS) established in Toronto as municipal and provincial lobby group
- interministerial study group established to consider ways to coordinate service for the disabled

**PROVINCIAL**
- New Brunswick is first province to enact legislative reform to protect people with physical disabilities from discrimination
- Ontario Government sponsors pilot project to provide parallel transportation services in 5 municipalities across the province

**TORONTO**
- Metropolitan Toronto appoints Coordinator of Disabled and Elderly to follow through on recommendations of the Task Force report
- Hosts fifth Paralympic Games (then known as International Games For the Disabled) at Woodbine Racetrack in Etobicoke; Games seem to invigorate action to make Toronto more accessible
- Scarborough Recreation Club for Disabled Adults formed by Beryl Potter; serves in conjunction with Scarborough Action activism
- Etobicoke is first Canadian municipality to pass resolution prohibiting job discrimination against disabled
- Society for Cripple Civilians joins International Goodwill Foundation and changes name to Goodwill Industries of Toronto; mandate evolves to include all employment-disadvantaged rather than specific focus on people with disabilities
- Rochdale Community Forum held to determine future use of the building; several disability groups submit proposals

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<th>1977</th>
<th><strong>INTERNATIONAL</strong></th>
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<td>- American disability rights advocates successfully protest in 10 cities for regulations that would implement section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act 1973</td>
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<td>- US Senator Jennings Randolph declares 1977 as the &quot;year of the handicapped&quot; at occasion of first White House Conference on Handicapped Individuals (2000+ participants) where President Carter gave opening address</td>
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**FEDERAL**
- Canadian Human Rights Act passed with clause prohibiting discrimination of physically handicapped in employment
  - federal Social Services Act passed
- Canada Employment and Immigration Advisory Council (CEIAC) established

**ONTARIO**
- Ontario Human Rights Review Committee conducts investigation and holds public hearings into Ontario Human Rights Commission reform (report released in 1979)
- Ontario Government holds conference of 500+ senior personnel from twenty-three ministries to discuss issue of employment of disadvantaged persons in Ontario Public Service (OPS)
- Council for Equal Employment of the Disadvantaged (CEED) established to increase employment of people with disabilities in OPS; organization of fifty community agencies representing people with disabilities with aim to develop relationship between these agencies and OPS

**PROVINCIAL**
- British Columbia Supreme Court decides on a general prohibition against discrimination 'without reasonable cause' when physically-disabled plaintiff (Jefferson) wins case against BC Ferries (first provincial court to recognize this)

**ONTARIO**
- second affirmative action mandate issued

**TORONTO**
- first issue of Task Force on Disabled and Elderly's *Access* reports that 1000 sidewalks have been made accessible with plans for a further 124 ramps by end of year
Wheel Trans commences operation with start-up registration of 2000 users; operates 6:30am-6:30pm Monday to Friday on subscription and non-subscription basis; priority trips to work, school, and doctor.

Metro Toronto Human Resources Development Committee strikes a Working Committee of Mayor's Task Force on Disabled and Elderly to "inquire into and make recommendations regarding the specific problems of employment of disabled people in the Civic Service."

### 1978

**INTERNATIONAL**
- Sit-ins held in Denver re inaccessibility of public transit system
- Frank Bowe of ACCD publishes *Handicapping America*; considered the definitive text for the disability rights movement that provides comprehensive review of the policies and attitudes denying equal citizenship to people with disabilities

**FEDERAL**
- Inaugural COPOH conference on Employment Conference held in Winnipeg
- Joint Public Service Commission and Department of Manpower joint report released: *Government plans for increasing opportunities for employment of the physically and mentally handicapped in the federal public service*
- BOOST receives Canada Works grant for project Developing Alternative Service Models (DASM)
- Department of Health and Welfare and CRCD embark on national advertising campaign aimed at sensitizing public to abilities and employability of handicapped; slogan "Look At What We Can Do"
- Association of Creative Dyslexic Adults (ACDA) established in Ottawa and became promoting job/small business creation program called CAPRICE (Cooperating Adroit People with Rare Ideas and Creative Enterprises) as means to reduce unemployment of people with learning disabilities; program is in response to 1970 CELDIC report in order to emphasize that the "one million children" are now largely unemployed adults

**ONTARIO**
- Progressive Conservative Premier Bill Davis' Speech from Throne proclaims intention to promote employment of handicapped
- Ontario Handicapped Employment Program (HEP) established with coordinator Barbara Earle transferred from existing position as provincial Women's Advisor
- United Handicapped Groups of Ontario (UHGO) officially established
- Office of the Provincial Coordinator for Rehabilitation Services established as result of interministerial study group recommendations
- OACPH establishes its Employment/Rehabilitation Committee
- Income Maintenance Group for the Handicapped Co-Ordinating Group (IMHCG) established
- Bill 181: Disabled Persons Employment Act introduced to provide registry of employable people with disabilities and 3% employment quotas; dies on the table
- Growing dissatisfaction with 1974 Ontario Building Code led to establishment of study group to improve accessibility standards for people with disabilities particularly in workplaces, apartments, but also in services

**TORONTO**
- Technical Aids and Systems for the Handicapped Inc. (TASH) established by CRCD and National Research Council as major non-profit provider of technical aids for disabled people in Canada
- Working Committee of Mayor's Task Force on Disabled and Elderly submits report to Exec Committee re employment people with disabilities in civic service; Executive Committee forwards report to Human Resources Development Committee who ordered further study on links between policies and priority placement of people with disabilities in civic service

### 1979

**INTERNATIONAL**
- October 20 designated as Disabled Citizens Civil Rights Day in the United States; also celebrated by disability activists in Canada

**FEDERAL**
- Youth Job Corps Project established with funding from Secretary of State and advisory relationships with various rehab agencies
- Bureau on Rehabilitation established by new Department of Health and Welfare
- Canadian Union of Blind and Sighted Merchants (CUBSM) representing blind workers in CNIB
Caterplan and sheltered workshops go on strike for better wages and working conditions; spawns sympathy pickets at other CNIB locations across Canada. - Association of Creative Dyslexic Adults (ACDA) renamed Association for Creating Employers (ACE) in order to reflect wider catchment of employment-disadvantaged population. - Prime Minister Joe Clark announces commitment to establish new Parliamentary Committee to investigate disabled and employment “for the 80s”

**ONTARIO**
- Coalition for Human Rights for the Handicapped established in Ontario in opposition separate legislation in Bill 188 - Handicapped Persons’ Rights Act
- Bill 188 dies shortly thereafter due to overwhelming opposition and with new commitment to amend the Ontario Human Rights Code to include people with disabilities
- UHGO in cooperation with World of One in Seven holds annual conference focusing on theme of “employment of the physically disabled”
- Ontario Manpower Commission established to oversee manpower activities and programs
- The World of One in Seven disbanded as Outreach funding expires
- Ontario Ministry of Transportation and Communications announces official policy to provide transportation for physically disabled

**TORONTO**
- City Council approves employment policy to promote hiring of people with disabilities and placement of city workers who become disabled through accident or illness
- Rochdale College reopens as a senior’s residence

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<tr>
<th>1980</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CRCD hosts World Congress of Rehabilitation International in Winnipeg</td>
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<td></td>
<td>World Coalition of Disabled Persons (later renamed Disabled Peoples’ International) steering committee established by delegates to World Congress of Rehab International in Winnipeg</td>
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<td><strong>FEDERAL</strong></td>
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<td>Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau fulfills former Prime Minister Joe Clark's commitment to establish Special Committee on the Disabled and the Handicapped to investigate ways to improve the social and economic integration of disabled people</td>
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<td>Canadian Employment and Immigration Commission launches affirmative action pilot project</td>
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<td>BOOST releases report &quot;Selfhelp and government commitment: a call to action&quot; as the result of its DASM grant from Canada Works</td>
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<td>Terry Fox embarks on tour Marathon of Hope</td>
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<td>Canada Works program terminated</td>
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<td>CRCD holds pre-World Congress seminar in Toronto with theme &quot;Employment of the Handicapped: the goal of integration and safety in the workplace&quot;</td>
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<td>Advocacy Resource Centre for the Handicapped (ARCH) established in Toronto by coalition of disability rights groups and service agencies</td>
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<td>COPOH holds second conference entitled &quot;Parameters of Rehabilitation&quot; in which sparked the development of the independent living movement in Canada</td>
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<td>Ontario Conservative government introduces bill to amend the OHRC to include people with disabilities following failed Bill 188</td>
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<td>HEP publishes report on Affirmative Action project in Hamilton, which acts as a standard model for the implementation of affirmative action in Ontario; results in issuance of third affirmative action mandate</td>
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<td><strong>TORONTO</strong></td>
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<td>Metro Toronto declares itself an “equal employment opportunity employer”</td>
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<td>Ontario Action Awareness established as subcommittee of Scarborough Action for the International Year for Disabled Persons</td>
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<th>1981</th>
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<td>International Year for Disabled Persons</td>
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</table>
- Disabled Peoples' International (DPI) establishes headquarters in Winnipeg

**FEDERAL**
- *Obstacles* report released by Special Committee on the Disabled and the Handicapped following extensive consultation with Canadians with disabilities across Canada
- Terry Fox dies in Thunder Bay during Marathon of Hope
- Treasury Board Canada releases first report of *Participation of the handicapped in the federal public service*
  - Canadian Human Rights Commission publishes Administration Criteria on physical handicap and employment that establishes for first time standard criteria Canadian employers must adhere to in selection and employment of people with physical disabilities
- *The Disability Myth, Part I: Segregation* has its first public screening at Sheraton Centre in Toronto
- *Work for Tomorrow: Employment opportunities for the 80s* report released by Parliamentary Task Force

**ONTARIO**
- Ontario Federation of Labour policy paper *Statement on Employment of the Disabled* released at convention
- UHGO disbanded and reorganized as People United for Self-Help (PUSH)
- Ontario Welfare Council holds "Conference on Employment and Disabled People" in Toronto
- amended Ontario Human Rights Code comes into force, prohibiting discrimination against people with disabilities in employment

**TORONTO**
- Metro established a ‘Disabled Program’ pilot project: fund employee rehab program, ‘pro-active hiring of disabled persons’, providing work experience internships to people with disabilities, recruiting disabled students for summer employment
- City of Toronto holds first annual Equal Opportunity Week
- Scarborough hosts Canadian Games for the Disabled with 500 participants at Variety Village Sport Training and Fitness Centre
- Mayor’s Task Force on Disabled and Elderly held employment conference entitled *Overcoming Obstacles*

1982

**INTERNATIONAL**
- United Nations adopts World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons
- US National Council on Independent Living is formed

**FEDERAL**
- *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* entrenched in the new Canadian constitution; disability rights included in section 15 as a protected group
- *Employ Ability* report published by the Canadian Human Rights Commission
- *The Disability Myth, Part I: Segregation* airs on CTV Television
- Low Visions Association of Ontario (LVAO) established
- CCRW holds National Symposium on Vocational Services and Employment Programs for the Disabled to consider new directions for 1980s

**ONTARIO**
- amended Ontario Human Rights Code comes into force with new protections against discrimination for people with disabilities
- Secretariat for Disabled Persons (SDP) replaces provincial Office of Coordinator of Rehabilitation Services

1983

**INTERNATIONAL**
- *ILO Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention No.159 and Recommendation 168* introduced
- beginning of UN Decade of Disabled Persons
- ADAPT is established and uses civil disobedience to obtain accessible public transportation and access to public and private buildings
- World Institute on Disability founded in Oakland, CA by American disability activists Ed Roberts, Judy Heumann, and Joan Leon
- *Job Accommodation Network (JAN)* is founded by the President's Committee on Employment of the
Handicapped to provide information to businesses with disabled employees

**FEDERAL**
- Office of the Minister of State on the Status of Disabled Persons: established in 1983 on the recommendation of *Obstacles* report; Secretary of State thus becomes department responsible for the status of disabled persons
- Disabled Persons Employment Directorate established by Employment and Immigration Commission as per *Obstacles* recommendations
- Federal Affirmative Action Program introduced alongside Special Measures Programs designed to increase recruitment of designated groups
- Royal Commission on Equality in Employment struck
- COPOH conference held on Income Security and Employment

**ONTARIO**
- Ontario Task Force on Employers and Disabled Persons submits final report *Linking for Employment*

**TORONTO**
- Metro Toronto establishes Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Division as successor to Disabled Program pilot program
- Toronto Transit Commission adopts EEO policy recommendations to improve accessibility and employment of people with disabilities
- Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 79 distributes pamphlet declares it is focused on ensuring people with disabilities are included in bargaining units and get a “fairer deal” in municipal public sector employment

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<th>1984</th>
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<td>“Abella report” released: Royal Commission on Equality in Employment recommends enactment of federal EEA</td>
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<th>1985</th>
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<td>Disabled Persons Secretariat established within Secretary of State: mandate broadened beyond the Office of the Minister of State on the Status of Disabled Persons to monitor developments and encourage change</td>
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<td>Disabled Persons Participation Program (DPPP) established by Disabled Persons Secretariat to disseminate funding to disability groups</td>
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<td>Special Committee on the Disabled and Handicapped becomes a Sub-Committee of Parliament</td>
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<td>Rick Hansen sets out on Man in Motion World Tour</td>
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<td>Prime Minister Brian Mulroney declares Canada’s commitment to initiating activities for the UN Decade of Disabled Persons</td>
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<td>Disabled Women’s Network (DAWN) established</td>
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<td>Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres (CAILC) established</td>
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<td>Canada Jobs Strategy (CJS) introduced</td>
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<td>Canadian Association for the Mentally Retarded (CAMR) changes name to Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL)</td>
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**ONTARIO**
- Coalition on Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities (CEEPD) established
- OFL passes resolution calling on provincial legislation to provide for equity programs and encouraging affiliates to negotiate employment equity, job modification and rehabilitation programs for injured workers
- Minister Responsible for Disabled Persons (MRDP) appointed
- Advisory Council on Disability Issues (OACDI) transferred to Minister without Portfolio responsible for Citizenship and Culture
- Office for Disabled Persons (ODP) established, replacing SDP

**TORONTO**
- Metro Toronto publishes *First Report on Equal Employment Opportunity* showing that people with
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<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Employment Opportunities for Disabled Americans Act is passed, allowing recipients of Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance to retain benefits, particularly medical coverage, even after they obtain work. The act is intended to remove the disincentives that keep disabled people unemployed</td>
<td>Bill C-62 passes: federal Employment Equity Act comes into force under administration of the Department of Employment and Immigration</td>
<td>Equality Rights Statute Law Amendment Act passed in Ontario: removed flaw in 1982 OHRA amendment that prevented people with disabilities from filing a complaint simply on the basis on an inaccessible place</td>
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<td>Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1986 define supported employment as a &quot;legitimate rehabilitation outcome.&quot;</td>
<td>Federal Contractors Program for Employment equity established governing contracts with the federal public sector for contracts $200,000+ or involving 100+ employees</td>
<td>introduction of Bill 7 to amend ESA that repealed minimum wage exemptions for disabled workers</td>
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<td>-Employers’ Forum on Disability established in UK</td>
<td>-first Statistics Canada’s Health and Activity Limitation Survey (HALS) released; collecting detailed data on disability and workforce participation</td>
<td>-Ontario Health and Safety Act and Employment Standards Act amendments extend legal protection to people with disabilities in sheltered workshops or rehab settings re pay equity</td>
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<td>-Coalition for Persons with Disabilities established to serve needs of people with disabilities in Greater Toronto Area</td>
<td>-Disabled Persons Secretariat releases Challenges report</td>
<td>-functions of Ontario Regional Advisory Committee for the Disabled absorbed by the regional component of Canada Employment and Immigration Advisory Council (CEIAC)</td>
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<td>1987</td>
<td>-Employers' Forum on Disability established in UK</td>
<td>-Management Board conducts &quot;I Count&quot; census of OPS on basis of voluntary disclosure to generate stats about people with disabilities and other minorities</td>
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<td>UN Human Settlements Conference held in Vancouver, reinforcing positive action on eliminating discriminatory practices against people with disabilities in Canada and abroad</td>
<td>-Rick Hansen completes Man in Motion World Tour</td>
<td>-Ontario declares November 3-9, 1986 as Rick Hansen Man in Motion Week</td>
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<td>-Sub-Committee of Parliament on the Disabled and Handicapped becomes the Standing Committee on Human Rights and the Status of Disabled Persons</td>
<td>-DisAbled Women's Network (DAWN) founded in Winnipeg</td>
<td>-Community Action Fund (CAF) established to fund community-based projects that promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities</td>
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<td>-Canadian Disability Rights Council (CDRC) established</td>
<td>-CPP-D reforms introduced</td>
<td>-Ontario Employment Equity Program expanded beyond just women to include people with disabilities and other minority groups</td>
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<td>-Canadian Mental Health Association establishes Consumer Participation Task Group (CPTG) to structure consumer input into the mental health system</td>
<td>-Canadian Disability Rights Council (CDRC) established</td>
<td>-Coalition on Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities (CEEPD) changes name to Disabled Persons for Employment Equity (DPEE)</td>
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<td>1987</td>
<td>-Rick Hansen completes Man in Motion World Tour</td>
<td>-Employment Equity Program expanded beyond just women to include people with disabilities and other minority groups</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td>INTERNATIONAL</td>
<td>-US National Employ the Handicapped Week becomes National Employ the Handicapped Month</td>
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<td>FEDERAL</td>
<td>-inaugural National Access Awareness Week supported by DPPP (continuation of Ontario's Man in Motion Week)</td>
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<td>-“The Special Initiative” is announced to support the development of Independent Living in Canada—funding from Department of Health and Welfare and the Secretary of State</td>
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<td>-Employment and Immigration Commission subsidizes extension of US-based Job Accommodation Network (JAN) services to Canada</td>
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<td>-ARCH holds Poverty and Disability conference which brought together various disability rights organizations including COPOH and National Anti-Poverty Organization, eventually leading to creation of Steering Committee for National Study Group on Employment and Disability</td>
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<td>ONTARIO</td>
<td>-ODP sponsors Ontario Action Awareness (Beryl Potter) to run awareness tour across province</td>
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<td>TORONTO</td>
<td>-Toronto Independent Living Advisory Committee (TILAC) established</td>
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<td>1989</td>
<td>INTERNATIONAL</td>
<td>-original Americans with Disabilities Act legislation introduced</td>
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<td>FEDERAL</td>
<td>-Disabled Persons Secretariat releases Court Challenges Program report</td>
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<td>-Labour Force Development Strategy announced (LFDS)</td>
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<td>-COPOH Employment Committee established</td>
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<td>-COPOH conference on Equalization of Opportunities During the Decade of Disabled People</td>
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<td>-Canadian Injured Workers Alliance (CIWA) established as national network of injured workers' groups</td>
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<td>-Attitudes Toward Civil Liberties and the Canadian Charter of Rights Project survey report released (began collecting data in 1987)</td>
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<td>-Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability (ALACD) established</td>
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<td>-merger of two standing committees creates: Standing Committee on Human Rights and the Status of Disabled Persons</td>
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<td>ONTARIO</td>
<td>-Ontario Human Rights Commission released Guidelines on Assessing Accommodation Requirements for Persons with Disabilities which set standards for interpretation of ‘undue hardship’</td>
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<td>TORONTO</td>
<td>-Metro Toronto publishes Second Report on Equal Employment Opportunity showing developments since First Report and recommendations at further increasing employment of designated groups</td>
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<td>-Metro adopted ‘Strategy for the 90s’ to establish numerical goals to increase representation of designated groups in its workforce</td>
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<td>-Metro established Employment Equity Implementation Task Force composed of city councillors, senior managers, union delegates, and Ontario HEP rep</td>
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<td>-Toronto Transit Commission takes formally takes control of Wheel Trans, ending subcontracting</td>
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| 1990 | -Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) signed by President George H.W. Bush which mandates that local, state, and federal governments and programs be accessible, that businesses with more than 15 employees make "reasonable accommodations" for disabled workers, that public accommodations such as restaurants and stores make "reasonable modifications" to ensure access for disabled members of the public  
- PCEH changes name to President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (PCEPD); Justin Dart replaces Harold Russell as Chair of the committee  
- ADAPT changes its focus to advocating for personal assistance services and changes its name to American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today | -Committee on Human Rights and Status of Disabled Persons releases report entitled *A Consensus for Action: the economic integration of disabled persons*  
-National Consumer Study Group on Employment and Disability established by EIC for joint study by COPOH-NAPO  
-National Employment Equity Network (NEEN) established to push for revisions to federal employment equity legislation  
-CIWA held inaugural National Conference on Re-Employment of Injured workers in Toronto | -HEP renamed Ontario Centre for Disability and Work (CDW)  
-Office for Disabled Persons (ODP) and Advisory Council on Disabled Persons comes under authority of Ministry of Community and Social Services  
-report of the Ministry of Community and Social Services Social Assistance Review Committee released, leading to six percent increase in payments, higher shelter benefits, improved employment support programs, elimination of factors determined to serve as disincentives to work  
-Bill 172, Ontario’s Employment Equity Act introduced to Cabinet by New Democratic Party Premier Bob Rae for first reading | -Metro Toronto begins collecting self-identified employment equity survey data on its employees; determines that people with disabilities are an under-represented group  
-CILT initiates *Access Connections* program in partnership with Metro Toronto and funding from federal Disabled Persons Unit, Secretary of State, and Employment and Immigration Commission; component programs include: Employment Connections, Media Connections, and The Disability Network  
-The Disability Network begins broadcasting Mar 17, 1990 (part of Access Connections project) |
| 1991 | -Jerry’s Orphans group stages its first annual picket of the Jerry Lewis Muscular Dystrophy Association Telethon  
**INTERNATIONAL** | -National Strategy for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities (NSIPD) initiated in response to *A Consensus for Action* report (apparently a direct result of Rick Hansen’s high profile and his request to Mulroney for a five-year strategy)  
-second (and last) HALS survey conducted by Statistics Canada  
-Training Coordinating Group for Persons with Disabilities (TCGPD) established to purchase training for people with disabilities but suffers serious initial underfunding  
-COPOH submits report *Willing to Work ... Together* to Employment and Immigration Commission  
-Canadian Labour Force Development Board (CLFDB) established following consultations managed by Canadian Labour Market Productivity Centre (CLMPC)  
- Consumer Participation Task Group (CPTG) renamed National Consumer Advisory Council (NCAC) to reflect expanded provincial membership base  
-People First of Canada (PFC) holds inaugural convention | -Advisory Council on Disabled Persons (formerly OACP) changed name to Advisory Council on |
<table>
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<th>Years</th>
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| 1992  | **INTERNATIONAL**<br>- conclusion of UN Decade of Disabled Persons<br>**FEDERAL**<br>- Disabled Persons Secretariat releases *Paying Too Dearly* report<br>- Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians (AEB) established<br>- Federal Government introduced Bill C-78 *An Act to amend certain acts with respect to persons with disabilities*— Omnibus legislation which amended six separate statutes concerning accessibility issues for people with disabilities<br>- CLFDB and EIC establish Canadian Committee on Employment and Disabilities (CCED; formerly "Willing to Work... Together Steering Committee") to address EIC barrier reduction; it collapses when COPOH suspended participation due to disagreements over structural changes in program that minimized consumer input; COPOH proposes establishment of Canadian Consumer Committee on Employment and Disability (CCCED)<br>- Workers with Disabilities Fund established under auspices of NSIPD<br>- CCRW conference entitled *Partnerships for Equity: access to education and employment for people with disabilities* held in Toronto in conjunction with annual NAAW and 3rd annual People in Motion exhibit at Exhibition Place<br>- CTWA held second national conference "Voice of Injured Workers"
| 1993  | **INTERNATIONAL**<br>- UN Declaration on the International Day of Disabled Persons (3 December)<br>- UN adopts Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities<br>- Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (1993-2002)<br>**FEDERAL**<br>- Federal Progressive Conservatives launch attack ads during Fall election focus on Liberal Leader Jean Chretien's partial facial paralysis (caused by Bell's Palsy), creating a distinct connection between physical disability and incompetence; unleashes storm of condemnation from disability activists against Progressive Conservative Prime Minister Kim Campbell; controversy helps Chretien in the polls<br>- National Aboriginal Network on Disability (NAND) gets grant to study employment of Aboriginals with disabilities<br>- position of Minister Responsible for the Status of Disabled Persons is terminated
| 1994  | **INTERNATIONAL**<br>- UN Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities<br>**FEDERAL**<br>- Federal government initiates Social Policy Review to restructure government programming: Disabled Persons Secretariat downgraded to a unit within the Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) and renamed Office of Disability Issues (ODI); ODI now responsible for administering DPPP, Partnership Fund, Ability Program, and Workers with Disabilities Fund alongside Disabled Persons Unit (DPU)
- Special Measures Initiatives Program (SMIP) replaces Special Measures Program with new emphasis on "innovation and flexibility"
- Federal/provincial report *Mainstream 92: review of fiscal arrangements affecting persons with disabilities*
- COPOH changes name to Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD) to reflect updated terminology and greater sense of national unity
- CDRC collapses

**ONTARIO**
- Ontario Employment Equity Act comes into force
- Ontarians with Disabilities Act Committee (ODAC) formed to push for enactment of effective disability rights legislation; proposes Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA)
- Office for Disability Issues abolished
- PUSH Ontario files for bankruptcy and goes into serious decline as an organization

**TORONTO**
- Access Place established in downtown Toronto as joint project of Canadian Abilities Foundation, CAILC, Neil Squire Foundation, Barrier Free Design Centre

**1995**

**INTERNATIONAL**
- American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) founded in Washington as "largest national non-profit cross-disability organization" in America

**FEDERAL**
- Canadian Labour Force Development Board (CLFDB) restructured and renamed Canadian Labour and Business Centre (CLBC)
- Canadian Centre on Disability Studies (CCDS) established as consumer-directed research institute with endowment funding from HRDC
- Committee on Human Rights and Status of Disabled Persons releases report entitled *The grand design: achieving the 'open house' vision*

**ONTARIO**
- Progressive Conservative Premier Mike Harris repeal Ontario Employment Equity Act as part of his "Common Sense Revolution" electoral platform
- Progressive Conservative government introduces Equal Opportunity Plan
- PUSH Northwest announces it will continue to operate despite dissolution of PUSH Ontario
- OPS Advisory Committee on Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities renamed OPS Advisory Group on Equal Opportunity for Persons with Disabilities

**1996**

**FEDERAL**
- HRDC Task Force on Disability Issues submits report *Equal Citizenship for Canadians With a Disability: The Will to Act* justifying why disability should remain a federal issue rather than be downgraded to provinces and municipalities
- NSPID ends with expiration of federal funding to many disability projects that are not renewed
- DPPP eliminated
- Disability activists declare that momentum on disability issues visibly beginning to decline
- Ottawa passes amended federal Employment Equity Act
- Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) replaces CAP
- Assistive Devices Programme Office (ADPO) established by Industry Canada to provide reference point for public and private sector consumers and employers re work-related assistive technology

**ONTARIO**
- Ontario Centre for Disability and Work (CDW) closed and remaining three staff dispersed throughout Ontario Government
- Disability Issues Group (DIG) established within Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Rec
- Advisory Council on Disability Issues (OACDI) abolished

**1997**

**FEDERAL**
- VRDP replaced with Employability Assistance for Persons with Disabilities Act (EAPD) following recommendations of the Task Force on Disability Issues
- Federal budget consolidates funding to thirty national disability organizations and 120 projects designed
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<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>FEDERAL</td>
<td>- federal funding to disability organizations begins to see severe cutbacks&lt;br&gt;- Social Development Partnerships established in federal budget to prioritize funding to projects that address advocacy, capacity-building, and citizenship rights&lt;br&gt;- joint report of federal, provincial and territorial ministers of social services release <em>In Union: a Canadian approach to disability issues</em> which describes long-term policy directions for promoting full participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of Canadian society&lt;br&gt;- NCAC becomes all-consumer organization&lt;br&gt;- TORONTO - The Disability Network renamed <em>Moving On</em> and continues national broadcast program relating current affairs affecting the disability community in Canada</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>INTERNATIONAL</td>
<td>- UN introduces Code of Practice on Managing Disability in the Workplace&lt;br&gt;- Statistics Canada conducts first Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS); new criteria for identifying and defining people with disabilities makes 1986 and 1991 HALS incompatible with PALS for comparison purposes&lt;br&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>INTERNATIONAL</td>
<td>- Employers’ Forum on Disability (EFD) creates the Disability Standard as benchmark self-assessment tool for businesses to evaluate their performance as it relates to disability&lt;br&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>ONTARIO</td>
<td>- ODA repealed and replaced with Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA); first</td>
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standard to be met, the Customer Service Standard, relates to changing attitudes toward people with disabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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</table>
| 2010 | **FEDERAL**  
|      | - Canada ratifies UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) |
| 2012 | **INTERNATIONAL**  
# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACCD</td>
<td>American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADA</td>
<td>Americans with Disabilities Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADAPT</td>
<td>Accessibility for the Disabled Action Program Toronto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADP</td>
<td>Assistive Devices Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AEBC</td>
<td>Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AODA</td>
<td>Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARCH</td>
<td>Advocacy Resource Centre for the Handicapped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIDS</td>
<td>Business Industrial Development Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOOST</td>
<td>Blind Organization of Ontario with Self-help Tactics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CACL</td>
<td>Canadian Association for Community Living</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAILC</td>
<td>Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAMR</td>
<td>Canadian Association for the Mentally Retarded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARC</td>
<td>Canadian Association for Retarded Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARP</td>
<td>Canadian Association of Rehabilitation Personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>Canadian Chamber of Commerce</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCD</td>
<td>Council of Canadians with Disabilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCHA</td>
<td>Canadian Council on Hospital Accreditation</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCRW</td>
<td>Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAP</td>
<td>Canada Assistance Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDW</td>
<td>Centre for Disability and Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEC</td>
<td>Canada Employment Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEEPD</td>
<td>Coalition on Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEIC</td>
<td>Canada Employment and Immigration Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>CELDIC</td>
<td>Commission on Emotional and Learning Disorders</td>
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<tr>
<td>CHRA</td>
<td>Canadian Human Rights Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>CHRC</td>
<td>Canadian Human Rights Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIL</td>
<td>Centre for Independent Living</td>
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<tr>
<td>CILT</td>
<td>Centre for Independent Living Toronto</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIWA</td>
<td>Canadian Injured Workers Alliance</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLFDB</td>
<td>Canadian Labour Force Development Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLC</td>
<td>Canadian Labour Congress</td>
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<td>CMHA</td>
<td>Canadian Mental Health Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>CNIB</td>
<td>Canadian National Institute for the Blind</td>
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<tr>
<td>COPOH</td>
<td>Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped</td>
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<tr>
<td>COTA</td>
<td>Community Occupational Therapy Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPA</td>
<td>Canadian Paraplegic Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPP-D</td>
<td>Canada Pension Plan for the Disabled</td>
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<tr>
<td>CRCD</td>
<td>Canadian Rehabilitation Council for the Disabled</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSIDIH</td>
<td>Canadian Society for the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>CUBSM</td>
<td>Canadian Union of Blind and Sighted Merchants</td>
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<td>CUPE</td>
<td>Canadian Union of Public Employees</td>
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<tr>
<td>DARE</td>
<td>Daycare, Assessment, Rehabilitative Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>DASM</td>
<td>Developing Alternative Service Models</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAWN</td>
<td>DisAbled Women's Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>DNHW</td>
<td>Department of National Health and Welfare</td>
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<td>DPEE</td>
<td>Disabled Persons for Employment Equity</td>
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<tr>
<td>DPI</td>
<td>Disabled Peoples International</td>
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<tr>
<td>DPPP</td>
<td>Disabled Persons Participation Program</td>
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<td>DPU</td>
<td>Disabled Persons Unit</td>
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<td>DRDP</td>
<td>United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons</td>
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<td>DSA</td>
<td>Developmental Services Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>DVA</td>
<td>Department of Veterans Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>EAPD</td>
<td>Employability Assistance for Persons with Disabilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>EEA</td>
<td>Employment Equity Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>EEC</td>
<td>Employment Equity Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>EEO</td>
<td>Equal Opportunity Employment</td>
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<tr>
<td>EOP</td>
<td>Equal Opportunity Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESA</td>
<td>Employment Standards Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>HALS</td>
<td>Health and Activity Limitation Survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEP</td>
<td>Handicapped Employment Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAPO</td>
<td>National Anti-Poverty Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>NDP</td>
<td>National Democratic Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSIPD</td>
<td>National Strategy for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>NUPGE</td>
<td>National Union of Public and General Employees</td>
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<tr>
<td>OACPH</td>
<td>Ontario Advisory Council for the Physically Handicapped</td>
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<tr>
<td>OACL</td>
<td>Ontario Association for Community Living</td>
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<tr>
<td>OACDI</td>
<td>Ontario Advisory Council for Disability Issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>OACDP</td>
<td>Ontario Advisory Council on Disabled Persons</td>
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<tr>
<td>ODA</td>
<td>Ontarians with Disabilities Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>ODI</td>
<td>Office for Disability Issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>ODP</td>
<td>Office for Disabled Persons</td>
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<tr>
<td>ODSP</td>
<td>Ontario Disability Support Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>OHRC</td>
<td>Ontario Human Rights Code</td>
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<tr>
<td>OFL</td>
<td>Ontario Federation of Labour</td>
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<tr>
<td>OFPH</td>
<td>Ontario Federation for the Physically Handicapped</td>
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<tr>
<td>OMOD</td>
<td>Ontario March of Dimes</td>
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<tr>
<td>OPS</td>
<td>Ontario Public Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>OPSEU</td>
<td>Ontario Public Service Employees Union</td>
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<td>PALS</td>
<td>Activity Limitation Survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>Progressive Conservative</td>
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<tr>
<td>PCEH</td>
<td>President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSAC</td>
<td>Public Service Alliance of Canada</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>Public Service Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>PUSH</td>
<td>People United for Self Help</td>
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<tr>
<td>PVA</td>
<td>Paralyzed Veterans Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>TASH</td>
<td>Technical Aids and Systems for the Handicapped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UHGO</td>
<td>United Handicapped Groups of Ontario</td>
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<tr>
<td>UIW</td>
<td>Union of Injured Workers</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDDP</td>
<td>United Nations Decade for Disabled Persons</td>
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<tr>
<td>VRDP</td>
<td>Vocational Rehabilitation for Disabled Persons (Act)</td>
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<td>VRS</td>
<td>Vocational Rehabilitation Services</td>
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<td>VRSA</td>
<td>Vocational Rehabilitation Services Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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Introduction

The lived experience of disability in Canada during the late twentieth century revolved around work. Widespread unemployment and poverty among people with disabilities from the 1960s to early 2000s was considered by disabled people, their allies and governments as the main obstacle to full social integration. Many working-age adults with disabilities existed in a perpetually liminal state during this period as they were neither fully integrated nor completely outside the labour market. Many people with disabilities were captivated by emancipatory civil rights movements led by other disenfranchised groups and sought to develop their own movement as part of their struggle to find jobs and social opportunities in mainstream society. Canadian employers, both private and public, as well as a labour movement in the midst of dynamic change, were hard pressed to refute the validity of such arguments for inclusion, but public declarations in support of disability issues failed to produce significant, measurable changes in the total labour market participation of disabled people. Was greater public awareness of employment barriers faced by disabled people enough to sustain concerted action on the part of employers and policymakers? Or was the problem too complex and individualized in which to advance a shared agenda among disabled people and their allies for social and economic integration? After an initial period of dogmatic rejection of other forms of disability activism, disability rights activists joined family advocates and rehabilitation professionals in a collaborative project to transform the field of employment for people with disabilities. There would be repeated awareness-raising campaigns, new ideologies and legislative protections in the workplace, as well as the
development of an idea that a disability “master status” did not necessarily define people living and working with disabilities.\(^1\) A renewed perspective regarding disability which departed from the longstanding acceptance of a largely negative ontology of disabled people represented a compelling result of this dynamic period.\(^2\)

Multiple disability movements, each with their own cultural, political and economic influences, emerged during this period. Families of people with physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities and mental health issues challenged existing institutional responses to disability that reinforced enduring patterns of exclusion. Rehabilitation professionals built alliances with family advocates to establish community-based service agencies in order to facilitate greater participation in the community. In their role as disability rights activists, disabled people themselves simultaneously defied the traditional medical paradigm of disability and devised their own path in the pursuit of employment integration. What limited historiography that does exist about these movements has considered them separately, partly due to pervasive binary distinctions between individual and social models of disability. This dissertation, however, identifies a shared emphasis between multiple sites of disability activism in Canada that forged a common platform to achieve greater economic integration of disabled people. This approach enables us to expand our understanding of disability activism beyond the parameters of a single group, organization or individual. Indeed, parts of the state, some employers, labour leaders and even ordinary individuals qualify as sites of disability activism. I argue that the focus on employment integration during

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this period reflected a general concern to safeguard the capabilities of people with physical and mental disabilities for meaningful labour market participation. In fact, it was this shared understanding about the importance of work and paid employment that constructed bridges between disabled people, their allies, and others who were collectively outraged with the treatment of people with disabilities in modern society. This outlook provides a revisionist perspective on the roles played by labour market actors and the scope of their involvement in the reconceptualization of disability during the late twentieth century.

From the early 1960s to the turn of the twenty-first century, people with disabilities and their allies endeavoured to reconstruct the social, political and economic environment that deprived them of full citizenship. This struggle presented the potential for many strategic possibilities, each with its own clear advantages and unseen pitfalls: should disability activists press for mandatory affirmative action and hiring quotas in order to force employers to comply with their emancipatory objectives? Was subtle reinforcement through hiring campaigns the way to go? Alternatively, could activists and disabled workers ride a wave of unprecedented awareness during the early 1980s that would carry them to new shores of economic prosperity? A lack of consensus on these and other strategic issues was frustrated by the existence of little in the way of enforceable employment guidelines beyond the next election or business cycle.

Successive policy and statistical reports during these long four decades demonstrated a disturbing pattern of similar conclusions regarding chronic poverty and unemployment in the disability community coupled with a repetitive set of recommendations for improvement. As a result, the following dissertation seeks to untangle rhetoric from
reality regarding conceptual and strategic responses to the economic problem of
disability. The positioning of various manifestations of disability activism alongside the
activities of decision-makers in the sphere of the labour market reveals new insights
about the labour history of people with disabilities while filling substantive gaps in the
historiography of disability and work.

A variety of psychosocial, cultural and labour challenges faced by war-wounded veterans has received much attention in Canadian history.\(^3\) In military historiography, the Canadian soldier, venerated in war propaganda and popular culture, was often juxtaposed with the harsh realities of postwar life. This was particularly so for veterans with “shell shock,” amputations or visual impairments.\(^4\) But what about their civilian counterparts? Veterans raised public awareness of disability issues, but this awareness did not necessarily include a much larger population of disabled people in Canada who faced similar obstacles in their daily lives. Veterans established new service agencies, welfare provisions and a tradition of collective advocacy, which heightened expectations of disabled people and their allies in the broader community regarding the transformation of status quo social and economic opportunities. Stimulated by the example of veterans and


other civil rights movements, new social movements involving people with disabilities were driven by a similar focus on inclusion and independence as the struggle to develop new ways to achieve social and economic parity with non-disabled Canadians.

What did economic liminality and exclusion look like for many people with disabilities and why did a relatively small cohort of disability activists and their allies stand against these conditions? Written in the tradition of social history and utilizing a critical disability history approach, the present dissertation seeks to recover the histories of working people with disabilities in Canada while situating these accounts in a wider context of social, political and economic developments. As with the broader classification of critical disability studies, disability history shares social history’s methodology of writing history from the “bottom-up,” concerned primarily with the liberation of disabled characters and subjects from invisibility in the historiographical record. As Douglas Baynton famously remarked, “Disability is everywhere in history, once you begin looking for it, but conspicuously absent in the histories we write.” Baynton suggests our knowledge of disabled people as historical subjects and as an analytical category for historical inquiry is seriously lacking and he challenges historians to be more attentive to disability in the historical record.

Disability history operates from the perspective that disability is a social category that can be incorporated into the historian’s analytical toolbox alongside such categories as race, class and gender. In doing so, important questions can be raised which warrant thoughtful consideration: is disability a stable-enough identity for drawing historically contiguous lines between different eras? How can we equate physical impairment and

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mental health in the same category when each has its own particular history and
infinitesimally variable subcategories that define the lived experience of disability? In the
past, such concerns have perpetuated the scholarly disambiguation of disability and
disabled people according to separate medical pathologies while preventing historians
and other scholars from pulling back to take a more holistic approach. In her case for
“another ‘Other’” in a survey piece on disability history, Catherine Kudlick demonstrates
the power and possibilities for approaching disability as a social category, reminding us
that “disability cuts across all races, classes, genders, nationalities, and generations
because it can potentially happen to anyone at any time; an accident, a degenerative
disease of the limbs, eyes, ears, or nervous system, can instantly transport someone into a
new category of existence.”6 Such was the argument made by many disability activists
who maintain that we are all simply “temporarily able-bodied” (or “TAB”) and that
disability likely seeps into other social categories with the result that it destabilizes one’s
identity and social status.7

A historical materialist approach to the study of working people sheds light on the
causes of economic marginality among disabled people. Labour profoundly shapes the
experience of health and impairment, particularly among middle- and working-class
subjects where the exchange of labour for wages is a defining feature in capitalist
societies. Working bodies have been conceived as cultural constructs in industrial
capitalist societies, classified and subjugated by a strictly utilitarian evaluation of

6 Catherine Kudlick, “Disability History: Why We Need Another ‘Other,’” American Historical Review
7 Sally Chivers, “Barrier by Barrier: The Canadian Disability Movement and the Fight for Equal Rights,” in
physical and mental abilities. Ava Baron and Eileen Boris demonstrate how disability can be integrated into historical studies of the working-class and working bodies. They argue that a critical analysis of disability can reveal new insights about social roles and structures such as gender, race, and sexuality which surround corporeal and signified worker bodies. Baron and Boris propose, “For working-class historians traditionally concerned with issues of agency, such an approach holds promise, for it enables us to examine the ‘fleshy body’ in interaction with its world.”

Disability studies scholars have borrowed an historical materialist approach from working-class historiography and identify the birth of industrialization and rise of the working-class as a key historical moment associated with the economic dislocation of disabled people. Recent contributions to the historiography of the body, including Paul Lawrie’s examination of the proletarianization of African American workers during the onset of industrialization, further our understanding of the body as a category of analysis during this period. Cultural ideals surrounding physical and moral capabilities were heightened by the introduction of industrial capitalism as workers were forced to compete with each other for wages in the labour market. This economic arrangement tended to

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9 Baron and Boris, “‘The Body’ As a Useful Category,” 25.
10 Baron and Boris, “‘The Body’ As a Useful Category,” 26.
11 Kudlick, “Why We Need Another Other,” 766.
marginalize people with disabilities rated unfavourably against other “able-bodied” workers with the result that other social and legal systems were introduced to deal with the social and economic problem of disabled people. The “logic of capitalism” thus asserted itself in the classification and oppression of people with disabilities whose bodies are thought to exclude them from the principal means of survival in a wage labour economy.

This dissertation describes a national story with a particular emphasis on developments in the province of Ontario and city of Toronto. Justification for this scope comes from the jurisdictional nature of the sources analyzed and the relatively limited historiographical corpus upon which to build. Provincial governments held jurisdiction over vocational rehabilitation, healthcare and other social programming that shaped the employability of disabled people. As a result, the relationship between people with disabilities and the state reflected a decidedly provincial focus. Also, many of the key accomplishments of disability activists during the late-twentieth century involved national coalitions of provincial organizations. Indeed, the leading disability rights organization during this period, the Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped, was conceived as an assembly of local groups representing each province across the country, each defined by specific regional politics. Key developments on the national stage were often made possible by provincial bodies and grassroots organizing at the local level. This dissertation also incorporates the oral narratives of people with disabilities whose diverse lived experiences of disability and individual work histories warranted a geographically scaled-down approach in order to improve comparability.

between study participants. Toronto does stand apart from other cities given its position as Canada’s largest city, the seat of Ontario’s government, and an engine of economic growth in the second half of the twentieth century. Toronto was also recognized across the country as a pioneer and national leader in the introduction of progressive public sector employment practices and popularized the implementation of physical accessibility measures among other municipalities, such as curb cuts and ramps. While not necessarily a definitive assessment of the relationship between disability and work in Canada, this study’s focus on the working experiences of Torontonians with disabilities presented within the context of regional and national developments offers a feasible entry into uncharted historiographical terrain.

The date range of this study was selected to allow for the examination of multiple generations of working experiences in relation to evolving disability movements and legislative developments. The social, political and cultural conditions that surrounded the introduction of unprecedented human rights protections in the early 1960s were not conducive to people with disabilities. The year 1962 marked the introduction of the Ontario Human Rights Code, which was the first piece of legislation of its kind in Canada to comprehensively address issues of discrimination on the basis of fundamental human rights. The Code, however, was seriously limited in scope and did not include disability as a protected category, despite there being no apparent attempt by a disability movement to press for new human rights protections for disabled people. At that time, an evolving parents’ movement reshaped the environment in which disabled people lived and worked, but they did not assert an identity politics of disability nor did they forge a civil rights movement seeking human rights-based protections to resist segregation. By
the turn of the twenty-first century, an entirely different set of social, political and cultural conditions surrounded the introduction in 2005 of the unprecedented *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* with its goal of achieving “accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities with respect to goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures and premises on or before January 1, 2025.” The rise of organized disability rights activism during the late 1970s and early 1980s transformed the political discourse of disability, revising the *Ontario Human Rights Code* in 1981 to include disability and securing new protections in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. For the next twenty years, disability rights activists guided by a social model of disability focused on dismantling barriers to full social and economic participation.

As this periodization suggests, this dissertation is driven by an inclusive understanding of the role of overlapping disability movements. The political activities of various disability movements, whether operating collaboratively or in conflict with one another, contributed to the redefinition of disability in the late twentieth century. Non-profit disability organizations involving disabled people and their allies have dominated the history of disability activism in Canadian historiography and political science discourse, partly because such organizations left an extensive record that enable historians to trace their influence on various political developments.¹⁴ Most of these texts have focused on the central role disability organizations have played in the advancement

of human rights and anti-discrimination legislation. Indeed, organizations of and for people with disabilities represented a consolidating force in the local and international disability community, but they are only part of the story. Sharon Barnartt considers the degree to which Canadian disability activists and organizations were influenced by the drift of American ideas and tactics through a process of “social movement diffusion.” Barnartt concludes that no such process took place and that Canada’s distinct social structure and culture supported the development of indigenous disability movements and organizations. Christine Kelly has recently argued for a broader definition of disability activism that stretches beyond this policy-driven discussion of the achievements of non-profit organizations and even outside the realm of organized activity in general. Kelly argues against a simplistic description of “the” disability movement in Canada, proposing contemporary examples where disability activism existed outside the confines of organizations of and for people with disabilities.

Kelly presents a compelling case for a renewed approach to the Canadian disability movement that coincides with this study’s perspective of disability activism. This approach delves into the relationships between disability activism and individual action, which also reflects the social historical methodology used in this study. According to this approach, the boundaries of social movement activism can (and should) be enlarged to include seemingly benign endeavours such as an individual’s determination to succeed in the workplace against all odds. As we shall see in Chapter Eight, I accept the notion that the refusal to accept a disability master status in place of a work-based

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identity contributes to our understanding of disability rights activism in Canada. Individual histories can be incorporated into the documented activities of disability organizations since these groups purportedly reflected the beliefs and objectives of people with disabilities. Analysis of the documented activities of disability organizations alongside individual narratives of people with disabilities can thus reveal new lines of inquiry into the written record.

This dissertation incorporates a range of published sources, oral narratives from interview participants, and archival documents. The records of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities held at the Manitoba Archives complemented records at Library and Archives Canada, the Archives of Ontario, Toronto Archives and private collections. Numerous government and non-profit publications were also secured from libraries across Canada. These sources tell only part of the story about relationships between disability and work, and it was deemed necessary to go beyond written records of disability organizations, government bureaucracies, and service agencies in order to uncover the “hidden” histories of work experiences. As a result, oral narratives from a cross-disability sample of interview participants proved invaluable in terms of filling gaps left in the documented record. People with disabilities responded to advertisements I posted around Toronto and online, in national and provincial newsletters and personal networks. I conducted semi-structured oral interviews with thirty people with a range of different types of disabilities in Toronto and southern Ontario regarding their work experiences and engagement with the labour market. Interview methodology and findings are discussed in further detail in Chapter Eight and Appendixes A, B and C, including an in-depth examination of individual participant work experiences. Of course, oral
narratives must be used critically and evaluated within the context of a documented history of events that shaped the social and economic history of people with disabilities. The incorporation of oral narratives as authentic historical sources were rated against the existence of substantive documented sources, producing an inclusive history of the period based on a synthesis of all available sources.

Prior to the emergence of disability history and critical disability studies in Canada during the 1990s, disability movements were largely studied by political scientists and individual activists recounting their experiences and observations based on their involvement with various disability organizations. Disability activists, who were often well-educated and went on to successful careers in the legal profession, education, and the public sector have written much of the existing historiography of the evolution of the disability rights movement in Canada. Diane Driedger provided a landmark account in *The Last Civil Rights Movement*, written in 1989 which documented the establishment of Disabled Peoples International and the important contributions Canadians made to the development of an international disability rights movement. Other accounts written by Aldred Neufeldt in *In Pursuit of Equality* provide a historical recounting of the development of organized disability activism in Canada based on firsthand experience. Michael Prince similarly relates a detailed political history of disability in *Absent Citizens* by relating his observations and experiences working in non-profit organizations

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regarding how disability movement infiltrated Canadian political discourse and influenced the course of policy development.\textsuperscript{19}

There has also been growing interest in the relationship between disability and work, both in Canadian scholarship and abroad, though much of this has been ahistorical. A recent special issue of \textit{Disability Studies Quarterly} examines the relationship between disability and work, focusing on various aspects of the cultural construction of a “burden narrative” and its impact on people with disabilities.\textsuperscript{20} Tim Weinkauf explores the role played by employers in the employment of disabled people, going directly to the interview table to discover ways in which employers are influenced by wider cultural systems.\textsuperscript{21} Robert Storey studies the emergence and dissolution of a movement by injured workers in Toronto during the 1970s and 1980s as groups of predominantly Italian immigrants protested changes to workers’ compensation benefits.\textsuperscript{22} American scholarship has also expanded our understanding of disability and work. Mary Grimley-Mason conducted interviews with thirty women with disabilities regarding their work lives and concludes that work was an integral aspect in the formation of identity.\textsuperscript{23} Sarah Rose explores the “invention of disability” in nineteenth and twentieth century American

\textsuperscript{19} Michael Prince, \textit{Absent Citizens: Disability Politics and Policy in Canada} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).
cultural, political and economic institutions. Rose concludes that the emergence of new industrialized systems of work economically displaced disabled people while new mechanisms to compensate and rehabilitate them ultimately reinforced their segregation.

This study builds on this body of scholarship by revisiting many key political developments as they relate to the progression of a new social and economic paradigm that included people with disabilities. Rather than conceptualizing the evolution of disability movements as a series of incremental and progressive developments as many existing accounts assert, this study finds that repeated waves of awareness contributed to a halting approach to the advancement of disability rights. A lack of consistent attention to disability issues in the public discourse and political sphere meant disability activists were continually regrouping to find new ways to promote their agenda. This study also seeks to examine the porous boundaries of “the” disability movement by discovering the interaction of multiple movements, institutions and individuals. In line with a social historical approach to the study of social movements, I will highlight the role of people with disabilities whose contributions to macro-level cultural and political developments were no less vital than that of disability organizations. An intensive examination of written and oral narratives allow for a revised narrative of disability activism and its impact on the economic integration of disabled people.

This dissertation significantly contributes to labour history by making the case that disability activism in the late twentieth century revolved around labour issues and constituted a labour-oriented social movement. Where the existing historiography of disability activism sketched out a broad vision of social inclusion and independent living,

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Canadian disability activists were equally motivated by the pursuit of labour market integration and undertook concrete measures to ensure disabled people found paid employment. As a result, disability activism during this period constituted a labour movement of sorts which involved both working and unemployed people with disabilities in collective ventures to campaign for improved employment opportunities and working conditions. An in-depth examination of the archival record reveals the ways in which disability activists contributed to the development of new labour policies, vocational programs and employment conferences, as well as organized labour’s responses to social justice and social movement activism. This perspective of disability activism as manifestations of labour-oriented social movements contributes to the general labour historiography of the period and enables us to consider the cultural processes and economic aspirations behind a civil rights movement among people with disabilities.

A discussion regarding the use of identifying language in the present study is in order. Debate surrounding “politically correct” language in which to identify people with disabilities has been shaped by various political, ethical, cultural and other paradigms. Participants in these debates often take diametrically opposed positions and leave little room for constructive discussion. Where one assertion argues that the term “disabled” underlines social oppression, another asserts “disabled persons” confirms the reality of disability and the possibility of impairment as a positive factor in one’s life. Others note that “disability” was originally an employment term referring to declarative work limitations such that people were only “disabled” insofar as they were unable to work or

26 Frank Overboe, ““Difference in Itself”: Validating Disabled People's Lived Experience,” in Rethinking Normalcy: A Disability Studies Reader, ed. Tanya Titchkosky and Rod Michalko (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2009), 82.
deemed unemployable.\textsuperscript{27} Although “persons” or “people with disabilities” became part of the common legal and political parlance by the 1990s, it was previously held that the World Health Organization’s distinction between “impairment,” “handicap,” and “disability,” initially outlined in the 1980 International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps (ICIDH) entailed a more accurate assessment of the nature of interdependency between biomedical sources of impairment, physical experiences of these impairments and social or environmental influences.\textsuperscript{28}

By the 1970s, disability activists in Canada argued that the term “handicapped” was in fact a loaded term used by professionals, and that social processes, in effect, “handicap” people when in fact individuals are “a person with a disability.”\textsuperscript{29} In a 1983 paper, the Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped (COPOH) argued, “A disability is a physical reality whereas a handicap is a social or environmental consequence of a disability” and that when used interchangeably, the social location of limitations is obscured.\textsuperscript{30} Critics of the “person-first approach,” however, argue that “people with disabilities” implies that “disability is the property of the individual and not of society,” that the phrase “conveniently side-steps the consequences of institutional discrimination,” that it represents “an explicit denial of a political or ‘disabled


\textsuperscript{29} Mary Johnson, \textit{Make them Go Away: Clint Eastwood, Christopher Reeve and the Case Against Disability Rights} (Louisville: Advocado Press, 2003), 54.

identity,”31 and that “those who refer to ‘people with disabilities’ are thus adopting the 'medical model' and must be re-educated or repudiated.”32

Disability language reflects logic of the time period in which it was used and must be documented as such in the historiography. Irina Metzler argues that it is important to use terminology from the time period being studied, particularly in a cultural history as it reveals part of the references to disability.33 Yet the lack of objective standard criteria for determining who is disabled not only frustrates the historian’s task of tracking change over time, but also complicates a balance between historically appropriate yet politically sensitive terminology.34 Tom Shakespeare observes,

Many who use the phrase ‘people with disabilities’ do so because they are striving to be respectful and supportive of disability rights and social inclusion. Rather than defining someone in terms of their impairments, they choose ‘people first’ terminology to express the common humanity which disabled people share. In other words, while terminology is important, it is not as important as the underlying values. Quibbling over ‘disabled people’ versus ‘people with disabilities’ is a diversion from making common cause to promote the inclusion and rights of disabled people.35

Perhaps more than mere “quibbling,” these debates form a critical component in the struggle to redefine disability in order to emphasize capability or employability. Yet the present study does not assert the validity of one language paradigm over another, nor am I convinced that any one term can have universal application. Insofar as these linguistic and representational debates are not engaged, they are also not directly refuted. It is

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33 Metzler, A Social History of Disability, 4.
35 Shakespeare, Disability Rights and Wrongs, 33.
conceded that there is historical and emancipatory importance attached to constructive
debate regarding the use of linguistic markers to connect individual experiences with
sociocultural conceptualizations of disability. But I leave this to other arenas of
discussion. As a result, terms such as “disabled people” and “people with disabilities,”
which are widely used within and outside the disability community, are used here
interchangeably and non-dogmatically while care is taken throughout to situate other
terms like “handicapped” and “crippled” within their particular historical contexts.

The following eight chapters document the evolution of disability activism and its
impact on the economic integration and working experiences of people with disabilities
in the late twentieth century. The chapters are organized thematically, although the
arrangement of the first three chapters reflects the chronological emergence of three
different streams of disability activism during this period. While the dissertation takes a
liberal perspective of the definition of disability activism, Chapters One, Two and Three
present cases made by different disability movements while Chapters Five, Six and Seven
reflect responses by key players in the labour market. Chapters Four and Eight are
intended to serve as meditations on the complex interrelationships between these multiple
activisms and responses they elicited.

Chapter One introduces us to the emergence of disability activism in the mid-
twentieth century and its conceptual roots in past social reform movements of the late
nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Families of people with disabilities spearheaded
debates about the capabilities of their children and adult relatives to live outside
residential hospitals and backrooms of family homes. Inspired by medical breakthroughs
and new philosophies of community living, local groups involving parents of children
with physical and intellectual disabilities forged a national social movement to usher disabled children away from a life of segregation. The family or parents movement was a first step in the pursuit of full citizenship for people with disabilities. I argue that family advocates established the groundwork for the development of a new discourse of disability that challenged the status quo while providing concrete measures for the realization of these goals.

Chapter Two examines the evolution of the rehabilitation industry and the role played by service agencies. Community living created an unprecedented demand for a range of rehabilitation services and people with disabilities and their families held greater expectations for participation in mainstream opportunities. Rehabilitated individuals, however, often found their path to integration blocked by physical and social barriers, prompting rehabilitation professionals to address broader social issues formerly outside the scope of their therapeutic activities. Rehabilitation organizations initiated massive awareness campaigns, becoming disability advocates that promoted their own unique vision of disability to a wider audience. I argue that within these awareness campaigns, rehabilitation professionals advocated a proto-social model of disability that underscored the limitations and restrictions of impairment while noting the significant barriers caused by social attitudes and conventional responses to disability. I also argue that this approach ultimately served to promote the interests of the rehabilitation industry as awareness campaigns also constituted advertisements for the expansion of rehabilitation services. Consequently, public and political endorsements of rehabilitation that followed insulated rehabilitation professionals from a developing movement of disability rights activists.
promoting self-help consumer philosophies and a social constructivist model of disability.

In contrast to the collaborative relationship established between family advocates and rehabilitation professionals, Chapter Three examines groups of mainly youthful disabled people that began to take root by the early 1970s. Inspired by other civil rights movements and a culture of anti-authoritarianism, people with disabilities, led mainly by wheelchair users and blind youth, forged a new social movement to challenge physical and attitudinal barriers in the workplace and larger community. I argue that these new groups of activists felt dispossessed of their own voice in the communication of their work-related needs and social objectives and increasingly resented the rehabilitation industry’s control over access to mainstream opportunities in the labour market. Groups of disillusioned youth resisted what they perceived as a highly hegemonic rehabilitation industry, citing their rights as citizens and as consumers of rehabilitation services. Disability rights activists asserted their own brand of identity politics and forged new coalitions within the disability community to carve out their own self-determined paths to employment integration.

Chapter Four presents sheltered workshops as a site where different conceptual models of disability were brought into stark contrast. Originally designed by vocational rehabilitation therapists to act as a conduit to (re)entry to the paid workforce through enhancement of work skills and capabilities of working-age adults with disabilities, I argue that sheltered workshops took on new forms and political symbolism. By the 1970s, the demographic makeup of workshops shifted dramatically. Previously constituted as transitional sites for people with primarily acquired physical disabilities to
rejoin the labour market, workshops increasingly included deinstitutionalized people with intellectual disabilities and mental health issues. Sheltered workshops acted as a makeshift replacement for residential occupational therapy programs as part of an under-resourced response to the deinstitutionalization movement in Canada. While initially separated by the support of different models of disability, family advocates, rehabilitation professionals and disability rights activists eventually arrived at a tentative *rapprochement* around the role of sheltered workshops in the work and social lives of disabled people.

The next three chapters examine responses to disability activism by major policymakers and figures in the labour market. Chapter Five assesses the influence which disability activism had on the attitudes and employment practices of private and public sector employers. Employer attitudes were consistently identified by activists and policymakers as a critical factor that prevented disabled people from enjoying full citizenship. Public declarations of support for disability issues by individual employers and business associations were ultimately undermined by widespread reluctance at the local level to actually hire disabled people as workers. I argue that employers’ actions were informed by a core set of attitudes about disability that included prejudicial beliefs about a variety of risks that disabled workers presumably presented to business operations. These prejudicial attitudes were consistently documented in successive reports that demonstrated patterns of deep-rooted attitudinal resistance to a platform of economic incentives offered by disability activists and political authorities. Public sector employers stood apart from the larger private sector by presenting themselves as models of progressive and equitable employment practices. The introduction of new computer
technologies in the 1980s led many people with disabilities and business leaders to believe that the incorporation of technology in the workplace would “level the playing field” upon which disabled and able-bodied people competed for employment. However, this expectation proved unfounded as many employers continued to outwardly voice their support for disabled people while failing to employ disabled workers.

In Chapter Six I take a closer look at how the state functioned both as a source of disability advocacy and as an arbiter of policies that shaped the labour experiences of people with disabilities. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, political authorities at the federal, provincial and municipal levels engaged disability activists in order to formulate official responses to a series of international developments in the area of disability rights. Governments established formal relations with the disability community through advisory committees and specialized bureaus in order to promote the employment and employability of people with disabilities. I argue that the work of these new bureaus and committees constituted centres of activism within the state which helped to promote a social constructivist model of disability while facilitating greater access to the labour market. This collaborative relationship was conditional upon prevailing political priorities, however, and public sector support of disability activism eventually began to erode as the state steadily reconfigured its involvement in the labour market.

Chapter Seven considers the labour movement's response to disability activism. Disability rights activists and government bureaus reached out to organized labour in order to endorse their platform of social and economic reform. While labour leaders reacted favourably, the situation was very different on the ground. I argue that many union leaders and rank-and-file members remained skeptical about the impact disability
rights might have on collective agreements, worrying that employers and individuals with disabilities might use new legislative protections to undermine seniority provisions and the principle of collective bargaining. I also argue that unions were caught between opposing forces within the labour movement which frustrated the acceptance of a new social model of disability. Injured workers within unions and disabled people outside unions embodied two very different groups with separate goals and opportunity structures, and many unions envisioned these groups as being in opposition with one another. As a result, the incorporation of disability rights clauses in collective agreements happened slowly, as did meaningful collaboration between disability and labour organizations.

Finally, Chapter Eight takes a closer look at the impact of disability activism on the ideological construction of work and actual labour market experiences of people with disabilities. The chapter reflects on the ideological importance of work in identity politics as well as in the construction of individual self-identities. I argue that the production and essence of politicized collective identities was distinct from the way many people with disabilities built their own identities. Using disabled sporting events as an example of identity formation in the disability community, I demonstrate how the creation of disability archetypes problematized the economic goals of both disability activists and non-activist individuals with disabilities. While helpful in raising awareness of disability issues in the broader public sphere, disabled athletes created representational dilemmas for disabled workers and jobseekers who often failed to measure up to employers’ unrealistic expectations. I also contend that many people with disabilities constructed their identity primarily through work separate from the sphere of identity politics.
Drawing on findings from interviews with thirty people with disabilities in Toronto, I demonstrate how work and paid employment held a central position in the development of identity. From this, we can deduce that while collective and individual identity formation appeared to be at odds, they in fact found resolution in the shared pursuit of economic integration.

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Work was a central feature in the lives of people with disabilities in Canada during the late twentieth century. As disability activists in multiple social movements worked to transform the public discourse of disability, people with disabilities lived and worked through a period of intense contrasts. New cultural, political and economic developments transformed the playing field upon which disabled people competed with others for economic opportunities. But this was a playing field scarred by open pitfalls and unseen barriers that continually frustrated individual and collective attempts at meaningful change. A sense of optimism rose, faded and grew again with each awareness campaign, policy development, and technological innovation. The introduction of new legal protections also brought with them new sources of resistance. Many physical and attitudinal barriers remained intact while unfamiliar ones arose suddenly. Despite decades of change, many aspects of disabled peoples’ relationship with the world of work remained disturbingly static. Yet, remarkable examples of creativity and flexibility emerged from within the disability community during this period in response to obstacles. This serves to remind us not only of the human capacity for resilience and adaptation against all odds, but also the existence of a shared social responsibility for building an inclusive society.
Chapter One: The Voice of Our Parents: Family Advocacy and the Struggle for Economic Integration, 1960-1980

I think it's partly parents saying, “No, I don't want to put my child in an institution,” or “Why should this child be in this school and my other children that school?” It's people who are caring for people with disabilities saying, “Why are they being separated?” … It never occurred to me that I wouldn't be going to school with the kids on my street. I don't know how much my parents had to fight for that.¹

All those really early jobs I had were low pay but it helped build a work ethic. Also, I was just expected to work. I was from a very poor family and my parents frowned on welfare and any form of it; so it was, “Get off your butt and do something kid!” It was expectations on the part of my parents that I had the opportunity to do these things.²

Parents and families of people with disabilities formed the vanguard of a developing movement during the 1960s in Canada that challenged the longstanding exclusion of disabled people from opportunities to live and work in mainstream society. As a formidable group of social reformers, family advocates sought to transform exclusionary institutional arrangements and social attitudes regarding disabled people’s capacity to participate in the life of the community and to engage in paid work. Parents tapped into a dynamic reserve of grassroots activist energy to address the lack of community services that perpetuated the segregation of disabled people, giving rise to advocacy organizations and service agencies designed to break down barriers to participation in the economic life of the community. As social reformers seeking to promote a new and more inclusive ideology of disability, family advocates engineered new work opportunities for disabled people by facilitating the development of service agencies based in the community. More than merely service-users, many people with disabilities also worked in the growing

¹ “Charlotte,” Interview with Author, 27 June 2011.
² “Grace,” Interview with Author, 28 July 2011.
voluntary, non-profit sector under the tutelage of rehabilitation and social service professionals who supported the community living model. By the mid-1970s, however, many people with disabilities who subscribed to consumer and self-help philosophies believed that the rhetoric and actions of existing disability organizations resembled a figurative overprotective parent whose unwillingness to relinquish control to disabled consumers ultimately undermined the objective of greater independence. This allegorical parental relationship revealed the limitations of family advocacy in practice as people with disabilities sought to assert control over their own lives.

The following chapter explores the evolution of family advocacy during the 1960s and 1970s in Canada and its role in the development of a new discourse around disability and work. The first two sections document the historical roots of disability advocacy in the construction of the family unit and the legacy of twentieth century social reform movements. The third section observes the core role of family advocates in the movement to deinstitutionalize people with disabilities, leading to the reconceptualization of disability with the emergence of community living philosophies. The final two sections examine the development of the voluntary sector as a source of employment and the upsurge of a reactionary movement of disability rights activists who challenged disability organizations to include people with disabilities as equal partners in the pursuit of social and economic integration.
HISTORICAL TRADITIONS OF DISABILITY ADVOCACY

Organized advocacy on behalf of disabled people in the postwar period in Canada reflected nearly a century of an evolving charitable organization movement. Charities responded to the moral imperative to assist people who were seen by waves of social reformers to belong to an underclass of unfortunate and vulnerable people. By most accounts, people with disabilities were not only among the disadvantaged population, but also the most deserving recipients of social welfare due to the inherent nature of their limitations which prevented them from acquiring paid work. As historian Paul Longmore explains, “Because disease and disability seem so self-evidently matters of biology, rather than sociology or public policy, the disadvantaging social and economic consequences endured by sick or disabled individuals are perceived as ‘natural,’ the inevitable social outcomes of biological ‘facts.'” Standardization, mechanization, consolidation of capital, and other key features of industrialization created a labour market in Canada that was particularly unfriendly to disabled people whose minds and bodies failed to conform to an increasingly competitive and wage-dependent economy. Unable to secure a livelihood, disabled people were often reliant on family, neighbours and from the late nineteenth century, public institutions. Responses to disability formulated during the advent of industrialization in Canada shaped the evolution of cultural attitudes toward disabled people, effectively shutting them out of opportunities to acquire gainful employment.

Elderly people whose infirmities rendered them incapable of productive work often lived with their families during the nineteenth century in Ontario since many people were landowners, using the family farm or other assets to house and leverage the costs of financially unproductive elderly parents. Yet as James Struthers observes, these informal arrangements became increasingly difficult if not impossible during the twentieth century as old age was redefined as a medical and social problem. Working-class people who increasingly moved to urban areas in search of wage work lived in cramped quarters and were unable to afford housing non-working members of the household. A similar situation likely befell many disabled people during this period as paid work in cities rendered them uncompetitive and disconnected from employment opportunities, driving them into closer association with charities and institutional authorities. Paid labour was considered an unattainable goal for many disabled people due to mental or physical impairments given their historical categorization as non-contributing members of an unaccommodating and inaccessible labour market. A cultural logic thus emerged over successive generations of charitable responses to disability in which disabled people were locked into relationships of dependency on the able-bodied mainstream while morally obligating productive able-bodied members of society to make provisions for charitable benevolence. Social reformers during this period equated disability with a state of


Struthers, “Welfare to Workfare”

dependency and focused their energies on improving access to welfare and charity which reinforced the disconnection of disabled people from a conventional trajectory of self-development through paid work.9

Charitable organizations in Canada during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries established a tradition of advocacy on behalf of disabled people for better provisions. Prior to the advent of an empowered disability identity and rights-based discourse of disability, charities and social reformers believed that disabled people were highly dependent on others. The “rights” of disabled people, such as they existed, were largely conceived by reformers to concern practical issues around support and compensation rather than the formulation of a new working identity. Charities were often run by people with a particular interest in uplifting people according to the “social gospel,” which applied evangelical Christian values to emergent social problems.10 Social reform during this period gave rise to an assortment of welfare mechanisms that initially included protections for destitute women and children, public health initiatives, nurseries, old age homes, and basic allowances for the unemployed.11 Religious and secular organizations, including the Jewish group Arbeiter Ring and other fraternal societies, augmented provincial and municipal facilities that cared for the “infirm” and “elderly.”12

Houses of Refuge (also known as Houses of Providence or Houses of Industry) provided

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limited municipal relief to the elderly and disabled population. But as Richard Splane explains, “With limited staff, it is obvious that the houses of refuge could offer little more than custodial care.” Middle-class reformers, including “maternal feminists” who articulated reform using the terminology of the family unit and sanctified the role of mothers in the reform process, encouraged the development of public services so that care of the disabled and elderly was more secure than the practice of relying on unpredictable charitable systems.

The development of the welfare state situated disabled people apart from an “employable,” “able-bodied” population. As James Struthers documents, the establishment of Houses of Refuge run by local municipalities and other measures to support the elderly reflected the belief that old age was linked with sickness and disability and had the effect of removing people from mainstream society. In fact, cultural connections between disability and old age are replete in the historical record. The formulation of categorical distinctions during the 1930s between the “undeserving” able-bodied and “deserving” disabled, elderly, and single or widowed mothers relieved people with disabilities from the moral conditioning that regularly accompanied welfare initiatives. It was widely believed during the twentieth century that idleness and dependency were the result of a diseased state of mind among the able-bodied unemployed. As Richard Splane explains, “The poor, or at any rate the able-bodied poor,

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16 Metzler, A Social History of Disability, 102-126.
were accordingly thought to be in need of correction and discipline.”

As a result, the introduction of social assistance promised to remedy moral defects by setting benefit rates well below the minimum wage and forcing “undeserving” recipients into work schemes where they laboured on public projects in exchange for minimal levels of support. During the early 1930s, for example, Ontario Welfare Minister David Croll and Liberal Premier Mitch Hepburn mandated “All able-bodied married men to perform work in municipal woodyards or on other city projects as a condition for maintaining their families’ eligibility for assistance.” The distinction was made even sharper from the Second World War to the mid-1950s when all able-bodied unemployed people were completely cut off from government assistance to preserve assistance to unemployable disabled people and in order to avoid supporting people who could ostensibly fill acute labour shortages. The exemption of the “deserving” poor from such work schemes coupled with strict welfare regulations reveal that disabled people were not expected to engage in employment during this period.

As Shirley Tillotson demonstrates in her investigation of modern charitable fundraising in Canada, charity organizers made “modern charity look like the welfare state in waiting.” Federations of charitable organizations developed progressively efficient means of raising funds, which supported their increasing political influence and further expansion of charities. Tillotson explains that charitable organizations not only laid the foundations for the development of the welfare state but grew alongside it, as

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19 Struthers, “No Fault of their Own,” 431.
20 Struthers, “No Fault of their Own,” 435.
Charities were increasingly run like businesses able to “mount a modern sales campaign.”Charitable organizations in Canada worked to redefine charitable giving as a civic duty while raising funds in a fashion that ironically underscored the importance of the public sector in the provision of those needs. Key to the success of charitable organizations was the cultivation of an influential network of professionals, businessmen, union representatives and other community figures whose contributions ensured that charities were “complements and not alternatives to public programs.”

By the mid-twentieth century, charitable organizations were also typically enthusiastic supporters of medical research and innovation. Optimism about medical breakthroughs engulfed the public consciousness of disability as medical and pharmacological advancements progressively improved the health of Canadians. Charities accordingly reinforced public faith in medical authorities through public fundraising initiatives. Fundraising campaigns conducted across North America to find a polio vaccine, for example, epitomized the harnessing of local activism to a wider project to conquer disability through the concerted support of improvements in medical science. The March of Dimes, so-called after the popular Marching Mothers campaigns, featured mothers of children with polio who canvassed local neighbourhoods to raise funds (even if “just a dime”) for poliomyelitis vaccine research. The Marches engaged concerned parents in the frenzied response to the polio epidemic that afflicted a generation of baby boomers still in pre-adolescence. The first Mothers Marches in

23 Tillotson, Contributing Citizens, 3.
24 Tillotson, Contributing Citizens, 5.
Ontario were held in Toronto during the 1950s, led in 1957 by Chief Marching Mother and later distinguished politician Ellen Fairclough who symbolized the importance of “activist parents whose struggles at an individual level for their own son or daughter launched national organizations.”\(^{27}\) The discovery of a vaccine for poliomyelitis by Dr. Jonas Salk in 1955 confirmed the success of these fundraising campaigns by concerned parents who turned their attention to expanding the activities of the Ontario March of Dimes while continuing the popular Marching Mothers campaigns.\(^{28}\) The organization rapidly expanded its advocacy efforts to support new medical research while providing services and supplying assistive devices to people with physical disabilities regardless of the nature of their impairments.

\(^{27}\) Panitch, *Accidental Activists*,

\(^{28}\) The March of Dimes was initially an American organization whose Marching Mothers campaigns engaged other charitable organizations. The Ontario-based Canadian Foundation for Poliomyelitics participated in the campaign but retained their name until 1973 when it was changed to the Ontario March of Dimes (hereafter OMOD). By 2006, the OMOD created March of Dimes Canada to reflect the fact that its services had expanded beyond the province of Ontario. March of Dimes Canada, “Who we are,” accessed 25 Sept 2012, available http://www.marchofdimes.ca/EN/AboutUs/about%20modc/Pages/WhoWeAre.aspx
“Marching Mothers” in Toronto with donation bags in hand, led by “Chief Marching Mother” Ellen Fairclough (at right) during the 1950s in order to raise funds for medical research that led to the development of the polio vaccine. The popular campaign, which also raised public awareness about people living with polio, led to the creation of the Ontario March of Dimes (after the fundraising slogan “Just a Dime”) as a major service organization for people with disabilities in Canada.29 (Public domain)

Family-driven organizations such as the Ontario March of Dimes complemented the work of other organizations dedicated to certain groups of disabled people, such as the Muscular Dystrophy Association, Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Canadian Paraplegic Association, and War Amps which established a pattern of disability advocacy on behalf of disabled people and provision of functional community services. These charitable organizations addressed the social and economic problems of disability through a combination of specialized services, medical research, public advocacy, and political lobbying. As charities increasingly recognized that greater public awareness of disability often resulted in greater influence over policies affecting disabled people, the boundaries of service agency and advocacy were progressively blurred when fundraising initiatives were linked with public awareness campaigns that supported a particular vision of disability. Organized charities cultivated widespread appeal by tapping into deep-seated anxieties and moral obligations toward the less fortunate, attempting to resolve the social problem of disability by mediating disabled people’s supportive relationship with the larger community thus reinforcing the perception that people with disabilities were perpetual recipients of social benefits.30 As disabled people were increasingly seen as a public issue, rather than specifically a family burden, charitable organizations that were

30 Stienstra et al., Making Equality, 3.
driven by family advocates played a pivotal role in responses to the economic problems of disability.

DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION AND THE ROLE OF FAMILY ADVOCACY

For most of the twentieth century, parents and families were forced either to relinquish their disabled children and adult relatives into the care of residential hospitals or face the daunting alternative of raising them at home amid a lack of necessary supports, underdeveloped local services, and widespread inaccessibility. Immersed in a culture of reverence for medical authority, the medicalization of disabled people framed disability as a complex medical phenomenon that required expert intervention and management by medical professionals. As a result, many families believed they lacked the resources and knowledge to effectively care for disabled people in the community and accepted doctors’ recommendations for institutionalization as a definitive assessment of their disabled relatives’ needs and abilities. In her oral history of children with physical disabilities who lived at Bloorview Hospital in Toronto between 1960 and 1989 Tracy Odell, who also lived at the hospital for a time, notes that one-third of study participants were placed in institutions due to medical needs that could not be addressed at home in the community. Odell observes, however, that these same people had “difficulty remembering the value or relevance” of the therapy they received while living at the hospital, suggesting that residential hospitals more accurately represented convenient depositories rather than places where intensive medical management was appropriate and necessary.  

and recovery committed generations of people to long-term residential care during this period.

The mid-twentieth century polio epidemic, however, triggered a series of events that unexpectedly transformed a generation of parents and families into a powerful group of social reformers. Children who survived the poliomyelitis disease often experienced a form of infantile paralysis that typically presented families with their first exposure to disability and a multitude of previously unseen systemic barriers. Iron lung respirators, crutches, and reliance on wheelchairs for mobility which accompanied the disease suddenly became a reality for many families who were forced to recalibrate their expectations around ability and health. Although some families placed recovering children in long-term care hospitals, many parents were driven by a new set of expectations about the possibilities of social integration and insisted that their children participate fully in the community. Parents who invested a high degree of emotional energy in the recovery and rehabilitation of disabled children often found these experiences resulted in them “accidentally” becoming advocates on behalf of disabled people. As Melanie Panitch notes, “activist parents whose struggle at an individual level for their own son or daughter launched national organizations.” 32

Parents and families of people with developmental disabilities during the 1960s increasingly questioned the quality of care and rationale for lifelong institutionalization. Reports on the poor state of residential hospitals shook the confidence of parents who were increasingly reluctant to relinquish their children into the total care of medical

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60.; For further discussion of the relationship between medical supports and discourses of denied or relinquished citizenship, see: Esther Ignagni, “Disabled Young People, Support and the Dialogical Work of Accomplishing Citizenship.” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2011).
32 Panitch, Accidental Activists, 2.
authorities. At the urging of influential parent activists Gerald and Betty Anglin in Toronto, Pierre Berton (then a journalist for the Toronto Star) conducted an investigation in 1959 of the Orillia Hospital School for the Mentally Retarded. The Anglins, who had previously removed their son Mark from the residential wing of the Orillia Hospital, led Berton on a tour of the facility in order to illustrate the concerns held by many parents that Ontario’s institutions for people with developmental disabilities were often substandard and contradicted the notion that disabled people enjoyed better care in such environments rather than in the community. Berton’s subsequent article based on his observations ignited a firestorm of controversy around the state of residential institutions in Ontario and fuelled a wider movement in Canada focused on radical reform of care for people with disabilities living in institutions. Similar media-led investigations in the United States, such as Geraldo Rivera’s award-winning investigative documentary on Willowbrook State School on Staten Island in New York City, represented crucial junctures in the cultivation of parent activism across North America.

Inspired by a growing movement in the United States to deinstitutionalize disabled people, parents’ groups in Canada coalesced around local closures of residential institutions, separate schools, and other segregated facilities. A movement spearheaded by loosely structured, ad hoc coalitions of parents and families of disabled people emerged during the 1950s and 1960s and were focused on shepherding people out of institutions and into the community. The development of local groups often originated

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34 “Betty Anglin”
35 Willowbrook: The Last Great Disgrace, directed by Albert Primo (1972; New York: WABC-TV, 1972), VHS.
with informal discussions in kitchens and living rooms that quickly spilled out into local
neighbourhoods and entire cities, providing the basis for the establishment of provincial
and national parent-based advocacy associations. 36 A letter published in the Toronto Star
in September 1948, for example, called for more resources to help parents keep their
disabled children at home. The letter led to a meeting at the Carlton Street United Church
(now St. Luke’s United) in Toronto and subsequent founding of the Parents' Council for
Retarded Children (now Community Living Toronto), which also served as the national
headquarters for the Canadian Association for Retarded Children (now Canadian
Association for Community Living). 37 Similarly, the Ontario Federation for the
Physically Handicapped (OFPH), for example, mushroomed following a letter that was
circulated in 1971 to various service agencies inviting them to a discussion of common
problems affecting people with physical disabilities. Eleven respondents quickly
ballooned to a meeting of 150 people in July 1971 at Jesse Ketchum School in midtown
Toronto that was open to “all who are concerned about the physically handicapped.” 38
Local groups such as these fed into a larger movement focused on replacing segregated
care with a constellation of need-specific services as family advocates demanded more
opportunities for their children and adult relatives with physical and developmental
disabilities than a life of segregation.

36 “Betty Anglin”
37 City of Toronto Archives (hereafter TA), SC 607, File 36, Report, Toronto Association for Community
38 Archives of Ontario (hereafter AO), RG 7-148, Box B217563, File “Professional Outreach,” Paper,
Ontario Federation for the Physically Handicapped, Affirmative Action: Public Education: 7th Annual
General Meeting and Conference, 23 Oct 1978; The OFPH was subsequently established as a federation of
twenty-six local, provincial and federal organizations. Although the OFPH included members from
consumer and rehabilitation groups, its president in 1981 was Lee Rullman of the Ontario March of Dimes
and it appeared that rehabilitation groups dominated the organization.
Oral narratives by interview participants interviewed for the present study similarly provided insight into the role parents played during this period in the cultivation of new disability identities within the deinstitutionalization movement. Study participants who discussed their relationships with parents and family members noted that they were encouraged to engage in productive work and view themselves as capable citizens. Participants found that their relationship with parents had a profoundly empowering impact on them which they then used to confront various social and physical barriers to economic participation.\textsuperscript{39} Often forced to advocate for access to mainstream opportunities, parents instilled traditional work ethics in their children despite their physical or mental disabilities. Study participants whose early parental relationships dated from the 1960s and earlier revealed that parents had a great deal of influence in the cultivation of individual values around work and integration. A strong work ethic, motivation, and self-confidence in one’s capabilities often stemmed from the social dynamics of family environments. “Michael,” born in 1966, discovered that he lived with certain mental health issues and believed that his family background convinced him that work was a necessary aspect of community integration. Michael notes, “I come from a middle-class family where my parents worked hard and my sister has been successful. I come from this ethic of ‘work hard.’”\textsuperscript{40}

Social conditioning within participants’ family environments emphasized the importance of work and functionality despite perceived limitations of individual

\textsuperscript{39} Following Research Ethics Board approval, thirty people with disabilities were recruited through various advertisements and word-of-mouth to conduct semi-structured oral interviews about how work and employment shaped their lived experience of disability. Interview transcripts were processed and coded using NVivo 9.0 and participants were given full control over the content of their testimonies. See Chapter Eight and Appendix C for a more detailed explanation of the oral history component used in this study.

\textsuperscript{40} “Michael,” Interview with Author, 27 July 2011.
impairments. Most participants agreed that stable family support provided the means to cultivate personal identities based around capability, including sloughing off stereotypes that linked disability with dependency. “Grace,” who acquired infantile glaucoma and lives with visual impairments states, “I was from a very poor family and my parents frowned on welfare and any form of it. So it was, ‘Get off your butt and do something, kid!’”

Similarly, “William,” also born in 1942, who sustained a spinal cord injury at age sixteen asserts, “I had the sense that I had to work as everybody else did, as my parents did. The idea of sitting in my parent’s house with my hand out was really repugnant to me. After I went away to Toronto to university I never went back home to live.”

Parental expectations around work, such as those expressed by interview participants, regardless of physical or mental impairments, imprinted utilitarian values but also challenged predominant expectations that enabled individual people with disabilities to resist conventional attitudes around disability.

Although there were many paths that led parents and families of disabled people to become vocal advocates promoting a progressive vision that focused on capabilities rather than deficits, parent activism entailed relating individual struggles to larger issues. Melanie Panitch notes that the term “parents’ movement” obscures the reality that it was primarily mothers who became activists even though it was mainly men who formed the leadership of emergent advocacy organizations. Panitch observes that these mothers were “accidental activists” in that they were not necessarily spurred to activism by feminist goals, but rather from a sense of “gendered obligation” reminiscent of the

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41 “Grace”
43 Panitch, Accidental Activists, 2.
principles articulated by an older generation of maternal feminists.\textsuperscript{44} Parents were increasingly confident that a segregated model of care was ultimately damaging to disabled people and undermined their children’s potential for successful community living. Parents often found they needed to advocate for their child to ensure they received the residential, recreational, educational, occupational, and psychological supports they needed to successfully live in the community and that their struggles were important experiences in the construction of a common platform with other families. Panitch concludes, “Faced with constantly having to present an alternative view of their child to the world, [mothers] became more confident and outgoing in what they knew—and more aware of what the authorities did not.”\textsuperscript{45}

While individual families were forced to navigate the complexities of the medical system and other family advocates, there also arose spaces for compatibility and tension surrounding the priorities of other families, service agencies and advocacy organizations. Personal and emotional inspiration formed the basis of family advocacy, but also occasionally contrasted sharply with the collective goals of advocacy groups and professionals. The Oscar-nominated film Lorenz’s Oil epitomized these dynamics within parent-driven organizations as one couple (played by Susan Sarandon and Nick Nolte) struggled to raise their child Francesco at home despite the fact that he lived with a highly rare degenerative disease that required complex medical care.\textsuperscript{46} Faced with an inflexible system of medical trials and a deferential parent’s group, Francesco’s parents rejected the collective vision of the other parents, forging their family’s own path toward community living. In her celebrated family autobiography Four Walls of My Freedom,

\textsuperscript{44} Panitch, Accidental Activists, 2.
\textsuperscript{45} Panitch, Accidental Activists, 2.
\textsuperscript{46} Lorenz’s Oil, directed by George Miller (1992; Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures, 1992), DVD.
Canadian author Donna Thomson explained such reasoning of parents of disabled children. Thomson asserts, “The wellbeing of children and their parents is so deeply interconnected that usually parents cannot separate the two. Certainly, I couldn’t. In the case of children with disabilities, this extreme closeness lasts much, much longer into adulthood.”

Families of people living in institutions during the 1960s increasingly believed that existing treatment of disabled people inadequately served the goal of improving the skills and abilities necessary for reintegration in society. The Woodlands Parents Group, for example, which was established in 1968 in Vancouver, produced a powerful documentary called *Thursday’s Child* which showcased widespread opposition to institutionalization among family advocates in Canada. As part of the national response to the ground-breaking investigation of the Orillia Hospital, the documentary represented the horrors of parents who criticized the state of Canadian residential institutions, featuring apparently unattended patients wandering sterile hallways or compulsively rocking in chairs, surrounded by incessant crying and screaming. Skeptical of the project, government officials initially denied the film’s producers access to certain units for “the severely retarded” and were eventually forced to sign a release form that reserved the right of administrators to deem any audio or video unacceptable. The film echoed the infamous Willowbrook investigation in New York as well as the landmark documentary film *Hurry Tomorrow* that documented life in a locked psychiatric hospital ward in Los

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Angeles and sparked a major investigation of the state of care for psychiatric patients.\textsuperscript{49} Many parents in the Woodlands Parents Group reported that after a three-month “settling-in” period, they had difficulty recognizing their skinnier, head shaven, and heavily medicated children. Parents were also reportedly made to feel unwelcome or treated with token civility by professionals and others involved in the care of children and told that if they fashioned themselves as experts they should take their children home and care for them on their own.\textsuperscript{50} Many parents felt they were forced to make an “intolerable trade off” between inadequate community supports or “placing our children in a traumatic environment in which they would be neglected and abused.”\textsuperscript{51} Parents felt pitied, not respected, and “prevented from exercising any meaningful influence in our handicapped children’s lives,” while being “branded as ‘over-emotional’” if they expressed anything beyond complete deference to medical authorities.\textsuperscript{52} It was from this sense of possibility and outrage that many parents stimulated the development of alternatives to institutional care.

RECALIBRATING THE EXPERIENCE OF DISABILITY

Family advocates grew increasingly frustrated with the existing treatment of disabled people, believing that community supports and services should be implemented to promote the social and economic integration of disabled people. Parents’ groups argued that medical authorities often inappropriately shuffled more people with

\textsuperscript{49} *Hurry Tomorrow*, directed by Richard Cohen (1975; Los Angeles, CA: Halfway House Partnership, 1975), DVD.


\textsuperscript{51} “Woodlands Parents Group”

\textsuperscript{52} “Woodlands Parents Group”
disabilities into residential institutions and that this situation partly arose from a lack of community-based services which discouraged parents from raising their children at home. Parents also argued that these conditions also inhibited institutionalized disabled peoples’ potential to develop necessary skills and competencies to function in the community. For many families, community living did not necessarily entail complete independence from medical care, but encouraged a step away from “total care” institutions that segregated many disabled people from the broader community environment.

By the early 1970s, parent advocates increasingly pressured lawmakers and service providers to incorporate the principles of integration into their policy. In Toronto, parents’ groups concerned with the “plight of the disabled and elderly” came together in 1972 to push for a major overhaul in social services, residential care, and community accessibility. Local parents joined with professionals, community volunteers and others in a local movement to transform the way disabled and elderly citizens were treated in the city. The coalition had excellent timing with the mayoralty election in which reform candidate David Crombie ran partly on a platform to initiate meaningful dialogue with the city’s disability community. Crombie’s election in 1973 proved a landmark victory for parent activists who helped “initiate a change in Toronto’s climate towards the disabled and elderly.” As a result of his campaign promises to parent advocates, Crombie created the Mayor’s Task Force on the Disabled and Elderly which functioned on an open-door policy where public submissions were openly solicited to help guide their work. The subsequent report of the task force detailed a number of ways to improve

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the participation of disabled people in the city which led to the creation of the Office for
the Disabled and Elderly led by a coordinator whose mandate revolved around the
implementation of the report’s recommendations.\(^\text{54}\) The Office marked the culmination of
years of concerted advocacy by disabled people, their families and allies which originated
in the struggle to desegregate people with disabilities and carve out space for them in the
community.

Crombie’s election also coincided with the introduction of the Ontario
Developmental Services Act in 1974 which injected provincial funds into the
development of local community services for people with developmental disabilities.\(^\text{55}\)
While parent activism had initiated a discussion of community alternatives for the
“mentally retarded,” it was not until the early 1970s that serious consideration was given
to the development of such services.\(^\text{56}\) Between 1975 and 1982 approximately 2,800
community living residential alternatives were created and the capacity of Toronto’s
workshop and employment-training system grew from 3,600 to 7,600 spaces as 3,800
residents moved from the province’s long-term residential hospitals and other institutions
into the community, followed by a five-year plan to close six major institutions and phase
down others.\(^\text{57}\)

Access to accessible housing, however, was not a straightforward issue, as
advocates discovered in efforts to convert one provincially-owned building in downtown
Toronto into housing for people with disabilities. Rochdale College, a failed student-run

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\(^\text{54}\) Ibid
\(^\text{56}\) “The Shift to Community Living”
\(^\text{57}\) AO, RG 74-30, Box B167563, File “Labour study (1),” Report, Toronto Youth Services, \textit{An Overview of the Requirements of Persons with Developmental Handicaps who are on Waiting Lists for Services in Metropolitan Toronto} (March 1985).
education and housing co-operative that operated between 1968 and 1975 at the corner of Bloor and Huron Streets, occupied an eighteen-storey building that became the subject of an intense campaign by parent-run organizations to create a flagship example of community living in which disabled people were fully integrated into their local neighbourhood. Letters from concerned community members and organizations noted that the “unique layout of the building is conducive to community living” especially since the “management of privately-owned high rises are reluctant to rent to people who are physically handicapped.”

The Toronto Handicapped Housing Registry proposed that since many disabled people had lived in co-operative housing they be in an advantageous position to teach others how to live cooperatively if one-third of the units were accordingly reserved for them. In response to mounting public concern about what to do with the building, provincial authorities agreed to hold a public meeting on the issue. A reportedly “well-attended” community forum was held in November 1975 and was the “first and only opportunity for the community to express its concerns about Rochdale and hear from Government officials what is being considered.”

Despite the overwhelming consensus reached at the forum for mixed-use in conformity with the principles of community living, with spaces reserved for people with disabilities, provincial government representatives declared that they were going to move ahead with the construction of a seniors’ residence as originally planned. Community forum members argued that they “deeply resent these bureaucratic manoeuvres” to circumvent

Celebrated urban planner Jane Jacobs even weighed in on the controversy, publicly lamenting the failed attempt to demonstrate commitment to community living philosophies in the city.\(^{62}\)

Deinstitutionalization also involved the replacement of institutional care with a complex matrix of community-based medical, social, rehabilitation and family services. For people with intellectual disabilities and mental health issues, deinstitutionalization involved downloading responsibility to local general hospitals whose psychiatric wards expanded precipitously in order to handle the spike in demand.\(^{63}\) But hospital wards were often ill-equipped to handle the influx of new patients and many were simply discharged into the community with minimal supports.\(^{64}\) People with “severe” physical disabilities also experienced a degree of “re-hospitalization” due to the lack of attendant care programming available to them in their own homes.\(^{65}\) The Canadian documentary series *Moving On*, for example, included an episode that focused on the experiences of ex-patients following the closure of psychiatric institutions. The episode revolved around healthcare initiatives and the narratives of people with disabilities who were concerned with the diversion of funds to support institutions and the result of “re-institutionalization” for many people with mental health issues.\(^{66}\) The story revealed that many people discharged from residential hospitals during the 1970s faced communities...

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\(^{61}\) Ibid


\(^{64}\) Ibid


\(^{66}\) *Moving On*, Season 1, Episode 14, first broadcast 20 June 1998 by Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.
not equipped to meet their needs and were later re-hospitalized into acute care wards or lived in extreme poverty and/or homelessness. One woman featured in the episode noted, “If somebody can live in the community, get a job, pay for their own way then I think society is better off than that person being locked in an institution.” While deinstitutionalization involved a shared desire to reintegrate disabled people into their local communities, it also entailed a new reliance on alternative access to services and family support. Families often acted as unpaid caregivers for thousands of people with disabilities who faced a patchy network of public, private and non-profit services. These families soon took matters into their own hands, however, as they worked to cultivate a new service infrastructure that dovetailed with their involvement in charitable organizations.

FAMILY ADVOCACY IN THE ERA OF DISABILITY RIGHTS

The rapid development of the voluntary non-profit sector during the postwar period in Canada laid the foundations for the integration of disabled people into mainstream society. The 1981 report of the Special Parliamentary Committee on the Disabled and Handicapped noted, for example, that while disabled people worked hard to achieve their self-determination, it “must be recognized that much of the progress that has been achieved on behalf of disabled persons over the past fifty years has come through the work of voluntary organizations. Without these pioneers, and the network of services they have created in every province, the prospects for self-help among disabled persons

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67 Ibid
would be greatly diminished.\textsuperscript{68} Similarly, Canadian delegates to the International Labour Organization in 1982 called for “official recognition of voluntary organisations which provided services aimed at the integration of disabled persons into the working life of the community.”\textsuperscript{69}

By the 1970s, charitable organizations—many which were established by family advocates—became key providers of disability-related supports and services for disabled people living in the community. Service agencies drew attention to the needs of disabled people while emphasizing that properly funded and administered programs were crucial to the success of community integration. Most service organizations for people with disabilities were based around a charitable model, surviving primarily on public donations and voluntarism. The Parents Council for the Retarded in Toronto, for example, stimulated the development of parent-based service organizations across the country and became a key fixture in the network of services for disabled children and adults during the transition to community living as the demand for services rose precipitously.\textsuperscript{70} Renamed the Metro Toronto Association for the Mentally Retarded (MAMR) in 1969, this parent-based organization was tightly organized around key principles of community integration and heavily reliant on volunteers and fundraising initiatives to maintain its level of service delivery. In lieu of state-run facilities, the MAMR developed its own specialized employment training centre, various sheltered

\textsuperscript{69} LAC, RG 29, Box 288, File 4304-3-16(1), Record, International Labour Organization, \textit{Provisional Record}, 68th session, 1982.
\textsuperscript{70} TA, SC 607, File 36, Report, Toronto Association for Community Living, 2000.
workshops, a long-term residence, and group homes to provide targeted services to the needs of people with intellectual disabilities living in the city.\footnote{Ibid}

The activism of concerned parents also transformed these organizations into effective lobby groups seeking improvement to public services available in the community as well as funding for their own organizations to provide alternative services themselves. Parent-driven organizations cultivated funding relationships with political authorities and built public credibility to become increasingly significant sources of services alongside an evolving welfare state. Parent networking also remained an important feature in the establishment and promotion of charitable services that made community living a reality and parents of disabled children and adults often sat on the boards of major charitable service organizations, providing support and direction to the development of new and existing services.\footnote{Panitch, \textit{Accidental Activists}, 5.} Non-profit charitable organizations accrued extensive experience during the 1960s and 1970s helping families of disabled children and adults find social and economic integration through in-house programming and promotional campaigns targeting prejudicial attitudes regarding the disabled. The Easter Seals of Ontario, for example, ran a Parent Delegate program during this period that was “rooted in the wisdom of generations of mothers” in which nurses would befriend new parents and connect them with relevant services, support, and advice.\footnote{Thomson, \textit{Four Walls of My Freedom}, 152.} Disability organizations such as these carved out a key position in the non-profit social service system that developed in the postwar period by acting as centers of expertise, research and advocacy.

\footnote{Ibid}
The expansion of the non-profit service system for disabled people was also due in large part to the widespread practice of servicing as well as employing clients as unpaid volunteers. In their study of disability-related charities in Ontario and British Columbia, Vera Chouinard and Valorie Crooks found that volunteer labour was used to run basic programming and support the administrative functioning of most charitable organizations. Service agencies that employed disabled clients increasingly came into conflict with parents who shared differing priorities than an increasingly organized and professional network of social workers and rehabilitation professionals. Goodwill Industries in Toronto reported, for example, that as more disabled people were referred to their organization at a younger age during the 1970s there was more opportunity for conflict with parents who sometimes disagree with operational issues. Goodwill noted in 1981 that thirty percent of referrals were terminated at the end of an eight-week assessment and that this was likely due in part to parents’ influence over access to services. Government officials with Ontario’s Handicapped Employment Program (HEP) concluded that “home environments affect successful employment rates,” particularly when it came to the nature of interactions with a developing infrastructure of disability-related services in the community.

Many voluntary organizations were set up under the auspices of a particular type of disability and services were typically structured to address the needs of its specific group of people with disabilities. As a result, service agencies during this period were

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76 Ibid
77 Ibid
fractured by a myriad of impairment-specific “causes” aligned with different medical categories of disability. This approach tended to focus on immediate concerns facing particular pathologies of disability rather than cultivating a broader identity or engage a larger constituency of disabled people. Parents of children and adults living with various types of “mental retardation,” for example, drove the deinstitutionalization movement and were also the ones later responsible for establishing local agencies to address the problems of social and economic integration facing this specific group of people with intellectual disabilities. As a result, services for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities proliferated while people with mental health issues and other disabilities did not necessarily enjoy the same expansion in a safety net of community agencies following rapid deinstitutionalization. As silos of disability advocacy developed in this manner, there was also little conversation or collaboration between them despite the fact that they collectively constituted the disability movement at the time. Each type of disability or category of impairment had its own medical experts, social advocates, and issues and generally lacked the framework in which to pursue a unified agenda that benefited all people with disabilities or in which to address the shared problems of employment, housing, education, and transportation.

Non-profit charities sought to improve opportunities for disabled people to live and work in the community, but did so without necessarily attempting to reconfigure the predominant view of disability as an individual medical problem. Need-specific advocacy restricted communication between disability organizations and prevented the development of a politicized disability identity since the medical and social needs of

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Different groups of disabled people were addressed variably by different groups of advocates. Disability studies scholar Tom Shakespeare has argued in support of a revised social model of disability that legitimates the realities of impairment beyond socially constructed barriers. Shakespeare notes, “Voluntary organisations and charitable relations will continue to be necessary, both on the road towards a more equal society, but also even after equality has been achieved. This is because disabled people and their families will continue to have complex needs, and voluntary organisations will often be the best way to support those needs.”

Family advocates largely prioritized fundraising for scientific research and development as it related to improvements in diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation, and assistive technology for people with specific disabilities. Significant advancements in medical science and assistive technology tied research fundraising initiatives to disability awareness campaigns which shaped a particular image of disabled people. While these initiatives were perhaps necessary for the funding of medical advancements and development of service agencies that initially enabled community living, such measures ultimately reinforced the notion of disability as a complex individual problem requiring medical intervention.

People with disabilities increasingly observed that fundraising initiatives largely reflected a charitable approach to disability. Disability activist Susan Peters observes that fundraisers, such as the Jerry Lewis Muscular Dystrophy Telethon, reflected a paternalist approach to disability in its showcasing of unfortunate representations of disabled adults.

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and children as marketing tools.\textsuperscript{81} The telethon, poignantly broadcast each Labour Day Weekend in Canada when the public was supposed to recognize and celebrate the achievements of working people, infantilized disabled people who were referred to as “Jerry’s Kids” regardless of their age.\textsuperscript{82} The American telethon was widely viewed in Canada, and Canadians typically donated approximately ten percent of the telethon’s total multi-million dollar revenue.\textsuperscript{83} Barbara Turnbull, similarly found that fundraising initiatives turned her into the subject of charity. Turnbull sustained a spinal cord injury due to a gunshot wound while working at a Brampton, Ontario convenience store and was subsequently the subject of intense media coverage.\textsuperscript{84} Turnbull recounted one instance where she was in a restaurant with her mother following a period of rehabilitation when a woman walked up to them, confirmed Barbara’s identity and said she wanted to donate to the Barbara Turnbull Fund but exclaimed “You never \textit{really} know if the money goes where it’s intended;” so the woman leaned down, kissed Barbara on the head, and left $100 on the table.\textsuperscript{85} Turnbull recalled that this direct encounter with “fundraising” left her “feeling greatly embarrassed and like, well, like a charity case.”\textsuperscript{86}


\begin{footnotesize}
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\itemookyline{Russell, \textit{Beyond Ramps}, 86.}
\itemookyline{Barbara Turnbull, \textit{Looking in the Mirror} (Toronto: Toronto Star, 1997), 46.}
\itemookyline{Turnbull, \textit{Looking in the Mirror}, 46.}
\itemookyline{Turnbull, \textit{Looking in the Mirror}, 46.}
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equal civil and human rights protections as well as economic and social security necessary for a decent standard of living. The Declarations were due in large part to multinational movements of parent advocates who struggled to recalibrate the experience of disability and represented the culmination of decades of parent activism focused on building a framework dedicated to securing the rights and protections of disabled people. The UN referenced the pivotal role of families of disabled persons in the entrenchment and protection of these rights as equal participants in the pursuit of community integration. The 1982 UN World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons similarly recognized the critical role of families in the rehabilitation and integration of disabled people. The UN again noted that “in helping disabled persons, every effort should be made to keep their families together, to enable them to live in their own communities and to support family and community groups who are working with this objective.” The parents’ movement that worked to bring about the goals set out in these international also helped to transform the political discourse around disability in Canada as parent-driven organizations recognized the need to enshrine their particular vision of disability in the legislative framework of the country.

While family advocates sought to reorient expectations around disabled people and energized the voluntary sector to improve resources for disabled people to live and function in the community, they did not necessarily prioritize the development of a new model of disability. Family advocacy in fact constituted a form of consumer activism as parents used their position as proxy consumers of services utilized by their disabled

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children and relatives to push for systemic improvements that better reflected their particular vision of disability. As the Woodlands Parents Group learned, “Parents of people with handicaps sometimes make the mistake of creating too sharp a distinction between human values and practical systems, and professionals seem particularly prone to this form of myopia.” Service agencies and clubs, parents’ groups, and other advocacy groups that acted on behalf of disabled people conveyed the message that increased funding for rehabilitation technology, services, and community-based supports would satisfy the needs of disabled people. The predominant approach taken by parent-driven organizations was largely focused on the pragmatic issues involved in improvement of disabled people’s ability to function in the community rather than reconfiguring the social and economic fabric of society to improve its inclusivity.

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89 LAC, RG-29, Box 238, File 4302-3-9, Film Proposal, 21 Jul 1983.
Illustration depicting how family advocates in the Woodlands Parents Group perceived their supportive role regarding individuals with intellectual disabilities living in the community. Among other issues, the working lives of children and adults associated with the Group were seen to require monitoring by family and personal networks which ensured individuals were fully supported by families, personal advocates, brokers, and independent monitors to access work, education, housing, medical services, recreation, legal aid, and other services in the community.90 (© Woodlands Parents Group, 1984. Reproduced with permission.)

Disability rights activists increasingly observed that while families were often a springboard to community integration, they could also have a disempowering effect on disabled people and argued that responses to disability by family advocates often occurred within the paradigm of the patriarchal family unit that projected utilitarian social roles upon people with disabilities. In a documentary televised in 1982 in Canada called The Disability Myth, Tracy Carpenter, a former resident at Bloorview Hospital during the 1960s, recalled that she always had strong family support whenever she resisted institutional control over her life.91 But Carpenter observed that her particular family situation was largely an anomaly in that many of her peers lived in families that presented barriers to their full social and economic participation in the community. Parents were often indicted by disability rights activists for being overprotective, particularly in their role as advocates. The Ontario March of Dimes, for example, lamented that many people with disabilities were “simply not employable” largely because they had grown up with low expectations of their capabilities in segregated schools and had overprotective parents who did not stimulate their development.92 A prime example of such dynamics was televised on CTV Network in 1979 on the popular Canadian series The Littlest Hobo

90 LAC, Box 238, File 4302-3-9, Woodlands Parents Group, c.1984.
in which a father blocked his disabled son, Chris (played by a young Mike Myers) from participating in a Frisbee competition:

Dad: Did you really think you could compete against these other boys?

Chris: I can try!

Dad: I’m sorry son, I can’t let you

Chris: Why not?

Dad: Because you might hurt yourself

Chris: Damn it...

Support worker: How could you do that to him?

Dad: Would you rather see him humiliate himself in a contest with some normal kids? I have to protect him.

Support worker: You’re not protecting him, Mr. Martin. You’re protecting yourself.93

As people with disabilities sought greater control over their lives, parents were increasingly considered to reflect a position of overprotectiveness and a barrier to full participation. Disability rights activism emerged during the 1970s with disabled people arguing that it became necessary to establish their own groups when charitable organizations driven by family advocates demonstrated a pattern of over-protectiveness.94

While family advocates created the conditions for the emergence of autonomy and disability rights activism in the 1970s and 1980s, they also presented barriers to the full expression of economic self-determination, consumer control over services, and identity

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93 *The Littlest Hobo*, Episode 2, “Boys on Wheels” first broadcast in 1979 by Canadian Television Networks.

politics which were increasingly marked as priorities for an emerging cross-disability community of people with disabilities.

During the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, the public face of disability spoke with many and varied voices, the majority of which did not belong to people with disabilities. Individual parents and groups comprised a dynamic set of family advocates who represented the condition, needs, and goals of disabled people to a wider audience. Advocates reflected different powerbases that collaborated and clashed in the promotion and protection of people with disabilities. The patriarchal family was often seen as a microcosm of larger social and economic that exerted power over loosely-defined subjugated populations, such as the relationship between people with disabilities, parents or service agencies. Many disabled people increasingly found charitable organizations to be stigmatizing and argued that they reinforced a patriarchal status quo since community living generally entailed heavy reliance on service networks controlled in part by professionals and family associations.

As the discourse of disability increasingly shifted toward the pursuit of disability rights and independent living during the 1960s and early 1970s, family advocates were forced to grapple with the emergence of new powerbases of disability rights activist organizations that challenged their influence over the lives of people with disabilities. These new voices within the disability community argued that despite developing service organizations and promoting awareness, family advocates failed to fashion a powerful and convincing identity from which to challenge predominant attitudes and responses to

people with disabilities. As Kathy Martinez notes in regards to the development of the Independent Living movement in Canada, “Unlike ethnic and racial minorities, but similar to the gay community, disabled individuals often are isolated from other disabled children or adults and cannot rely on their families or those around them to develop their identity. Therefore, when disabled people got together for the first time as a minority group and began to develop and deliver their own messages, this was uniquely empowering to them and, at the same time, shocking to a public who had never encountered this phenomenon.”96 Different conceptualizations of autonomy thus often resulted in tension between children and parents, creating situations where the full realization of independence for many people with disabilities was effectively blocked by family advocates.97

Disability rights activists challenged the charitable approach to disability on the basis that it promoted negative stereotypes of disability, robbed people of their rightful access to work opportunities, and counteracted attempts to secure social and economic equality.98 While many parent-driven organizations secured public funds to deliver vocational rehabilitation services, most disability organizations continued to rely heavily on charitable donations. Non-profit charitable organizations in Canada were generally restricted during this period in terms of the scope and extent of their political activities.99 Charities were not to engage in political endorsements and were permitted to commit

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only a small fraction of their budgets to political campaigns. Yet, fundraising initiatives provided regular opportunities to promote awareness of their disabled constituencies and highlight the organization’s agenda. For a growing movement of disability rights activists, however, the continuation of charitable methods to raise awareness and funds for services were seen as being delivered as a matter of privilege rather than right that conflicted with a developing discourse around disability rights which sought to move away from the longstanding charitably approach to disability.

Parent advocates and their advocacy organizations were also increasingly seen by disability activists as (perhaps unintentionally) contributing to negative attitudes around disability. In his autobiography *Daddy Bent-Legs*, Canadian author Neil Matheson, who lives with cerebral palsy, commented on the relationship between his parents and his personal experience of disability that motivated him to an activist position. He noted, “As parents, my mom and dad may have a good second-hand knowledge and understanding of what it is like to be disabled, but they could never hope to give an accurate firsthand account of anything. Not without living it, as I have.”

The professionalization of social, vocational and rehabilitation services also distanced social welfare from its roots in charitable work as many activists and scholars argued that service agencies continued to reinforce widespread disabling attitudes. As Fraser Valentine and Jill Vickers explained, “The lives of PWDs [people with disabilities] were increasingly medicalized and a large cadre of rehabilitation professionals emerged. The focus was on rehabilititating or ‘curing’

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100 Ibid
PWDs who were seen as ‘sick.’”

Family advocates and service agencies were thus increasingly seen by disability rights activists as being responsible for reinforcing the view disability as a ‘problem’ to be ‘solved’ through research funding, and improved assistive technology. As a result, social services that were established by parents and increasingly controlled by professionals in the “disability field” were increasingly seen as locking disabled people into relationships of dependency and inadvertently promoting longstanding disabling attitudes.

CONCLUSION

Family advocates during the 1960s and 1970s in Canada established the conditions necessary for the redefinition of disability. Individuals and local groups envisioned new models of care based in the community rather than segregated facilities and actively worked to create inclusive social and physical environments capable of supporting disabled people. As modern social reformers, parents and families argued that disabled people were capable of living with their families or in group homes if provided with the proper supports. Community living entailed the destruction of an existing system of institutionalized care that had long prevented people with disabilities from seeking social and economic integration. As parents’ groups funnelled their energies into charitable service organizations, a powerful network of disability advocacy materialized which laid the groundwork for “full participation.” With practical supports in place and family advocates championing their cause, the goal of integration with mainstream

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society appeared imminent. While family advocacy largely adhered to the conventional medical model of disability during this period, advocates were also responsible for the development of an international framework for disability rights.

A unique dilemma arose, however, with the advent of disability rights activism by the mid-1970s which challenged families’ control over services and the messaging of disability issues to a wider audience. By the end of the decade, disability rights activists believed they represented the vanguard of a longstanding path toward developing a progressive vision of disability in mainstream society that articulated needs and goals of disabled people. Family advocates, charitable and religious organizations, and rehabilitation agencies controlled by social service and rehabilitation professionals were considered by disability rights activists as barriers to the realization of civil rights activism in the disability community which promised to translate the “good intentions” of others into a practicable platform of legal, cultural and economic advancement.  

As the representative voice of disability rights activists during the 1970s in Canada, COPOH thus worked toward “strengthening the organizational efforts of the handicapped community in Canada” in order to help the disability community move out from dependent relationships with family and charitable organizations. Disability rights activists charged that parents, in both their familial and organizational roles, were often overprotective and inhibited full realization of independence and self-determination. Nevertheless, families of people with disabilities remained a fundamental element in the pursuit of social and economic integration and helped to establish a platform for the realization of disability rights.

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Many of the handicapped we have encountered seem to have the attitude that only a handicapped person knows what's good for a handicapped person … While we believe that the handicapped can add a new dimension to the thinking of traditional service delivery systems, being handicapped does not necessarily make one an instant expert. Many responsible disabled persons have become extremely knowledgeable in the field of rehabilitation. Many of these people also have a constituency to whom they are responsible. Thus, a person with a handicap who has developed a good background in rehabilitation, who has the ear of other handicapped, and who has the ability to provide the system with insights which they themselves might not have, can be a valuable person. On the other hand, there are many professionals who are not handicapped, have good rapport with their clients, and are objective enough to realize the deficiencies and short-comings of the system, who are just as valuable to the purpose of promoting change for the better.¹

During the 1970s and 1980s, people with disabilities became more visible in local communities across Canada, fostered in large part by the proliferation of disability organizations and development the rehabilitation industry. The “work of disability” encompassed a wide range of professions and vocations dedicated to assisting people with acquired and congenital disabilities to develop their physical, mental, social, and vocational preparedness for full participation in the labour market. Rehabilitation, particularly in preparation for competitive employment, often entailed an extensive and prolonged journey through various training regimens designed to help disabled bodies approximate normative standards of ability. Medical and technological innovation enhanced the capability of rehabilitation programs to produce highly “abled” disabled

people. Rehabilitation associations, however, used their social capital as part of the medical authority complex to enhance their public credibility by shaping the presentation of disabled bodies to the rest of society. As products of a modern rehabilitation system staffed by “experts,” people with disabilities were regularly featured in awareness campaigns sponsored by rehabilitation organizations that were designed to highlight disabled peoples’ employability while ultimately underscoring the importance of the rehabilitation system in their lives. Rehabilitation was often essential for people with acquired and congenital disabilities who sought greater levels of social and economic participation in the community. Yet, rehabilitation practices and philosophies were also problematically situated against new sources of disability activism, particularly with the emergence of disability rights activism which challenged the traditional medical model of disability. Insulated by their high public esteem, professional associations of rehabilitation workers and service agencies were reluctant to share power with disability rights activists. The growing influence of disability rights activism over the course of the 1980s, however, forced these professionals into a collaborative position in order to pursue shared goals of social and economic integration.

This following chapter examines the contested role of the rehabilitation system in the lives of people with disabilities during a period in which an emerging social movement of disability rights activists transformed the conceptualization and experience of disability. The first section documents the growth of the rehabilitation industry as people with disabilities increasingly pursued mainstream employment opportunities and community integration. The second and third sections analyze the increasing reliance of disabled people on a rehabilitation industry that perpetuated a medicalized “rehabilitation
paradigm” of disability. This paradigm is analyzed through an examination of the nature
and process of rehabilitation practices as well as the emergence of public awareness
campaigns conducted on behalf of the disability community by rehabilitation
professionals. The final section examines the evolving relationship between professional
associations, service agencies and disability rights activists as an emerging social
movement attempted to forge a new cooperative politics of rehabilitation.

VETERANS AND THE GROWTH OF THE REHABILITATION INDUSTRY

The contemporary rehabilitation system in Canada originated largely in the
development of supports and services to reintegrate injured veterans back into the social
and economic fabric of Canadian society. The aftermath of both World Wars and
outbreaks such as the mid-twentieth-century polio epidemic enhanced the public’s trust in
medical authorities while highlighting the importance of the rehabilitation industry. As
Jerome Bickenbach observes, “The social problems brought about by returning veterans
and the underclass of unemployed people with disabilities were seen as problems arising
from the impact of impairments.”² Thousands of veterans with amputations, visual
impairments, and other physical and mental impairments returned to inaccessible homes,
workplaces, and public spaces. Despite undergoing intensive physical and vocational
rehabilitation to enable them to access mainstream social and economic opportunities,
many injured veterans could not find employment. The economic dislocation of injured
veterans was morally unacceptable to most politicians and the wider Canadian public,

² Bickenbach, Physical Disability and Social Policy, 105.; David Cameron and Fraser Valentine,
and Federalism: Comparing Different Approaches to Full Participation, ed. David Cameron and Fraser
Valentine (Montreal: Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, 2001), 95.
which resulted in the development of initiatives to facilitate veterans back into the paid workforce. The 1951 National Conference on the Rehabilitation of the Physically Disabled reflected the culmination of this sentiment and also constituted a watershed event which led to the creation of a federal co-ordinator for vocational rehabilitation programming and new cost-sharing agreements with the provinces in an effort to rapidly expand the rehabilitation system to meet the needs of a growing disabled population.³ Federal-provincial cost-sharing in the area of vocational rehabilitation with veterans thus set the stage for the rapid development of the rehabilitation industry.

Eager to re-establish themselves as independent wage-earners, veterans formed associations and service organizations to promote awareness of disability and to secure resources that would improve disabled peoples’ access to rehabilitation services. Confronted with the dismal fate of continued social liminality, unemployment, and poverty which they saw as being commonplace among civilians with disabilities, injured veterans organized themselves into lobby groups and developed service agencies to actively improve the rehabilitation and social services systems. Veteran activists and associations lobbied relentlessly for the expansion of the rehabilitation system to assist them in their endeavour to live independently within largely inaccessible communities and to acquire work-related skills to promote financial independence.⁴ Organizations such as War Amps, established in 1920 by Great War veterans, were established on the principle of fraternalism or brotherly social support networking in order to help fellow injured veterans to acquire prosthetics, vocational training, and other rehabilitation

⁴ Pelka, What We Have Done, 131.
services at a time when few other options existed. Sir Arthur Pearson’s Association of the War-Blinded and the National Council of Veterans’ Associations formed a national lobbying force that pushed for improvements to pensions, legislation, and therapeutic services. In the postwar and interwar periods, veterans’ organizations such as these pressured federal and provincial governments to increase their direct involvement in rehabilitation programs for disabled veterans and civilians.

In response to the success of veterans groups, non-veteran people with disabilities increasingly complained that the developing rehabilitation system favoured veterans over civilians. Civilians argued against a two-tiered rehabilitation system, asserting that all people with disabilities living in the community needed similar access to work supports and rehabilitation services regardless of the origins of their impairments. Veterans were among the first to gain access to new accessible technologies and rehabilitation facilities which often enabled them to access job opportunities and generally achieve social and economic reintegration more expeditiously than civilians without such benefits. War-wounded veterans existed within a moral economy separate from other people with disabilities as it was generally held that their injuries and permanent impairments constituted the result of a patriotic sacrifice, which justly qualified them as being particularly “righteous” and “worthy beneficiaries.”

A landmark study conducted in the

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6 Durflinger, Veterans with a Vision, 250.
9 Blanck, Right to Live in the World, 375-376.; For more information on the relationship between the Great War and disability see: Clarke, “‘You Will Not Be Going to this War,’” 161-183.
mid-1970s by Cyril Greenland, for example, included approximately 2,000 participants across the country and found, “The more basic services the CNIB [Canadian National Institute for the Blind] provided them compared poorly to the generous government pensions and other funding for the war-blinded veterans.”

Graeme McCreath argues that distinctions between veteran and civilian disabled people inhibited the development of better services for both groups. McCreath contends, “The contrast between what was available to veterans and what was available to civilians severely divided the blind community and prevented it from uniting toward a common goal.”

As wartime coordination agreements between federal and provincial governments expired, non-veteran people with disabilities enjoyed greater access to rehabilitation services that were critical to their economic success. Social historian Mary Tremblay observes that the volume and social dynamics of war veterans returning to Canadian communities provided the impetus for the development of treatment and rehabilitation facilities for civilians. Veterans with physical disabilities pushed for the rapid expansion of such community-based physical and occupational therapies as well as other disability-related programs, services, and supports that stimulated the rehabilitation industry. The spotlight that shone on large cohorts of injured veterans who made their way through the rehabilitation system convinced policymakers to initiate programs to increase wider access to rehabilitation services. While veterans received funding through Department of Veterans’ Affairs (DVA) and injured workers accessed the workers’ compensation

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11 McCreath, The Politics of Blindness, 16.
system, Tremblay found that civilians largely continued to deal with congenital and acquired disabilities on their own or through private insurance.\textsuperscript{13}

Wartime orders-in-council designed to facilitate the development of vocational rehabilitation programs for disabled veterans were replaced in 1961 with the Vocational Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons Act (VRDP). The VRDP enabled the rapid expansion of rehabilitation and job training for disabled civilians.\textsuperscript{14} Attentive to the economic reintegration of disabled people, vocational rehabilitation "stressed the importance of serving people with disabilities within their communities (as opposed to residential institutions) creatively helping people with disabilities overcome the challenges of daily life to attain self-sufficiency and personal fulfillment."\textsuperscript{15} The VRDP was a cost-sharing agreement between the federal and provincial governments to finance the provision of vocational rehabilitation for people with disabilities. In 1970, close to $45 million (approximately $272 million adjusted for inflation) was spent through the VRDP to finance the rapid development of rehabilitation services; an annual expenditure that ballooned to $510 million by the mid-1990s (approximately $705 million adjusted for inflation).\textsuperscript{16} Under the VRDP, rather than being deducted from disability pensions or requiring clients to pay out-of-pocket, all the necessary costs of rehabilitation programs were covered, including assessment fees, counselling, books, tools, restorative services, 

\textsuperscript{13} Tremblay et al., “When Elevators Were For Pianos,” 107.
vocational and job training, equipment, aids and other allowances were paid through vocational rehabilitation services. Due to the introduction of the VRDP, rehabilitation services were made available to many disabled people who could acquire work skills and abilities that would promote greater participation in social and economic life.

The prioritization of vocational rehabilitation in Canadian postwar policy flowed directly from the experiences of veterans and reflected the general belief that a speedy return to financial independence and paid employment effectively paved the way for fuller social integration in the community. Indeed, across North America vocational rehabilitation was the first type of service made available to both veterans and civilians with disabilities. In the United States, President Harry Truman established the President’s Committee for the Employment of the Handicapped (PCEH) in 1949 to address increased demand for vocational rehabilitation services by disabled veterans and the wider disability community. Back in Canada, veterans pursued initiatives to develop sheltered employment programs for fellow disabled veterans, including those at War Amps which established a well-known key tag recovery service that provided employment to veterans with amputations who were unable to find paid work in mainstream settings.

Similar to the War Amps approach to developing employment for people with disabilities, the CNIB ran a catering and concessional stand business that was staffed in large part by clients with visual impairments as part of a general program of vocational

18 Carey, On the Margins of Citizenship, 95.
19 Carey, On the Margins of Citizenship, 95.
supports.\textsuperscript{21} The enterprise, called “Caterplan,” began as a single lunch counter in Ottawa in 1928 that ballooned into a highly successful business by the 1960s with annual sales reportedly in excess of $30 million in over 550 locations across Canada.\textsuperscript{22}

One interview participant in the present study named “Robert,” who worked in CNIB’s Caterplan during the 1960s, recalled “I worked weekends at the CNIB ... every weekend throughout my high school and university days. It's relevant because it is very difficult to get part-time and summer employment for a blind or low vision person. But back in the 1960s and certainly even earlier than that, if you wanted to work you always got a job.”\textsuperscript{23} Other interview participants, “Dan” and “Grace,” similarly found that summer employment at Caterplan during the late 1950s and 1960s was the key to their success in obtaining full-time employment with the CNIB and eventual work as successful public servants in various levels of government.\textsuperscript{24} Disability rights activists associated with the group Blind Organization of Ontario with Self-help Tactics (BOOST), however, argued that Caterplan, whose blind workforce averaged thirteen to nineteen per cent of its total workforce between 1968 and 1975, had become a “substantial profit-making enterprise” that paid minimum wages and was tainted by “allegations of negative bias towards blind workers, who had little choice but to accept poor wages with little prospect of earning raises or promotions.”\textsuperscript{25} As BOOST observed, “The public is familiar with the image of a blind man behind the counter, dispensing

\textsuperscript{22} McCreath: 27.
\textsuperscript{23} “Robert,” Interview with Author, 20 June 2011.
\textsuperscript{24} “Dan,” Interview with Author, 10 June 2011.; “Grace,” Interview with Author, 28 July 2011.
\textsuperscript{25} Euclid Herie, \textit{Journey to independence: Blindness—the Canadian Story} (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2005): 115-116.; Figures based on calculations of sighted (S) and blind (B) workforce ratios reported by Euclid Herie (for 1968: 275(B), 2100(S)) and BOOST (for 1975: 125(B), 650(S)). See: Greenland, \textit{Vision Canada}; BOOST, \textit{The Third Eye} 11 (10 February 1977).; Durflinger, \textit{Veterans with a Vision}, 45.
candy or coffee in many public buildings, but the public does not know the problems faced by that man behind the counter.”

Unionized blind workers at Caterplan even went on strike in 1979 over allegations of poor working conditions and stipend-level wages and to protest the lack of consumer control in CNIB as evidence for the unjust working arrangements. COPOH similarly maintained that it was necessary to promote consumer activism because the rehabilitation industry including agencies such as the CNIB was increasingly seen to represent barriers to self-determination.

In Toronto, the establishment of Lyndhurst Lodge in 1945 under the DVA represented the success of local veterans groups led in part by Lieutenant John Counsell who identified a need for comprehensive residential rehabilitation and community support for people with spinal cord injuries. As DVA-sponsored patients and funded receded, Lyndhurst became part of an expanding network of rehabilitation services for people with physical disabilities. Under the leadership of Counsell and others, rehabilitation facilities such as Lyndhurst partnered with local and national service agencies, notably the Canadian Paraplegic Association, to provide both veterans and non-veteran people with disabilities increased access to assistive devices, counselling, and other tools essential for successful community living. Lyndhurst garnered a national reputation as a major centre for rehabilitation in the treatment of spinal cord injuries.

Saskatchewan Premier Tommy Douglas, champion of universal healthcare in Canada, famously committed his provincial government to subsidize Saskatchewan residents with

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29 Tremblay, “When Elevators were for Pianos,” 103-116.
30 Tremblay, “When Elevators were for Pianos,” 103-116.
spinal cord injuries to attend Lyndhurst in order to receive intensive rehabilitation therapy that was otherwise unavailable to them.\textsuperscript{31}

Upon completion of physical rehabilitation, however, many Lyndhurst patients faced the dilemma of inaccessible communities and workplaces. In his institutional history of Lyndhurst Lodge, historian Geoffrey Reaume reveals that many people with spinal cord injuries who attended Lyndhurst and were successfully discharged nevertheless encountered difficulty in their social and economic reintegration into society. Reaume recounts the work of medical director, Dr. Albin Jousse, who wrote to the Commissioner of Ontario’s Hospitals in 1964 complaining that many young patients had nowhere to go following the completion of rehabilitation programs other than long-term care facilities.\textsuperscript{32} Jousse understood the difficulty encountered by Lyndhurst patients during the transition to community living and considered this to be a dilemma of the rehabilitation hospital itself which had a responsibility to assist them in find suitable work and living arrangements. In one instance, Dr. Jousse proposed that young females might live in student nurse residences in order to avoid being placed with the elderly while still receiving the ongoing care they required, which included an added benefit of possible employment as receptionists.\textsuperscript{33} As veteran and civilian Lyndhurst clients found, rehabilitation addressed only issues of physical recovery and vocational or occupational abilities needed to function within accessible environments.

\textsuperscript{31} Reaume, \textit{Lyndhurst}, 86.
\textsuperscript{32} Reaume, \textit{Lyndhurst}, 86.
\textsuperscript{33} Reaume, \textit{Lyndhurst}, 86.
Photographs of typical obstacles during the 1970s confronted by wheelchair users on the University of Toronto campus as reported in *The Varsity* newspaper. Street curbs and long staircases presented barriers to access in the city and thus prevented many people with mobility impairments from fully participating in the life of the community.  

The reality, however, was that most clients of rehabilitation programs, whether having acquired a disability from birth or later in life, were discharged into communities that were not always willing or able to receive them. Mary Tremblay observed, “When the veterans returned to civilian life they adapted existing homes, including installation of in-home elevators, found houses without stairs, or used apartments with elevators. The veterans received funding for housing modifications. Civilians who were eligible for Workmen’s Compensation could count on some assistance with home modifications, and sometimes charitable organizations would offer limited assistance with housing.

adaptations.” Tremblay observed that most people with disabilities, regardless of the origin of their impairment, relied heavily on the family support or individual resilience. One interview participant in the present study, “William,” attended Lyndhurst in the early 1960s following a spinal cord injury. William reflected on his experience and those of his peers who found that initial treatment and recovery he received only partly prepared him for community living. Following two years of rehabilitation at Lyndhurst, William returned to his hometown before attending university during a period of time in the early 1960s which he referred to as the “pre-accessibility days.” He encountered no curb cuts at street corners, “apartment buildings were very difficult,” “bathroom doors were too narrow,” no accessible underground parking “which is pretty much a necessity if you’re living on your own,” among other difficulties. William credited Canadian Paraplegic Association social worker Ross Beggs for providing essential support while he reintegrated into the community. Beggs, whose accomplishments and accolades by ex-patients were documented in Reaume’s history of Lyndhurst, was a vocational rehabilitation counsellor responsible in the early 1960s for assisting people to find jobs, housing, and gain access to schooling. William reported that Beggs even liaised with his university’s engineering department on his and other students’ behalf to design and install curb cuts at priority locations throughout campus. For William and other people with various disabilities, rehabilitation commenced his pursuit of social and economic reintegration rather than representing its terminus.

35 Tremblay, “When Elevators were for Pianos,” 108.
36 Tremblay, “When Elevators were for Pianos,” 108.
38 Reaume, Lyndhurst, 117.
39 “William”
REHABILITATION AND THE RE-EDUCATION OF DISABLED BODIES

Disability became “big business” in the postwar period as people with disabilities were situated at the center of an extensive rehabilitation industry which “demands clients in order to justify [its] existence.”  In drawing attention to “special” needs arising from impairment, disabled people were singled out by rehabilitation that instituted “corrective” regimes. As a result, rehabilitation separated disabled people from the “able-bodied” population where submission to therapeutic intervention and corrective measures were ostensibly not required.  Rene Gadacz observes that rather than being “warehoused” in institutions, disabled people instead were often “rehabilitated from the time they are disabled to when they go to their graves [since] very often all arrangements were made by assigned social workers in conjunction with other professionals (for example, psychologists, rehabilitation practitioners, therapeutic recreologists, life skills specialists) from a rehabilitative service agency which offers or controls comprehensive diagnostic/evaluative, educational, training, employment, housing, recreational, transportation and social services.”

Fraser Valentine and Jill Vickers similarly observe, “The lives of PWDs [people with disabilities] were increasingly medicalized and a large cadre of rehabilitation professionals emerged. The focus was on rehabilitating or ‘curing’ PWDs who were seen as ‘sick.’ Successful rehabilitation lessened the state’s obligations but also increased the authority and control of medical professionals.”  Marta Russell and Ravi Malhotra found that people with disabilities were worth more to the economy as liminal figures, existing

41 Russell and Malhotra, “Capitalism and Disability,” 214.
42 Gadacz, Re-Thinking Dis-Ability 64.
in-between exclusion and integration, than they would be if they were full participants in the labour market given that each disabled person generates substantial employment in the various supports and services they use. Russell and Malhotra assert, “The logic of capital reasserts itself via the recommodification [sic] of the disabled body in the home.”

James Charlton similarly observes that whole industries were established to rehabilitate, transport, house, educate, employ and service people with disabilities. Charlton argues that disabled people “experience commodification just as do people who work. Whereas workers become commodities the moment they sell their labor (power) to others for a wage, people with disabilities become commodities the moment their disabling condition acquires an exchange value that a few people profit from.”

Rehabilitation entailed an exercise in developing an individual’s physical and mental abilities in an attempt to enhance conventional assessments of their utility. Vocational rehabilitation built upon this premise by training people with disabilities to restore or improve their functioning in order to meet the physical, social, and economic demands of paid employment. Physical therapy was often necessary following traumatic accidents, debilitating illnesses, or long-term hospital stays and rehabilitation workers focused on improving an individual’s compromised functional abilities in order to enable them to navigate their communities and the workforce more effectively. In reference to the American vocational rehabilitation industry, Alison Carey notes that it “stressed the importance of serving people with disabilities within their communities and creatively helping people with disabilities overcome the challenges of daily life to attain self-

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44 Russell and Malhotra, “Capitalism and Disability,” 216.
sufficiency and personal fulfillment.\textsuperscript{46} Clients in vocational rehabilitation programs were evaluated according to individual functional deficits and subjected to targeted interventions intended to improve their ability to pursue mainstream social and vocational goals.\textsuperscript{47} Clients of rehabilitation programs learned to traverse physical or cognitive limitations in order to maximize their ability to function independently. As a result, physical barriers were effectively remedied by an individualized approach that involved various adaptive strategies and assistive devices designed to enable people with physical and sensory disabilities to interact with inaccessible environments.

During the twentieth century, rehabilitation was considered an essential feature in the transition from segregation in residential or general hospitals to mainstream community living. Vocational rehabilitation, in particular aimed to help disabled people achieve “a measurable increase in employability or wage-earning potential.”\textsuperscript{48} Within the “rehabilitation paradigm” that emerged during the 1970s, disability was literally defined by an individual’s difficulty accessing employment. The U.S. Rehabilitation Act of 1973, for example, defined disability as an individual who has a physical or mental disability which represents a “handicap” to employment and who can be expected to benefit from vocational rehabilitation services.\textsuperscript{49} Rehabilitation effectively brokered disabled people’s engagement with the community through intensive training and education that enabled them to live in a world not necessarily designed to meet their needs.

On one hand, rehabilitation was primarily directed at disabled persons, subjecting them to intensive training regimens that promised to help them better navigate an

\textsuperscript{46} Carey, \textit{On the Margins}, 97.
\textsuperscript{48} Bickenbach, \textit{Physical Disability}, 219.
inaccessible world. Ruth O’Brien observes that the original conceptualization of vocational rehabilitation entailed training disabled people to be accommodating to employers, given that business enterprises were not expected to accommodate people with disabilities.⁵⁰ Clients of rehabilitation programs were continually pushed to test the boundaries of their abilities, sometimes using devices and technology that supplemented or replaced “lost” abilities. On the other hand, rehabilitation professionals during the 1970s and 1980s often found that local communities were ill-prepared to handle the needs and demands disabled people placed upon mainstream environments.⁵¹ Inaccessible infrastructure and prejudicial attitudes shaped the experience of disability during this period such that rehabilitation often failed to resolve the problem of disability such as it was. Rehabilitation, then, was a twofold individualized process that reshaped deviant bodies to approximate normative standards while easing disabled people’s access to mainstream environments.

By focusing on individuals’ perceived deficits and struggles, rehabilitation relieved explorations of the reconstruction of exclusive environments and systemic practices that restricted disabled people’s access to mainstream opportunities. Although many disabled people recognized the obvious benefits of rehabilitation, there was growing recognition that it could also preserve an exclusionary status quo.⁵² A strong emphasis within the rehabilitation approach was based around the correction of individual shortfalls so that disabled people could effectively be “put to work” in order to save millions of dollars in public financing for public welfare and to recoup costs from

⁵¹ O’Brien, “From a Doctor’s to a Judge’s Gaze,” 325-346.
the subsidization of the rehabilitation system.\textsuperscript{53} As Valentine and Vickers argue,

“Although the commitment to rehabilitation increased the mobility of persons with physical disabilities, it reinforced ‘dependency’ assumptions about PWD. Nor did the rehabilitation and reintegration process extend to all kinds of disabilities (i.e., people with cognitive disabilities) or focus on the economic needs or political concerns of PWD.”\textsuperscript{54}

Continuous intervention in disabled people’s lives by professionals ultimately perpetuated the belief that disability was a complex problem that precluded the ability to live and work independently in the community. The predominant medical model of disability that informed rehabilitation practices forced disabled people into relationships of dependency on systems that were dominated by medical authorities.\textsuperscript{55} Shelley Tremain explains how philosopher Michel Foucault envisioned his notion of “bio-power” as a process involving the subjugation and control of various populations, which was exercised in particular upon disabled bodies through rigorous means of regulation, improvement, and measurement from the onset of disability and often throughout one’s life.\textsuperscript{56} The medicalization of disability represented a key element of bio-power that was perpetuated through “bio-politics;” that is, systemic configurations that benefit medical authorities’ control over the conceptualization and treatment of disability.\textsuperscript{57} As a result, the medical model of disability legitimated rehabilitation regimens that reflected technologies of bio-power enacted upon deviant bodies, and shaped disabled peoples’

\textsuperscript{53} Wright, “The Status of Disabled Persons,” 81.
\textsuperscript{54} Valentine and Vickers, “Released from the Yoke of Paternalism,” 159. “PWD” refers to “people with disabilities.”
\textsuperscript{55} Valentine and Vickers, “Released from the Yoke of Paternalism,” 159.158.
\textsuperscript{57} Dews, “Power and Subjectivity,” 72-95.
experience of impairment.\textsuperscript{58} Paul Lawrie similarly asserts that technologies of rehabilitation were exacted upon the bodies of African Americans in order to salvage their labour power for postwar reconstruction. In particular, he argues, “Theories of black physiological superiority gleaned from anthropometric inquiry … informed social scientific efforts to simultaneously define and rehabilitate a supposed ‘Negro type’ within the confines of legalized and de-facto segregation.”\textsuperscript{59} Ava Baron and Eileen Boris also argue in favour of Foucault’s technologies of bio-power thesis. They assert, “Historicizing the body thus entails identifying the variability of bodily forms and bodily techniques and how these are naturalized, as well as the ways such forms are used symbolically to reinforce or undermine power relations.”\textsuperscript{60} Diane Driedger observes that rehabilitation created “more rehabilitated people, but it also medicalized all aspects of life for disabled persons.”\textsuperscript{61} Insofar as disability was individualized, social responsibility for disabled people was transferred onto a class of medical, rehabilitation, and social service professionals who were ostensibly more knowledgeable and qualified to address disability issues.

This “rehabilitation paradigm” of disability informed the development of systems to reform individuals with disabilities in order to assist them to reach their optimum level of functioning according to objective measurements of physical, mental, and social functionality. The care and control of people with disabilities in long-term care hospitals, residential facilities, social service agencies, and community-based services created a pervasive medical gaze that shaped attitudes toward disability. Success in the

\textsuperscript{58} Tremain, \textit{Foucault}, 5.
\textsuperscript{59} Lawrie, “To Make the Negro Anew,” 162.
\textsuperscript{60} Baron and Boris, “‘The Body’ as a Useful Category,” 25.
\textsuperscript{61} Driedger, \textit{The Last Civil Rights Movement}, 174.
rehabilitation paradigm was achieved by adhering to prescribed therapeutic interventions as part of the objective to achieve optimal functionality relative to able-bodied norms. Adherents of the rehabilitation paradigm asserted that the question was not so much whether rehabilitation worked but which therapy or intervention worked best for a particular person or group of clients.\(^{62}\) As Gadacz reminds us, a rehabilitation approach focused on individual characteristics and therapeutic prescriptions considers the problem of disability as belonging to the individual with the expectation that patients or clients will follow the instructions of physicians, counsellors, and therapists.\(^{63}\)

Alternative conceptualizations of the rehabilitation system, however, positioned the medical model of disability and medical authorities outside a rehabilitation paradigm. The International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps (ICIDH) formula, which has enjoyed wide acceptance in the public policy community since its introduction in 1980, distinguished rehabilitation from the medical model.\(^{64}\) Jerome Bickenbach notes that in the ICIDH, “Medical diagnosis and treatment components are impairment issues; adaptation and rehabilitation components are disability issues; and discrimination and access issues come under the rubric of handicap.”\(^{65}\) Bickenbach observes that rehabilitation generally only became relevant in the lives of disabled people subsequent to medical intervention, with the possible exception of physical therapy. Rehabilitation focused on maximizing intrinsic sources of liberation from impairment, disability and handicap rather than relying on external applications of medical knowledge

\(^{62}\) Gadacz, *Re-Thinking Dis-Ability*, 78.

\(^{63}\) Gadacz, *Re-Thinking Dis-Ability*, 77.


\(^{65}\) Bickenbach, *Physical Disability and Social Policy*, 60
and treatment. Within this perspective, vocational rehabilitation and other rehabilitative practices theoretically involved the development of an individual’s inherent capacities by expanding their range of abilities rather than dealing with any underlying medical impairments. In 1979, Renée Anspach observed of rehabilitation, “The ideology of rehabilitation, a fusion of welfare liberalism and the medical model, has been a powerful historical force favoring normalization. Infused with optimism and a belief in human perfectability [sic], imbued with a belief in the efficacy of individual effort, rehabilitation agents promulgate a rhetoric of ‘coping’ with disability and ‘adjustment’ to the prevailing normative structure.” Michelle Driedger notes, for example, “It is the intersection of changes over space and over time that result in the process of disablement for a person with an impairment and chronic illness.” People with early onset musculoskeletal diseases, learning disabilities, or neurological disorders, found their lives literally transformed when properly diagnosed, treated, and rehabilitated.

The “rehabilitation paradigm” was closely but problematically connected with a medical model of disability which saw individual functional limitations as an incomplete process of improvement which often justified lifelong intervention in the lives of people with disabilities by a range of rehabilitation professionals. The co-existence of two distributive systems—one based on work and the other based on need—defined the

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66 Bickenbach, Physical Disability and Social Policy, 97.
67 Renée Anspach, “From Stigma to Identity Politics: Political Activism Among the Physically Disabled and Former Mental Patients,” Social Science and Medicine, Part A Medical: Psychology and Medical Sociology 13 (1979): 770.
predominant economic model of disability in twentieth century Canada, but also created “the social problem of disablement” in which economically productive segments of the population created a peripheral surplus population that included many people with disabilities in order to support the “need-based” system. In order to rectify the imbalance between these two systems, vocational rehabilitation emerged as an adjunct to physical rehabilitation in order to address the economic problem of disability by training disabled people to become more productive by mainstream standards. Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell assert, “Rehabilitation often subjects limitations in functional capacities to the very activities that exist outside of a body’s abilities. This emphasis on ‘inability’ is the result of a persistent historical attention to formulations of disability as excessive functional deficit.” As a result, disability was often conceptualized in the context of rehabilitation as a matter of undeveloped physical properties that could be harnessed and trained to mitigate physical obstacles presented by individual manifestations of impairment. This rehabilitation approach to disability was systematically promoted in the wider public sphere, albeit with some evolutionary qualifiers, by the presentation of disabled people in awareness campaigns which highlighted the intrinsic abilities of disabled people and transformative capacities of rehabilitation.

“HIRE THE HANDICAPPED” AND THE PRESENTATION OF THE “ABLE DISABLED”

“Your attitude could be their biggest handicap;” so went the tagline of an unprecedented national awareness campaign undertaken by the leading disability

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71 Snyder and Mitchell, Cultural Locations of Disability, 8.
advocacy organization in the early 1970s, the Canadian Rehabilitation Council for the Disabled (CRCD).

As the national voice of the rehabilitation industry, the CRCD was generally seen to speak on behalf of the disability community. Television and print advertisements rolled out across the country featuring people in wheelchairs, wearing leg braces, and other physical disabilities with the provocative caption. Suddenly people were encouraged to discard accepted knowledge which rooted disability in an individual’s medical pathology, replaced with the concept that overcoming the limitations of impairments required a combination of professional intervention and adjustments in social attitudes. Just as the Marching Mothers campaigns twenty-years earlier attempted to reconfigure general understanding about the impact of polio, the CRCD campaign ambitiously set out to create greater public awareness of the role of attitudes in the construction of barriers to integration. Indeed, many children with polio during the 1950s were now working-age adults facing attitudinal and physical barriers to employment that would have benefited from greater awareness sought by the CRCD.

A brief discourse analysis of the CRCD advertisement reveals how rehabilitation professionals cautiously approached the social constructivist model of disability. The suggestive tone of the text spoke to the novelty of the message, since an assertive statement might have been read as overtly accusatory. Spectators were encouraged to be mindful of their own responses to explicit images of disability and to consider the possibility that disability represented something other than a purely individual issue. However, the message did not entirely overturn the traditional medical model of

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73 Anne Finger, Elegy for a Disease: A Personal and Cultural History of Polio (New York: St Martin’s Press, 2006).
disability. Attitudes were presented as the “biggest,” as opposed to the only, source of disabled people’s limitations, reinforcing the individual medical nature of disability while considering the impact of social attitudes. Additionally, if attitudes were the problem then attitudes were also the solution. Viewers were led to believe that if attitudes toward “the handicapped” were different, then new opportunity structures might emerge for many people with disabilities. Since attitudes are less definitive than a medical diagnosis, the message empowered the viewer to consider their personal role in constructing attitudinal barriers. Finally, handicaps were seen to originate in a collective system of beliefs. The personalized language of the message engaged viewers, but constructed them as part of a wider public mindset where collective attitudes serve to marginalize disabled people.

When federal responsibility for vocational rehabilitation programming under the VRDP was transferred from the Department of Manpower to the Department of Health and Welfare in 1973, rehabilitation services were more fully integrated with other provincially-administered disability support mechanisms under the Canada Assistance Plan. As a result, funds were immediately made forthcoming to the CRCD to raise awareness of disability in a way that ultimately underscored the role of the rehabilitation sector in the lives of disabled people. The type of awareness CRCD sought to create was that of disabled peoples’ potential, unlocked by rehabilitation services and unblocked by prejudicial attitudes.
For the architects of the CRCD awareness campaign, disability was misunderstood and this ignorance fed into the continuation of attitudinal barriers. The campaign reflected a developing consensus in the rehabilitation industry that an ill-informed public was similarly responsible for disabled people’s liminal existence. Rehabilitation professionals repeatedly observed that people made their way through the rehabilitation system only to find their integration blocked by physical barriers and

unspoken prejudices. As a result, a lack of awareness about disability was seen to create and reinforce “disabling” attitudes which restricted the potential impact that rehabilitation professionals sought to achieve in terms of the meaningful social and economic integration of disabled clients.

The CRCD campaign built upon longstanding “Hire the Handicapped” campaigns and associated events in the United States. Harold Russell, whose hands were amputated and replaced with prosthetic hooks following a war-related injury, wrote in his memoir about the development of the well-known awareness campaign. Russell, who was born and raised in Sydney, Nova Scotia achieved international celebrity status by starring in the acclaimed war-themed Hollywood film *The Best Years of Our Lives* and subsequently serving as the long-time chair of the President’s Committee on the Employment of the Handicapped. Russell recounted how the National Employ the Handicapped Week helped raise awareness of disability following the Second World War in order to encourage employers to change their attitudes and practices around the employment of disabled people. The Week typically constituted a number of local-level events that were endorsed at the national level; but by 1949 organizers began to promote the slogan “Hire the Handicapped—It’s Good Business.” The slogan achieved wide influence by such means as skywriters, a famed zeppelin that traveled along the East Coast carrying the message, a special invocation by the Archbishop of New York City, and nationwide

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school essay contests which prompted students to write essays on hiring the handicapped with top money and trip prizes to Washington, D.C.\textsuperscript{78}

The ubiquitous slogan made its way into the Canadian discourse of disability issues and awareness activities surrounding the promotion of disabled people in the labour market. In Toronto, the Mayor’s Task Force on the Disabled and Elderly noted in 1976, “All of those Hire the Handicapped campaigns, however well-intentioned they may have been, have done little to alleviate the situation, possibly because they were saying, in effect: ‘Do the crippled a favour.’”\textsuperscript{79} Goodwill Industries similarly noted that the slogan had become a “tired old line.”\textsuperscript{80} Meanwhile, the Ontario Human Rights Commission asserted that despite longstanding campaigns to promote the hiring of disabled people, people with disabilities were “constantly being denied the opportunity even to try for jobs that are within their competence.”\textsuperscript{81} By 1980, the Ontario government was forced to distinguish programs of affirmative action as “not a program to ‘hire the handicapped’” since “increased employment opportunities for the handicapped is the overall goal but this involves much more than a hiring program.”\textsuperscript{82} Still, local organizers with the Vocational Rehabilitation Advisory Committee in Belleville, for example, continued to hold their own Hire the Handicapped Week in April 1980 in recognition of the legacy of the campaigns in order to highlight local efforts to improve the employment

\textsuperscript{78} Russell, \textit{The Best Years of My Life}, 158.
\textsuperscript{79} AO, RG 7-148, Box B353847, File “Mayor’s Task Force,” Report, Toronto Mayor’s Task Force on the Disabled and Elderly, \textit{This City is for All its Citizens} (June 1976).
\textsuperscript{80} AO, RG 7-148, Box B100558, File “Speeches/TV,” Newsletter, \textit{Goodwill Quarterly} (Spring 1978).
of people with disabilities in their community, confident that the popular slogan had
enough social capital to effectively resonate with local employers and the wider public.83

The slogan also continued to have wide influence in the conceptualization of
awareness programs and activities in Canadian popular culture in Ontario. A popular
television program called *The Littlest Hobo*, for example, featured an episode which aired
in 1984 on CTV Networks. Set in Toronto, construction foreman Victor Corrano (played
by local television legend Al Waxman) received a phone call from an agent regarding
promotional materials sent to him. Corrano shuffles through his mail to locate a pamphlet
which read: “Hire the handicapped. It's good business.” Clearly agitated but pressed to
display his sympathy, Corrano responds, “I got your brochure and the book. Well look
Mr. White I appreciate what you’re trying to do, really I do, but this is … well I got
enough problems with normal guys. I don’t need crutches and wheelchairs here. This is
construction work here, Mr. White. I don’t make handbags here. That’s alright.
Goodbye.”84 The dramatized exchange revealed what ostensibly would have been
understood at the time as a commonplace response by an employer typically insensitive
to disability issues when faced with rehabilitation professionals or disability advocates
promoting the employability of people with disabilities.85 Only when Corrano is later
paralyzed after falling from faulty scaffolding and is accordingly confronted with an
altered self-identity does he realize that his preconceptions about disability were

83 AO, RG 7-149, Box B363026, File “Public Relations,” Letter, Vocational Rehabilitation Advisory
Committee to Handicapped Employment Program (26 March 1980).
84 *The Littlest Hobo*, Season 6, Episode 5, “One Door Closes,” first broadcast 11 October 1984 by Canadian
Television Networks.
University Press, 2006), 111.
In the end, the episode leaves viewers with a moral lesson of acceptance and understanding about disability issues embedded within a warning about the emotional and psychological consequences of prejudice and discrimination.

The reconceptualization of disability as the effect of attitudinal barriers constituted an entirely new paradigm that would time take to accrue in the public mindset. Many people found it counterintuitive to prioritize attitudinal change given that a traditional approach believed social and economic dislocation naturally emerged from the effects of individuals’ impairments. In his landmark text Handicapping America published in 1978, Frank Bowe wrote, “Resistance to hiring disabled people is as emotional as it is cognitive.” Bowe asserted that attitudes can be remarkably inflexible even when people are presented with ample evidence regarding the prevalence of “disabling” attitudes and the result of socially and economically sidelining disabled people. Bowe discovered that attitudinal barriers were in many ways much more resilient than architectural barriers in that they could not be erased simply with legislation. Bowe concluded that more than thirty years of Hire the Handicapped Weeks and similar awareness campaigns across North America had resulted in little appreciable change in employer attitudes.

Deprived of a diverse set of experiences with people with disabilities, many people in mainstream society relied upon stereotypes about disability that reinforced the ideological and actual separation of disabled people from normative settings. In her address to the Seminar on the Employability of the Handicapped in Toronto, Ontario Minister of Labour Bette Stephenson noted, “We may ramp the steps and widen the doors

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86 Life Together
and redesign the washrooms, but until attitudes change, progress will be illusory.”

Stephenson observed that attitudinal and psychological barriers could not be undone as readily as physical accessibility and rehabilitation, reflecting a developing consensus among rehabilitation professionals and disability rights activists regarding the attitudinal barriers to rehabilitation. Despite a collective desire to “help the handicapped,” Stephenson found there was often a tendency to seek out simplistic solutions. As René Gadacz notes, “A heightened awareness should foster an equal partnership that enhances and not diminishes the image of disabled people, while at the same time produces the needed resources to solve what are undoubtedly common societal problems.”

In addition to the “hire the handicapped” campaigns, another common refrain in awareness campaigns at the time promoted the abilities of the “able disabled,” adopting a decidedly expectant approach to changing conventional attitudes, rather than focusing on the consequences of negative attitudes as per the CRCD campaigns. The phrase “abled disabled” suggested that the “dis-” in disability wrongly characterized people with disabilities as incapable, when in fact one’s medical status did not necessarily reflect their capacity for self-determination and ability to be productive in the labour market. In 1973, E.I. Du Pont de Nemours & Company based in Wilmington, Delaware conducted a landmark study of its disabled employees. Du Pont included a sample of 1,452 workers and evaluated them against records of insurance rates, absenteeism, job performance, taxes, and motivation. The report, titled “The Able Disabled” but widely known as the “Du Pont study,” discovered that many fears around hiring disabled people and the

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88 AO, RG 7-149, Box B367312, File “Dr. Stephenson’s Speech,” Speech (26 November 1976).
89 Ibid
90 Gadacz, Re-Thinking Dis-Ability, 69.
impact on companies were unfounded, suggesting that disabled workers were just as “able” as nondisabled workers despite widespread prejudice against them. The Du Pont study had wide international influence among the business community and rehabilitation industry as the term “able disabled” quickly spread in disability advocacy circles in the United States and Canada as the successor to older “hire the handicapped” campaigns. A subsequent study conducted by Du Pont, released in 1981 and titled “Equal to the Task,” included a wider survey of 2,745 employees that confirmed earlier findings and reinforced the construction of disability in socially progressive terms.\(^{92}\) Canadian authorities quickly picked up on the study’s findings and message about disability with their own conceptualization of disabled people’s abilities as workers. Toronto Dominion Bank, for example, embarked on a nationwide hiring campaign following the Du Pont study. Human resource professionals in Toronto also organized events featuring Du Pont as a model for Canadian employers.\(^{93}\)

In preparation for the International Year for Disabled Persons (IYDP) in 1981 and subsequent promotional activities, the Ontario Ministry of Labour’s Handicapped Employment Program (HEP) promoted the underlying message in the Du Pont studies. HEP undertook a major campaign through its educational seminars, television commercials, posters, print advertising and an exhibit that toured the province with the slogan “Label Us Able” and “We Are All Able.”\(^{94}\) The campaign recognized that disabled people were considered “unable” in many ways in the workplace and broader community, but sought to reverse prejudicial “labeling” by emphasizing disabled

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\(^{94}\) “A Conference on Education Now—Employment Later”
peoples’ capability for productive employment. The campaign involved a multidimensional exhibit funded by the province that toured the province featuring disabled people in everyday working environments. The *Globe and Mail*, for example, used the publicity generated by the campaign to promote employers that demonstrated exemplary commitment to the campaign’s slogan. One television commercial that was produced as part of HEP’s campaign and broadcast across Ontario showed a camera panning over a production studio where an advertisement was set to be shot. The scene bustled with the activities of various workers, including “carpenters, technicians and musicians preparing for the production.” At the conclusion of the commercial, it was revealed that all the workers were disabled. While television commercial producers apparently encountered difficulty finding qualified disabled workers, the wider campaign built upon the foundation of public awareness about disability generated through longstanding hiring campaigns with concrete examples of productively employed people with disabilities.

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98 University of Toronto, “Queen’s Park says ‘They’re Able!’” *The Varsity: Supplement on Disabled Persons* (9 November 1981).
Worried that lacklustre results of the “hire the handicapped” campaigns would repeat itself through a lack of meaningful development of employment prospects for people with disabilities, despite active engagement and endorsement by rehabilitation professionals seeking to improve the state of social and economic participation among their clientele, University of Toronto’s Varsity newsletter warned that the success of the IYDP in achieving greater awareness of disability issues, including financing for important campaigns such as HEP’s “Label Us Able” programming, might backfire due to a “distressing tendency of people to jump on a popular bandwagon, subsequently

jumping off when it has run its course."⁹⁸ Varsity writers lauded the “reordering of our perceptions of disabled persons,” which included greater labour market opportunity structures for many people with disabilities who went through the rehabilitation system only to confront a lack of job opportunities.

In addition to raising awareness of disabled people, an increasingly visible politics of disability during the 1980s reflected simmering tensions surrounding systematic practices to integrate disabled people and the control by the rehabilitation industry over the articulation and promotion of disability issues.¹⁰¹ Rehabilitation thus became an increasingly politicized experience as many people with disabilities began to question why disabled people continued to experience social and economic dislocation after many years (and dollars) spent on the expansion of the rehabilitation system and promotion of the rehabilitation approach to disability.

THE POLITICS OF REHABILITATION

“Who’s driving the system?” asked one columnist in reference to the ongoing controversial debates around the merits and challenges of a “provider-driven” versus “consumer-driven” vocational rehabilitation system.¹⁰² Disability rights activists in Canada increasingly argued that providers were more focused on longevity of their programs.¹⁰³ The column noted that despite appearances, the two approaches were “not necessarily mutually exclusive nor do they need to be at odds with one another.”¹⁰⁴

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¹⁰⁰ “Label Them Able”
¹⁰¹ “Label Them Able”
¹⁰³ “Who’s Driving the System”
¹⁰⁴ “Who’s Driving the System”
Disability rights activists argued that commitment to medical and rehabilitation procedures which initially justified intervention in their lives often became a lifelong relationship with the rehabilitation industry and accordingly kept disabled people in a perpetually liminal state of separation from mainstream social and economic activities. Disability rights activists believed that medical and therapeutic responses to disability, while initially establishing control over disabled bodies through institutional mechanisms, also served to shape public knowledge of disability. This situation occurred in particular because disabled people lacked control over vast rehabilitation service systems that broadcast this definition to wider audiences. Providers retorted that consumers were ignorant of the realities of the rehabilitation system and failed to appreciate the work of rehabilitation professionals. Despite the shift toward an emphasis on social and economic integration which formed the basis for vocational rehabilitation, disability rights activists complained that disabled people continued to face a liminal existence in addition to new sources of dependency on rehabilitation professionals.

Similar to other civil rights movements during the 1960s and 1970s, people with disabilities struggled with the search for a positive framework in which to foster an empowered identity to resist common experiences of oppression. Renée Anspach observe, “Until the 1960s there were simply no alternatives to the ideology of rehabilitation. And without an ideology or set of constituent ideas, a social movement is impossible.” The experience and perception of disability was highly mediated by the medical gaze that underscored the rehabilitation paradigm, declaring expert knowledge of the technical aspects of disability and assuming control over the remediation of physical

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105 “Who’s Driving the System”
106 “Who’s Driving the System”
107 Anspach, “From Stigma to Identity Politics,” 771.
and mental impairments. The medicalization of disability was also considered by disability rights activists as being largely responsible for restricting disabled people from developing its own human rights discourse critical to the collective uprising of people with disabilities to assert their social and economic rights.\textsuperscript{108}

The prevalence of a largely negative ontology of disability stigmatized people with disabilities and undercut the development of a positive framework in which to build an empowered disability identity. Disabled bodies were objectified “through the gaze of deficits and deviance” that shaped the rehabilitation paradigm since it was held that failure to adapt to normative functional standards also disqualified disabled people from full participation in social and economic opportunities.\textsuperscript{109} Consequently, disability rights activism lagged behind other social movements, in part due to the condition that many people with disabilities simply accepted such negative associations continually drawn around the signification of disability. Many people with disabilities lived, learned, and worked alongside one another during this period, in long-term care hospitals, residential institutions, rehabilitation facilities, and sheltered workshops. But the powerful influence of negative reflections of disabled bodies, due in large part to the interaction between a pervasive medical gaze and negative cultural attitudes, permeated the experience of disability and discouraged the collective empowerment of people with disabilities.\textsuperscript{110} Widespread cultural disdain for dependency that partly motivated the segregation of disabled people also meant there were limited opportunities for individuals to acquire an

\textsuperscript{110} Oliver, “The Social Model in Context,” 19.
understanding of disability within outside of this ubiquitous negative framework.\textsuperscript{111} As a result, disability was linguistically and culturally conceived to be the inverse of ability, freedom, and independence—all major cultural ideals in modern capitalist societies—since most forms of disability were regarded as states of compromised health that robbed individuals of their self-determination.

Despite the negative framing of disability, rehabilitation associations ironically fostered the development of self-help consumer activism by supplying the opportunity for disability rights activists to come together to discuss philosophies and strategies of resistance to the status quo, which included the existing rehabilitation system. Disability activists’ participation in CRCD, for example, stemmed from the solicitation of consumer feedback around the state of rehabilitation services and areas for improvement. Marc Lalonde, then federal Minister of Health and Welfare and highly influential member of Liberal Prime Minister Trudeau’s government, provided an unprecedented endorsement of the disability rights movement in 1970 by suggesting that service agencies should consult with their disabled clients before coming to him with various requests.\textsuperscript{112} Lalonde was unique in that he worked closely with the disability rights activists and others in the disability community to focus on “the development of a citizenry attached to a single identity [being Canadian] through their differences.”\textsuperscript{113} Despite Lalonde’s endorsement, however, the CRCD decided to limit consumer input to issues around recreational services, since it was apparently “less threatening to the agencies than issues like

\textsuperscript{111} Cameron and Valentine, “Comparing Policy-Making,” 5-6.; Valentine and Vickers, “Released from the Yoke of Paternalism,” 156.
\textsuperscript{112} Ruth Enns, A Voice Unheard: The Latimer Case and People with Disabilities (Halifax: Fernwood Pub, 1999), 85.
\textsuperscript{113} Valentine and Vickers, “Released from the Yoke of Paternalism,” 162.
In 1973, the CRCD instructed consumer representatives to select six delegates to attend their inaugural conference in November in Toronto; “However, the goal was to form an advisory committee, not to share power.” By this time, however, disability activists had grown frustrated with neither the lack of people with disabilities as leaders in the CRCD nor any substantive recognition of the principles of consumer rights. Provincial consumer organizations had already begun to take shape, establishing a basis for a national cohesive force of consumers to challenge the CRCD’s hegemony in the sphere of rehabilitation services and promotional campaigns. As a result, a group of activists in attendance at the CRCD conference demanded that the Executive Board reconvene with a majority of members with disabilities, otherwise consumers would withdraw their support from the organization. The CRCD Executive Board rejected the petition, causing consumers to leave the conference; yet the delegates left “more inspired by meeting each other than the thought of belonging to CRCD’s advisory committee.” The unprecedented move by Canadian disability rights activists echoed similar set of circumstances that occurred simultaneously in the United States as the annual meeting of the PCEH provided the backdrop for disability rights activists to meet one another and collaborate in the development of the American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities (ACCD).

The energetic repudiation of the rehabilitation industry’s control over rehabilitation services and disability advocacy on both sides of the border sparked an electric atmosphere of disability rights organizing in Canada. Disability rights activists

114 Valentine and Vickers, “Released from the Yoke of Paternalism,” 162.
115 Valentine and Vickers, “Released from the Yoke of Paternalism,” 86.
116 Valentine and Vickers, “Released from the Yoke of Paternalism,” 86.
117 Valentine and Vickers, “Released from the Yoke of Paternalism,” 86.
118 “Independent Living in the US and Canada”
affiliated with COPOH similarly noted that disability advocacy during the 1970s was led largely by organizations representing the rehabilitation industry. Disability rights activists believed that rehabilitation professionals no longer represented the interests of people with disabilities, which they argued had failed to present a coherent, unified message on behalf of disabled people. The multiplicity of rehabilitation agencies and associations supposedly representing separate groups of disabled people undermined the pursuit of a shared agenda in the pursuit of social and economic participation. As evidence of the disunity, disability rights activists pointed to the domination of national organizations for disabled people, including the Canadian Paraplegic Association, Canadian National Institute for the Blind, the Multiple Sclerosis Society, the Cerebral Palsy Association, The Canadian Coordinating Council of the Deaf, the Canadian Mental Health Association, the Canadian Association for the Mentally Retarded, the Canadian Association of Rehabilitation Services, and the Canadian Rehabilitation Council for the Disabled; none of which were consumer-controlled organizations.  

Each of these organizations represented different groups of disabled people with their own priorities, mandates and inter-organizational politics, which often had little to do with the concerns of their constituents. Although the CRCD was considered to act as the “national umbrella organization for many societies dedicated to rehabilitation,” COPOH determined that it in fact represented the interests of rehabilitation professionals which “failed to bring together the handicapped community” while denying consumer participation by “retaining real leadership in the new national vehicles created.”

119 MA, CCD Fonds, Box P5364, File 1, Memo, COPOH Development (1978).

120 Ibid
Interior of the Winnipeg Convention Centre, setting for the 1980 World Congress of Rehabilitation International. It was here where COPOH made history as the first disability rights activist organization to participate in the Congress as representatives of the disability community.  

121 (© Easter Seals March of Dimes National Council, 1979. Reproduced with permission.)

Participants at the 1980 World Congress of Rehabilitation International. For the first time, disability rights activists from COPOH and individual consumers sat as equals alongside rehabilitation professionals, service agency representatives, workers’ compensation board officials, and public policymakers. The inclusion of disability rights activists in Rehabilitation International was an unprecedented development in the field of rehabilitation advocacy. (© Hugh Allan, 1980. Reproduced with permission.)

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122 Hugh Allan Fonds, Collection of the Society for Manitobans With Disabilities Archives.
Mounting tensions between disability rights activists and the CRCD led COPOH to refuse endorsing the rehabilitation industry in any substantive way at the 1980 World Rehabilitation Congress in Winnipeg if consumers were denied the right to present their views as “autonomous consumer organizations.” The CRCD had managed to avoid recognizing COPOH as an equal partner following disability rights activists’ separation from the Council in 1973, and as the host member for Rehabilitation International, the CRCD Executive Board took the extra step of refusing COPOH’s petition to speak as an autonomous organization. Consistent pressure and endorsement by leading political leaders in Canada finally convinced CRCD to reluctantly allow COPOH to attend the conference as equal members of Rehabilitation International and representatives of the disability community. At the time, membership in Rehabilitation International was limited to representatives of the rehabilitation industry and workers’ compensation sector. Thus, the move to include COPOH prompted American disability rights activists associated with the American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities (ACCD) to voice their concerns to COPOH, believing that their membership in Rehabilitation International constituted an endorsement of the rehabilitation industry. The ACCD warned that if COPOH proceeded, it should ensure the principles of autonomy and consumer representation were fully respected. Straddling this fine line between representational autonomy and endorsement of the rehabilitation industry, disability rights activists in Canada had won a significant symbolic hurdle in the promotion of consumer control.

125 MA, CCD Fonds, Box P5365, File 23, Telefax, COPOH to ACCD, 1978.
126 Ibid
In an effort to move away from the prevalence of a negative framework of disability partly reinforced by a medicalized rehabilitation system, disability rights activists argued that the emphasis in rehabilitation on self-care, mobility and employment did not always serve the best interests of disabled people. COPOH contrasted the rehabilitation model with an emerging independent living model during the 1980s which stressed “wider outcomes such as living arrangements, relationships, consumer knowledge and assertiveness, outdoor and out-of-home activities.” The “IL approach” focused on empowering people with disabilities through core programs in a developing network of Independent Living Centres across Canada which connected people with disabilities with a wide range of community resources. Important resources like peer support and self-advocacy skills effectively challenged the rehabilitation paradigm’s reliance on professional intervention and control of services, ensuring that access to social and economic opportunities represented the best interests of people with disabilities.

CONCLUSION

The rapid expansion and professionalization of the rehabilitation sector during the latter half of the twentieth century combated discriminatory attitudes with rehabilitative techniques and technologies aimed at demonstrating disabled people’s capacity for labour market participation. Although rehabilitation challenged the segregation and exclusion of people with disabilities by demonstrating their potential for improvement, many disabled

129 Lord, *Impact*
people increasingly resented a “rehabilitation paradigm” of disability fixated on “correcting” perceived individual deficits in order to achieve conventional social and economic goals. This rehabilitation paradigm often justified long-term intervention in disabled peoples’ liminal lives by a variety of rehabilitation professionals, particularly in the arena of employment. It also became increasingly clear that rehabilitation itself was often not enough to address the problem of chronic unemployment and poverty; a fact made evident to both rehabilitation professionals and people with disabilities. As a result, a growing consensus developed around the need to supplement individual rehabilitation interventions with broader awareness campaigns designed to change the social and physical environments within which disabled people lived and worked.

By the 1980s, many disabled people harboured mixed feelings about rehabilitation as a process, industry, and philosophy. An emerging social movement of disability rights activists presented a new perspective of disability that placed individual people with disabilities at the centre of their own pursuit of labour market participation rather than allowing rehabilitation professionals and their organizations to set the agenda for social and economic integration. Disability rights activists sought to assert greater control over rehabilitation services and to reset the image of disabled people promoted by rehabilitation organizations in line with a more positive framework. A new consensus began to develop in the disability community around independent living that situated the social and vocational objectives of individual people with disabilities ahead of the priorities that shaped the development of the rehabilitation industry. As a result, rehabilitation organizations were constructed into a closer, albeit collaborative, position
with consumers of rehabilitation services as they worked toward the wider objective of economic integration.

I was nineteen when I was injured so I was pretty independent and pretty much on my way, knowing what I wanted to do and working out there in the world. I knew to get that same level of response there was a lot of self-advocacy that had to take place. You really do have to put yourself out there and prove yourself above and beyond other people, perhaps, because other people look at you with doubt.¹

It is not for a lack of skill, education or ability to work that is the problem, but the perception that people with disabilities are going to be a drain on the organization through extra services, medical care, leave, etc... Not only do I have to contend with my disability that I was born with or acquired through no fault of my own and all the difficulties and energies that entails, I feel like I am fighting a ghost that restricts me from taking my place in society.²

During the late twentieth century in Canada, the pursuit of paid employment among people with disabilities dovetailed with a desire for greater levels of self-direction and autonomy. Alongside the work of family advocates and rehabilitation professionals, a growing movement of consumer activists with disabilities emerged during the late 1970s, promoting greater consumer control over disability-related services in order to achieve self-determined social and vocational goals. Many people with disabilities found they were not represented among the leadership of many disability organizations that claimed to advocate on their behalf while also providing much-needed services. Many people with disabilities increasingly believed that their lack of control over the supports and

¹ “Katie,” Interview with Author, 25 Jul 2011. Following Research Ethics Board approval, thirty people with disabilities were recruited through various advertisements and word-of-mouth to conduct semi-structured oral interviews about how work and employment shaped their lived experience of disability. Interview transcripts were processed and coded using NVivo 9.0 and participants were given full control over the content of their testimonies. See Chapter Eight and Appendix C for a more detailed explanation of the oral history component used in this study.
² “Rachel,” Interview with Author, 27 Nov 2011.
services they depended upon to access the labour market ultimately undermined the underlying objective of “full participation” in society. Inspired by American and British developments in social movement activism, disabled people in Canada began to assert their rights as citizens and consumers of rehabilitation services as well as their social and economic rights as citizens of a democratic country.  

New activist groups composed and controlled by people with disabilities emerged during the 1970s, articulating their vision of self-determination and civil rights in addition to promoting new philosophies of self-help and consumer control in their engagement with advocacy organizations and the rehabilitation industry. Consumer activists in Canada stimulated the development of a social movement to empower disabled people to fight prejudice directed toward them in a variety of social institutions. Employment figured centrally in the early development of these groups as exclusion from the labour market was thought to perpetuate a wider condition of cultural and economic liminality, including reliance on systems of charitable support and medical authorities. Consumer activists discovered they could use their status as citizens and consumers of disability-related services to press for political reform while creating a public discourse around chronic poverty and unemployment in the disability community. Grassroots disability rights groups at the local level engineered provincial and national coalitions of volunteer activists who shared a common purpose in retooling the rehabilitation industry to increase the level of consumer control and input.

The following chapter examines the rise and evolution of disability rights activism in Canada from the late 1970s to early 2000s. The chapter begins with an

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analysis of the articulation of this vision by a coalition of disability rights activists who asserted consumer philosophies to an existing service platform and discourse of disability. The second section documents the evolution of disability rights activism in Ontario through an analysis of the relationship between provincial disability rights organizations and service agencies. While producing bitter animosity and resentment, this relationship also gave rise to iconic Canadian disability activists and innovative consumer-run employment agencies that demonstrated consumer control in action. The final section examines the evolution of disability rights activism with the rise of independent living philosophies and their impact on disabled workers in Toronto.

DEFINING A NEW VISION OF EMPLOYMENT INTEGRATION IN CANADA

In the early 1970s, representatives of the federal Department of Health and Welfare pondered in a government periodical, “Why is it so difficult for the disabled to organize?” subsequently answering that disabled people lacked a clear constituency in which to organize, and that individuals with disabilities were preoccupied with their own experiences and challenges dealing with the many obstacles to social and economic participation. The authors observed, “The ‘60s was a time when the traditional minority groups organized to fight for peace, civil rights, and an end to poverty, but disabled people (physically handicapped in particular) were the last group to be activated by this kind of activism.” The authors discovered local groups of activists across the country working toward similar goals around accessibility, however, it was determined that these groups were disconnected from one another and did not represent a genuine social

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5 Ibid
movement compared to the example of civil rights movements of the time. Within these disability rights organizations, the authors determined there existed a “new breed of handicapped person,” characteristically having acquired physical disabilities, middle or working-class, and youthful, fully expecting to “return to their former jobs, schooling, and pursuits” after rehabilitation.⁶

Such statements reflected the growing belief that a new culture of disabled youth reflected the genesis of a developing national social movement that would soon transform the discourse around disability issues. The emergence of political organizations in Canada during the 1970s led by disabled people were indeed animated by a youth-based culture of protest and the development of a politicized identity that focused on dismantling barriers faced by people with disabilities.⁷ Canadian historians have examined the intersection of “rebellious” groups of youth and new political ideas that emerged in the postwar period.⁸ Ian Milligan considers the emergence and evolution of a cohort of “rebel youth” from the mid-1960s to early 1970s that was animated by a culture of protest and forged a movement of New Left activists and young workers.⁹ Milligan concludes that labour was a defining feature of these social, political and cultural developments that motivated many of their activities, including a new wave of militancy and radicalism shaped by a defiance of existing conditions and systems of belief.¹⁰ In the United States, Renée Anspach similarly observes the development of a new kind of disability activism during the 1970s that differed from previous groups established within

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⁶ Ibid
⁹ Milligan, “Rebel Youth,” iv.
¹⁰ Milligan, “Rebel Youth,” 1-2.
or as adjuncts to service organizations. Anspach notes, “While the emerging activist
groups borrow from the consumer movements the emphasis on indigenous organization
and self-reliance, they are political, rather than therapeutic, in orientation. They seek not
to modify their own behavior in conformance to a pre-existing normative mold, but rather
to influence the behaviour or groups, organizations, and institutions.”

A consumer-led movement of disabled people dovetailed with other social
movements in Canada during the late twentieth century. As Dominique Clement
observed, the 1960s and 1970s “was a period of energetic social movement activism,
with the arrival of a vast array of new social movement organizations representing a
myriad of constituencies.” In contrast to the previous generation of parent advocates
seeking new opportunities for disabled children, disability rights activists (often the very
same children grown to early adulthood) forged new “social movement organizations”
alongside their contemporaries including women’s liberationists, gay rights activists, and
other civil rights associations advancing a discourse and culture of rights that collectively
constituted Canada’s “rights revolution.” While the development of fully operational
and effective disability social movement organizations did lag somewhat behind other
civil rights groups, social activism by disabled people emerged directly out of an ongoing
culture of protest that engulfed the 1970s political discourse of human rights in Canada.

By the mid-1970s, a new organization stepped onto the national stage in Canada
to lead a developing social movement of disabled people. COPOH was established in

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11 Anspach, “From Stigma to Identity Politics,” 766.
12 Dominique Clement, Canada’s Rights Revolution: Social Movements and Social Change, 1937-82
(Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 200.
13 Clement, Canada’s Rights Revolution, 56-60
14 Jennifer Ruth Hosek, “The Canadian National Security War on Queers and the Left,” in New World
Coming: The Sixties and the Shaping of Global Consciousness, ed. Karen Dubinsky (Toronto: Between the
Lines, 2009).
Winnipeg in November 1976 in order to “fill a specific need which was not being met at the time, namely for a democratically structured national vehicle through which provincially based consumer groups of handicapped people could speak to issues at the national level.”\(^{15}\) Led by Jim Derkson and Henry Enns, both reflecting many of the characteristics of the supposed “new breed” of disability activist, COPOH evolved out of a consumer-based subcommittee of the CRCD that was established in 1973 to create an organization that was led by people with disabilities instead of rehabilitation professionals or other non-disabled authority figures. COPOH brought together disparate groups of disability rights activists operating locally across the country by organizing them into affiliated partnerships with provincial organizations in order to share information and engage in coordinated action to push forward a shared agenda on disability rights. By the end of the 1970s, COPOH membership included the British Columbia Coalition of the Disabled, Committee of Action Groups of the Disabled (Alberta), Voice of the Handicapped (Saskatchewan), League of the Physically Handicapped (Manitoba), United Handicapped Groups of Ontario, Carrefour Adaptation (Quebec), Council of the Disabled (Prince Edward Island), The HUB (Newfoundland), League for Equal Opportunities (Nova Scotia).\(^{16}\)

Despite differences in the constitution of each activist group and local politics that separated them, members of the coalition shared the conviction that a “lack of information, inflexibility, and bias in the society are the greatest handicaps; and that people with various kinds of disabilities have these in common, these cross-disability handicapped consumer organizations are by-passing the traditional organizational

\(^{15}\) MA, CCD Fonds, Box P5360, File 1, Letter, COPOH to Credit Union Central, 9 Jan 1979.

environment with its fragmented variety of competing (and sometimes self-serving) unidisability [sic] service organizations.”\textsuperscript{17} While disability rights activists promoted policies of consumer control, organizations affiliated with COPOH indicated a willingness to work with existing organizations to achieve this objective rather than assuming a stance of outright rejection of the status quo. Sally Chivers argues that while the Canadian disability rights movement was “founded on the transformative and liberation politics of the 1960s new left movements” it was decidedly “less dramatic” than its American counterparts.\textsuperscript{18} Disability politics blossomed in response to the development of the New Left. Ravi Malhotra argues, “With the revitalization of the women's movement, the emergence of the Civil Rights movement, the movement against the war in Vietnam and the gay and lesbian movement, this new conjuncture provided the space for disabled people to self-organize.”\textsuperscript{19} Disability rights rights groups in Canada during this period largely adopted pluralist positions in contrast to other disadvantaged identity groups in order to escape being considered “special” and in the spirit of moving forward a progressive, but practical, agenda.\textsuperscript{20} Sharon Barnartt similarly concludes there was little evidence to suggest that “social movement diffusion” from the United States influenced the development of disability rights activism in Canada.\textsuperscript{21} Barnartt analyzed 177 Canadian and 1,215 American protests that occurred between 1970 and 2005, concluding that there were “substantial, and statistically significant, differences between the US and Canada.”\textsuperscript{22} Barnartt observes, “Protests in Canada have different issues,
targets, demands, and timing, and they are fomented by different types of organizations. What has diffused, perhaps, is the idea that disabled people can protest.”

In contrast to much disability rights activism in the United States, disability activists in Canada were particularly “state-focused,” believing that the pursuit of incremental reform by politically-engaged disabled citizens coupled with the public funding of disability rights organizations represented the best method to redistribute power away from rehabilitation professionals into the hands of consumers. Indeed, Michael Prince notes, “a politics of socio-economic redistribution is at the core of disability activism in Canada, complemented by a politics of recognition and a democratic politics of representation, the latter of which involves claims for more accessible, empowering, and accountable policy making structures and processes.” Led mainly by volunteers, an emerging social movement of disability rights activists lacked funds for organizational development but rejected charitable fundraising as a matter of principle in order to move away from the association of disability with charity, which disability rights activists defined in pejorative terms. henb25 As a result, COPOH and its affiliate organizations used public funds to develop the disability rights movement. Indeed, many disability rights organizations during this period survived initially on a series of developmental grants from the federal government. In spite of developmental grants from the public sector, however, disability rights groups in Canada possessed meagre resources for proper organizational development. COPOH, for example, did not

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23 Barnartt, “Social Movement Diffusion?”
26 MA, CCD Fonds, Box P5364, File 2, Letter, COPOH to Secretary of State, 16 May 1978.
even have an administrative office during its initial years, instead forwarding all its correspondence and official mailings to co-founder Jim Derkson’s home in Winnipeg.\textsuperscript{27}

Despite limitations in public financing that enabled only the skeletal development of the disability rights movement, Derkson identified public sector funding as “the single most important factor responsible for the tremendous growth in Handicapped Consumer/Monitoring Organizations across Canada.”\textsuperscript{28}

COPOH asserted itself as the national representative of the disability rights movement in 1978 by holding an inaugural conference on employment. In addition to addressing the challenges of disabled people in the labour market, COPOH used the conference to articulate its understanding of the principles and objectives of disability rights activism regarding the economic integration of disabled people which were articulated to key stakeholders across the country. Since COPOH was still an embryonic body of volunteer activists from across the country, it had been “making an effort to establish its policies based upon grassroots concerns” in order to avoid the risk of alienating groups within the fragile coalition.\textsuperscript{29}

COPOH noted, “A prime concern which has been expressed by the membership to date is that of employment. For this reason employment has been chosen as the basic theme for this first national conference.”\textsuperscript{30} In addition to encouraging COPOH members to stick together as a national organization of disability activists, the decision to highlight the employment concerns of disabled people within a consumer-controlled discussion presented a consumer perspective—unprecedented in Canada—regarding the challenges that disabled people faced in the

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid
\textsuperscript{28} Chivers, “Barrier by Barrier,” 308.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid
labour market. The title of the conference *Employment—Action Now* articulated the consumer vision of labour market integration in which employment services, advocacy, and labour legislation were defined by the needs of consumers rather than the priorities of the rehabilitation industry. The conference also signified the first time disability rights activists, service agencies, bureaucrats, politicians, employers, labour groups, and others came together under the auspices of consumer activism to discuss labour market issues. A letter of invitation sent to the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) by COPOH noted, “Due to current uncertain economic times the right of every Canadian to meaningful employment is being undermined,” the conference would help focus attention on disabled workers who “are often forgotten when jobs are scarce.”

The conference successfully established COPOH’s reputation as the national representative of the disability community, usurping the role previously held by rehabilitation professionals in the CRCD, and greatly clarified the general consumer view around employment integration. Determined to insert consumers into the discourse around labour market integration, the conference revolved around the disability rights perspective of public sector employment policies, external affirmative action programs, human rights legislation, and ways in which the government, private sector, labour movement, and disability rights activists might work together to improve employment integration. COPOH confidently asserted that the conference demonstrated that “handicapped Canadians are no longer content to accept ‘lip service’ when it comes to participating in the decision making process.”

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resolutions from the conference would help craft a “greater role for handicapped representation within advisory and decision making federal bodies” in the construction of employment legislation, architectural barriers, and training resources for disabled people. 34 Alongside many disability rights activists across Canada, conference participants included most major stakeholders in the question of disabled employment issues senior representatives from the Treasury Board, Secretary of State, Department of Manpower and Immigration, Canadian Chamber of Commerce (CCC), many major companies and labour organizations. Conference organizers shrewdly featured Terrance O'Rourke, president of the ACCD, as the keynote speaker in order to promote an American precedent of establishing working partnerships with disability rights activists to achieve meaningful employment integration. 35 Reviews of the conference were extremely positive, praising the unique cross-fertilization of ideas between participants within a consumer framework resulted in a highly productive exchange. 36 As a result, the United Handicapped Groups of Ontario (UHGO which was later known as People United for Self Help or PUSH) held their own employment conference the following year in order to build upon these national developments by cultivating similar cooperation with the public sector and employers at the provincial level.

34 Ibid
Feature photo of female office worker and wheelchair user at a modified workstation as she answers the phone and manipulates a typewriter. The presence of the wheelchair is intended to be incidental as the woman is busy at work, reflecting the theme of the UHGO employment conference “We must stress our abilities…not our disabilities” which is printed in large font above the woman’s workstation. The image, which appeared on the cover of an Ontario Ministry of Labour booklet regarding job hunting advice for disabled workers, reflected the principles of self-help by educating consumers about ways to improve their search for employment.37 (© Queen’s Printer for Ontario, 1979. Reproduced with permission.)

In addition to promoting the national role of disability rights activists in Canada, the COPOH employment conference resulted in the establishment of formal and informal partnerships between disability rights activists, major employers and policymakers. One key partnership that emerged from the conference involved Gordon Fairweather,
inaugural chief commissioner of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, who praised
the conference for producing an extraordinary growth in public recognition of disability
rights activism, pointing to national radio, television and newspaper media coverage of
consumer philosophies that resulted from the conference.38 Indeed, Fairweather was so
impressed by meeting disability rights activists that he drafted a letter to Prime Minister
Pierre Trudeau exhorting him to include new protections for people with disabilities in
forthcoming introduction of the new Canadian constitution. Fairweather argued that
while the Canadian Human Rights Act protects people with physical disabilities in
employment matters, “Many Canadians who support this significant advance in public
policy are anxious that the Constitution also reflect the rights of those who are
disabled.”39 The federal government subsequently initiated changes in public sector
employment policies following the COPOH and UHGO employment conferences, while
Fairweather’s entreaty to Trudeau laid the foundation for a frenzied last-minute campaign
to ensure physical and mental disability was included in the 1982 Charter of Rights and
Freedoms.40

The conference also had the effect of strengthening the status of disability rights
activists and COPOH in particular as the representative voice of the disability community
in Canada, creating momentum within the disability rights movement to push forward an
emerging agenda to promote the emancipation of disabled people from social and
economic liminality. Following the conference COPOH’s funding was increased,
allowing volunteers to settle into a new administrative office in Winnipeg. COPOH was also finally incorporated on October 27, 1978 while Derkson embarked on an outreach tour across Canada and the United States in order to build support for disability rights activists in Canada. Derkson’s journey took him to Washington, D.C. to strengthen relations with American disability rights activists, such as peers in the ACCD, whom he described as “a very together group” after which COPOH could model itself by learning from its method of combining political lobbying with direct action. Derkson’s visit to the United States helped refine COPOH’s representation of disability rights activism in Canada. He attended meetings of the President’s Committee on Employment of the Handicapped (PCEH) whose “Hire the Handicapped” campaigns had defined the predominant method of promoting public awareness of disabled people’s employability in Canada up to that point. As he sat far from the “high ranking officials” alongside his ACCD colleagues “at the back not eating steak like the others because they couldn’t afford the banquet fee,” Derkson determined that the PCEH reflected the American equivalent of the CRCD; or in other words, “A façade to hide the impotence of the various governmental employment programmes.” Unlike the ACCD, however, COPOH and its affiliate organizations were structured along reformist rather than radical lines, adopting what Michael Prince describes as a typical Canadian approach to disability activism which focused on “progressive administration and social democratic thought.”

The visit was a formative experience for Derkson, and thus COPOH, as he returned home

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42 Ibid
43 Ibid
44 Prince, “Canadian Disability Activism”
with renewed enthusiasm to work alongside other leaders in the disability rights movement across Canada to develop the self-help consumer approach to employment integration.

DISABILITY RIGHTS ACTIVISM AND EMPLOYMENT OF DISABLED PEOPLE IN ONTARIO

As part of a wider social movement to secure the rights of disabled people, disability activists in Ontario focused their efforts on improving the economic integration of disabled people by recalibrating their relationship with the rehabilitation industry and employment services. Driven by the ideologies of pursuit of disability rights and importance of labour market participation articulated at consumer employment conferences at the national and provincial level, disability rights groups in Ontario encountered a degree of reluctance among service providers to engage consumers as equal partners in discussions about labour market integration. As Michael Prince notes, “A core element of the struggle for ‘access’ means access to paid labour. The economic dimension of full citizenship typically assumes gainful employment, rather than the alternatives of shelter [sic] workshops or voluntary service masquerading as competitive and fair wage-based work. Disability activists recognize the importance of work incentives in social policy and condemn the work disincentives embedded in various income programs and public services.”

While rehabilitation professionals and service agencies participated in consumer-driven conferences and engaged in dialogue with disability rights activists, they resisted the notion that consumers should determine their

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45 Prince, “Canadian Disability Activism”
own future through selective engagement and control over rehabilitation, employment and other social services.

This reluctance on the part of service agencies occurred in part because self-help disability rights activism represented a vague threat to the legitimacy of professionals’ control over service agencies. John Lord found that service agencies in Canada were either indifferent or opposed to the notion of consumer-controlled services.\textsuperscript{46} Lord notes that service agency representatives would often respond to disability rights activists with an attitude of “We already do that” or “Why would we want to do that?”\textsuperscript{47} During the late 1970s, for example, people with visual impairments expressed their dissatisfaction with the ability of existing services to facilitate their economic integration. A seminal study in 1976 by Cyril Greenland called \textit{Vision Canada} determined that the state of services for blind Canadians reflected a condition of many “unmet needs” that were causing growing numbers of people with visual impairments to question the CNIB’s vocational rehabilitation and employment counselling services.\textsuperscript{48} Despite the CNIB’s eighteen specialized employment counsellors, only thirty per cent of registered blind people in Ontario were gainfully employed in 1974, mainly within CNIB’s Caterplan business venture or in CNIB-run sheltered workshops.\textsuperscript{49} Greenland also discovered a younger generation of blind youth and young adults among CNIB clientele who were increasingly intolerant of the apparent inability of the CNIB to facilitate their full participation in society.\textsuperscript{50} This cohort of blind youth stood against an older generation of people with visual impairments who represented approximately fifty percent of CNIB clients who

\textsuperscript{46} Lord, \textit{Impact}, 13.  
\textsuperscript{47} Lord, \textit{Impact}, 13.  
\textsuperscript{48} Greenland, \textit{Vision Canada}, 43.  
\textsuperscript{49} Greenland, \textit{Vision Canada}, 42.  
\textsuperscript{50} Greenland, \textit{Vision Canada}, 42.
were also emotionally and financially dependent on the CNIB. Greenland recommended that the CNIB help bridge this generational gap by decentralizing its services and improving consumer representation in its administrative boards and in the provision of employment services. The Greenland report revealed that despite CNIB’s repeated assurances that they were capable of facilitating people with visual impairments into the mainstream labour market there remained a significant gap between CNIB consumers who sought greater levels of self-determination and those who actually found jobs in the open labour market.

Disability rights activists with visual impairments affiliated with the Blind Organization of Ontario with Selfhelp Tactics (BOOST) challenged the CNIB’s virtual monopoly on services for people with visual impairments, characterizing the CNIB as an exploitative hegemony that inhibited the social and economic integration of blind Canadians. As a reflection of the growing confidence of some people with visual impairments, BOOST released its own report on the “unmet needs” of blind people that amplified concerns articulated in the Greenland report while also serving as BOOST’s manifesto. The BOOST report, called *Selfhelp and Government Commitment*, was part of a project to develop alternatives to the delivery of services for blind people. BOOST determined that several grassroots-based rights organizations of blind people that emerged and quickly failed after 1970 did so because they suffered from a lack of political experience and lacked a sufficient base of supporters. BOOST discovered that the incipient nature of disability rights activism in Canada during this period led many leaders of upstart groups to be co-opted by the CNIB who hired them as staff members.

52 Greenland, *Vision Canada*, 43.
53 John Rae et al, “Selfhelp and Government Commitment”
which effectively cut down consumer opposition to CNIB’s authority.\textsuperscript{54} BOOST believed it had had remained steadfast by building a mass base of supporters in Toronto and the rest of the province, avoiding an overly dogmatic approach to the promotion of consumer control philosophies.\textsuperscript{55} The extensive report included sixteen chapters of recommendations that challenged the “single agency model,” maintaining that there was an unhealthy reliance on CNIB services.\textsuperscript{56} The BOOST report echoed previous recommendations by the \textit{Vision Canada} report that concluded CNIB should be decentralized over time, devolving responsibility to local disability rights organizations and community partners since such services were ostensibly better positioned to assess and respond to the needs of consumers.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{54} John Rae et al, “Selfhelp and Government Commitment”
\textsuperscript{57} Greenland, \textit{Vision Canada}, 6-12.
Photographs of Anne Musgrave, a key member of BOOST and University of Toronto student, as she navigates St. George campus in downtown Toronto. A member of the youthful “new breed of handicapped person,” Musgrave was an outspoken self-help consumer activist whose involvement in consumer activist politics led *The Varsity* newspaper to feature her in an examination of the experiences of “U of T’s handicapped students.”1 (© *The Varsity*, 1977. Reproduced with permission.)
BOOST’s report reflected growing tension among people with visual impairments in Ontario during the 1970s, particularly among youth and other activist groups that responded to the growing enthusiasm that surrounded the progressive organization of disability rights groups. As Graeme McCreath recalled, BOOST’s report reflected “an atmosphere of disillusionment that was prevalent in the late 1970s among the mass of progressively-motivated blind Ontarians.”

A wave of strikes rocked the blind community during the late 1970s when unionized blind workers alleged that CNIB’s Caterplan retail outlets provided unsafe working conditions and the $0.40 per hour wages exploited blind workers forced to endure an inadequate job placement program.

Picketers’ signs read “CNIB unfair to the blind”; “I only make .40 an hour. What do you make?”; “Strike”; “Please, enough to live on.” One protest led by BOOST’s John Rae marched on CNIB Toronto headquarters on March 14, 1979 during a meeting of the CNIB Ontario division board of management, demanding consumers receive open access to their confidential files which were only discussed with consumers at meetings with job counsellors. Rae commented that “deplorable conditions which face most blind Canadians” were due to a lack of control over decisions that affected their lives. The CNIB refused to allow access to their job files and barred BOOST’s access to the meeting, perpetuating the bitter resentment and lack of collaboration between the organizations.

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60 Ibid
61 See Chapter Seven for further discussion of the CNIB strike.
Disability rights activists in Ontario during this period experimented with the development of their own consumer-run service agencies that challenged the conventional approach to employment training and job placement. One such agency was established in 1973 in Kingston, Ontario called “The World of One in Seven”—so named after the apparently “one in seven Canadians” who have some type of physical disability.\(^{63}\) The specialized employment agency, funded by a federal Outreach grant to promote special employment projects, matched disabled jobseekers with vacancies by providing specialized interventions on the basis of clients’ variable needs and working closely with employers to ensure successful placements. Led by disability rights activist Jean Moore and staffed by employment counsellors with disabilities, The World of One in Seven was unique among employment agencies in the province. The agency explicitly adopted a “client-centred” peer-support approach made possible by low counsellor-to-client ratios as compared with conventional services offered at Canada Manpower Centres.\(^{64}\) Specialized employment counsellors acted as a liaison between clients and employers in an attempt to establish a positive working environment and to facilitate future job placements. Moore argued that by focusing on placing disabled people in jobs they reduced the tax burden to fund welfare benefits, promoted awareness among growing networks of employers, and boosted the self-confidence and skills profile of disabled workers so they were more likely to stay in the workforce.\(^{65}\)

The World of One in Seven’s success was commemorated in a documentary film that profiled disabled workers who had been placed in paid employment through the agency, emphasizing how the organization worked toward reducing attitudinal barriers to

\(^{63}\) *The World of One in Seven*, directed by Michael Steele (1975; Kingston, ON: Quarry Films, 1975), VHS.  
\(^{64}\) *The World of One in Seven*, 1975, VHS.  
labour market integration. The Kingston Whig-Standard also profiled the agency in 1977, noting that it had placed 324 clients in jobs with an additional fifty on its waiting list and interviewed former clients and employers who praised the agency for its many successful placements. Under the leadership of Jean Moore, the agency also built its influence within the disability rights movement by helping organize UHGO’s seminal employment conference in May 1979, serving as an innovative example of how consumer principles worked in practice.

Despite this success, however, The World of One in Seven was disbanded in 1979 when its funding contract expired. Sixty active clients managed by two specialized employment counsellors (a 1:30 ratio) were transferred to the local Canada Employment Centre (CEC) where eight counsellors managed 5,000 clients (a 1:625 ratio). The transition plan included Moore working nine months beyond the closure of the program to advocate for the remaining clients, with no provision for an ongoing role in future placements. Moore complained that the move did not make financial sense because the agency had in fact been doing the work of local CECs in addition to necessary advocacy work promoting employment opportunities for disabled clients and did so at salary levels considerably less than CEC employment counselors. Nevertheless, the agency dissolved and a groundbreaking example of consumer-run employment services abruptly ended, also demonstrating the hardships in maintaining examples of successful consumer-controlled service agencies.

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66 The World of One in Seven, 1975, VHS.
As the World of One in Seven wound down, a new relationship developed between consumers and service agency professionals at the provincial level. UHGO, founded in 1953 as an umbrella organization for social groups of people with disabilities across the province, transitioned in the early 1970s from “merely a means of encouraging recreational activities” to “an advocacy group promoting change in human rights, transportation, and employment.” Similar to the success of COPOH’s inaugural conference, UHGO’s employment conference in 1979 had a profoundly consolidating effect on disability rights activism in Ontario, serving to sharpen the organization’s determination to ensure consumers were adequately represented in service agencies.

UHGO’s executive director Lois Harte-Maxwell, a polio survivor who ran the organization from Room 28 at St. Joseph’s Hospital in Peterborough noted in reference to the conference, “The 130 delegates, suffering from virtually every form of mobility disease, decided to press for better representation of the disabled in advertising and to see all buildings employing people in business and industry made accessible to the handicapped within seven years.” Determined to move away from the association of disability with charity, UHGO resolved that “fundraising by outside groups concentrates on pity and is paternalistic because the physically handicapped should have the capacity to raise their own funds.”

Despite its stance regarding the nature of advocacy and fundraising by non-disability rights organizations, UHGO developed a close working relationship with the Ontario March of Dimes (OMOD) as part of a nationwide project initiated by COPOH to

70 MA, CCD Fonds, Box P5360, File 2, Paper, COPOH, “Emergence of the Consumer Movement of the Handicapped in Canada,” 1979.; UHGO was also reorganized in 1981 as People United for Self Help (PUSH) Ontario.
72 “Handicapped Unemployed’
build the capacities of local disability rights groups to respond to the employment needs of disabled people. The project, known as “Job Corps,” operated under a Canadian Employment and Immigration Commission grant administrated by COPOH to enable their provincial affiliates to develop resources to provide disabled people with employment counselling, training programs, labour rights, and to serve as a conduit for consumer input in the development of labour policy.\textsuperscript{73} As the \textit{Kawartha Sun} noted, the Ontario branch of Job Corps involved fourteen fieldworkers who were “helping UHGO’s 21 member organizations to mobilize to achieve their own local political ends.”\textsuperscript{74} Disability rights activists in Ontario were still vastly underequipped to respond to the employment needs of people with disabilities as disability rights organizations struggled to build an effective social movement across the province. In addition to her role as executive director of UHGO, Harte-Maxwell served as project leader, earning only $5.40 per hour ($17.19 adjusted for inflation) to lead fourteen employees—ten of whom were disabled—in their work performing research and organizational development of affiliate and non-affiliate UHGO member organizations.

Although the Job Corps project represented an important moment in the development of organized disability rights activism in Ontario, it came with certain risks that the principles of self-help and consumer control would be compromised by close association with service agencies. Despite the fact that UHGO was supplied with $100,000 (approximately $315,000 adjusted for inflation) for organizational development from the federal government, UHGO accepted another $10,000 (approximately $31,000 adjusted for inflation) from the OMOD as well as access to OMOD office space across

\textsuperscript{73} MA, CCD Fonds, Box P5360, File 1, Memo, COPOH, 1978.
\textsuperscript{74} “Peterborough is Nerve Centre for Province-Wide Disabled Movement,” \textit{Kawartha Sun} (10 July 1979).
the province which hosted Job Corps Community Development Workers. Without office space of its own in which to coordinate the project, the project relied upon consumer access to OMOD local offices across the province since UHGO was still struggling to establish itself as a viable disability rights group. Despite the industrious purposes that brought disability rights activists and service agency administrators together, however, tensions quickly emerged over each partner’s respective roles within the working relationship. Soon after UHGO agreed to work with OMOD officials, OMOD administrator Lee Rullman demanded that project lead and UHGO chairperson Lois Harte-Maxwell use official OMOD letterhead in all its written correspondence in order to justify OMOD’s investment in the project. Harte-Maxwell reported that UHGO member groups complained that the OMOD letterhead in its communications ran counter to consumer principles and reflected poorly on UHGO as a representative disability rights organization.

As UHGO sought to build its own capacity to respond to the employment needs of disabled people, the working relationship with their OMOD partners incited the anxiety of other disability rights activists in the province. Harte-Maxwell complained to Rullman and other OMOD administrators that prospective disability rights organizations, such as BOOST had chosen not to affiliate with UHGO and was likely discouraged from doing so when they received letters from fellow disability rights activists printed on OMOD letterhead as Rullman had instructed. Beyond the obviously poor optics of

76 MA, CCD Fonds, Box P5364, File 13, Letter, Secretary of State to COPOH Ontario Job Corps Project Leader, 17 May 1979.
77 Ibid
sending out correspondence on OMOD letterhead, Harte-Maxwell worried that it also undermined the expansion of disability rights activism in the province. The federal government wrote to Harte-Maxwell, assuring her that despite her role as executive director of UHGO, Job Corps operated separately from both UHGO and OMOD. \(^{78}\) Despite OMOD’s objections and under the terms articulated to her by the federal government, Harte-Maxwell promptly changed its letterhead to “Self-Help Efforts - Handicapped Community, Ontario” and forwarded her correspondence with the Secretary of State to OMOD administration in order to substantiate her arguments against Rullman’s decision. \(^{79}\)

Project insiders also worried about the administration of Job Corps and its reflection on the fragile state of a developing disability rights movement in Ontario. Staff members in the project questioned the status of UHGO as a disability rights organization given its close association with OMOD, indirectly reflecting the concerns of disability activists across the province. For example, Rachelle Halpenny, community development worker for the Eastern Ontario branch of Job Corps and celebrated activist and disabled athlete, wrote to Harte-Maxwell about her frustration regarding the administration of the project. Halpenny advised that other project workers were disheartened by the lack of direction in the project, arguing that the OMOD might have more effectively implemented the project on its own rather than dealing with the unclear and contradictory direction provided by disability rights leaders. \(^{80}\) She worried that the principles of disability rights activism appeared to be jeopardized, noting, “In an organization such as

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\(^{78}\) MA, CCD Fonds, Box P5364, File 13, Letter, Secretary of State to COPOH Ontario Job Corps Project Leader, 17 May 1979.

\(^{79}\) MA, CCD Fonds, Box P5364, File 13, Letter, UHGO to COPOH, 18 May 1979.

\(^{80}\) MA, CCD Fonds, Box P5364, File 13, Letter, Eastern Ontario Community Development Worker to Ontario Job Corps Project Leader, 1 June 1979.
UHGO whose object is to bring together a large number of independent member groups in some common action stance that a certain amount of confusion is inevitable.”

COPOH observed a degree of ambiguity regrettably existed at the time in regards to how disability rights groups, service agencies and individual workers were supposed to work together. COPOH found that a lack of organizational cooperation resulted in the project taking too long to become operational, fuelling disagreements between disabled people and service agency professionals. These differences were demonstrated during a meeting between Harte-Maxwell and OMOD executive director Lee Rullman on August 13, 1979:

**Harte-Maxwell**: UHGO is attempting to spread their wings as a consumer group.

**Rullman**: It doesn't make sense, business or otherwise, to duplicate.

**Harte-Maxwell**: What are you doing?

**Rullman**: Why don’t you get in touch with me and find out? We are offering to support and consult with your people.

**Harte-Maxwell**: We seemed to part company in Kingston over control—whether my staff would do anything contrary to March of Dimes.

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principles, etc. The operative word there is ‘assist’ versus ‘control.’ I am responsible to the government.

Rullman: The province of Ontario is our bailiwick.

Harte-Maxwell: It’s ours too! As a consumer organization, we have a lot of strength.

Rullman: You should take help where it is offered. It’s our position that you haven't taken any help—we want to help.

Harte-Maxwell: I don't see it as a positive help.82

Illustrative of the “We-already-do-that” approach to disability rights activism by service agency professionals, the above exchange demonstrated that OMOD administrators perceived their role as the dominant host in which they held both financial and professional authority. UHGO leadership, however, recognized they were in a highly unbalanced yet collaborative relationship with OMOD and sought to develop the disability rights movement in Ontario through an arm’s-length partnership with service agency professionals.

Despite these differences, disability rights activists in UHGO and service agency professionals in OMOD successfully completed their agreement, regularly reporting the development of the Job Corps project in a biweekly newsletter called Wheels of Progress. By December 1979, Rullman wrote to Harte-Maxwell inquiring if OMOD could provide any additional financial assistance to ensure the successful completion of the project.83 Relations between UHGO and OMOD had spontaneously improved due to their shared

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82 MA, CCD Fonds, Box P5364, File 13, Minutes, “UHGO/March of Dimes Meeting Re Relationship Under YJC Project.” 13 August 1979.
83 MA, CCD Fonds, Box P5364, File 13, Letter, OMOD to UHGO, 5 Dec 1979.
participation in the Coalition on Human Rights for the Handicapped which emerged to protest the introduction of new provincial legislation that avoided crucial amendments to the Ontario Human Rights Code on behalf of disabled people.\footnote{84} Rullman, in fact, was quoted during the protest, noting it was the first time service agencies and disability rights groups came together to speak with a single voice.\footnote{85} As the relationship between service agencies and disability rights groups steadily evolved toward a position of greater mutual understanding, individual activists and people with disabilities attempted to redefine the parameters of their engagement with community-based services in their pursuit of full participation in the labour market.

INDEPENDENTLY LIVING AND WORKING IN TORONTO

The struggle to fashion a consumer-led vision of economic integration in Canada stimulated the expansion of self-help services for people with disabilities in Toronto. A new philosophy of “independent living” (IL) emerged in Canada following its introduction to Canadian disability rights leaders at the 1980 COPOH conference on rehabilitation. An IL approach regarded the conceptualization and experience of disability primarily in social and political terms, empowering disabled people to take control over access to rehabilitation and employment services through such measures as peer support initiatives. Proponents of the IL approach believed that “people with disabilities can best identify their own needs and can have productive lives in the community through self-help, empowerment, advocacy, and the removal of barriers.”\footnote{86}

\footnote{84} “Disabled Demand Equality and Integration, Not Favors,” \textit{Toronto Star} (15 Dec 1979).
\footnote{85} “Disabled Demand Equality and Integration”
This perspective held that discriminatory attitudes and employment policies created social and economic barriers to full participation that should be resisted through the assertion of civil rights and equitable access to employment opportunities. The pursuit of independent living became a reality for many people with disabilities in Canada during the early 1980s following the precedent-setting experience of Judith Snow who was granted a special order-in-council for necessary supports and attendant services which she required to function independently in the community. Independent Living Centres (ILCs) soon developed to ensure that a consumer-led IL approach to social and economic integration could assist people with disabilities in Canada find work in order to live independently in the community. Accordingly, the IL approach empowered people with disabilities to assert greater control in their own lives by learning skills from other peers with disabilities about how to live and work independently in the community.

The proliferation of the IL approach in Canada reflected the contours of an evolving social movement of disability rights activists during the 1980s and 1990s that grew increasingly confident in moving beyond the conventional rehabilitation paradigm. Developments in disability rights activism were particularly visible in the case of activists in the Toronto area. As co-founder of the Scarborough Recreation Club for Disabled Adults in 1976, disability rights activist Beryl Potter helped move local disabled people toward a more activist stance. Potter and her peers within the Club, which included many working-age adults with physical disabilities, were optimistic about the potential of an IL approach to actively transform the employment prospects of people

89 DeJong, “Independent Living,” 435-446.
with disabilities in Toronto. As part of this growing consensus, Potter established a new organization called Scarborough Action Awareness in September 1980. Potter represented the organization, and disability rights activists in Toronto by de facto, by appearing before the Special Parliamentary Committee on the Disabled and Handicapped, which received submissions for its seminal report that shaped the development of public policies regarding the social and economic integration of disabled people in Canada.90

Potter also took advantage of the growing awareness of disability issues during the IYDP in 1981 by organizing various activities in Toronto to promote disabled peoples’ pursuit of full participation in the community and labour market. Similar to disability rights activists at the national level, Potter conceived employment as the lynchpin around which other issues, such as transportation, housing, education, and recreation revolved. She argued that people with disabilities must be incorporated into the workforce in greater numbers, so that “we can become useful citizens and pay taxes too” since a larger tax base provided by working disabled people would help pay for demands for greater levels of accessibility.91

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Beryl Potter, President of Scarborough Recreation Club for Disabled Adults, with director and cameraman while shooting documentary. Potter was a key player in helping to awareness of the self-help disability rights movement in Toronto. ²⁄₉© Michael Slaughter/Getstock.com, 1981. Reproduced with permission.

As a leading disability activist, Potter’s highly public profile in Toronto’s east end heightened interest in the region around disability rights and the IL approach to economic integration. Potter hosted her own local weekly cable television program called “Ability Forum” that shared news affecting the local disability community and featured local people with disabilities on a variety of topics.³⁄₉ She also received a major federal grant to establish the abortive Scarborough Centre for Independent Living in which the principles

³⁄₉ “TV Film Stars Triple Amputee”
of independent living would be put into action. By June 1981, Potter was also the public face of a provincial “Employ Ability” campaign that featured an exhibit which travelled the city’s malls and public plazas to promote awareness of disabled people’s capacity to engage in paid work. Building upon her notoriety as a leader of disability activists in Toronto, Potter was also the subject of a documentary called “Life Another Way” which aired on public television in October 1981, documenting her work as “one of Canada's foremost crusaders for the rights of disabled people”.

Similar to Potter’s efforts to promote the advancement of the disability rights movement, the local disability community in Toronto envisioned the development of an independent living centre. Disability rights activists such as Sandra Carpenter cited widespread “frustration with services offered in Metro Toronto” and a desire for an information centre to guide disabled people through the maze of services for disabled people in the city. As a co-founder of a national organization of female disability rights activists called DisAbled Women’s Network (DAWN), Carpenter focused on securing the reputation of the Centre for Independent Living in Toronto (CILT). Reminiscent of the relationship between OMOD and UHGO at the provincial level, a steering committee at CILT composed of disabled people and service agency representatives was initially established, which subsequently opening an office in downtown Toronto at 182 Brunswick Street under the sponsorship of Community Occupational Therapy

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Association (COTA).\textsuperscript{98} The Centre immediately began work on a service inventory and consumers’ needs survey in the city to demonstrate the case for an independent living centre in the city based around consumer principles. Similar to other independent living centres in the United States, CILT was a non-profit, cross-disability, consumer-controlled organization that worked to provide disabled people with opportunities to pursue integration and full participation in the workforce.\textsuperscript{99}

Rather than building an insular movement of disability rights activists, both Carpenter and Potter reached out beyond the disability community to provide a consumer perspective in mainstream organizations. In addition to her role as executive director of CILT, for example, Carpenter served on the board of the Canadian Labour Force Development Board (CLFDB) and National Training Board, providing consumer input into the planning and implementation of employment training services across the country.\textsuperscript{100} CILT also promised to offer disabled people in Toronto a place in which the principles of independent living could be realized through information sharing and networking among disabled people about various services that worked toward the full participation in the community. By 1987, for example, CILT developed a local weekly radio program called “The Radio Connection” which aired on CIUT-FM supported by the University of Toronto and provincial government.\textsuperscript{101} The success of the multifaceted program was part of a larger project during the late 1980s called “Access Connections”

\textsuperscript{99} “CILT: Empowerment and Independent Living”
which involved CILT, Metropolitan Toronto, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and the federal Canadian Employment and Immigration Council. The collaborative project involved actively promoting social and economic integration by employing disabled people in the media industry, the capstone of which was the development of a new weekly national news program called *The Disability Network*, which first aired in 1989 on Saturdays from 12:30-1:00 pm and ran until 2006 after being reformulated in 1998 as the program *Moving On*. The *Disability Network* focused on employment issues early on, acting as “an information vehicle to reach disabled job seekers about employment opportunities. It will increase the collective profile of people with disabilities as active labour-market participants.”

Staffed and hosted by people with disabilities, the program reflected the principles of the disability rights movement while actively disseminating independent living philosophies to a wider Canadian audience.

Despite this expanded influence, however, Carpenter and other disabled people in CILT were compelled to develop consumer access within a primarily unreceptive service network. As CILT sought to develop its own consumer-led services, rehabilitation professionals established groups such as the Toronto Independent Living Advisory Committee (TILAC) intended to reassert rehabilitation agencies’ control of rehabilitation services. TILAC was conceived as a coordinating body of service providers and consumers to address the needs of physically disabled people who sought to live independently in the community.

Despite its name, however, TILAC (which held its meetings at Lyndhurst Rehabilitation Hospital) was in fact primarily composed of service providers. TILAC was intended to reassert rehabilitation agencies’ control of rehabilitation services.

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agencies that promoted the rehabilitation industry’s vision of independent living.\textsuperscript{104} In contrast to the principles adhered to by Potter, Carpenter and other disability rights activists in the city, TILAC maintained that people with physical disabilities who wished to direct or control their own care would experience a potentially negative impact on their lifestyle and quality of care, in addition to increasing costs to service providers and frustrating the administration of long-term care services.\textsuperscript{105} Despite attempts to solicit greater consumer representation, TILAC was repeatedly rebuffed by Carpenter and other disability rights organizations, as demonstrated by the lack of consumer membership in the group, since it did not reflect the values of consumer-control despite its support of independent living.

Amid ongoing conflict between disabled people and rehabilitation professionals, Beryl Potter co-founded the Coalition on Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities (CEEPD).\textsuperscript{106} Potter led disability rights activists from across the country to Ottawa to protest the introduction of federal employment equity legislation, which she argued did “little to force federally regulated employers and Crown corporations to hire and promote disabled people.”\textsuperscript{107} Images from the protest featured Potter triumphantly leading a protest in April 1986 amid placards that read “Dead like Bill C-62”; “No penalties, no justice”; “Jobs when?”; “Black Monday, disabled person, no equality, no

\textsuperscript{104} Members of TILAC included: ALS Society, Lyndhurst Hospital, Bloorview Children's Hospital, Easter Seals, Bellwoods Park House, Muscular Dystrophy Association of Canada, COTA, Gage Transitional Living Centre, Ministry of Community and Social Services, Participation Apartments Toronto.

\textsuperscript{105} AO, RG 74-30, Box B186697, File “TILAC,” Letter, Minister Responsible for Disabled Persons to TILAC, 11 December 1989.


\textsuperscript{107} “150 Disabled Travel to Ottawa to Protest Job Bill with ‘No Teeth,’” \textit{Toronto Star} (15 April 1986); “Disabled Protest Hits House,” \textit{Montreal Gazette} (15 April 1986).
jobs, no justice.” During the protest, Minister of Labour Flora MacDonald addressed the Speaker of the House on behalf of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, denying that the government had ignored disabled groups' attempts to discuss the bill with the Prime Minister and that he had personally written to Beryl Potter explaining the situation. In an extraordinary outburst, Potter, sitting in the back row of the public gallery, yelled out: “My name is Beryl Potter and I've received no such letter!” The Toronto Star reported that the rest of her words were drowned out by calls from the Speaker for order before Potter was forcibly removed from the gallery. Indeed, individual acts, such as Potter’s parliamentary outburst, represented a larger spectrum of disability activism encompassing the actions of individuals with disabilities in the labour market. While disability rights organizations occupied a central position in the advancement of disability rights, they also represented what Christine Kelly called the “documented parameters of the Canadian disability movement [which] are only part of the picture.” Kelly’s contemporary study discovered “multiple disability movements” operating outside of disability rights organizations but not documented in existing disability studies.

108 “150 Disabled Travel to Ottawa”
109 AO, RG 74-49, Box B299294, File “Beryl Potter,” Ontario Action Awareness, “Work Plan,” 1991.; Minutes of the Council of the City of Toronto 712 (13 May 1998), 865-866. Potter subsequently ran an awareness program during the late 1980s and early 1990s that toured Ontario, establishing connections with local schools, policymakers, media, consumer groups, and other disability organizations. For these and other activities, Potter’s profile as a leading activist also earned her an Order of Canada medal and formal recognition by the City of Toronto Council upon her death on 1 May 1998 for her contribution to the promotion of disability rights in the city.
110 Kelly, “Towards Renewed Descriptions”
111 Kelly, “Towards Renewed Descriptions”
Protestor on Parliament Hill in Ottawa with a placard affixed to back of his wheelchair that reads “No equality. No penalties. No justice.” As the message suggests, disability rights activists were upset that the legislation did not come with any stipulations for the enforcement of hiring targets.\footnote{\textcopyright Murray Mosher/Getstock.com, 1986. Reproduced with permission.}

Increased support for the IL approach promoted by disability rights activists such as Potter and Carpenter transformed access to employment opportunities for many people with disabilities in Toronto. Interview participants in the present study maintained that

\footnote{“150 Disabled Travel to Ottawa”}
the rise of disability rights activism and the IL approach during the 1980s created new employment opportunity structures in which self-determination through work became increasingly attainable. “Lily,” who lives with quadriplegia and worked in the public sector, encountered steady improvements in physical accessibility which led to increasing access to accommodations and greater attention to flexible working arrangements. She notes, “I require assistance in terms of attendant services to help me with clerical work, washroom, getting my coat on and off, things like that. When I first started working that wasn't available so I had to rely on coworkers.”113 The introduction of accommodation funds that provided increased access to attendant services in the workplace as well as assistive technologies like voice recognition computers, speaker telephones, ramps, elevators, and door openers all served to create a working environment that enabled Lily greater control in her workplace.

Interview participant “Michael” who lives with mental health issues similarly found that the growth of the disability rights movement coincided with the proliferation of job opportunities in the voluntary sector. Limited availability of flexible work for people with mental health issues caused Michael to search for employment within the disability rights movement where employers and co-workers in consumer-run enterprises were more likely to provide accommodations rather than force him to self-accommodate in an inflexible workplace. He recalled, “I did make the point with somebody who was helping me with my personal experience speech and we were coming to the part where I

113 “Lily,” Interview with Author, 27 June 2011. Following Research Ethics Board approval, thirty people with disabilities were recruited through various advertisements and word-of-mouth to conduct semi-structured oral interviews about how work and employment shaped their lived experience of disability. Interview transcripts were processed and coded using NVivo 9.0 and participants were given full control over the content of their testimonies. See Chapter Eight and Appendix C for a more detailed explanation of the oral history component used in this study.
was talking about the past. I had difficulty with work. Her suggestion was ‘You weren't able to work.’ I said, ‘No, I had difficulty.’ I’m comfortable with descriptive language. I had difficulty working. Generally, I've put myself in a consumer friendly work environment.”

Michael found that since he started working in the early 1980s, his path toward economic integration reflected a process of self-accommodation that incorporated income support with work that suited his abilities.

Michael found that despite the growing availability of consumer-friendly jobs, however, mental health issues were generally conceived separately from physical disabilities. He explained, “You get fruit baskets when you’re in hospital for blood work or a heart test or some kind of serious health or physical health issue. But you get misunderstanding and fear with certain aspects of mental health recovery and support. That’s a big thing. It’s not a socially comfortable illness, condition or experience.”

In contrast, Lily encountered a trend of increasing acceptance of her visible physical impairments in the workplace, “I’m pretty sure that most people when they first see me don’t think I could be working at the type of job I’ve been at for thirty years. When I first started there was certainly scepticism about who I was and what I was capable of. [Since then] I think a lot of my coworkers don’t really see me as a person with a disability.”

Notwithstanding these differences, both Michael and Lily were empowered by the growth of disability rights activism in Toronto to achieve a level of self-determination through work. As Lily noted, “By working and having good income I’m able to make choices in where I live, if I want to go on a trip somewhere, it helps me purchase additional

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114 “Michael”
115 “Michael”
116 “Lily”
attendant care services that if I didn't work I couldn’t afford. It allows me freedom and choice.”

CONCLUSION

In the late twentieth century, people with disabilities began to organize themselves into activist groups in order to pressure existing service agencies and public policymakers for greater levels of self-determination in the pursuit of social and economic integration. These disability rights groups adopted a particularly statist approach which enabled them to expand their activities through the provision of public funding initiatives in order to directly challenge the conventional approach to helping people with disabilities find jobs. Individual activists and disability rights organizations emerged as part of a growing social movement of disabled people seeking to live and work independently in the community. Significant consumer-led employment conferences in the late 1970s demonstrated these goals as people with disabilities searched for ways to increase access to employment opportunities within an alternative framework. Fledgling disability rights groups such as COPOH and UHGO marked a high point in the development of disability activism in Canada with their inaugural conferences on employment integration involving disability rights activists, government officials, rehabilitation agencies, service organizations and, business and labour groups. These labour market actors came together to deliberate not only the experience of economic liminality, but also the sidelining of disabled people in the process of seeking independent living through work.

117 “Lily”
As disability rights organizations became better organized, they increasingly insisted that people with disabilities required greater control in the services upon which they relied since other people with disabilities were the best judges of their own needs in the labour market. The interaction of disability rights activists and rehabilitation professionals at the national, provincial, and local levels reflected growing dissatisfaction with the articulation of disabled people’s needs and abilities by parent advocates and the rehabilitation industry. Rather than sloughing off service agencies, however, disability rights activists applied a state reform approach to stimulate change within rehabilitation and employment services. Disability activists sought to break away from conventional patterns of passive reliance on social welfare mechanisms by articulating a vision of “independent living” in which disabled people controlled the development of vocational skills within rehabilitation services and employment supports that were needed to access the mainstream labour market. While service agencies and policymakers expressed reluctance to relinquish control over these services during the 1980s, the development of the independent living movement and its emphasis on establishing systems of peer-to-peer networking created alternative pathways toward labour market participation. As demonstrated by the work experiences of individuals in Toronto, people with disabilities engaged in unique forms of disability rights activism by asserting themselves in the workforce as the influence of disability rights groups helped to bring about changes in the physical, social, and political landscape. For disability rights activists, “full participation” was impossible without securing “a voice of our own.”
Chapter Four: “A Little Hong Kong?”: Sheltered Workshops and the Evolution of Disability Advocacy, 1970-1985

The present reality was ‘A little Hong Kong’ because [workshops] provided a lot of contracts for companies that would send their products there to be packaged and they would be very happy to receive this work done by the handicapped people, but they wouldn't hire them. Supposedly, the goal of the workshop was to give people skills so they could be hired in a company and didn't worry about looking for placement. They could not earn more than $100 a month because otherwise their pensions would be cut down. So they were in a trap of poverty. They didn’t have money … and were very poor. Because of this repetitious work process and lack of attention to them as human beings, their physical handicap was also, in a way, driving them to become mentally handicapped.¹

In 1978, Canadian disability rights activists wondered aloud, “Why, when we have the creativity and the resources to establish meaningful, long term jobs, do we continue to accept the status quo of the sheltered workshops as opposed to community integrated employment alternatives?”² A number of obstacles confronted people with disabilities in Canada during the 1970s and 1980s as they attempted to participate in the labour market, including pervasive inaccessibility that perpetuated exclusion from opportunities to gain conventional work and life experiences. Deemed unfit to work by mainstream standards but requiring social and vocational skills necessary for the transition to paid employment, many people with disabilities were channelled into the sheltered workshop system to perform work that would develop desired abilities. Sheltered workshops reflected broader social, political and economic dynamics that surrounded the problem of disability during

¹ Wayne Roberts, “A Little Hong Kong: Sheltered Workshops in Ontario,” Rank and File, first broadcast in 1982, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Radio. Quotation is an excerpt from an interview Roberts conducted with Ebar Brione, a former supervisor at a sheltered workshop in Toronto, Ontario regarding his experiences and thoughts on the state of sheltered employment in the city.
this period. People in sheltered workshops, for example, were neither “patients” nor “workers” but laboured within a transitional or liminal space originally designed to ensure that people deemed unemployable could engage in work appropriate to their abilities and build skills that would eventually transfer to gainful employment. Yet sheltered workshops were neither unable to rectify the chronic poverty and unemployment of disabled people nor reconcile the many criticisms of the workshop model. Instead, the workshop system formed an integral part of an evolving welfare state and revealed the exclusive nature of Canada’s economic system that stigmatized people with disabilities unable to compete effectively in the mainstream labour market.

The following chapter examines the role and evolution of sheltered workshops in Canada during a period in which the advent of disability rights created countervailing pressures on the workshop system. Changes in the discourse of disability and realities of community living situated sheltered workshops at the center of debates around the rights and opportunities available to people with disabilities. An initial discussion of the purpose of sheltered workshops moves into an analysis of the dynamic relationship between workshop advocacy and disability activism. The final two sections observe this relationship in action during the attempted industrialization of the workshop system and developing consensus around a new model of sheltered work.

EMPLOYABILITY AND THE ROLE OF SHELTERED WORKSHOPS

A common dilemma encountered by disabled people in the labour market revolved around subjective determinations of their employability. Brian Doyle describes a strategic process many disabled jobseekers followed when applying for a new job, “Do
disabled persons argue that their disabilities are serious, thereby attracting the defence that they are unable to carry out the essential elements of the job, or do they contend that their disabilities are not so severe as to effect employability, thereby risking a finding that they are not sufficiently disabled to attract the law's protection? An assessment of one’s employability by employers, rehabilitation professionals, social workers, as well as jobseekers themselves, involved a subjective evaluation of an individual’s skills, background and general utility in the labour market to secure paid employment. These assessments were complex and unpredictable for many people with disabilities whose visible or non-visible impairments weighed heavily upon them in the search for employment. Indeed, the subjective evaluation of employability in general was often the primary reason disabled people were rendered unfit to work in mainstream settings.

Participation in the labour market, as determined by one’s level of employability, indicated the extent to which disabled people could exercise active citizenship by engaging various social and economic opportunities. Yet people with disabilities were often situated in different opportunity structures during the twentieth century that affected their ability to take part in training, education and other means of developing employment-related skills and competencies necessary for labour market participation. Widespread physical inaccessibility, prejudicial attitudes, and other such barriers to full participation during this period frustrated disabled people’s pathways to employment. The postwar welfare state, for example, was largely constructed on the basis of the distinction between “employable” and “unemployable,” compelling people who were

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unable to find work to declare that they were in fact *incapable* of competitive employment in order to qualify for welfare benefits.\(^5\) People with disabilities often found themselves among other chronic recipients of social welfare forced to navigate the boundaries of the labour market due to assumptions about their limited capacity to contribute to the economy.\(^6\)

Sheltered workshops emerged from this pervasive and longstanding liminality of people with disabilities from the labour market. Irina Metzler describes people with disabilities occupying a liminal space, existing in-between, as opposed to outside of, social and economic identifiers. She argues, “I have chosen liminal over marginal, since it better describes the in-between phase that physically impaired people found themselves in, since they are between normatively fixed positions (such as healthy or ill, alive or dead, male or female) rather than completely *outside* of traditional structures.”\(^7\)

Conceived as mechanisms to rectify the diminished employability of people with disabilities, workshops addressed this liminality faced by many disabled people who lacked the necessary skills and abilities in which to compete with “able-bodied” people in the workforce. Workshops occupied a key position in the lives of many people who could work but whose disabilities rendered them unemployable and their labour uncompetitive in the mainstream labour market. In her historical analysis of the emerging field of occupational therapy in Canada, Judith Friedland notes that sheltered workshops supplied jobs to people whose impairments disqualified them from competitive employment in


\(^6\) Refer to Chapter One for further discussion of the evolving relationship between welfare and opportunities for disabled people to participate in the labour market.

order to provide work skills they would otherwise not have the opportunity to develop in the open labour market. Antecedents of sheltered workshops in Canada and the United States included mid to late-nineteenth century work programs for blind people that were designed to provide work deemed appropriate to their abilities, such as basket weaving, thread spinning, and other light assembly. But the earliest workshops that survived into the 1970s in Canada dated to the aftermath of the First World War when a surge in resources for war-wounded veterans as part of the resettlement process created demand for protected settings in which injured and war-blinded veterans could acquire competitive work-related skills. As part of a regime of therapeutic intervention in the lives of disabled people, work in workshops—even if unproductive, unpaid and uncompetitive—was seen by medical and rehabilitation professionals that controlled such programming to convey desired physical, psychological, and social benefits.

Sheltered workshops reflected longstanding faith in the concept of work-as-therapy, reflecting the influence of occupational therapists and steady expansion of the vocational rehabilitation industry during the twentieth century. The concept that work could be therapeutic was a popular theme in medical and social work practices stretching back to the establishment of Victorian institutions for people with disabilities. In his examination of patient labour at the Toronto Hospital for the Insane, historian Geoffrey Reaume documented the consistent application of therapeutic work regimes in psychiatric institutions throughout Ontario from the 1870s to the period following the First World War.

War. The provision of regular, if not demanding, labour allegedly served to stabilize “disturbed” or “distracted” minds by encouraging patients to focus on the immediate task in their occupation. Similar principles justified the provision of sheltered work outside institutions to “emotionally disturbed” soldiers and civilians with mental health problems whose conditions could be rehabilitated through the provision of regular, largely physical, work. By the 1920s, occupational therapists staffed “curative workshops” (as sheltered workshops were originally called) which formed part of the steady growth of the rehabilitation industry in Canada. For people with physical disabilities, workshops represented the latter stages of rehabilitation by restoring physical ability and self-confidence while providing work skills that would improve employability and enable future entry to the mainstream labour market.

A persistent and widespread cultural fear of idleness inspired the provision of work-as-therapy, which stimulated the expansion of the workshop system as an integral part in the development of the modern social welfare state. The primary purpose of sheltered workshops was not necessarily to replace mainstream work opportunities, but to protect people with disabilities against the apparent morally deleterious effects of idleness on physical and social functioning as a result of their inability to secure and maintain paid employment. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson explains, “As modernization proceeded, the disabled figure shouldered in new ways society’s anxiety about its inability to retain the status and old meanings of labor in the face of industrialization and

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14 Friedland, *Restoring the Spirit*, 147.
15 Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 146.
increasing economic and social chaos.”16 Workshops justified the payment of stipends to sheltered workers whose disabled bodies were ostensibly reactivated through rehabilitation science since sheltered work was considered part of a therapeutic or training regimen that was meant to facilitate individuals to join the mainstream workforce. Most sheltered workers during this period instead survived primarily on social assistance while they attempted to build their vocational skills. Geoffrey Reaume concludes that unpaid work was seen as part of a moral treatment for apparent idleness which presumably contributed to poor mental as well as physical health.17 Workshops were seen to protect disabled people from the moral hazards of idleness as a result of being deemed unemployable in the open labour market while providing them with structured opportunities for the development of vocational skills.

Sheltered workshops were originally designed to provide “work-like activities” outside hospitals and the home in pursuit of social and vocational development.18 One interview participant in the present study, “Rachel,” reflected upon her late father’s experience at a local sheltered workshop in Toronto during the early 1970s, “It was place for him to go to spend his working hours rather than sitting at home.”19 When visiting her father at the workshop, Rachel encountered “people with cerebral palsy, people with seizures, another person who wore a helmet all the time, but no programs to integrate him

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16 Thomson, Extraordinary Bodies, 47.
18 Friedland, Restoring the Spirit, 153.
19 “Rachel,” Interview with Author, 27 Nov 2011. Following Research Ethics Board approval, thirty people with disabilities were recruited through various advertisements and word-of-mouth to conduct semi-structured oral interviews about how work and employment shaped their lived experience of disability. Interview transcripts were processed and coded using NVivo 9.0 and participants were given full control over the content of their testimonies. See Chapter Eight and Appendix C for a more detailed explanation of the oral history component used in this study.
back into the community or these other people in the sheltered workshop. There was no attempt to consider that they might have a mind to do something else.” Judith Heumann, pioneering American disability rights activist, similarly reflects upon her visits to sheltered workshops. Heumann recalls, “I remember one day we went to visit a sheltered workshop in Manhattan. We had a meeting with one of the executives. I remember this guy telling me that people had a choice. No one forced people to come to a sheltered workshop. If they really didn’t like it there, they didn’t have to come. I remember saying to him I didn’t think people were really being given a choice if their choice was staying at home or coming out, at least being here. It didn’t seem to me that was a choice.”

An occupation, even unproductive and repetitive physical work, was considered necessary during conventional “working hours” since the apparently sedentary alternative of “sitting at home” was deemed unacceptable despite physical impairments that rendered individuals unemployable. Widespread faith in the value of workshops as a site for developing functional ability motivated the pursuit of work regardless of remuneration.

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20 Pelka, *What We Have Done*, 186.
Sheltered workers with a variety of visible and non-visible disabilities performing various assembly-related tasks in a local workshop in Toronto under the guidance of a supervisor (bottom photo at centre). As pictured above, work was often performed in a collaborative setting with individual work stations set up to measure productivity.\textsuperscript{21} (© Bors Spremo/Getstock.com, 1982. Reproduced with permission.)

Workshops, however, did not necessarily improve the employability of sheltered workers. As Rachel observed in reference to her father, “There were no programs to integrate him back into the community or these other people in the sheltered workshop. There was no attempt to consider that they might have a mind to do something else.”\textsuperscript{22} Workshops did not necessarily restore employability for people with temporary and long-term physical impairments, intellectual disabilities or mental health conditions. Instead, sheltered work was an extension of occupational therapy services that were designed to rehabilitate people up to the point where they could subsequently seek to acquire marketable skills in the mainstream labour market.\textsuperscript{23} Regardless of the necessity or value of the protected nature of workshops in the treatment of disability, their separation from

\textsuperscript{21} “Workshops Dead-End for Disabled, Study Says,” \textit{Toronto Star} A14 (4 December 1982).
\textsuperscript{22} “Rachel”
\textsuperscript{23} Friedland, \textit{Restoring the Spirit}, 155.
the competitive workforce frustrated the transference of skills and experience gained to mainstream work environments.

Sheltered workers in Toronto at the CNIB and Corbrook Sheltered Workshops, for example, convinced the Toronto Mayor’s Task Force on the Disabled and Elderly in the early 1970s that their work, which included the packaging, assembly and manufacturing of various goods such as brooms, brushes, mops and ceramics, was in fact not therapeutic at all. The task force’s 1973 report included the scathing conclusion that most “physically handicapped” people in the city “if they are working at all (often in sheltered workshops) are doing so at a level which insults their potential.” Since the nature of sheltered work was conventionally unskilled or non-marketable, workers in sheltered workshops arguably gained little actual competitive work experience and employment counselling or placement services were rarely offered at the time. Regardless of the necessity or value of workshops in “protecting” working-age people with disabilities, their separation from the competitive workforce frustrated the transference of skills and experience gained to mainstream work environments.

Since the nature of sheltered work was conventionally unskilled or non-marketable, people in workshops gained little actual competitive work experience. Insofar as sheltered workers were considered trainees, which justified the payment of stipends instead of wages, they were in effect training to become employable rather than gaining skills that in fact rendered them employable. Consequently, the role of sheltered workshops in relation to the development of one’s employability raised larger questions about the ability of welfare state mechanisms, such as sheltered work, to rectify the

24 “This City is For All Its Citizens”; Greenland, Vision Canada, 47.
25 “This City is For All Its Citizens”
structural displacement of disabled people from the labour market. Reliance on sheltered work indicated larger social and economic problems created by designating entire categories of people “unemployable” by means of their physical and mental abilities. Since paid employment was typically the means to survival and independence in mainstream society, those deemed unemployable were arguably denied full citizenship given their reliance on sheltered employment instead of competitive paid work.

WORKSHOP ADVOCACY AND RELATIONS WITH DISABILITY ACTIVISM

The sheltered workshop system experienced a number of transitions during the twentieth century in response to changes in the broader sociopolitical environment. The workshop model evolved over the course two World Wars and numerous medical advancements that drastically improved survival rates for people with physical disabilities. Sheltered workshops were generally considered to be an unfortunate but essential strategy to promote the economic integration of people recovering from or adapting to some form of impairment. During the Second World War and remainder of the 1940s, the federal Department of Veterans Affairs introduced massive new funding to develop the rehabilitation industry in order to expedite the recovery of “unemployable” injured soldiers.27 By the 1950s, the rehabilitation system transitioned back to care for the civilian population as federal funding receded and injured veterans completed their programs.28 Sheltered work typically figured into the latter stages of vocational

rehabilitation programs as most veterans participating in sheltered work were working-age men with high expectations of re-entry into the labour market.

The workshop model was flexibly incorporated into an evolving rehabilitation process such that sheltered employment often blurred the boundaries between separate but closely related disciplines that served similar populations. Occupational therapy and vocational rehabilitation programs in the healthcare and social service sectors formed concurrent thrusts within the workshop model. As a result, the workshop system was capable of addressing the needs of a diverse population of people with acquired and congenital disabilities with a wide spectrum of different rehabilitation needs. These dual currents meant that workshops contained people with a range of abilities utilizing the workshop model within their own trajectories of rehabilitation. Whereas occupational therapy typically involved therapeutic intervention to develop an individual’s functional skills and tasks related to daily living, vocational rehabilitation reflected a more intensive focus on employment integration through job coaching, training, and placement. Vocational rehabilitation extended from longstanding support of the work-as-therapy model in order to facilitate the integration of people with disabilities into the labour market. Although work-as-therapy was a universal concept that shaped both disciplines of occupational therapy and vocational rehabilitation, sheltered workshops were originally designed to help develop work-related skills that would eventually enable labour market re-entry. Unlike “day centers” where many deinstitutionalized people with

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29 Friedland, *Restoring the Spirit.*

30 O'Brien, “From a Doctor's to a Judge's Gaze,” 325-46.
intellectual disabilities attended to develop remedial life skills while living in the community, workshops were originally more intently focused on employment issues.\textsuperscript{31}

![The Salvation Army sheltered workshop at 124 Lisgar Street in Toronto’s Beaconsfield Village neighbourhood circa 1960. Many sheltered workshops such as the one pictured above provided work to local residents with disabilities and were consequently embedded within local neighbourhoods in order to ensure greater access to people with disabilities living nearby in the community.\textsuperscript{32} (Public domain)](image)

The majority of sheltered workshops in the 1960s and early 1970s primarily served people with acquired physical disabilities and closely reflected a focus on vocational rehabilitation and workforce integration. The acceptance of vocational rehabilitation as a transitional process in one’s physical and emotional recovery in


\textsuperscript{32} TA, Alexandra Studio Fonds 1257, SC 1057, Item 369.
response to impairment meant that sheltered work was primarily intended as the means to economic integration. An emphasis on employment contrasted somewhat with the nature of work therapy regimes in residential institutions that were often more focused on long-term care than progress-oriented rehabilitation programs. Work therapy had long figured as an integral aspect of patient life in psychiatric institutions under the direction of “ward aides,” as occupational therapists were originally known. Work therapy was considered by rehabilitation professionals to promote physical fitness, calm psychological turbulence by providing tangible activities that focused the “distracted mind,” ensuring that patients were more compliant for staff while supplying cheap labour to subsidize the operating costs of institutions.33 Therapeutic work regimes in the rehabilitation process, however, were ultimately driven by rigorous methods to promote swift recovery and integration by building work skills that improved employability and enhanced vocational performance.

The emergence of the deinstitutionalization movement during the 1970s resulted in the reconfiguration of the workshop system to meet new demands as thousands of deinstitutionalized people with disabilities transformed the scale and scope of sheltered employment. Even Goodwill Industries, which had been in operation since the mid-1930s, found that deinstitutionalization transformed their workforce to include unprecedented numbers of people with “mental handicaps.”34 Workshops became not just a transitional means to paid employment but a way for recently deinstitutionalized populations to secure remedial skills that would enable them to live in the community.35

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33 Reaume, *Remembrance of Patients Past*, 144.
Occupational therapists, which had been a key feature in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities and mental health issues in residential and community-based programs, found that in the wake of deinstitutionalization many occupational therapists found jobs in an expanding workshop system.\(^\text{36}\) Whether or not participation in sheltered workshops led to paid employment for deinstitutionalized people was no longer the primary focus since disability advocates were often more concerned with ensuring ex-patients had sufficient community-based resources to develop their capabilities.\(^\text{37}\)

Initially focused on reform within psychiatric hospitals following mounting evidence of poor living conditions and quality of care, the popularization of community living philosophies turned many concerned parents and rehabilitation professionals into vociferous advocates for the closure of psychiatric hospitals. Deinstitutionalization replaced segregated facilities with community-based services ostensibly more attuned to individual needs and the ultimate objective of community integration.\(^\text{38}\) The notion that people with disabilities were “better off” in long-term care facilities led families to relinquish their disabled children and policymakers to devote extraordinary resources to costly residential facilities.\(^\text{39}\) Yet, the longstanding belief in segregation was increasingly contested. Disabled people and their allies repeatedly argued that most people with disabilities could live in the community but for the lack of supports and services in the

\(^{36}\) Ibid


\(^{38}\) Judith Sandys, “‘It Does My Heart Good’: The Perceptions of Employers Who Have Hired People with Intellectual Disabilities Through Supported Employment Programs” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1993), 55.

\(^{39}\) See Chapter One for discussion of family advocacy and the developing deinstitutionalization movement.
Based on her extensive work with people with intellectual disabilities or “mentally handicaps,” American special education teacher Marion Welsh, author of the grimly-titled Tales from a Human Warehouse, notes that “with proper evaluation and developmental methods most of them [institutional residents] could be forming the base of the economic pyramid and releasing a lot of people for more important work than keeping many of their fellowmen non-coping invalids.”

Welsh criticized her colleagues and superiors for making little distinction between “retardation” and “mental illness,” observing that the hardships of institutionalization could actively create “mentally ill” clients.

The development of community-based social services, accommodations, and other supports thus figured as a primary mandate in the movement to deinstitutionalize people with intellectual disabilities and mental health issues.

Rehabilitation professionals who operated the workshop system were obliged to respond to the developing social movement of disability rights activism that galvanized groups of mainly youthful people with physical disabilities, visual impairments, and psychiatric survivors and others that promoted consumer philosophies and the extension of certain rights and privileges to disabled people in order to allow for greater levels of self-determination. Predominantly small, local, and grassroots groups, disability activism in Canada (as in the United States) often emerged out of social and recreational groups. As noted in Chapter Three, the Scarborough Recreation Club for Disabled Adults that was comprised almost exclusively of people with physical disabilities was reorganized as

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41 Marion Welsh, Tales From a Human Warehouse: A Book About People with Special Needs (Boston: Branden Press, 1982), 11.
42 Welsh, Tales From a Human Warehouse, 12-13.
the Scarborough Advocacy Centre for the Disabled (or “Action Awareness”) which was led initially by well-known activist Beryl Potter. Groups such as Action Awareness fostered social interaction among people with disabilities and helped to construct a sense of shared identity and common purpose against oppressive beliefs and practices. As these groups grew and evolved over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, they drew upon a developing international discourse that envisioned greater opportunities for disabled people’s full participation, citizenship, and equality protected by certain inalienable legislated rights. Frank Bowe’s *Handicapping America*, for example, was once considered to be the definitive text of the American disability rights movement that also outlined many common grievances shared by activists in Canada. Activists promoted their message by lobbying the state and service organizations as local disabled people demanded greater input and control over the services they required to live independently in the community.

The promotion of sheltered employment and sheltered workshop advocacy was originally spearheaded by parents’ groups and concerned professionals, many of whom had helped move an entire generation of people out of an extensive and aging system of residential institutions and into their local communities. The deinstitutionalization movement brought together different groups of parents and professionals responsible for the care of people with intellectual disabilities and mental health issues in the community. Parents groups and other allies of the disability rights movement forged

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45 Martinez, “Independent Living in the U.S. and Canada”
46 Bowe, *Handicapping America*
47 Sandys, “It Does My Heart Good,” 54.; Also refer to Chapter One for a discussion of the influence of family advocacy on deinstitutionalization.
48 Pelka, *What We Have Done*, 131.; Martinez, “Independent Living in the U.S. and Canada”
coalitions that evolved into service agencies that included rehabilitation professionals, such as the Ontario March of Dimes and local Associations for Community Living. Organizations such as these lobbied the state to reform an existing state of care for institutionalized populations of disabled people, including the replacement of residential institutions with community-based services.\textsuperscript{49} Rehabilitation professionals devoted much of their attention and resources to developing local and national organizations such as the Canadian Council for Rehabilitation Workshops (CCRW), CRCD, and other professional associations.\textsuperscript{50} Organizations such as these fuelled political lobbying at provincial and federal levels as well as extensive public campaigns that promoted awareness of the needs and abilities of disabled people.

Deinstitutionalization turned out to be a relatively swift process in Canada in response to these overlapping sources of disability activism. Psychiatric hospitals housing people with developmental disabilities and mental health issues began shutting down as early as the mid-1960s with almost 70,000 people institutionalized across Canada.\textsuperscript{51} By 1981, nearly 50,000 people had been deinstitutionalized or a seventy-one per cent decrease in operating capacity. With the highest number of institutionalized patients located in Ontario, that province saw an eighty-five per cent decrease during the same period or more than 16,000 people discharged into the community within a span of ten to fifteen years.\textsuperscript{52} Provincial governments steadily closed residential hospitals as a result of escalating operating costs, dwindling public funds and the rise of the social forces within the deinstitutionalization and disability rights movements that rejected segregated models

\textsuperscript{49} Panitch, \textit{Accidental Activists}, 2.
\textsuperscript{51} Sealy and Whitehead, \textquotedblleft Forty Years of Deinstitutionalization,\textquotedblright 251.
\textsuperscript{52} Sealy and Whitehead, \textquotedblleft Forty Years of Deinstitutionalization,\textquotedblright 251.
Rehabilitation professionals observed the transition to community living with a combination of optimism and skepticism. The official newsletter of the Canadian Association of Rehabilitation Personnel (CARP) released a special issue of their newsletter in 1979 that took a detailed look at the closure of the Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital in Etobicoke, Ontario. The newsletter presented the case “for” and “against” the closure of the hospital that noted upwards of thirty million dollars in projected renovation costs, compared to immediate closure of the hospital which would result in a savings of approximately two-and-a-half million dollars and six million dollars in annual operating costs. Such costs reflected the broader concern as highlighted by the deinstitutionalization movement, that it “costs a great deal of taxpayers’ dollars to keep people helpless.”

Among the reasons against closure included the relative scarcity of alternative resources to supplement outpatient clinics and the likelihood that without adequate augmentation of community supports, ex-patients would end up in boarding houses, motels, and on the street. The editorial juxtaposed the demise of the hospital with the exuberance of sheltered workshops as “a place to work like any other” for deinstitutionalized ex-patients that served as a key part of a growing framework of community services.

An existing network of sheltered workshops addressed the unprecedented increased demand for community services for disabled people by providing a means for deinstitutionalized populations to develop their capabilities for work and independent living.

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53 Sandys, “It Does My Heart Good,” 55.
55 Welsh, Tales From a Human Warehouse, 13.
56 Welsh, Tales From a Human Warehouse, 13.
living. Joe Dale of the Ontario Disability Employment Network explained, “At the time, it was not understood that people who had a disability were capable of holding regular paid jobs and most of those who went to the Canada Manpower Centres or VRS [Vocational Rehabilitation Services] Employment Counsellors were typically referred to a sheltered workshop.”

People with disabilities were funnelled into workshops partly because they were an available source of professional community support where few other options existed. Longstanding institutional arrangements had created yawning gaps in community-based services since many people’s needs were presumably taken care of within residential facilities. A deluge of people leaving closing institutions put a severe strain on existing community-based resources, including the workshop system. The legacy of workshops as a feature of occupational therapy in the rehabilitation of people with primarily physical disabilities appeared compatible with the principles and goals of deinstitutionalization. Advocates who promoted the social and economic integration of ex-patients and others with intellectual disabilities and mental health issues saw workshops as part of a broader system of services necessary to facilitate successful community living.

As people streamed out of institutions and into community living arrangements, they found placements in existing sheltered workshops while advocates encouraged the development of new workshops to handle the extra demand.

New workshops were created to address the particular needs of people with developmental disabilities, many of whom had spent their entire lives in psychiatric hospitals.

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58 See Chapter One and Chapter Two for a discussion of how family and rehabilitation professionals promoted the social and economic integration of disabled people.
59 “1978 Workshop Survey”
60 “1978 Workshop Survey”
disability advocates rejected institutional segregation, simultaneous concerns emerged surrounding issues around how people with disabilities might fare in the community without adequate support mechanisms.

Although workshops were never operated directly by the state, growing reliance on public sector funding meant the administration of workshop operations was increasingly shaped by political priorities, and consequently, recurrent fluctuations in the level of support from social services. Prior to the 1970s with the introduction of regular government support in many provinces, most sheltered workshops relied on a combination of private subscriptions, public fundraising campaigns, and sales of goods and services.\(^{61}\) Fundraising had long been an integral component of disability advocacy organizations, such as the OMOD whose well-known campaigns helped support the development of a network of sheltered workshops across Canada.\(^{62}\) Other organizations, such as Goodwill Industries and the CNIB cultivated a legacy of providing storefront goods and services to the public.\(^{63}\) The growing emphasis on out-patient care consistent with the goals of community living precipitated a rise in government funding during the 1970s to enable the rapid expansion of the workshop system to meet new demands. In Ontario, for example, the provincial government passed the Developmental Services Act (DSA) in 1974 under which community-based services, such as sheltered workshops,

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found the bulk of their funding in addition to federal-provincial cost-sharing agreements established under the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Act (VRSA).  

Private and public sector reviews of sheltered employment conducted in the late 1970s and early 1980s noted what appeared to be a revolution in the workshop system. As residential hospitals closed, sheltered workshops boomed and were repurposed as community-based alternatives to segregated settings. In 1979, the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) conducted an authoritative survey of workshops which confirmed the extent to which the evolution of the workshop system in the province reflected broader trends in the rest of the country. The survey determined that between 1973 to 1978 provincial subsidies to sheltered workshops increased 674 per cent, which coincided with the introduction of the DSA and other changes to vocational funding arrangements. Where only twenty-five workshops existed prior to 1960, by 1978 there were nearly 150 workshops receiving provincial subsidies. Such figures coincided with the rate of expansion of the American workshop system where 85 workshops in 1948 became 1,500 employing 160,000 workers at the start of the 1970s swelling to 3000 workshops by 1976 and over 650,000 workers by the mid-1980s. Pre-1960s workshops in Canada were predominantly dedicated to serving the needs of people with physical disabilities, but by the end of the 1970s approximately 75 per cent were

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65 “1978 Workshop Survey”
66 “1978 Workshop Survey”
67 Alberto Migliore, “Sheltered Workshops and Individual Employment: Perspectives of Consumers, Families, and Staff Members” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2006), 5.; Pelka, What We Have Done, 574.
staffed by “mentally retarded” workers in what were termed “MR shops.” At the peak of institutionalized care during the short three-year period from 1974 to 1977, fourteen MR shops were established compared to only three non-MR shops. By the early 1970s, with the eclipse of a workshop system focusing on the needs of people with physical disabilities by workshops devoted to people with developmental disabilities, it was presumed that most new non-MR shops included a range of people with disabilities. American observers also found by the early 1970s that most sheltered workers were “mentally retarded.”

The decline of sheltered workshops serving people with physical disabilities relative to those for people with developmental disabilities and mental health issues revealed the extent to which workshops reflected changing dynamics at the fringes of the labour market. Many people with physical disabilities in North America experienced a wave of deinstitutionalization during the 1950s and 1960s when hospitals began to open up wards to young disabled people. This occurred partly in response to a developing consensus among disability activists and medical authorities that disabled youth should not be living alongside the elderly and increased reliance in the medical system on pharmacological solutions. During the 1970s and early 1980s, many people with physical disabilities found themselves exposed to new opportunities not necessarily available to other disabled people due to greater levels of accessibility and awareness of physical disability. The deinstitutionalization movement coincided with the rise of the disability rights movement, new assistive technologies, and shifting governmental

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68 “1978 Workshop Survey.”; “MR shops” were defined in the 1978 MCSS study as “those which predominantly served persons who were developmentally handicapped.” “Non-MR shops” were either mixed shops or those dedicated solely to people with physical disabilities. 69 Pelka, What We Have Done, 574. 70 Fleischer and Zames, The Disability Rights Movement, 34.
notions of disability which forced a transformation in the social discourse and physical structure of local environments as disabled people confronted inaccessible communities. While disability rights activism technically encompassed all people with disabilities, much disability advocacy and awareness initially revolved around disabled people’s experience of physical barriers in the community. Physical accessibility was often prioritized in the postwar period as wheelchair users, for example attempted to access the community due to progressive improvements in wheelchair technology that enabled increasing numbers of wheelchair users to demand greater physical access to public spaces.71 As disability activists and state officials acknowledged, however, attitudes toward disabled people took much longer to change than the improvement of physical accessibility.72 Notwithstanding the complexity of responses to disability, physical impairment was perhaps more relatable to most able-bodied people and generated more enthusiasm about changes in the mainstream than intellectual disabilities or mental health issues which were still widely misunderstood.

As policymakers increasingly spoke of disability in progressive terms during the 1970s, most tangible changes were seen in the improvement of accessible infrastructure. Initial responses to disability activism revolved around the development of accessibility projects to retrofit the physical environment, which largely benefited people with physical disabilities with mobility needs.73 Disability activism tended to focus on physical accessibility that enabled greater numbers of people with mobility-related

72 AO, RG 7-149, Box B367312, File “Dr. Stephenson’s Speech,” Speech, 26 Nov 1976.
73 This City is For All Its Citizens.”; Jon Caulfield, “The Tiny Perfect Mayor: David Crombie and Toronto's Reform Aldermen” (Toronto: Lorimer, 1974), ix, 20.
impairments to access mainstream services and move about the community with a greater degree of freedom. Indeed, “accessibility” was often reductively interpreted merely as the removal of physical barriers. An “accessible” building was one characterized by ramps, elevators with Braille buttons, and the like, rather than one in which the social, organizational, and logistical environment reflected a broader conception of being barrier-free. Yet physical accessibility only partly addressed underlying discriminatory attitudes that continued to exclude many people with disabilities from economic participation.

By the 1970s workshops had transitioned from being the mainstay of occupational therapy focused on the vocational rehabilitation of people whose physical impairments prevented them from gaining work-related skills in the paid labour force. Now, workshops increasingly represented places where unemployable former patients in residential institutions could learn life skills through work therapy programs while living in the community. Frustrated with the apparent failure of sheltered employment to facilitate clients into meaningful paid employment, people with physical disabilities increasingly turned away from workshops, pursuing other means of vocational rehabilitation and job coaching. By the early 1980s, it was common knowledge among people seeking labour market integration that workshops were failing to live up to their original purposes. One activist associated with People First, an activist organization for people with intellectual disabilities exclaimed, “They call it a training workshop. If you’re there 10 years it’s not training.”

Critics argued that funding arrangements encouraged workshops to retain productive clients in order to meet certain contract

74 The Disability Myth: Part Two: Beggars Can't Be Choosers, directed by Alan Aylward (1984; Toronto: Lauron Productions, 1984) 16 mm.
production targets, preventing them from moving out into the labour market. When funding criteria changed to discourage these practices, critics again argued that workshop administrators focused on placing the least disabled clients, a practice known as “creaming.”

Workshop advocates, however, were less concerned with the original purpose of sheltered workshops than using the workshop system to address the practical concerns of assisting recently deinstitutionalized ex-patients gain a foothold in the community. As Michael Bach of the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL) noted, “Through the 1950s and 1960s our associations for community living built an impressive infrastructure of special education, sheltered workshops and activity centres, and residential care arrangements, inspired by a vision that people with intellectual disabilities were as deserving of support and a chance in life as anyone else. By the 1970s, there were some voices among families and leaders of our movement which began to challenge whether this was enough.” The 1979 MCSS workshop survey noted many major differences between “MR shops” and “non-MR shops,” particularly in respect to the influence of parents, program diversity, and complexity of tasks. Workers in “MR shops” were more likely to have no work experience, rely on social welfare for income, depend on family members for participation in programming, rely on workshop managers for contract procurement, and spend longer duration in workshops on average. The distinctions between sheltered workshops and remedial occupational activity centres

typically designated for people with “severe” developmental disabilities also became blurred during this period as sheltered employment moved away from its associations with vocational rehabilitation.\textsuperscript{78}

Workshops had experienced an unprecedented shift in density, clientele, and purpose as the workshop system was reconstructed to meet the needs of a changing disability community. As sheltered workshops increasingly came under fire by disability rights activists, policymakers, and a wider public, rehabilitation professionals and policymakers were forced to explore ways of improving the workshop system to address some of these concerns.

\textbf{INDUSTRIALIZATION OF SHELTERED WORKSHOPS}

By the 1970s the role and discourse around workshops in the lives of disabled people became increasingly contested in Canada as family advocates, rehabilitation professionals, disability rights activists and policymakers grappled with competing ideologies and priorities. Disability historian Paul Longmore observes, “The Disability Rights Movement is not a homogeneous or unitary effort. Rather, it is an assemblage of disability-based political movements that sometimes cooperate and sometimes compete.”\textsuperscript{79} In his assessment of disability activism in the United States, Longmore observes that the disability rights movement actually involved dynamic relations between separate groups with differing agendas which occasionally worked in tandem, but also conflicted with one another. Workshops in fact constituted a major struggle between disability rights activists, service agencies and the rehabilitation industry as each

\textsuperscript{78} MA, CCD Fonds, Box Q012250, File 45, Letter, Anonymous Concerned Citizen to COPOH, 5 March 1984.

\textsuperscript{79} Longmore, \textit{Why I Burned my Book}, 111.
component of the disability rights movement reflected differing and sometimes competing priorities. On one hand, an embryonic disability rights movement claimed that sheltered workshops represented the vestiges of an oppressive regime that counteracted efforts to promote disabled people’s integration. On the other hand, workshop advocates endorsed sheltered employment as necessary for some people with intellectual disabilities and mental health issues who flooded into communities that were woefully underequipped to receive them. The conflict escalated throughout a crisis in community-based services introduced by rapid deinstitutionalization as an increasingly influential cadre of disability activists concluded that an expanding workshop system merely substituted the segregation of disabled people in residential institutions by “warehousing” sheltered workers and violating some of their basic civil rights.

Escalating distrust and uncertainty surrounding the legitimacy of sheltered workshops compelled administrators and advocates to respond by reinventing the workshop model. In 1980, the CCRW published a national inventory of sheltered workshops which concluded that the workshop system was ripe for a total makeover. The $450,000 survey (over $1 million adjusted for inflation) was described as “one of the most extensive research and development surveys ever undertaken in Canada on the industrial and commercial potential of Rehabilitation Workshops for disabled persons.”\(^{80}\) The inventory was conducted as part of a proposal to bring about the industrialization of the workshop system that would convert workshops from expensive, unproductive mechanisms of social welfare into robust, self-sustaining, non-profit enterprises providing realistic work experiences for clients. The objective identified industrial and commercial work that could be performed “profitably” by workshops in order to establish

\(^{80}\) LAC, RG 29, Box 210, File 4314-4-2, Press Release, Bureau on Rehabilitation, 13 August 1979.
programs to develop business skills and operational strategies to re-establish workshops in a better position to take on public and private sector contracts.\textsuperscript{81} The CCRW inventory determined the existence of over 600 workshops across Canada serving 25,000 workers, approximately half of which (forty-five per cent) were located in Ontario in medium-sized communities.\textsuperscript{82} The majority (sixty-seven per cent) of workshops were dedicated to clients with “mental retardation,” while only seven per cent were focused on delivering services to people with “physical disabilities.”\textsuperscript{83} As the 1979 Ontario MCSS workshop survey indicated, “MR shops” were less self-directed than “non-MR shops” in that they relied heavily on workshop managers to secure contract work.\textsuperscript{84} Given the hierarchical orientation of “MR shops,” the conversion of most workshops in Canada to an industrial model could take place in a rather straightforward fashion.

The CCRW’s preliminary inventory culminated in “Project BIDS” (Business Industrial Development Strategies), a collaborative venture between CCRW and the recently-established federal Bureau on Rehabilitation to facilitate the transition of workshops from “mere activities” into actual “production lines.”\textsuperscript{85} The retrofitting of the workshop system proved to be a key moment in the evolution of both the CCRW and the Bureau as it helped both organizations to establish professional reputations, clarify general mandates of both offices and allowed advocates and bureaucrats to accrue experience and develop closer working relationships.\textsuperscript{86} The transformation of the sheltered workshop system was identified at an early stage in the development of the

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid
\textsuperscript{82} MA, CCD Fonds, Box P5364, File 19, Brief, CCRW, Business Industrial Development Strategies, 1980.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid
\textsuperscript{84} “1978 Workshop Survey”
\textsuperscript{85} MA, CCD Fonds, Box P5364, File 19, Letter, Bureau on Rehabilitation to COPOH, 27 April 1979.
\textsuperscript{86} CCRW, “Who We Are”
Bureau as internal documents revealed plans to earmark special funds (or “set asides”) to support workshops and stimulate their industrialization.\footnote{LAC, RG 29, Box 238, File 4314-3-1 9(1), Paper, Bureau on Rehabilitation, “Potential Incentives to Employment of the Handicapped,” May 1979.} In April 1979 (a mere two months after being created) the Bureau was already actively working with CCRW to pursue Project BIDS and committed another $86,000 (or $260,000 in today’s terms) to develop pilot projects in Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia to assist selected workshops in the handling of recycled waste paper products in order to effectively compete for public and private sector contracts.\footnote{LAC RG 29, Box 238, File 4314-3-1 9 (1), Paper, Bureau on Rehabilitation, “Projects Relating to Employment of the Disabled” (1 April 1979).; CCRW also held a special conference to clarify roles around the marketing, contract procurement, and manufacturing business of workshops. MA, CCD Fonds, Box P5364, File 19, Conference Program, CCRW, “Implementing Industrial Strategies for Workshops,” 19-21 June 1980.}

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*Sheltered workers at the Truro Butler Centre in Nova Scotia sorting waste paper as part of the Project BIDS project. The pilot project in Truro was one of four pilot sites across the country in the cities of Fort Erie, Ontario, Ottawa, Ontario*
As a preliminary measure in order to generate some initial business for industrialized workshops, the Bureau advocated that the federal Treasury Board and Department of Supply and Services enact policies favourable to the procurement of contracts from sheltered workshops on a government-wide basis. The Department of Supply and Services initially raised concerns about the quality of goods and services from sheltered workers as well as their lack of experience fulfilling competitive contracts, but consented anyway to work with workshops on an experimental basis. A series of progress reports from 1979 to 1981 on the status of pilot projects in the recycling industry as part of Project BIDS in the Ottawa region found that workshops increased their net productivity and profitability. Sheltered workers participating in the project, all of whom were recruited from the Ottawa District Association of the Mentally Retarded, ostensibly demonstrated a more “industrious attitude” and developed new work skills. Feedback from the other pilots also appeared to confirm these findings.

The reported success of a few workshops, however, masked underlying problems and tensions that threatened the continuation of the project. One branch of the project was

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90 LAC, RG 29, Box 238, File 4314-3-1, Press Release, Bureau on Rehabilitation, “Policy on Employment of the Handicapped Announced,” 21 March 1978.; LAC, RG 29, Box 210, File 4314-4-3, Letter, Bureau on Rehabilitation to Department of Supply and Services, 27 April 1979.; LAC, RG 29, Box 210, File 4314-4-2, Letter, Department of Supply and Services to Bureau on Rehabilitation, 14 March 1983.
91 MA, CCD Fonds, Box P5364, File 19, Letter, Bureau on Rehabilitation to COPOH, Undated.
92 LAC, RG 29, Box 210, File 4314-4-3, Report, Bureau on Rehabilitation “Organization, Implementation and Assessment of Opportunities for Canadian Sheltered Workshops in the Recycling Industries: Follow-up Report” (October 1982).
93 Ibid
located in Fort Erie because the “area was particularly depressed and needed the work.”

At one stage of the project, parents withdrew their support due to a financial crisis that affected the entire workshop enterprise. Although the financial difficulties were eventually resolved, parents considered the industrial project to be a financial liability to the success of the workshop’s overall social objectives. The Bureau on Rehabilitation retained a private consultant to conduct an internal audit of Project BIDS. The scathing report, submitted in 1982, found that by vaguely referring to “adequate remuneration for work performed,” progress reports and proposals did not address key criticisms of the project, namely the payment of subminimum wages to sheltered workers. The non-partisan auditor noted many substantive problems, including extensive documentary inconsistencies, insufficient data, inadequate costing mechanisms, miscommunication between levels of government, and a number of procedural issues. The auditor finally concluded that the project had lost sight of the “individual client as the ultimate workshop product” by placing too much emphasis on the conversion of workshops into “competitive businesses” when reviews of the workshop system “suggest that few could [become competitive].”

The internal report confirmed what some disability activists had been saying for years. As the national organization of disability rights activists, COPOH provided regular input to the CCRW at each stage of the project. Although initially optimistic with the prospect of providing consumer input, COPOH soon became disillusioned with the

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95 Ibid
notion of using sheltered work to “produce commercial articles for contracted sales without paying production scale wages, insurance” and other benefits. Suspicious that the industrialization of workshops legitimated “an outdated, detrimental concept,” COPOH argued that rather than retrofitting workshops into production lines there should be “consultation with handicapped people as to what type of meaningful work they wish to be trained for and in what training atmosphere.” COPOH complained that there was little indication that Project BIDS would address the issues of consumer control, minimum wages, fringe benefits, safety standards, and how the project planned to work with private industry. In 1980, COPOH held its second conference in Vancouver where it resolved to extend greater “human rights to disabled workers” since Project BIDS was not demonstrating sufficient commitment to “eliminating exploitative wages” despite negative feedback on minimum wage exemptions in sheltered employment. For disability rights activists, the industrialization of sheltered workshops represented an attempt to extend the life of a rapidly-crumbling and essentially exploitative system.

Public opinion of workshops was also in serious decline by the early 1980s as mainstream media and disability literature painted a bleak picture of sheltered work. An early retrospective by David Cooney, president of Goodwill America, noted it is “disappointing but, not surprising” that those who favour de-institutionalization are critical of sheltered workshops and that “attacking a program as successful and useful as the sheltered workshops system is both illogical and counterproductive.” Sheltered

99 MA, CCD Fonds, Box P5360, File 1, Letter, COPOH to BIOS Committee, 1980.
101 Ibid
work became something of a “hot topic” as complaints of unfair labour practices, poor working conditions, mismanagement of funds, violation of minimum wage legislation, and funding disincentives that held back productive workers hit news outlets across the country. In a critical commentary on sheltered workshops in Ontario, Lola Freeman wrote, that training in workshops was not related to current market demand for skills. Freeman concluded, “Parents often see the workshops as a place for the person to go during the day, rather like day care for adults. These parents neglect to take responsibility for enhancing or assisting their child's progress.” Workshops were even associated with “slave” or “sweatshop” labour in certain accounts, as the indistinct status of sheltered workers was further complicated by the revelation that industrialized workshops would continue to receive minimum wage exemptions. The National Union of Public and General Employees even undertook to organize sheltered workers, calling charitable organizations among the “worst employers in the country” and advocated for the repeal of minimum wage exemptions. Payment of stipends instead of minimum wages was a common practice in most workshops across North America, but disability activists in both Canada and the United States increasingly pointed to this as evidence of their exploitative nature. American disability activist Frank Bowe similarly noted, for


example, that the U.S. *Fair Labor Standards Act* ironically permitted sheltered workers to be paid half the minimum wage even when this proved “the only source of work he or she can secure.”

Indeed, minimum wage exemptions proved to be the sticking point in the fight against workshops in Canada; an issue exacerbated by the move to reorganize sheltered work into industrial-type production lines. CCRW discussed the wage issue at their national conference in order to help resolve concerns around Project BIDS. However, since poor finances were part of the original impetus to industrialize workshops, there was little incentive to pay sheltered workers minimum wages or anything above what they “earned.” A 1980 review of procedures used in granting wage exemption permits in Ontario concluded that the system operated as intended, but that permits should probably apply to individuals only rather than entire workshops. The report also found that if workshops were required to pay minimum wages it might actually create disincentives for sheltered workers to leave and join the mainstream workforce since continued welfare entitlements would put them above the minimum wage. But disability activists were convinced that sheltered workshops often did more harm than good to people with disabilities seeking social and economic integration. They demanded mandatory minimum wages or welfare benefit “top-ups” and workshop administrators should provide greater emphasis on vocational rehabilitation and job placement services. The wage issue remained a serious point of contention across the country until the late 1980s.

109 MA, CCD Fonds, Box P5364, File 5, Letter, CCRW to COPOH, 8 January 1981.
110 “Wage Permits for Handicapped Employees”
111 Ibid
when fair wages legislation was first implemented in Ontario. In the meantime, sheltered workshops gained a reputation as segregated institutions that violated disabled people’s rights.

Canada celebrated the IYDP in 1981 which culminated in an unprecedented degree of attention that was centered on the capabilities and rights of people with disabilities. While disability activists seized the moment to press their rights-based agenda on a number of fronts, work began on a unique documentary series entitled The Disability Myth. The documentary series contrasted common “myths” about disabled people with “facts” based on interviews with disabled people, activists, professionals, and politicians. With a combination of public and private sector funding, Toronto-based filmmakers secured Oscar-nominated actor John Hurt to host and narrate the series that aired in 1982 and 1983 on Canadian Television Network (CTV). The response to the program was “positively overwhelming” and CTV was “inundated with phone calls from viewers.”

One published review noted, “Aylward [the director] paints a bleak economic picture. The handicapped in sheltered workshops earn between $1.50 and $5 an hour. Some are not paid at all; they're not considered worth the minimum wage. Yet the best workers are kept in the shelters because they keep the operations going, yet about 65 per cent of the disabled remain unemployed.” Part one of the series subtitled Segregation stated it was a “fact” that “most people are better off in integrated

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115 Ibid. The Disability Myth Part I: Segregation was financed primarily by Suncor Corp while subsequent films secured funding from a variety of federal ministries and provincial departments of social services.
116 Ibid
117 Ibid
settings.” Workshops were depicted as having a particularly dark atmosphere accompanied by ominous music and workers were portrayed as helpless victims of an unjust institution. Part two of the series focused on employment issues and criticized how workshops inhibited the promotion of sheltered workers into the mainstream workforce while emphasizing the importance of focusing on finding alternatives to the workshop model. Sheltered workshops were depicted as being fundamentally challenged by alternative training methods that provided more realistic work opportunities. Leroy Thompson, representing CCRW, noted that workshops negatively impacted occasions to have “normal life experiences.” Such portrayals permeated the public consciousness of workshops as disability activists used the workshop problem to press for the advancement of disability rights.

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT AND THE DEMISE OF THE WORKSHOP SYSTEM

With mounting pressure surrounding the workshop model and imminent failure of the capitalist experiment, workshop advocates and rehabilitation professionals entertained alternatives to the workshop model. The accepted wisdom was, and continued to be, that workshops were necessary for some people depending on the type and severity of impairment. However, it became increasingly clear that workshops had moved away from the original emphasis on vocational rehabilitation, and lost sight of the transitional nature of sheltered employment. A study commissioned by the Ontario Ministry of Labour’s Handicapped Employment Program (HEP) in 1980 explained,

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120 Ibid
121 Ibid
As a business operation […] the workshop relies heavily on its most productive workers. Workshop managers whom we interviewed confirmed that there is an immediate and noticeable drop in output when good workers leave. The workshops may then find itself in the peculiar position of not being able to meet the income target set in the agreed budget with MCSS, thus paying an economic penalty for achieving a prime rehabilitation goal. This contradiction is likely to intensify as the workshops expand their business operations.\textsuperscript{122}

Working in a sheltered workshop was never intended to be a permanent alternative to competitive employment, yet it seemed this had become the reality for too many unemployable people who “trained” for paid jobs that never materialized. Among the key complaints were a lack of individual attention and resources dedicated to the ultimate goal of social and economic integration.\textsuperscript{123}

By the mid-1980s, a new consensus crystallized around supported employment that left sheltered workshops starving for moral and financial support as disability advocates, disability rights activists, and groups of rehabilitation professionals collaborated to actively oppose the workshop model.\textsuperscript{124} The landmark 1984 report of the Commission of Inquiry on Equality in Employment confirmed that if workshops were going to continue to exist they should pay minimum wages and provide better job placement services that assisted sheltered workers join the mainstream workforce.\textsuperscript{125} Active dismemberment of the workshop system did not immediately materialize, but many existing workshops built supported employment initiatives into existing

\textsuperscript{122} “Wage Permits for Handicapped Employees”
\textsuperscript{124} Sandys, “It Does My Heart Good,” 1993.
programming instead of abandoning a “facility-based program” model. Many risk-averse parents also continued to have “a strong voice in setting policy for workshops,” preferring to keep their disabled adult-children in sheltered settings rather than engage with the developing influence of disability rights activism in the development of disability policy.

Cognizant of the changing times brought on by an avalanche of criticism about workshops, the CCRW undertook a major constitutional review by engaging in extensive consultations with key stakeholders in government and with employers, disability rights activists, advocacy organizations, and service agencies. CCRW distributed a questionnaire called *Updating for the 80’s* and solicited input “about what the current vision was, and what role this national organization would play in working towards making that vision a reality.” The review provided the constitutional revision committee with sufficient information regarding concerns and issues with vocational services and employment programs to set CCRW on a more viable track. Results of the review steered the CCRW away from sheltered workshops toward a “new mandate of increased access to competitive employment.” With a new mandate came a new name as the “Canadian Council of Rehabilitation Workshops” became the “Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work,” signifying the developing consensus within the organization to move away from the sheltered workshop model.

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129 Duffy, “The Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work”
A new concept called “supported employment” found widespread appeal in the early 1980s, presenting an ideal alternative to sheltered workshops. Supported employment typically involved placing clients in work-training programs within mainstream industry for specific durations under the co-management of employers and rehabilitation professionals.\textsuperscript{131} The general expectation was that clients would acquire skills and experience that would enable them to move into proper paid employment relationships. The supported employment model relied heavily on the intervention of social workers, rehabilitation professionals, and job placement workers to cultivate relationships with employers and clients to sculpt work arrangements in order to meet mutually-agreeable goals.\textsuperscript{132} The model worked by gradually removing support mechanisms until clients became virtually independent workers in mainstream settings.

Supported employment revolutionized the role of professionals from one of protective segregation to supportive facilitation by suggesting that rather than being “sheltered” disabled people needed “support” to ultimately achieve the goal of independent living in the community. Supported employment could be described as,

A strategy, promoted primarily by advocates of people who had an intellectual disability, the supported employment model challenged the thinking of the day. This model asserted that, with the right supports, people who had a disability could, in fact, hold down paying jobs. It also challenged the notion that people had to engage in never-ending training and prove their capability before being given the chance to work. Rather, it put forth the “place and train” model based on the belief that: “most people learn to work on the job.”\textsuperscript{133}

\textsuperscript{132} Hagner and DiLeo, \textit{Working Together}
\textsuperscript{133} “A Brief History of Employment Services”
These were no idle pipedreams but actively emerging and contested concepts of disabled people’s capacity for self-determination that developed from the second COPOH conference entitled *Parameters of Rehabilitation*, later recognized as the momentous birth of the independent living movement in Canada. Many parent activists and rehabilitation professionals that had initially promoted the expansion of workshops in the 1960s and early 1970s to handle the influx of deinstitutionalized ex-patients became disillusioned by the 1980s with the workshop system’s poor track record of promoting sheltered workers into paid employment. Developments in the American disability movement had demonstrated to Canadian disability activists and their allies that it was advantageous to collaborate in order to condemn the workshop model as being incapable of achieving the goal of self-determination and fair compensation.

The popularization of supported employment built on years of experience during the 1970s by disability advocates and outreach agencies that developed their contacts with prospective employers and honed their placement methodologies. In 1976, the Metro Association for the Mentally Retarded (MAMR) in Toronto successfully placed twenty-nine clients in supportive work arrangements. MAMR representatives discovered that cultivating an open and honest relationship with employers meant clients were placed in realistic and ultimately successful jobs. The World of One in Seven also developed a national and international reputation for their highly successful client-centered approach to supported employment that focused on low client-counsellor ratios to ensure that job placements were successful experiences for both supported workers and

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135 Bach, “Achieving Social and Economic Integration”  
138 “Retarded People Placed in Jobs”
participating employers.\textsuperscript{139} By the mid-1980s the CCRW declared, “Most of the sheltered workshops in this country are in a state of transition. They were founded by family members and concerned citizens because society was not willing to accept disabled people on other terms. It was, in part, through the achievements that disabled people demonstrated through the ‘workshop’ system that societal attitudes have evolved and that the early inroads to competitive employment were achieved.”\textsuperscript{140} A retrospective assessment by the CCRW regarding the main success of workshops praised their role in designing new community-based services despite lamenting an approach addressed the economic problem of disability by “sheltering” disabled people in separate workplaces.\textsuperscript{141}

CONCLUSION

With the rise of greater public discourse of physical barriers in the community during the 1970s due to the onset of disability rights activism, an unprecedented atmosphere of optimism among people with disabilities arose to pursue social and economic opportunities in the mainstream. The same optimism that led people with physical disabilities and mental health issues away from institutional segregation also invigorated the workshop system in accordance with the needs of a new generation of sheltered workers. Workshops for people with intellectual and psychiatric disabilities proliferated in the wake of the deinstitutionalization movement as their advocates demanded greater opportunities for disabled people to engage their local communities in


\textsuperscript{141} Ibid
the aftermath of hospital closures. The rise of disability rights activism with its focus on
the liberation of people with disabilities from various sites of oppression came into sharp
contrast with the pragmatic goals of workshop advocates focused on the care of
vulnerable adults in an adequate system of disability-related services. By the early 1980s,
however, it became increasingly clear that sheltered workshops were incapable and
perhaps no longer entirely devoted to helping resolve the economic displacement of
disabled people. Many people came to workshops and never left; others came and left
quickly, crediting workshops for demonstrating the kind of directionless future they
wished to avoid. The transitional nature of sheltered work, initially conceived as training
for competitive jobs, justified the non-payment of wages; but as relatively few clients
ever “graduated” by moving onto competitive employment, it became difficult to
differentiate workshops from older methods of “warehousing” disabled people. As
criticism of workshops mounted during the 1980s, administrators and advocates
attempted to salvage the workshop model by experimenting with the industrialization and
commercialization of sheltered work. Seemingly unproductive and unprofitable
workshops would be transformed into thriving capitalist non-profit enterprises capable of
becoming self-sustaining and improving working conditions to address the vocational and
rehabilitation needs of client workers. As policymakers spent thousands of dollars on the
reconstruction of the workshop system, however, critics lamented the apparent focus on
making sheltered workshops more profitable as opposed to more effective vehicles of
employment integration. Initial pilot projects were heavily criticized and activist
organizations argued that money would be better spent helping people with disabilities
establish their own businesses or developing strategies to promote inclusive job creation.\(^{142}\)

While originally devised as a strategy to extend work-as-therapy regimes into the process of vocational rehabilitation, sheltered workshops ultimately did not resolve the problem of chronic unemployment and poverty among people with disabilities; nor were they proven as the solution for a generation of people whom left residential institutions only to find themselves trapped in a workshop model unable or unwilling to facilitate full participation in the economy. Despite the rapid expansion of the sheltered workshop system during the 1960s and 1970s in Canada, the majority of disabled people continued to be socially and economically excluded. The industrialization of workshops, attempt at rectifying many of the fiscal and moral dilemmas presented by sheltered employment, ultimately failed to address the underlying causes of disabled people’s social and economic exclusion. Changes in the labour market owing partly to the growth of neoliberal politics and economic instability became increasingly difficult to replicate in sheltered settings and raised larger questions about how industrialized workshops would survive when manufacturing capital actively fled to other countries as well as how work skills gained in industrialized workshops would be applicable in a transitioning economy. The social construction of employability also meant that the social and economic liminality of people with disabilities was rooted in the nature of labour market transactions in the capitalist economic system that fundamentally deemed able-bodied workers more attractive than many people with disabilities. Sheltered workshops revealed how people deemed unemployable became casualties of an economic system predicated

on arbitrary standards of the working body. If people with disabilities were to achieve full participation and integration in their communities, they needed to work in integrated settings with the appropriate supports. Such logic was apparent to disability activists, their allies and public policymakers who formed part of a growing consensus about the economic rights of people with disabilities.

“There are those who listen politely and do nothing, those who listen politely and want to do something, and those who will do something,” quoted Canada’s foremost business newspaper the Financial Post in June 1981 during the International Year for Disabled Persons (IYDP). The columnist, Toronto-based City TV’s business editor Peter Silverman, concluded that few companies adopt the attitude that change from the top down is necessary, despite the warning that provincial governments would introduce affirmative action programs if businesses did not adopt proactive measures to hire people with disabilities. Earlier that year, the Financial Post reported that disabled people were an “untapped resource,” encouraging employers to stop thinking of people with disabilities as “charity cases.”

Editorials such as those in the Financial Post reflected growing awareness in the Canadian business community that many people with disabilities were excluded from employment opportunities, not due to some intrinsic limitation, but because employers failed to ensure their workplaces were barrier-free.

Despite outward expressions of support for disability issues, however, many employers from the 1970s to 1990s privately held deep-seated reservations about employing people with disabilities, demonstrating a systemic reluctance to hire disabled workers as reflected by statistical records of employment. Outward expressions of support for disability issues coupled with unspoken attitudes and prejudicial employment practices toward disabled people in Canada represented a state of “glass ceilings and

2 “Hire Handicapped for Ability, Not Disability,”
doors” in the labour market as working-age people with disabilities anticipated greater employment opportunities that ultimately failed to materialize. A comprehensive study conducted by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce (CCC) in 1975 identified typical employer attitudes toward disability that provided a foundation for understanding how employer practices excluded people with disabilities from participation in the labour market. Repeated studies from the 1970s to 1990s demonstrated few substantive changes in the attitudes and practices of employers around disability despite ongoing campaigns across the country that raised awareness of disability issues in the workplace and specifically targeted employers that encouraged them to rethink their role in the objective of “full participation.” Employers continued to sideline workers and jobseekers through “disabling” hiring and work practices amid the ideological reconstitution of the wider labour market and local workplaces by disability activists who called for greater accessibility and new government programs to promote the employment of disabled people.

The following chapter examines the role played by employers in the economic integration of people with disabilities. A discussion of employer attitudes and responses to initial efforts to promote employability is followed by an examination of the limitations of awareness campaigns and ways in which employers calculated sensitivity with pragmatism. The third section looks at the transmission of public sector values to the wider private sector by analyzing the ways in which government employers modelled and promoted equitable work practices. The final section examines the veracity of early predictions that new assistive technologies would automatically “level the playing field,”
transforming economically liminal disabled figures into competitive workers and jobseekers.

EMPLOYERS AND THE PROBLEM OF ATTITUDES

The relative success of people with disabilities who sought “full participation” in the labour market during the latter twentieth century in Canada ultimately rested upon the hiring preferences and employment practices of employers. As Brian Doyle observes in his study of the relationship between disability and employment discrimination, “It is the employer’s perception which matters, not the employee’s actual medical status.”

Employer responses to disability were conveyed through workplace policies regarding recruitment, compensation, accommodation, promotion, termination, and other key aspects of the employment relationship. Yet recruitment preferences and the treatment of disabled employees reflected broader social attitudes around disability that influenced decisions by employers in the workplace. In his study of Canadian employers’ attitudes toward the employment of people with disabilities, Tim Weinkauf concludes that while employers recruited people on the basis of merit, they also consciously or unconsciously held negative attitudes about disability that impacted various employment-related decisions.

Weinkauf argues, “Employer’s attitudes towards employees or prospective employees with disabilities may be preferential, but under unfavorable circumstances, their negative attitudes are amplified to become more extremely negative.” Weinkauf explains that employers approach an interview with an existing set of preconceptions about disabled people and may even be highly willing and ready to hire a person with a

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4 Doyle, Disability, Discrimination and Equal Opportunities, 174.
6 Weinkauf, “Employer Attitudes,” 12.
disability; but when actually confronted with such an individual, a preconceived image may result in an “insufficient portrayal” in which the disabled person fails to live up to the employer’s contrived expectations that are based on an artificial image of disability.\(^7\)

Indeed, people with visible and/or disclosed disabilities often found their pursuit of employment scuttled by the typical interview process. Whereas job interviews typically reflected an employer’s calculation of a job applicant’s capabilities, skills, and suitability for the position, interviews involving people with disabilities introduced an additional layer of evaluation. American disability activist Susan Peters discovered that many typical work environments during the 1970s and 1980s were configured for able-bodied workers which improved the odds that an employer would react more positively to able-bodied job applicants than disabled jobseekers.\(^8\) Peters recalls, “As I reflect on my own life, I find it discouraging to consider the many times I have been put on trial, have had my abilities challenged and my disability essentially considered an obstacle to employability and productivity.”\(^9\) Similarly, one interview participant in the present study “Rachel” explained, “I feel like I’m in a catch twenty-two. If I disclose, I may encounter the discrimination because it spooks them, but if I don’t disclose, then they hear rumours in the industry; ‘She’s a real ...; she doesn’t know how to project manage; you can’t deal with her.’ So it’s a really tough thing for me to decide.”\(^10\) As both experiences suggest, unlike apparently able-bodied jobseekers that did not necessarily face similar levels of

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\(^7\) Weinkauf, “Employer Attitudes,” 74.
\(^10\) “Rachel,” Interview 27 November 2011. Following Research Ethics Board approval, thirty people with disabilities were recruited through various advertisements and word-of-mouth to conduct semi-structured oral interviews about how work and employment shaped their lived experience of disability. Interview transcripts were processed and coded using NVivo 9.0 and participants were given full control over the content of their testimonies. See Chapter Eight and Appendix C for a more detailed explanation of the oral history component used in this study.
interrogation of their limitations, disabled people often faced employers that were reluctant or unwilling to recognize the negative conditioning that often soured the interview process. As a result, many people with disabilities found it necessary in interview settings to downplay the impact of their impairments on job functionality.\(^\text{11}\)

Disabled people were generally expected to craft their presentation to employers, being fully self-aware of the limitations of their impairments, yet also display attributes including positivity, optimism, and energy in an effort to anticipate and challenge stereotypical and likely negative perceptions of disability. Interview participant “Olivia” reflected on her experience growing up in a residential institution and subsequent search for work in Toronto during the late 1970s. Olivia found, “Getting your foot in the door, you’re dealing with everybody’s preconceptions about what you can and cannot do. What kind of help you will need and how much trouble you’re going to be as an employee. How difficult it’s going to be to get rid of you if things don’t work out. You’re dealing with all that baggage just looking for a job.”\(^\text{12}\) American rehabilitation consultant Carolyn Vash similarly noted in the early 1970s, a disabled person is “stereotyped as one whose total body and soul are concerned with his disability and issues relating to that disability. And if this is the impression an employer has, there’s no reason on earth he’s going to hire a person who sits and broods all the time about his own problem [my emphasis].”\(^\text{13}\)

One pamphlet on job hunting advice produced by the Ontario MOL’s Handicapped Employment Program (HEP), for example, emphasized that people with disabilities were partly responsible for challenging employer attitudes. The pamphlet asserted, “Your own

\(^{12}\) “Olivia,” Interview by Author, 5 July 2011.
attitudes are also important. Handle your disability in a positive way and employers will be more receptive to hiring you. You have to believe that you will be an asset to an employer and that productive work is fulfilling."\textsuperscript{14} In 1981 Jean Moore, president of UHGO and former director of The World of One in Seven, commented on her experience finding jobs for people with disabilities. Moore concluded, “Employers can go just so far in hiring the handicapped—and they still have a way to go—but the handicapped, too, must have some responsibility.”\textsuperscript{15} Moore felt that social skills in the area of self-promotion were regarded as one of the keys to successful social and economic integration, emphasizing that “so many [disabled people] have been out of the labor market for so long that they have a low self-image” and fail to adequately promote themselves to employers.\textsuperscript{16}

Once employed in mainstream settings, many disabled workers faced an onslaught of discriminatory attitudes. Hyper-vigilant supervisors, assignment to menial tasks, co-worker complaints about perceived special treatment, general social aversion to disability issues and disabled workers in the workplace as well as other manifestations of negative attitudes were a common experience. Interview participants in the present study encountered many obvious, as well as discreet, instances where they were discriminated against by employers and colleagues. Interview participant “Lisa” reflected on her experience working in the municipal public service since the mid-1970s, “It’s the middle managers, the supervisors, whoever you have to deal with at the actual job site … because they might not know about disabilities, they have already formed an opinion and

\textsuperscript{15} “Many Handicapped People Wallow in Self Pity Rather Than Learn Skills, Group President Says,” \textit{Whig-Standard} (23 September 1981).
\textsuperscript{16} “Many Handicapped People Wallow”
idea of what they think you can do or should do.” Interview participant “Dan,” similarly found that discrimination, prejudice, and ignorance existed even among his provincial public sector employer. Dan lamented, “I’ve had to fight with superiors and go over their head to demand that accommodations be made in certain circumstances.” Interview participant “Richard” also observes, “I’ve always remembered that because when you have a disability or something else that’s often discriminated against, you sort of expect to be discriminated against so you might see discrimination when it’s not really there. So I’m always reluctant to say something is discrimination.” In spite of his cautious attitude, however, Richard recalled one “cut and dry” example of discrimination where he was not given the opportunity to compete for a new position because a supervisor had unilaterally decided the job was not appropriate for Richard due to his disability.

Reminiscent of the observations of the Financial Post articles above, employers often approached the problem of disability from a charitable outlook rather than a straightforward labour issue. This approach was most visible in 1973 when federal responsibility for vocational rehabilitation was transferred from the Department of Manpower to the Department of National Health and Welfare (DNHW). The move effectively disconnected disabled people from the conventional policy discourse around employment matters, resituating concerns about their economic integration alongside other health and welfare issues. Since DNHW officials were primarily focused on public health issues and the provision of welfare benefits, they sought input from Canadian employers about how best to move forward with the vocational rehabilitation portfolio.

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17 “Lisa”
18 “Dan”
20 “Richard”
and larger goals around integrating disabled people in the workforce.\textsuperscript{21} As a result, DNHW commissioned the CCC to conduct a study to determine why employers did not hire disabled people. The request was made in the context of DNHW’s income security review when it was discovered there was little data on the subject of the employment of disabled people.\textsuperscript{22} As the largest network of boards of trade, business associations, and local chambers of commerce across Canada, the CCC study helped to fill an important void of employment data on the employment of disabled people and provided the authoritative voice of multi-sector small, medium and large-scale employers across Canada.

The CCC’s ground-breaking report, released in 1975, marked the first comprehensive examination of the relationship between employer attitudes and the employment of people with disabilities. The report, entitled \textit{Employability of the Handicapped}, concluded that employers’ attitudes were among the most important factors that shaped the exclusion of people with disabilities from mainstream employment.\textsuperscript{23} Thirty per cent of survey respondents acknowledged they had never hired nor considered hiring a disabled person and were unaware that the public sector might be a source for new employees.\textsuperscript{24} Nearly seventy-five per cent of employers stated there was no job that disabled workers could handle or that the nature of their business was inappropriate for disabled people, and a further sixty-one per cent stated that a disabled person had never applied or contacted them about available jobs.\textsuperscript{25} Many employers

\textsuperscript{22} LAC, RG-29, Box 238, File 4314-3-1-9(1), Canadian Chamber of Commerce and Health and Welfare Canada, “Employability of the Handicapped,” Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1975.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid
believed that disabled workers were inherently at greater risk of accidents, that they may contravene fire regulations or generally result in increased insurance premiums. Other employers believed that their workplace was inaccessible to many disabled people and could not be adapted to become accessible. 26 Additionally, many employers believed disabled workers would be chronically absent, result in greater turnover, had emotional problems, require too much supervision, or would ultimately negatively affect production rates.27

The CCC found these and other concerns about how disabled workers would upset the typical employment relationship gave rise to a general attitude of resistance among most employers to hiring people with disabilities.28 Employers clearly had little experience with disabled people in general, as demonstrated by the litany of prejudices expressed and the explicit belief that many employers felt that recruiting disabled people would represent “hiring the unknown,” which exposed their organization to unnecessary risks. Employers were perplexed by the needs of people with disabilities and how disabled workers negotiated an inaccessible workplace and broader environment, which fed general uncertainty and the sense of risk that challenged their attractiveness as potential employees. Importantly, the CCC study concluded that while there was a serious lack of awareness of disability issues among employers, there was also a general willingness to learn more about disability and potentially hire disabled people should a suitable opportunity arise.29

26 Ibid
27 Ibid
28 Ibid
29 Ibid
The report was highly influential within the business community in Canada, promoting awareness and self-reflection about prejudices held against disabled people. The CCC and DNHW built on positive feedback from the report by subsequently organizing a Seminar on Employability of the Handicapped in Toronto in which key stakeholders met to discuss the report’s findings. The event brought together an unprecedented array of key multi-sector stakeholders, including representatives from the DNHW, CCRW, Ontario MOL, municipal and provincial disability activist organizations and others in an attempt to brainstorm strategies for increasing the employment of disabled people. Many members of the local Toronto chamber of commerce sat alongside senior federal and provincial government officials, representatives from rehabilitation agencies, and disability rights activists to discuss strategies for improving disabled people’s job opportunities. In advance of the seminar, disability activists lobbied political officials to use the conference as an opportunity to make firm commitments to reforming policies that would effectively promote the inclusion of disabled people in the labour market. In her keynote speech at the seminar, Ontario Minister of Labour Bette Stephenson expressed the general atmosphere of optimism at the seminar, noting the attendance of many business leaders gathered to work with government officials and voluntary agencies in order to create realistic job opportunities for disabled people seeking work.

31 Ibid
33 AO, RG 7-149, Box B367312, File “Dr. Stephenson’s Speech,” Speech, 26 November 1976.
Cover of the Metropolitan Toronto Business Journal published by the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Toronto featuring man in a wheelchair superimposed on typical newspaper job opportunities section. The cover story revealed that employers in Toronto were responding to the growth in public attention to the various barriers faced by people with disabilities in their pursuit of employment. (© Toronto Region Board of Trade, 1979. Reproduced with permission)

Despite healthy attendance and widespread optimism about the potential to build a widespread consensus on the development of new initiatives within the business

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community, however, the seminar received uneven praise. The Ontario Advisory Council for the Physically Handicapped (OACPH) optimistically reported the creation of “ripples of public awareness” due to the event as various Toronto-based company headquarters announced accessibility plans in the wake of the seminar.\textsuperscript{35} The Ontario MOL also devoted increased resources to promoting the employment of disabled people within the provincial public sector.\textsuperscript{36} The Canadian Human Rights Commission similarly responded to the work of the CCC by delivering a nationwide series of seminars on employment during the IYDP which were modelled on the original Seminar, bringing together private sector employers, various levels of government, unions, disabled people, and service agencies.\textsuperscript{37} While some hailed the event as a success that helped generate dialogue about employment barriers faced by disabled people, the CCC itself admitted the seminar was “minimally successful due to the fact that it was related to only one area in the Canadian scene and only to one region in [southern] Ontario.”\textsuperscript{38} As a result, the CCC declined to sponsor further seminars, deferring to the CRCD as the appropriate agency to follow up with additional awareness campaigns, which it did in 1980 as part of a pre-World Congress of Rehabilitation seminar in Toronto.\textsuperscript{39} Subsequent seminars and training events, such as those conducted in conjunction with the annual National Access Awareness Week beginning in 1988 and continuing throughout the 1990s also reflected a constant effort to combat resilient employer attitudes with awareness-building activities in order to confront emerging trends and issues.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid
\textsuperscript{39} MA, CCD Fonds, P5367, File 23, Article, \textit{International Rehabilitation Review} 3 (1980).
RESILIENT ATTITUDES AND NEW PROBLEMS

Employer attitudes and practices that acted as barriers for people with disabilities identified in the CCC report were repeatedly discussed in subsequent studies during the 1980s and 1990s for blocking disabled peoples’ access to economic integration. Studies subsequent to the definitive CCC survey documented a trend of relatively stagnant attitudes and responses to disability among employers as disabled people continued to be underrepresented in the mainstream workforce. In 1980 the Blind Organization of Ontario with Self-help Tactics (BOOST), a disability activist group representing blind people, released its own report in 1980 entitled Developing Alternative Service Models which encouraged employers to adjust their attitudes in order to embrace a more proactive approach to hiring disabled people. BOOST envisioned the creation of a series of tax credits that would entice employers to hire disabled people and recommended new funds for the development of public education programs aimed at increasing awareness of disability issues among employers, employment agencies, and employers’ associations. The BOOST report reflected a prevailing attitude in the federal Liberal administration of supporting innovative approaches to the problem of unemployment in the disability community.

By the early 1980s, new reports demonstrated that employer attitudes had not significantly changed. The ground-breaking 1981 report called Obstacles submitted by the Special Parliamentary Committee on the Disabled and Handicapped (Obstacles) reflected a climate of social change regarding people with disabilities in the government.

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40 John Rae et al, “Selfhelp and Government Commitment”
41 John Rae et al, “Selfhelp and Government Commitment”
42 Canada Works grants were originally introduced in 1976 to replace Local Initiatives Programs and were intended to further stimulate the development of innovative social programs, such as those proposed by BOOST.
and broader public sphere. The *Obstacles* committee, which included Vice-Chairman MP Walter Dinsdale who was also the father of a child with various disabilities and a particularly energetic ally of the disability rights movement, was created in 1980 to develop realistic proposals for new initiatives to improve the social and economic integration of disabled people in Canada.\(^{43}\) The *Obstacles* committee travelled the country soliciting feedback from the disability community, which galvanized members to participate in emergent initiatives to advance disability rights in Canada. Demonstrating their respect for consumer input, committee members collaborated with disability rights activists in Ontario to fight separate disability rights legislation and lobbied officials in Liberal Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau’s government to include disability in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.\(^{44}\) Following hundreds of submissions across the country, the *Obstacles* report included a number of recommendations aimed at alleviating barriers to disabled people’s employment opportunities caused by employer policies and practices. Among the proposals related to the role of employers, the report included the proposition of special tax incentives to hire disabled workers; affirmative action contract compliance measures to ensure contractors respected the hiring preferences of disabled people and other identified minority groups; on-the-job training stipulations so to expedite the movement of disabled people off welfare rolls; increased protection for injured workers who acquired disabilities at work; penalties for non-retention of disabled employees; and other provisions that were intended to counteract harmful employer policies and attitudes


that prevented disabled people from accessing employment opportunities.\footnote{Obstacles} The \textit{Obstacles} report thus highlighted the importance of employers in the promotion of the social and economic integration of disabled people.

The Canadian Employment and Immigration Commission (CEIC) also reported that despite widespread awareness-raising around disability issues since the 1970s, little change had been made among employer attitudes in Canada. In response to public awareness generated by the IYDP, a CEIC report titled \textit{EmployAbility} detected “mounting pressure everywhere” and an “urgent need to increase employment opportunities for persons with physical disabilities.”\footnote{Canadian Employment and Immigration Commission, “Employ - Ability: A Guide to the Employment of Persons with Physical Disabilities,” 1982.} In seminars involving disability rights activists, unions, service agencies, and employers, CEIC determined that physical barriers in the workplace and particularly attitudinal barriers among employers continued to represent the biggest obstacles to labour market participation among people with disabilities. Similar to the CCC survey, the CEIC found that employer attitudes toward disabled workers included: labelling, pity, inflated expectations of disabled applicants, beliefs that disabled people were “too much trouble,” as well as general anxiety and myths around insurance costs, health and safety, and productivity.\footnote{Ibid}

By the mid-1980s, provincial and federal government officials learned that awareness-boosting activities and training seminars undertaken since the 1970s were not having their intended effect, leading to the development of innovative measures to address the problem of employer attitudes. The 1983 report of the Ontario Task Force on Employers and Disabled Persons entitled \textit{Linking for Employment} envisioned the creation
of community councils linking businesses with local agencies and government departments in an innovative network that promised to connect qualified disabled people with job vacancies.\textsuperscript{48} The task force, led by Jean Pigott, believed that the concept of community councils situated employers as active participants with an integral role in cultivating employment opportunities for people with disabilities.\textsuperscript{49} Pigott also envisioned a vocational rehabilitation system that fully included employers in the process of finding job opportunities for people with disabilities.\textsuperscript{50}

Justice Rosalie Abella, the sole commissioner of the federal Commission on Equality in Employment, built on Pigott’s findings in 1984, encouraging employers to redesign their recruitment and workplace practices to promote the employment of people with disabilities, as well as other designated groups.\textsuperscript{51} After a series of consultations with disabled people across Canada, Abella issued a number of recommendations to promote the improvement of employment opportunities for people with disabilities across Canada by challenging barriers to employment created in part by employer attitudes.\textsuperscript{52} In particular, Abella introduced the term “employment equity” to refer to a system of special measures taken to accommodate differences that would surmount barriers to participation in the labour market.\textsuperscript{53} Employment equity was distinct from the “duty to accommodate” which reflected employers’ legal responsibility to accommodate workers with disabilities

\textsuperscript{49} Linking For Employment
\textsuperscript{50} Linking For Employment
\textsuperscript{51} Report of the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment
\textsuperscript{52} Report of the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment
in the workplace up to the point of undue hardship. The term, which was based on the American conceptualization of affirmative action, laid the foundations for the federal Employment Equity Act in 1986 and confirmed that employers’ discriminatory recruitment, hiring, and promotion practices had no place in an equitable labour market. Reminiscent of the conclusions reached by earlier studies, Abella found that disabled people as well as women, Aboriginals, and visible minorities were denied job opportunities as a result of systemic discriminatory attitudes and practices by employers and the wider public which presented obstacles to equitable employment.

Statistical indices of disabled people’s economic marginality reinforced the findings of reports during the 1990s that pointed to the failure to change employer hiring practices. Post-census surveys demonstrated a consistent pattern of unemployment and underemployment that confirmed earlier studies and reports indicating employers’ reluctance to hire disabled people. In 1981, Statistics Canada began collecting data on the employment of disabled people through the Work History Survey which was replaced in 1986 by the Labour Market Activity Survey and again in 1993 by the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics. These post-census surveys revealed characteristics about jobs held and changes in labour market status among survey participants that confirmed findings by the above government reports. The labour surveys complemented findings from the Health and Activity Limitation Surveys (HALS) conducted in 1986 and 1991, and replaced in 2001 with the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) that

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55 “The Legal Genealogy of the Duty to Accommodate”
56 Report of the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment
outlined limitations in workforce participation as a result of health-related issues. The HALS and PALS assessed the impact of disability on labour market participation and were critical in establishing connections between the experience of disability and economic marginality. Many commentators pointed to deficiencies in the validity and comparability of these surveys and questioned their use as tools that informed the structuration of public policies affecting people with disabilities. The HALS and PALS, however, consistently indicated that people with disabilities were approximately half as likely to be employed as non-disabled people and that the workforce non-participation rate (i.e. people who had stopped looking for work) among disabled people was twice as high as their non-disabled peers.

Reports on economic integration continued to indicate little change in employer attitudes and employment practices regarding people with disabilities. The Standing Committee on Human Rights and the Status of Disabled Persons released its report *A Consensus for Action* in the waning years of the UN Decade of Disabled Persons. The report indicated some noteworthy achievements, but noted “modest” overall improvement in employment prospects for disabled people and suggested that the

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59 Valentine and Vickers, “Released From the Yoke of Paternalism,” 173.


“economic integration of disabled persons … is reaching an impasse.” The committee believed that the expectations of policymakers and disabled people during the 1980s about increased employment integration had not materialized despite the promotion of rhetoric in the business community regarding support for measures to integrate disabled people. In 1992, the federal Disabled Persons Unit (DPU) released a similar report intended to update key stakeholders on the status of labour market integration of people with disabilities. The study involved eighty interviews with employers, workers, service agencies, and other stakeholders and was conducted to inform the implementation of the $158 million National Strategy for Integration of Persons with Disabilities. The study also highlighted cases where employers had taken innovative approaches to employing disabled people, such as the creation of a labour consortium in Ontario that involved employers, service agencies, disabled people, labour networks, and the education sector coordinated by a community steering committee. The DPU concluded, however, that employer attitudes which included reluctance to undertake effective measures to make the workplace accessible presented significant barriers to workforce participation, citing the predominant attitude among employers that believed most disabled people were “poorly prepared to confront the realities of today's labour market, and possess few of the skills and qualifications required.”

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63 Ibid
64 Ibid
66 Ibid
67 Ibid
The Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW) produced the handbook *Focus on Ability* in 1991 in response to recurrent reports indicating that employer attitudes toward hiring people with disabilities had not changed. The cover page, pictured above, featured disabled employees of major employers such as Royal Bank of Canada, Bell Canada, and McDonald’s. CCRW Executive Director Rob McInnes wrote in the introduction to the handbook “Why would your company want to employ someone with a disability? Why wouldn’t it?”


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Provincial and federal officials similarly sponsored the development of employer networks to share best practices in the mitigation of conventional employment practices that excluded disabled people from full participation in the labour market. During the 1990s, the Employers’ Forum on Disability, founded in 1986 in the United Kingdom, expanded into Canada to improve job opportunities for people with disabilities.\(^{69}\) The Forum reflected longstanding concerns about the disconnection between employers and disabled jobseekers and was conceived as a non-profit organization funded by 400 employer members and 100 global corporations that employed disabled people.\(^{70}\) The Forum was “welcomed as an alternative to the traditional approach of seeing the employer as the problem.”\(^{71}\) While not employing people directly, the forum connected employers and shared best practices regarding the development of progressive employment policies. In 1995, the federal government supported the expansion of the Forum to Canada as part of the National Strategy on the Integration of Persons with Disabilities (NSIPD) which was devised to promote various initiatives to improve employment rates among disabled people.\(^{72}\) Although there were no subsequent reports to demonstrate the impact of innovative measures to increase the employment of disabled people that involved employers, the acceptance of the Forum as part of the NSIPD demonstrated that employer attitudes and practices continued to play an important role in the economic integration of disabled people. Similarly, the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) which was established in the United States by the President’s Committee on Employment of the Handicapped expanded into Canada by 1988 under a federal


\(^{70}\) Thornton and Lunt, “Employment for Disabled People”


\(^{72}\) Thornton and Lunt, “Employment for Disabled People”
development grant. JAN’s services included the provision of consultative services to employers seeking to accommodate disabled workers by sharing best practices from other members with similar workplace profiles and experiences. With the establishment in Ontario in 1989 of Guidelines for Assessing Accommodation Requirements for Persons with Disabilities, JAN supplied private sector employers with practical solutions to concerns about the employment of disabled people. Through public sector support, JAN and the Forum reflected a pattern of the public sector providing outreach to private employers in order to effect promote the economic integration of disabled people.

GOVERNMENT EMPLOYERS MODELLING EQUITY

Public sector employers were often at the forefront of initiatives to hire disabled people and other underrepresented groups given the introduction of new human rights legislation protections and the highly visible political nature of public sector work in which recruitment and employment policies were subject to public scrutiny. The emergence of disability rights activism and growing awareness of disability issues during the early 1980s reshaped the political discourse of disability, positioning public sector employers as models for a greater body of private sector employers. The City of Toronto Executive Committee, for example, accepted the conclusion in 1979, “As a public sector employer, the City of Toronto has an obligation both to its own employees and to society at large to set an example in its treatment of injured and disabled workers into the

workforce as full participants; those gains must begin with public employers.” By the late 1970s, disability activists in organizations such as COPOH complained of little progress in the employment of disabled people across the country, calling upon various levels of government to actively model employment practices to the private sector. COPOH reminded public policymakers and the wider business community, “The federal government has since 1978 been saying that if voluntary affirmative action/equal opportunities programs are not achieved in the private sector as regards to employing disabled people then compulsory affirmative action will be imposed on the private sector.” COPOH and its affiliate disability organizations believed governments, in their capacity as public sector employers, were responsible for validating and promoting equitable employment practices by modelling them to the wider private sector.

The approximate size of private sector employment during the late twentieth century in Canada reflected a relatively consistent average of approximately sixty-four per cent, compared to a declining share of twenty-four to nineteen per cent for public sector employment, and increasing share of twelve to fifteen per cent for self-employment. Given that the private sector was approximately three times the size of the public sector, government policies that actively promoted or demonstrated equitable employment practices potentially had widespread influence.

The Ontario Handicapped Employment Program (HEP) understood the value in using employers as models for progressive employment practices in the wider labour market. In fact, one of the principal elements in HEP’s founding mandate in 1978 under Ontario Progressive Conservative Premier Bill Davis was to promote the employment of disabled people in the private sector while actively facilitating connections between employers and disabled jobseekers. In 1979, HEP undertook a joint project with the Ontario March of Dimes to test the implementation of an affirmative action program in Hamilton, Ontario.\textsuperscript{79} HEP organizers explained that the impetus for the project was provided by the 1975 CCC report which demonstrated that the cultivation of a cadre of progressive-minded employers would ripple outward into the business community.\textsuperscript{80} The pilot project approached the problem of creating positive role models by pairing participant employers with service agencies and other sources of disabled jobseekers that worked closely with human resources workers to reform their company’s labour relations policies and practices.\textsuperscript{81} The forty-six million dollar project resulted in the placement of many disabled workers in Hamilton, cultivation of an innovative network of progressive employers in the city and provided content for the fledgling HEP to produce promotional employer resource kits to liaise with an increasingly large group of employers.\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{79} "The Hamilton Affirmative Action Project"
\textsuperscript{80} "A Conference on Education Now—Employment Later"
\textsuperscript{81} "The Hamilton Affirmative Action Project"
\textsuperscript{82} "The Hamilton Affirmative Action Project"
The above image demonstrates skilled labour required in the assembly of roller skates, which involves twenty-eight assembly operations in an average of four to five minutes. The subsequent image, which reads, “Martin Hughes knows how to assemble roller skates. He uses all 22 components. He completes all 28 assembly operations. With practice he can do the job in 4.4 minutes. Martin is mentally retarded. That means you can expect him to be as helpful...as reliable...as loyal...as punctual...as diligent...as enthusiastic as all your other employees. And a little slower to learn.” The above demonstration was performed by students of Marc Gold, whose “Try Another Way” workshops toured Canada and the United States during the 1970s, presenting to audiences of disability professionals and employers. The distillation of this approach was reproduced above as part of a joint project between the Ontario Association for the Mentally Retarded and the Ontario Ministry of Community Services, and reflected a typical promotional pamphlet that encouraged employers to rethink their prejudicial attitudes regarding the employment of disabled people.83 (© Marc Gold & Associates, c.1979. Reproduced with permission.)

Inspired by the HEP affirmative action project, the Personnel Association of Toronto (PAT) decided in 1980 to undertake its own program to demonstrate exemplary

employment practices regarding disabled people. In partnership with HEP, PAT delivered a series of “how to” seminars that explored the impact of discriminatory attitudes that surrounded the process of interviewing, hiring, and supervising disabled workers as well as the development of outreach recruitment programs that established partnerships with public sector employment bureaus and non-profit organizations.\textsuperscript{84} The PAT seminar focused on the promotion of various government outreach initiatives, best practices resulting from the Hamilton affirmative action project, and existence of various Toronto-based employment agencies designed to improve the employment of disabled people.\textsuperscript{85} PAT reported positive reviews from seminar participants, which included representatives from AMX Canada, Shell Canada, Kellogg, IBM, Steinberg, Revenue Canada, Suncor, Sheraton Centre, Transport Canada, Canada Coast Guard, Du Pont Canada, Guardian Insurance, Labatt's, Kodak, Bell Canada, and British Petroleum.\textsuperscript{86} The event mirrored similar seminars delivered to thousands of employers across Canada by motivational speaker Richard Pimentel during the 1980s and 1990s whose awareness program called “Windmills” taught corporate and small business employers to understand the nature and impact of their attitudes on disabled workers and jobseekers.\textsuperscript{87} Pimentel stated, “I accept employers’ comments about expenses and safety as valid concerns, but not as valid judgments. We hear the same tune every time we ask employers to hire someone. They didn’t want to hire women because they don't know about business; they didn't want to hire blacks because they didn't know what would happen. It’s the same song with

\textsuperscript{87} LAC, RG 29, Box 210, File 4315-06-91 001, Brief, CCRW, “Richard Pimentel,” 1991.
different lyrics.” The seminars were intended to directly challenge employers in their resistance to hiring disabled people and others.

As the largest municipal corporation in the country and one of the biggest employers in the region, the Metropolitan Toronto public service repeatedly served as a role model that influenced the development of new employment policies among other public sector employers within the Federation of Canadian Municipalities as well as local private sector employers in Toronto. A motion to pass the Metro Bill of Rights in Toronto was introduced in 1980 which proposed to “ban discrimination in hiring, assignment or promotion on the basis of race, creed, colour, nationality, ancestry, place of origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital or family relationship, physical disability or any other distinguishing characteristic.” Aside from the curious omission of intellectual disability or other mental health issues in the Metro Bill of Rights, the Metro Council opted for the weaker (though unprecedented) declaration in support of equal opportunity employment which encouraged the employment of underrepresented groups in the municipal public service. Although the Ontario Public Service had a formal equal opportunity program and corporate policy on employment of disabled people in place since 1979, Metro Toronto was among the first municipal federations to formally incorporate the concept of equal opportunity into its general employment practices.

The gay liberation paper Body Politic reported that analysis of the Metro Council’s voting results to reject the Metro Bill of Rights pitted the conservative boroughs against the liberal city centre; a typical pattern that apparently reflected the bulk

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of decision-making in the Metro Council.\footnote{Ibid} By the time the Metro Bill of Rights was passed, the City of Toronto had already established itself as a leader in the area of disability issues with the establishment in 1972 of the Mayor’s Task Force on Disabled and Elderly and subsequent instalment of a permanent office and coordinator to implement accessibility reform in the city. The task force’s 1976 report in fact promoted the employment of disabled people in the public service and the initiation of partnerships with private sector employers to effect wider change beyond the parameters of the public service.\footnote{“This City is for All its Citizens”} The declaration to reform Metro Toronto’s employment practices emerged from a context of reform spearheaded by the City of Toronto which supportedMetro Toronto’s “position of leadership in the employment of people with disabilities” in the community and set the tone for progressive employment practices in the region.\footnote{TA, SC 1143, Item 2357, Report, Metro Equal Employment Opportunity Division (hereafter EEO), “Equal Employment Opportunity: A Strategy for the 90s,” June 1989.; Metropolitan Toronto was comprised of the City of Toronto and surrounding boroughs until 1998 when it was amalgamated into the City of Toronto, abolishing the municipal federation structure that had dominated municipal planning since the 1950s.}

The entrenchment of Ontario Human Rights Act protections in Metro Toronto’s employment policy as contained in its policy statement on equal opportunity employment, however, did not provide for the establishment of a program of action to improve the labour market integration of underrepresented groups in the municipality.\footnote{Ibid} In response to criticism that Toronto lacked an effective implementation strategy, Metro Council approved the creation of a pilot Disabled Program in 1981 with the goal of coordinating Metro’s activities in relation to the IYDP while initiating special programs to promote the employment of disabled people in Metro Toronto’s workforce.\footnote{Ibid} The

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\footnote{Ibid}
Disabled Program resulted in the recruitment of forty-six disabled people, justifying the expansion of the pilot into a full division in 1983 called the Equal Employment Opportunity Division (EEO Division) that focused on intensifying efforts to improve the employment of target groups. The EEO Division’s first report demonstrated that while women and racial minorities continued to be underrepresented in the public service, disabled people were particularly marginalized. The EEO Division reported that sixty-seven people with disabilities worked at the City and that between 1981 and 1984, twenty-nine people with disabilities were hired, mainly in temporary positions. The primary activities of the EEO Division were focused on “an Employee Rehabilitation Program; pro-active hiring of disabled persons into positions within the regular permanent, temporary and casual service; the provision of Internships to provide disabled persons with work experience; and outreach recruitment of disabled university students for summer employment.” By 1987, debate within Metro Council regarding poor staffing levels of target groups led the EEO Division to develop a report on the accountability of managers undertaking EEO initiatives. The EEO Division encouraged the implementation of new goals and timetables in response to due to concerns that new requirements for statistical monitoring resulting from the introduction of the provincial Municipal Employment Equity Program would challenge Toronto’s position of leadership in the realm of progressive employment policy.

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96 Ibid
100 “Equal Employment Opportunity: A Strategy for the 90s”
Metro Toronto sought to confirm this position as a model employer in the region by adopting a progressive stance on employment practices. During the late 1980s, Metro Toronto entered into a partnership with the Centre for Independent Living Toronto (CILT) as part of a 30-month, three million dollar pilot program called \textit{Access Connections} that was designed to “actively promote the greatly untapped human resources available within the disabled community.”\textsuperscript{101} The program involved recruiting employers to develop and demonstrate successful employment models with the goal of removing systemic barriers, developing support measures, enhancing existing training resources, and integrating employment equity measures at all levels of management.\textsuperscript{102} CILT reported, “By developing and sponsoring Access Connections, Metro Toronto is challenging employers across the municipality to equitably employ people with disabilities.”\textsuperscript{103} The second EEO Division report, entitled \textit{Strategy for the 90s}, also reported that the current model of EEO resulted in “limited progress in achieving full equality in the workplace” and recommended the establishment of an employment equity task force to implement Municipal Employment Equity Program guidelines.\textsuperscript{104} By 1990, the Employment Equity Implementation Task Force was in operation, involving city councillors, senior managers, union delegates, and provincial government officials in a joint effort to model employment practices to the wider private sector.

The “staged introduction of employment equity” beginning with the promotion of public sector modelling of best practices had in fact been the plan of the Ontario Public

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid
\textsuperscript{104} “Equal Employment Opportunity: A Strategy for the 90s”
Service (OPS) as well. In 1987, an employment equity program was introduced in the
OPS in a policy statement that noted, “With the exception of people with disabilities, the
representation of these groups in the OPS is already at or near their levels in the Ontario
population,” although most target groups were concentrated in lower-paying and
temporary jobs. The Office for Disabled Persons (ODP) believed that while
employment equity was framed as a matter of “justice” and “equality,” public sector
employment practices were more appropriately administered by the Ontario MOL given
the public sector’s role promoting the goals of equitable employment practices to the
wider private sector. As with the initial Hamilton affirmative action pilot in 1979, the
ODP argued that the best way to stimulate changes in employer attitudes and practices
was by establishing public sector workplaces as models for other sectors and industries.
The ODP stated, “Governments and the private sector alike are rapidly adjusting to the
exigencies of a highly competitive, information-based, post-industrial society.”
Given the voluntary nature of employment equity programs, however, it was held that sound
evidence based on a tested equity program was the best way to influence a wider
community of employers whose attitudes toward disability were consistently rated as
hindering the employment of disabled people. These attitudes, however, did not reflect
the predominant attitude among employers which rated technological innovation as the
means by which disabled people would achieve economic integration.

TECHNOLOGY AND THE FAILED LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

By the 1980s the progressive advancement of computer technology, assistive devices, prosthetics, and environmental controls began to radically transform the lives of many people with physical, sensory, and cognitive impairments, enabling them to live and work more independently in the community. There was widespread expectation in the late twentieth century in Canada that new technology would act as a great levelling force between able-bodied and disabled people, providing unprecedented access to social and economic opportunities regardless of prejudicial employer attitudes. It was widely believed that “computers don’t discriminate” in that the proliferation of computerized workstations would enable many disabled people to overcome physical barriers in the workplace and attitudinal barriers of employers.109 In his investigation of disabled workers utilizing employment services in Hamilton, Ontario Robert Wilton discovered substantial literature from the early 1980s that predicted the development of a new economy with many job opportunities for people with disabilities.110 Wilton explains that many people with disabilities, their allies and others in the employment field believed that “a post-industrial economy characterized by new technologies would facilitate the economic liberation of disabled people.”111 Yet as Alan Roulstone warns, “the continuing presence of capitalist imperatives coupled with the global opportunities for corporate

109 Turnbull, Looking in the Mirror, 151.
hedging presents major risks for disabled people and to traditional class-based social movements rooted in economic struggles.\textsuperscript{112}

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, service agencies and government officials maintained that computers were effective “game changers” in the struggle to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Newsletters and journal articles promoted the newest assistive devices and profiled people who used new computer technologies in the workplace. A 1979 column in the Canadian National Institute for the Blind newsletter \textit{Employment Services News}, for example, reported that computers were enabling access to previously inaccessible jobs and even creating entire new job categories for blind Canadians.\textsuperscript{113} The article noted: “More and more companies in Canada are using computers for rapid information retrieval and storage. Now, thanks to modern technology, computer terminals can be used by blind as well as sighted employees.”\textsuperscript{114} Synthesized speech boxes or “talking computers” installed at computer terminals enabled blind users to type, edit, print, mail, and monitor incoming and outgoing data efficiently and were seen to directly confront the notion among many employers that the majority of office work was inaccessible for people with visual impairments. In 1980, the Ontario MOL also reported that computers were changing the entire labour market in a way that presented new opportunities to improve the employability of disabled people, such as working remotely or engaging computerized workplaces with new assistive technologies.\textsuperscript{115} The Ministry believed that by the end of

\textsuperscript{112} Roulstone, “Disabling Pasts, Enabling Futures?” 636-637.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid
the 1980s, the “computer revolution will be here” and that a “substantial percentage of the population in the workforce will be using small desk-top computer terminals.”

A man and woman seated at an accessible workstation utilizing state-of-the-art IBM equipment, including an audio typing unit consisting of an audio console, keypad, headset, and storage dial. The introduction of such assistive technologies that interfaced with a rapidly evolving computerized workplace offered the promise of new levels of access to job opportunities in the mainstream workforce for people with visual impairments. (© International Business Machines Corporation, 1981. Reproduced with permission)

The application of new technologies in the workplace, however, had an uneven and contradictory impact on the employability of disabled people. There was often a persistent tension between accessible technology and liberal individualism in the area of employment such that disabled people were at once liberated and marginalized by

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116 Ibid
technology in the workplace. Dimitris Michailakis argues, “The positive effects on the individual level are counteracted by the rationalisation of production at the societal level” such that employers in large enterprises, despite having greater resources, were in fact more resistant to individual needs because workplace technologies tend to emphasize standardization and efficiency. Able-bodied workers continued to appear more attractive to employers because they did not elicit the same questions about the cost of accommodations and impact on productivity despite the introduction of new workplace technologies or assistive devices. Indeed, new assistive technology raised additional questions among employers about the cost of accommodations. Technology did not “level the playing field” for many disabled workers that utilized new assistive technologies since, “From employers’ perspectives, disabled workers may be conceived as lacking flexibility—a product of both recent changes to the structure and organization of paid work and enduring stereotypes about disability.”

Access to new assistive technologies also presented a veritable barrier to the transformation of employment opportunity structures since many new technologies were unaffordable or otherwise unavailable to many people with disabilities. The problem of limited access to assistive devices and technologies undermined the potential impact of new technology to improve the employability and competitiveness of disabled workers. In support of the concept that technology levelled the playing field, HEP officials asserted that limited access to assistive devices “cannot be separated from the capacity of

121 O'Brien, “From a Doctor's to a Judge's Gaze,” 345.
the disabled person to obtain or maintain employment.”

HEP found that the promotion of disabled peoples’ employability to employers increasingly conflicted with the fact that many qualified people with disabilities did not have the means to acquire technologies and devices that enabled them to integrate into a workplace. In order to address limited access to new workplace technologies, the CRCD and the National Research Council of Canada established Technical Aids and Systems for the Handicapped (TASH) in Toronto in 1978 to act as a major non-profit provider of technical aids for disabled people in Canada. The CRCD noted that many new aids developed during the 1970s were not actually being used by the bulk of people with disabilities in Canada. As a result, TASH’s mandate focused on marketing, distributing, and servicing assistive devices in the local Toronto market and nationally to facilitate the rehabilitation of disabled people and their goals in the workplace.

As the non-profit sector attempted to fill the gap between supply and demand of work-related assistive devices, during the early 1980s in Ontario disability activists lobbied the provincial government to develop an Assistive Devices Program that improved access to assistive devices through targeted subsidies. A study committee was struck to investigate measures that would improve disabled peoples’ access to devices that would in turn improve their access to employment opportunities. Service agencies in the province complained to the study committee that disabled people suffered from an uncoordinated system for providing aids. The Ontario March of Dimes (OMOD), for

124 Ibid
126 “Attitude Overhaul”
127 AO, RG 7-149, Box B367312, File “Assistive Devices,” Letter, OMOD to Study Committee on Assistive Devices, 10 April 1981.
example, which had provided many disabled people access to assistive devices, weighed in on the committee’s cost-sharing proposal of an eighty per cent coverage rate for new assistive devices. The OMOD felt that cost-sharing arrangements duly acknowledged the expensiveness of assistive devices but would continue to be a “significant financial burden to the low-and-middle-income wage earners” and that “such a system would thus act as a disincentive to employment.”\textsuperscript{128} Given that the subsidization of assistive devices was largely intended to promote increased labour market participation among people with disabilities, critics concluded that any plan to increase access to new assistive technologies should aim to provide increased access through universal coverage and training on the use of new aids.\textsuperscript{129}

Many interview participants in the present study found that employer attitudes were not fundamentally challenged by technology as expected and new barriers to employment even emerged from the introduction of new technologies. The incorporation of computer technology in particular did not necessarily “level the playing field” so much as expose the underlying influence of attitudinal barriers as the root obstacle to full participation. “Paul” noted, “Technology is supposed to be the game changer, but it hasn't worked out that way. I deal with it every day so I see the barriers and they're generally social. It's not that people can't do the jobs, it's convincing the employers that we can do the jobs.”\textsuperscript{130} “Alex” found that the growth of new technologies did not necessarily result in greater access to employment. In his work as a youth focus group leader, Alex observed, “I see so many young people ... coming out of school who really do want to work badly and they can't get any jobs. That really distresses me because there's never

\textsuperscript{128} ibid
\textsuperscript{129} ibid
\textsuperscript{130} “Paul,” Interview with Author, 23 June 2011.
been a time in our history where there was so much technology that’s available.”

“Mary” observed, “A lot of people with disabilities can't afford all the technology that you need to embrace and have access to. You have to learn it somehow or at least get access to it so you have a sense of it. Sometimes going to a job without knowing anything, sometimes that doesn't work, sometimes it doesn't.”

Other interview participants reported having to constantly learn new systems, that accessible operating systems were often incompatible with mainstream technologies, and employer decisions to standardize workplace computer configurations excluded workers reliant on accessible systems. Paul concludes, “I can definitely cite many instances where people have actually been packaged out on jobs after several years of working for different companies because they can no longer do the job and bring value to the table so they were released because their software and technology couldn't access the internal systems in various corporations.”

“Lily” encountered greater access to employment through assistive technology that later evolved to be inaccessible, forcing her out of her job. She observes, “The IT systems are set up for the general working population and don't always take into account the special needs of people with access technology. They might make changes to a system and not give us advance warning, so my system is fine one day and not the next.”

Lily concluded, “If there were the right attitudes then the computer technology problems would be resolved. If employers took the attitude that they should not and will not accept programs that will not work for everyone then they

131 “Brad,” Interview with Author, 24 June 2011.
132 “Mary”
133 “Paul”
134 “Lily”
would push back to the manufacturers and vendors of said programs and say ‘make it accessible.’”

CONCLUSION

Employers figured prominently in disabled people’s pursuit of economic integration during the late twentieth century in Canada. Employer attitudes toward disability in general and disabled workers in particular shaped recruitment preferences and employment practices that rendered many people with disabilities unemployable in the mainstream labour market. Discrimination in recruitment and employment was often unconsciously projected upon people with disabilities, undermining their attempt to achieve full participation in the community. The seminal report of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce demonstrated many of these employer prejudices while highlighting the pervasive undervaluation of disabled people’s potential as productive members of the workforce. Subsequent activities brought public, private, and non-profit sector actors in the labour market together to discuss the ways in which employer attitudes were responsible for counteracting measure to improve the economic integration of disabled people. But studies of employer responses to disability from the 1970s to 1990s revealed that attitudes and practices among private sector employers had not significantly changed.

For its part, the state undertook to model equitable employment practices to the private sector. Yet, disability activists and others increasingly believed that voluntary measures including “employment equity” and “equal opportunity employment” were inadequate responses to chronic unemployment in the disability community. While Metropolitan Toronto was one of the earliest municipalities to pursue “equal opportunity
employment” initiatives, various federal and provincial employment initiatives promoted a model of progressive employment practices that presumably rippled out into the wider labour market. As demonstrated in the failed hope that new technology would lead to a “level playing field” for disabled workers, however, employers often prioritized efficiency, productivity and standardization over the creation of an accommodating workplace. The chronic unemployment and poverty of disabled people which persisted during this period led many critics to consider the limitations of awareness campaigns and value of sensitivity training for employers. The disability community’s mounting frustration with “those who listen politely and do nothing” led them to pressure the state to adopt a more activist stance in protecting the economic rights of people with disabilities.
Chapter Six: Life and Death of an Activist State: Politicians, Bureaucrats and the Shifting Ground Beneath Disability Activism, 1975-1995

By saying that we live in an activist state, I mean to mark a special feature of our self-consciousness: an awareness that our society’s existence depends upon a continuing flow of decisions made by politically accountable state officials.¹

[The] commitment to an activist state which spent money to support organizations through which citizenship could be developed … was part of its commitment to ‘participatory democracy’ and achieving a ‘just society.’²

An activist state developed in Canada during the late 1970s that was devoted to ensuring the “full participation” of people with disabilities in the social and economic life of Canadian society. The governance of disability issues underwent a remarkable series of transformations at each level of government from the mid-1970s to mid-1990s in response to domestic and international disability social movements as well as political and economic developments. Special government bureaucracies designed to address the economic dislocation of disabled people in Canada were established, evolved, and partly dismantled during a dynamic twenty-year period when disability rights activism encouraged new responses to rampant poverty and unemployment in the disability community. Disabled people and their allies introduced the state to a new approach to disability issues as a result of disabled peoples’ active engagement as paid advocates, coalition-builders, public sector workers, and advisory committee members committed to the objective of greater participation in the labour market. A progressive discourse of

² Valentine and Vickers, “Released from the Yoke of Paternalism,” 169.
disability rights was entrenched in the structure of the state through the active participation of people with disabilities in the work of the state, enabling various levels of government to assume—and strategically feign—its role as protector of disability rights and promoter of a progressive vision of disability in the labour market. The presence of formal vehicles of disability advocacy within government also helped to ensure a degree of continuity in the visibility of disability issues despite continuous shifts in the political terrain. These special ministerial posts, bureaus, and advisory committees, however, arguably disguised a lack of political action to improve the labour market integration of disabled people who continued to experience high rates of unemployment and poverty throughout this period.

The following chapter charts the impact and evolution of a disability rights agenda within the federal, Ontario, and Toronto governments as it pertained to the pursuit of disabled people’s economic integration. The first section examines the influence of international developments in disability rights on the conceptualization and governmental response to the economic problem of disability in Canada. The second section discusses the creation and work of special offices designed to act as a focal point in the bureaucratic handling of political responses to labour market issues affecting people with disabilities. The third section takes a closer look at the influence of one such vehicle in the relationship between policymakers and the disability community called the Ontario Advisory Council for the Handicapped, analyzing its role as a formal conduit between the provincial government and Ontarians with disabilities. The final section examines the demise of an existing relationship between the state and disability community dominated
by “activist” centres in government due to the rise of a new political discourse of
disability that withdrew from an interventionist role in the economy.

ESTABLISHING A POLITICAL FRAMEWORK FOR DISABILITY RIGHTS

A political framework of disability rights took shape during the late 1970s and
early 1980s in Canada, stimulated by the introduction of international declarations on
disability rights that included promotional timetables by the UN in support of such rights.
When the UN issued its Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons (DRDP) in
December 1975, Canada had not yet established a comprehensive political basis in which
to address the longstanding social and economic dislocation of disabled people. Despite
growing awareness of disability issues in the broader public sphere brought about by
family advocates and rehabilitation organizations, there was no framework in which
Canadian policymakers could effectively address the exclusion of people with disabilities
from the labour market. The DRDP began to fill this substantial policy gap by promoting
disability rights, calling for “national and international action to ensure that [the
declaration] will be used as a common basis and frame of reference for the protection of
these rights.”3 Within the DRDP’s thirteen-point resolutions regarding disability rights
included the “right, according to their capabilities, to secure and retain employment or to
engage in a useful, productive and remunerative occupation.”4 Canadian disability
activists interpreted the section to mean, “The right to work is not a privilege reserved for

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3 United Nations, Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons, Geneva: General Assembly, 1975:
Resolution 3447.
4 Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons
the non-handicapped” and expected policymakers to use the UN framework to develop policies to promote the social and economic integration of disabled people.⁵

The DRDP was welcomed by Canadian politicians as an important means in which human rights could be advanced in the country. President of the federal Treasury Board Robert Andras cited the pivotal role played by Canada as the sponsor and member country to introduce the resolution to the General Assembly, which was subsequently adopted.⁶ Liberal Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau sustained this enthusiasm by immediately signing onto the DRDP as an expression of federal policy in principle. The declaration presented Trudeau with a unique opportunity to publicly demonstrate his commitment to participatory democracy and the creation of a “just society;” a famously vague yet energetically upheld platform during his successful 1968 and 1974 electoral campaigns.⁷ In the book Towards a Just Society, Trudeau explained that his 1968 electoral campaign rested on policy of universal equal opportunity.⁸ In an attempt to clarify his intentions behind the creation of a “just society,” Trudeau wrote, “How can we call a society just unless it is organized in such a way as to give each his due, regardless of his state of birth, his means or his health?”⁹ He explained that a “just society” fundamentally represented a call for “anything that would make us more free and more equal.”¹⁰

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⁶ Ibid
⁹ “The Values of a Just Society”
¹⁰ “The Values of a Just Society”
Fraser Valentine and Jill Vickers observe that changes in the conception of citizenship due to Trudeau’s promotion of participatory democracy and “active citizenship” stimulated the development of disability organizations and encouraged disabled people and their allies to press the state to improve protection of their rights.\textsuperscript{11} Despite the supportive political reception of the DRDP in Canada established by Trudeau, however, the Mayor’s Task Force on the Disabled and Elderly in Toronto wondered by 1977 how many people were even aware that Canada had signed onto the DRDP given that little had been done by provincial and federal governments despite political commitments to uphold the principles of the declaration.\textsuperscript{12}

To kick-start the policy formation process at the national and sub-national levels, the UN subsequently dedicated 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP). Trudeau perceived the IYDP as his opportunity to secure Canada’s reputation as an internationally recognized leader in the promotion of human rights. The IYDP was devised to encourage all levels of government to formulate strategies and mechanisms to act upon the principles articulated in the DRDP. With the theme “full participation and equality” the IYDP promoted (among other things) initiatives to “provide disabled persons with proper assistance, training, care and guidance, to make available to them opportunities for suitable work and to ensure their full integration in society.”\textsuperscript{13} The inclusion of people with physical disabilities in the 1977 Canadian Human Rights Act, which provided protection from discrimination in employment, was seen by disability activists as a significant step toward realizing the principles outlined in the DRDP given

\textsuperscript{11} Valentine and Vickers, “Released from the Yoke of Paternalism,” 164.
\textsuperscript{12} AO RG 7-149, Box B363026, file Publications, Mayor’s Task Force on the Disabled and Elderly, Access, 1, May 1977.
that the previous Canadian Bill of Rights did not contain any human rights protections for
disabled people. In response to the announcement of the IYDP, the Toronto Mayor’s
Task Force on the Disabled and Elderly asserted that the IYDP was not a beginning but
rather the “culmination” of nearly ten years of struggle to improve social and economic
opportunities for disabled people in the city. The Metropolitan Toronto Council even
established its own Disabled Program to promote public sector employment of disabled
people as an explicit component of the region’s commitment to the DRDP and
enthusiasm leading up to the IYDP.

Progressive solutions to improve the economic integration of disabled people
came to Ontario during the late 1970s and 1980s as part of struggles by the New
Democratic Party (NDP) to introduce affirmative action legislation. The NDP repeatedly
proposed legislation titled “An Act to Provide for the Employment of Disabled Persons”
under the NDP leadership of Michael Cassidy and Bob Rae, which would have
effectively brought affirmative action to the province. A lack of enthusiasm for
affirmative action, particularly in the political climate dominated by a longstanding
Progressive Conservative government and Liberal Opposition, repeatedly killed the bills
before second or third readings. Despite this opposition, private members’ bills were
repeatedly introduced beginning in 1978 by Toronto NDP MPP Odoardo Di Santo and
later by Hamilton-East NDP MPP Robert Mackenzie (both labour leaders and members

14 The Canadian Human Rights Act was amended in 1980 to include people with “mental disabilities” in
15 TA, SC 361, Box 21, File 21, Paper, Toronto Mayor’s Task Force on the Disabled and Elderly, Access
(1981)
16 TA, SC 1143, Item 2357, Metro EEO Division, “Equal Employment Opportunity: A Strategy for the
90s,” June 1989.
of the NDP’s core membership in the labour movement). The introduction of affirmative action bills by the provincial NDP continued until 1987 when opposition in the disability community to voluntary employment equity legislation at the federal level resulted in dwindling political interest in such legislation at the provincial level. Modeled after public and private sector affirmative action legislation in Britain and the United States, the bills were introduced as amendments to the Employment Standards Act with the objective of providing employment opportunities for disabled people, in large part through the imposition of hiring quotas. The legislation required that at least three percent of an employer’s workforce include “disabled persons,” defined as a person with a “serious and prolonged physical disability [that] interferes with the ability to obtain employment.” Despite the three-per cent workforce standard, there were allowances for variable percentages and individual employers or entire classes of employers could be exempted by the Minister of Labour if they were deemed eligible. A register of “employable disabled persons” constituted the labour pool from which employers could


18 "150 Disabled Travel to Ottawa to Fight Job Bill With ‘No Teeth,’” Toronto Star A4 (15 April 1986).


select qualified workers and employers who violated the Act were liable to fines ranging from $1,000 to $10,000.\textsuperscript{22}

Although each bill repeatedly died after being tabled, it represented a concerted attempt by the NDP to provide a legislated floor to support disabled people chronically trapped in unemployment or unwillingly dependent on welfare assistance. Mackenzie admitted that affirmative action was understandably “controversial but stems from my frustration with efforts to provide employment for the handicapped.”\textsuperscript{23} Ontario NDP Leader Michael Cassidy similarly defended the creation of a legislated program of affirmative action in the province, noting “the principle, it seems to me, is an important one, and that is that major employers should be required to have an affirmative action program to ensure that people who are disabled do, in fact, have as a matter of reality, not just [in] principle, access to employment from which they are now barred.”\textsuperscript{24} As the NDP Labour Critic during the late 1980s, Mackenzie recalled, “Back in 1976, I think, which was the first year I asked questions about the percentage of disabled and handicapped people who were working, it was something like 15 per cent; 85 per cent were not working. The figures just last year were almost identical. Year after year … we would find that the figures were not changing.”\textsuperscript{25}

Despite general aversion to affirmative action in Canada, the desire to defend the country’s reputation as a protector of human rights encouraged various levels of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[22] Ibid
\item[23] Robert Mackenzie, “Disabled Persons Employment Act” in Ontario Legislative Assembly, \textit{Legislative Debates (Hansard)}, 32\textsuperscript{nd} Legislature, 1\textsuperscript{st} session (1 May 1981), accessed 17 August 2013, http://hansardindex.ontla.on.ca/hansardeissue/32-1/0009.htm
\end{footnotes}
government to formulate proactive measures to address the economic problem of
disability, particularly amid the rise of an increasingly influential social movement of
disability rights activism at the national and provincial levels. Accordingly, a Special
Parliamentary Committee on the Disabled and Handicapped was struck in 1980 to
develop a series of recommendations to guide the implementation of specific measures to
improve “full participation” as defined by the DRDP and in celebration of the IYDP. The
committee’s landmark report, fittingly titled Obstacles, made twenty recommendations
related to employment (130 recommendations in total), calling on all levels of
government to undertake specific measures to improve employment opportunities for
disabled people.\textsuperscript{26} The committee received hundreds of submissions from across the
country and claimed to represent the views and needs of the disability community, which
numbered approximately two million people in Canada at the time. The Obstacles report
specifically urged greater cooperation between the federal and provincial governments in
regards to the implementation of its recommendations, noting that “jurisdictional
boundaries were no excuse for avoiding necessary actions.”\textsuperscript{27} Recommendation 74 of the
Obstacles report, for example, directed the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to
exercise leadership encouraging municipalities to improve accessibility and conditions
for social and economic integration as part of an ongoing effort to construct a
comprehensive framework for policymakers at all levels of government.\textsuperscript{28} The Obstacles
report uniquely personalized its message by interspersing its recommendations with
pictures and narratives of individuals with disabilities that made submissions to the

\textsuperscript{26} Obstacles
\textsuperscript{27} Obstacles
\textsuperscript{28} TA, SC 113, File 92, Letter, Federation of Canadian Municipalities to Special Parliamentary Committee
on the Disabled and Handicapped, 8 January 1981.
committee, explicitly attaching a “human face” to a complex set of issues. In the spirit of the momentous IYDP in which the report was released, committee members concluded “There are no insurmountable obstacles to prevent Canada from taking a world leadership role in providing disabled persons with the practical means for greater independence.”

An atmosphere of enthusiasm surrounded the release of the Obstacles report, partly due to the “last minute” inclusion of disability in section fifteen of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Trudeau’s announcement that new human rights protections would accompany the patriation of the Canadian constitution led disability activists to believe that the disability community would benefit from the introduction of new human rights protections. When news broke that Trudeau did not include disability as a protected category in the draft Charter, an intensive lobbying campaign erupted to force Trudeau’s hand. Members of the Obstacles committee, disability rights activists, and their allies initiated a letter-writing campaign and staged protests across the country to demand inclusion in the Charter. Trudeau and Minister of Justice Jean Chrétien resisted the inclusion of disability as a protected category in the Charter, fearing it would create an enormous financial burden on the federal, provincial, and municipal governments that would be required to retrofit existing infrastructure in order to meet new accessibility standards. At the last minute, however, Trudeau relented to the pressure of disability activists, writing disability into the new Charter of Rights and Freedoms as a protected category. David Lepofsky asserted that it was disability activists’ reference to “Canada’s

29 Ibid
31 “Disability Rights in Canada: A Virtual Museum”
international obligations” and its support of the IYDP that finally swayed Trudeau to live up to his promise of participatory democracy.\(^\text{32}\)

Protesters outside federal Employment & Immigration Minister Lloyd Axworthy’s office in Winnipeg in October 1981 with placards that read “Disabled Demand Dignity.” Demonstrations such as this occurred across the country as disability rights activists demanded the inclusion of disability as a protected category in the forthcoming Charter of Rights and Freedoms.\(^\text{33}\) (© Ken Gigliotti/Winnipeg Free Press, 1981. Reproduced with permission).


The widespread success of the IYDP also led the UN to adopt a World Programme of Action in 1982 and associated Decade of Disabled Persons (1983 to 1992) in which activities related to the prevention, rehabilitation, and equalization of opportunities for disabled people could be implemented and measured. These new UN resolutions prompted Trudeau to create a new cabinet position responsible for coordinating the federal government’s implementation of the report’s recommendations. When Canada finally signed onto the Decade of Disabled Persons in 1985, federal and provincial governments, including Ontario, each created ministerial posts (called the Minister Responsible for Disabled Persons) that coordinated initiatives to “accelerate progress toward the full participation and integration of disabled persons.” The selection of well-known reformers, including former Toronto mayor David Crombie in the federal post and former Toronto alderman Tony Ruprecht in Ontario, reflected the intended cooperative reform tenor of the ministerial post with its obligation for tackling a wide range of complex issues that required balancing delicate collaborative relationships with several government departments to succeed in achieving progressive reform. For example, the Ministers collaboratively developed National Access Awareness Week which was devised as an annual “opportunity to promote attitudinal change in access for disabled persons” at the local level, involving all levels of the public sector, businesses, and communities in activities to promote greater

36 Ibid
awareness.\textsuperscript{38} These special cabinet posts also represented positions of advocacy within government that were responsible for facilitating the reform of public policies and promoting wider attitudinal changes around disability by ensuring that the government was both "complete" and "effective" in its response to disability rights.\textsuperscript{39} The assertion of an activist position on disability issues within the state, however, entailed the creation of an organizational infrastructure dedicated to devising and implementing initiatives to improve the economic integration of disabled people.

**SPECIALIZED BUREAUS AND THE GROUNDWORK OF ECONOMIC INTEGRATION**

Beneath the political framework that developed around disability rights during the 1970s and 1980s, a central feature of the state response to disability activism was to establish special offices at each level of government that were mandated to develop measures to improve job opportunities for people with disabilities. The offices, which included the federal Disabled Persons Unit (DPU), the Ontario Handicapped Employment Program (HEP), and the Metropolitan and Toronto Office of Services for the Disabled and Elderly (Toronto Office) were unique in that disability advocacy represented a major thrust of their mandate. As governmental focal points in the implementation of activities related to the social and employment integration of disabled people, the offices represented a vanguard for the promotion of disability rights within government bodies. Special offices educated employers and the wider public about the


needs and abilities of disabled people in the labour market as the official liaisons between government, employers and the broader public sphere. New initiatives to promote awareness of disability issues were often devised within these offices and staffers exerted pressure on other parts of government to modify or eliminate barriers to social and economic participation. Simultaneously acting as civil servants and paid disability advocates, workers in these offices combined the responsibilities of running a government office with an activist agenda marked by progressive widespread reform that targeted multiple apparatuses of the state.

In response to grassroots organizing during the early 1970s by an eclectic mix of citizens concerned about the social and economic status of people with disabilities in the city, a formal Toronto Office eventually took shape. A dynamic group of professionals, volunteers, and family advocates led by Alderman Anne Johnston coalesced during the 1972 mayoral election, lobbying candidates for improved accessibility and job opportunities for disabled Torontonians. The successful election of reform Mayor David Crombie, who responded positively to the promotion of disability issues, was seen by disability advocates to commence a new era of positive change in the promotion of disability rights in the city. Crombie’s inaugural address acknowledged the influence of the group in the formation of his political platform. He exclaimed,

And let us remember that while we, the people, comprise a majority, we each are part of some minority or other. One minority we can no longer afford to ignore is the physically handicapped. Some of us are confined to wheelchairs and we are not impressed with buildings and elevators which make our entry impossible. Some of us need ramps and others need access to public telephones and we see no reason why these facilities are not available. Some of us are aged, pregnant, some

40 See Chapter One for a discussion of the family advocacy background of the Toronto Mayor’s Task Force on the Disabled and Elderly.
infirm—to the extent that many thousands of us are physically unable to make full use of our City—and it's time the City made allowance for that simple fact. This City is for all its citizens no matter how palsied their step or frail their grasp.\footnote{AO, RG 7-149, Box B363026, File “Publications,” Article, Mayor’s Task Force on the Disabled and Elderly, \textit{Access} (1 May 1977).}

In his analysis of the 1972 Toronto election, which he dubbed a “populist victory” for the allegedly reformist mayor, Jon Caulfield argued that Crombie was in fact forced to “court” reformists, such as Alderman Anne Johnston, since he lacked much support among those in their camp; and despite his entreaties, Crombie was “never seriously regarded … as one of them.”\footnote{Caulfield, \textit{The Tiny Perfect Mayor}, ix, 20.} As part of his pursuit of a political alliance with other reformists, Crombie created the Task Force on the Disabled and Elderly in 1973, following strong recommendations by Johnston.\footnote{AO, RG 7-149, Box B363026, File “Publications,” Article, Mayor’s Task Force on the Disabled and Elderly, \textit{Access} (1 May 1977).} The Task Force was mandated to investigate ways of improving disabled people’s access in the city and its report included a comprehensive series of recommendations encouraging city council to facilitate social and economic integration through improved accessibility, housing, education, transportation, employment and income, leisure and recreation, and city services.\footnote{Ibid} By the time the Task Force’s first newsletter was released in 1977 to provide the public with an update regarding the ongoing work of task force members, the initial impact of the report on physical accessibility was already made apparent with the installation of over 1,000 curb cuts at sidewalks across the city with plans for a further 124 ramps by end of year.\footnote{Ibid}
With the report adopted in principle as a policy statement of Toronto city council, the Toronto Office continued in its advisory role. Meanwhile, Metropolitan Toronto council (which encompassed the City of Toronto and surrounding boroughs) hired a new coordinator for the Metro Toronto Working Committee on the Disabled and Elderly that would collaborate with members of the Mayor’s Task Force to implement their recommendations within the municipal federation. Belinda Morin was selected to lead the new committee, working with the Toronto Office to broaden the mandate of the task force to serve the entire Toronto region.\(^{46}\) A North Toronto resident and ally of the disability community, Morin apparently abandoned a budding political career to work as a social justice advocate for the United Community Fund (forerunner to United Way Toronto) where she became known for her progressive views.\(^{47}\) Morin represented the municipal equivalent of federal and provincial Ministers Responsible for Disabled Persons, acting as a paid advocate and local “point person” for disability issues in the region. Such responsibilities were apparent in her appearance before the Special Parliamentary Committee on the Disabled and Handicapped alongside Alderman Johnston to represent the views of the Metropolitan Toronto Council.\(^{48}\) Her duties included monitoring employee recruitment and selection, providing input to municipal departments on the needs and concerns of disabled employees, coordinating the education of supervisors and personnel regarding the employment of disabled people as well as acting as an advisor to the Mayor’s Task Force.\(^{49}\) A sensational and chauvinistic profile of Morin in the Toronto Star included a provocative picture of her sitting barefoot in a

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47 “‘Real Dynamo’ To Police Metro Hiring”
48 Obstacles
flowing dress under the heading “‘Real dynamo’ to police Metro hiring,” describing her as “tall, attractive, married to a doctor” while pointing out that she was also a well-connected, influential, and ambitious person who was able to “move with ease among an exclusive circle of political and bureaucratic heavyweights.”

Despite the distracting sketch of her personal and physical characteristics, Morin spoke explicitly to the tenor of government-based disability advocacy, noting that the primary challenge which accompanied her position included the fact that "The bureaucratic expectation is to keep the lid on while you have a mandate to keep the lid off."

By 1978, Morin, the Toronto Office, and other local disability activists joined together to lobby for the creation of a permanent program in the city and additional staff, citing continued widespread poverty and unemployment of disabled people in the region as a complex issue demanding the sustained attention and expertise of a dedicated team of government-based disability advocates. A submission prepared by the Toronto Office stated, “Because of the publicity generated by the Mayor's Task Force report, the City has gained a reputation of providing strong support to the disabled and elderly. However, this position has not yet become a reality. If City Council wishes to fulfil Mayor Crombie's goal that Toronto become 'truly a City for all the people', a commitment to additional resources and program security is required.”

Toronto Executive Council agreed to provide the Toronto Office additional staff, enabling them to continue their work with local disability activists and expand their influence as a force of progressive change in the city. Led by Morin at the Metropolitan level, the Toronto Office swiftly expanded its

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50 Ibid
51 Ibid
advocacy of disability issues in the city by promoting the enactment of anti-discrimination legislation, regularly lobbying Executive Council to improve accessibility in the city, holding seminars on employing disabled people, and hosting a major employment conference during the IYDP involving other levels of government. By 1981, the Toronto Office boasted, “It has had an impact on not only the citizens of Toronto, but other municipalities as well. It helped spur other levels of government to review their policies and legislation affecting disabled people.”

Indeed, the influence of the Toronto Office on other levels of government reflected the importance of intergovernmental relationships in the development of new policies at the municipal and provincial levels. A close connection existed between provincial authorities and the provision of new funding for the Mayor’s Task Force to establish a permanent office. Jon Caulfield explained, “Toronto’s Metropolitan federation is a provincial invention. Ontario municipalities are ‘creatures of the province,’ subject to its absolute control.” As a result, most major programs—such as new initiatives to deal with disability issues—were fundamentally dependent on provincial funds, revealing the extent to which political priorities defined at the provincial level shaped the implementation of new initiatives devised at the municipal level.

Progressive Conservative Premier Bill Davis’ 1978 Speech from the Throne, for example, outlined the Ontario government’s new plans to place greater emphasis on promoting job opportunities for disabled people throughout the province. Davis discussed various issues

54 AO, RG 74-30, Box B391448, File “Mayor’s Task Force,” Letter, Working Committee of Mayor’s Task Force on Disabled/Elderly to Neighbourhoods Committee, 30 November 1981.
55 Caulfield, *The Tiny Perfect Mayor*, 74.
56 Ibid
regarding the “full participation” of disabled people in Ontario (borrowed from the UN Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons), including the need for greater accessibility, access to assistive devices, welfare assistance, and vocational rehabilitation programs; all of which required cooperation with municipal authorities.\textsuperscript{57}

Davis’ Throne Speech provided the impetus for the establishment of an innovative new provincial office that would act as a catalyst for change in the Ontario government to address the economic displacement of people with disabilities across the province. Despite initial indecision about where to place the new program given the perceived jurisdictional complexity of disability issues, HEP was finally situated within the Ministry of Labour, which strengthened its mandate to focus on facilitating employment integration for disabled people.\textsuperscript{58} HEP was devised as a crucial link between multiple key stakeholders in the provincial labour market, including employers, unions, disabled persons, special interest groups, voluntary programs, social agencies, related government programs, educators and health professionals.\textsuperscript{59} HEP promoted cross-sectoral awareness of disability issues among these stakeholders, providing education materials and consultation on specific matters while facilitating the development of new initiatives in government. Eager to establish itself as a catalyst for change, HEP undertook a whirlwind of activity in its first year of operation, including fielding more than 2,000 inquiries from disabled people, development of an information centre for employers, publication and distribution of several reports, fact sheets, and pamphlets, initiation of

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid
contact with major employers, service agencies, and labour organizations, television appearances, and strategizing models for job matching.\textsuperscript{60}

Despite the formidable enterprise of promoting the social and economic integration of disabled people with the goal of “full participation,” special offices were restricted by relatively small budgets despite their responsibility to pursue an impressive yet intimidating objective. Yet, even with limited resources and staff, special offices steadily fleshed out the political framework around disability rights with the progressive creation of initiatives to improve job opportunities for people with disabilities. HEP maximized the effectiveness of its small staff complement of approximately three people by reaching out to the disability community, cultivating connections with consumer-run organizations and disability rights leaders. The Ministry of Labour strategically hired John Rae, for example, to work as a consultant to implement many of the program’s objectives and to act as the program’s public face at various conferences, training seminars, and client consultations.\textsuperscript{61} A leading activist in BOOST and tireless critic of the CNIB’s monopoly on services for people with visual impairments, Rae led striking workers at a picket of CNIB headquarters in Toronto and helped organize the unprecedented Coalition for Human Rights for the Handicapped as part of a sustained lobbying effort to amend the Ontario Human Rights Code to include disability.\textsuperscript{62} In his role as HEP consultant, Rae combined his experience as a disability rights lobbyist with his new role as a civil servant, channeling his skills and connections with the disability

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid
\textsuperscript{61} John Rae, Interview with Author, 27 June 2011.
community into HEP’s mandate advocating for change within government and the provincial labour market.\textsuperscript{63}

In response to the energetic political discourse generated by the forthcoming IYDP, the federal government also followed the course of creating a special bureau to promote the economic integration of disabled people across Canada. The Bureau on Rehabilitation (the Bureau) was finally established in 1979 following a “lengthy” period of development, undertaking activities to promote awareness of disability issues and to improve employment, income, housing, transportation, and access in the community.\textsuperscript{64} The Bureau’s mandate focused on harmonizing federal policies and practices around the prevention of disability and support of rehabilitation services given that responsibility for rehabilitation services was fragmented across several ministerial jurisdictions.\textsuperscript{65} Similar to its provincial and municipal counterparts in Toronto, the Bureau advised the federal government on policy development while initiating special projects to facilitate the development of employment opportunities for disabled people. The Bureau’s initial focus on rehabilitation issues encouraged the cultivation of close working relationships with rehabilitation organizations and advocates including the CRCD, CCRW, and the CNIB. Federal resources were funnelled through the Bureau into collaborative partnerships with rehabilitation agencies such as a longstanding media campaign by the CRCD and CCRW’s initiatives to improve the sheltered workshop system.\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{63} John Rae
\textsuperscript{64} LAC, RG 29, Box 238, File 4304-1-4, Paper, “Bureau on Rehabilitation: NHWC,” 1981.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid
\textsuperscript{66} LAC, Box 238, File 4314-3-19(1), Minutes, Bureau on Rehabilitation, “Deputy Minister’s Meeting with the Ottawa Liaison Committee of Chamber of Commerce—Employment of the Handicapped,” 20 May 1979.
Unlike the Toronto Office and HEP, the Bureau did not initially foster a close relationship with the disability rights community given that it primarily functioned as an ally of the rehabilitation industry and focused on developing partnerships with rehabilitation organizations. When Toronto producer Alan Aylward approached the Bureau in 1981 seeking funds for a new documentary series featuring disability rights activists, for example, he received a rather cool reception. The series, called *The Disability Myth*, adopted a particularly critical stance on the existing rehabilitation system in Canada and showcased the agenda of disability rights activists who sought greater consumer control over rehabilitation services. Despite wide acclaim after being aired on CTV Network, including an endorsement by HEP, the Bureau felt that the initial film called “Segregation” was “somewhat lengthy and repetitive” and believed that Ontario had been “filmed to death” given the recent proliferation of consumer-oriented films.67 The Bureau ultimately rejected Aylward’s proposal on the grounds that its funds were already committed to the CRCD for its advertising campaign.68 By 1984, however, as the spotlight of the IYDP receded and austerity returned to the federal budget, the Bureau was restructured, downscaled, and renamed the DPU and engagement with disability activists increased. During the mid to late-1980s, the DPU provided critical funding to an emerging network of consumer-run Independent Living Resource Centres (ILRCs). The Centre for Independent Living Toronto (CILT), for example, received its core funding from the DPU, providing crucial support to disabled people in Toronto. CILT’s Executive Director, Sandra Carpenter, wrote to the DPU, noting “You have no idea what a new

67 LAC, Box 238, File 4312-4-1, Brief, “The Disability Myth,” 8 December 1981.
68 LAC, Box 238, File 4312-4-1, Letter, Bureau on Rehabilitation to Lauron Productions, 27 November 1980.
sense of stability and purpose this money has given us. It will be so valuable in the years to come as a foundation from which to help our fellow consumers.\textsuperscript{69}

Each special bureau naturally came into contact with one another given their similar overlapping objectives that exposed underlying tensions that resulted from differing bureau priorities and clashes between individual advocates. Disability issues in Canada typically fell within the purview of provincial and municipal governments, which created opportunities for the HEP and Toronto Office to coordinate their effort to improve the economic integration of disabled people. Given that the Toronto Office predated the provincial bureau and had developed experience facilitating the implementation of its recommendations in the municipal sector to improve employment, they offered assistance to the new HEP office to establish a pilot affirmative-action project in the City of Hamilton.\textsuperscript{70} HEP also regularly promoted the work of the Toronto Office in its publications and other education initiatives as an example for other municipalities across the province to follow.\textsuperscript{71} The exemplary partnership between HEP and the Toronto Office also helped minimize complex jurisdictional issues that arose from the proposed installation of accessibility ramps to the Ontario MOL’s offices on University Avenue in Toronto.\textsuperscript{72} After several months of stalled talks between various infrastructural departments within the City of Toronto, Metropolitan Toronto, and provincial government about how to construct the ramps and where they should be

\textsuperscript{69} LAC, Box 210, File 4314-4-4, Letter, CILT to DPU, 19 June 1989.
\textsuperscript{70} AO, RG 7-148, Box B217563, File “Professional Outreach,” Letter, Working Committee of Mayor’s Task Force on Disabled and Elderly to HEP, 23 May 1979.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid
located, the HEP and Toronto Office collaboratively pushed the project through to completion, citing the high visibility and political importance of the site.

This intergovernmental relationship was tested during the IYDP when a new provincial awareness campaign initiated by HEP revealed conflicting personalities and politics. The HEP devised a media campaign with the slogan “Employ Ability” as part of its mandate to raise awareness of disabled people in the labour market and in celebration of the IYDP. HEP commissioned a set of four posters by renowned paper sculpture artist Jonathan Milne to be incorporated into various events and activities across the province that promoted awareness of disabled people’s needs in the workplace, encouraged the retention of disabled workers, and modeled equitable hiring practices.\(^{73}\) As an ally of the disability rights movement, Milne offered to cut his usual rate in half in support of disability rights and the “promotion of the needs and abilities of disabled people.”\(^{74}\) The final set of posters featured the depiction of a male worker on crutches, a blind female secretary and a dark-skinned female “executive” wheelchair user.\(^ {75}\) The posters were subsequently distributed to HEP’s client list, which included more than four thousand employers across the province, whose reception was reportedly extremely positive.\(^ {76}\) The Personnel Association of Toronto, for example, featured the poster set during its annual conference as a graphic depiction of the principles of the IYDP and the kind of workforce in which employers in Ontario should help to create.\(^ {77}\)

\(^{75}\) Jonathan Milne, Interview with Author, 31 January 2013.
\(^{76}\) AO, RG 7-148, Box B100558, File “Publications Posters,” Letter, Assistant Deputy Minister of Labour to Minister of Labour, 27 April 1981.
\(^{77}\) Ibid
Shortly after the set of posters was released a debate emerged in Toronto regarding one poster which allegedly dealt insensitively with representations of disability and race. The questionable poster featured a dark-skinned female wheelchair user dressed in a suit sitting in front of Toronto City Hall, which Milne stated was intended to depict a female “executive.” Although Milne explicitly sought to situate all his subjects squarely within the context of disability awareness rather than race relations, the poster sparked strong negative reaction from activist groups representing visible minorities who alleged the imagery reflected an insensitive portrait of race given the “degree of blackness of the subject.” The brewing debate erupted into a full-blown controversy, ignited primarily by Belinda Morin, then-Metro Toronto Coordinator for the Disabled and Elderly, who publicly voiced her displeasure with the poster to the media. Morin, who was interviewed by the Toronto Star in an editorial titled “She’s black, she’s in a wheelchair and she’s causing a ruckus at City Hall,” advised that she had written to the HEP office complaining that the posters were “in extremely poor taste.” A copy of Morin’s letter stated, “The message conveyed, particularly by the Employ Ability poster [depicting the female wheelchair user], cannot be taken seriously. It looks more like something from the National Lampoon and does not elicit thoughts of competency in a job.” Milne later recalled that in the ensuing furor he received angry phone calls from black rights activists in Toronto who told him that he “didn’t understand how black people looked.”

Progressive initiatives that promoted the employment of disabled people were thus

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81 Jonathan Milne
reconfigured once they entered the public sphere and were repositioned within a broader discourse involving other disadvantaged groups.

As the controversy unfolded, it became clear that Morin and her supporters in the Toronto Office attempted to distance themselves from the anticipated public relations damage that would ensue from the unfortunate poster. The Ontario Human Rights Commission, led by pioneering senior bureaucrat and politician Dorthea Crittenden, also refused to endorse HEP’s awareness campaign. Crittenden faced a precipitous rise in complaints dealing with discrimination against visible minorities during her tenure and the commission was already under intense public scrutiny at the time regarding its perceived lack of efficacy handling cases and promoting new human rights legislation. In an attempt to shield himself and HEP from political fallout, Minister of Labour Robert Elgie instructed HEP to remove the offending poster from its campaign in order to refocus public attention on the substantive issues of the awareness campaign. The posters, however, were already touring Toronto area plazas as part of Disability Awareness Month in the city when Scarborough Action leader Beryl Potter learned of the debate. Instructed to remove the poster, Potter instead wrote “CENSORED” across the disputed poster and “Not so proud are you, Dr. Elgie?” across an accompanying message from the Minister of Labour in reference to what she perceived as political damage.

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control that undermined the strength of the awareness campaign.\textsuperscript{85} The “Potter incident” and wider controversy that now surrounded the campaign prompted HEP officials to prepare apologetic media statements. The incident, fuelled by their colleagues in the Toronto Office, demonstrated that while the missions of the provincial and municipal special bureaus coincided they did not necessarily share a uniform outlook on the representation of disability issues nor were the actions of each office above mutual reproach in the public sphere.

Within the scope of federal-municipal relations, a collaborative venture during the late 1980s brought the Toronto Office into a closer working relationship with the DPU as part of a joint initiative to improve employment opportunities in the Toronto region for people with disabilities. As the federal Conservatives geared up for Prime Minister Brian Mulroney’s second term election, funding was made available for the development of an innovative initiative to promote the employment of disabled people.\textsuperscript{86} The new Metro Toronto Coordinator of Services for the Disabled and Elderly (following Belinda Morin’s exit to the private sector) encouraged Metro Council to continue its longstanding support of disability issues by partnering with CILT in order to administer an innovative project called Access Connections.\textsuperscript{87} With CILT and the Toronto Office’s technical support and the DPU’s financial oversight, the exciting project involved developing employment initiatives, radio programming called Radio Connections, and a television program called

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid
The Disability Network as a multi-pronged media-based strategy for raising awareness of employment and other issues affecting disabled people.  

From left, John Southern, Susan Forster and Don Peuramaki at the CIUT-FM studio on University of Toronto campus where their weekly radio show “Radio Connection” was first broadcast in January 1988 as part of the Access Connections project. The show shared employment-related news and other current affairs affecting people with disabilities in Ontario and the Toronto region, and included a phone-in segment where disabled people could voice their opinions on various topics.  

Designed to “actively promote the greatly untapped human resources available within the disabled community,” the project was consumer-run, employing people with

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88 Ibid
89 Liam Lacey, “Radio Show is Voice for Disabled,” Globe and Mail E3 (20 February 1988).
disabilities as staff while showcasing the abilities of disabled people on-air. Initially broadcast out of local stations in Toronto, Windsor, Ottawa, and London during its thirty-month pilot, *The Disability Network* received such wide acclaim that the CBC endorsed the expansion of its carriage to a national audience, which it was able to do with commitments for renewed public funding for the program. The success of *Radio Connections* and *The Disability Network*, which ran for another fifteen years, demonstrated the extent to which productive partnerships between government-based advocacy offices played an important role in developing employment opportunities for disabled people and awareness of disability issues in the public sphere. As these offices embarked on collaborative projects and worked out their differences, the relationship between the wider disability community and the state also evolved in response to new mechanisms for communication between disabled people and the government as well as changing political responses to the economic problem of disability.

**ESTABLISHING FORMAL RELATIONS WITH THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY**

In reflection of the developing consensus around disability rights in Canada and abroad, the consumer-led Ontario Advisory Council on the Physically Handicapped (OACPH) was established in 1975 by the second-term Progressive Conservative Premier Bill Davis to fulfill his electoral promise to improve his government’s relations with the disability community. The OACPH provided the disability community in Ontario with

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91 Ibid
an official voice in government that was designed to distill the needs and concerns of over one million disabled Ontarians through a formal advisory body that influenced the policymaking process in the province. The OACPH held regular public hearings across the province on various issues in order to translate these views to government in a way that shaped the development of policies that represented the wider disabled population.\footnote{Ibid} As an advisory council, the OACPH’s role was purely informational, but it provided policymakers with an official mechanism for consulting with disabled constituencies in the province. As an influential yet controversial body, however, the OACPH’s role as a mechanism for influencing the reform of disability-related policies across the province reflected the degree to which an activist agenda fit problematically within the council’s official capacity as a government body and the contested sphere of disability politics.

The establishment of the OACPH also represented an attempt to streamline relations with disability activists through official channels during a period in which disability organizations and disability rights activists engaged with policymakers and sought progressive advances in the realm of disability rights. As the Toronto Star reported, the OACPH “serves as an umbrella organization for all handicapped groups and is the channel through which the disabled of Ontario and the government communicate with each other [emphasis added].”\footnote{Sidney Katz, “Disabled Don’t Want Sympathy,” Toronto Star C5 (18 November 1978).} As a disability-led council with more than fifty percent of its approximately nineteen appointed members and chairperson being people with disabilities, the structure of the council was intended to reflect the major principles of the disability rights movement in spite of its lack of grassroots origins.\footnote{AO, RG 74-30, Box B167563, File “Labour Study (1),” Brief, OACPH, “Background Information,” 1985.} OACPH
members included disability rights leaders across the province such as chairperson Jack Longman of Windsor, Beryl Potter (founder of Scarborough Action), and Lois Harte-Maxwell (director of People United for Self Help) as well as professionals associated with various service agencies and government observers in an attempt to legitimize the council’s mandate as a conduit between government and disabled people. Responsible to government for providing regular input on a range of disability issues, the arms-length OACPH meant it was ultimately responsible to the disabled population of Ontario which it purportedly represented.\(^96\)

In recognition of the economic problem of disability, the OACPH established a special subcommittee that focused on researching employment issues and formulating recommendations to improve the employment of disabled people across the province.\(^97\) As it became clear by December 1978 that the council should work to improve government policies and practices around labour market integration, the council focused on to get an overview of the situation as there existed a number of “organizations involved in looking at the employment needs of the physically handicapped” but little definitive data on actual employment rates.\(^98\) As part of this objective, Chairperson Longman organized a public forum at Toronto city hall as part of a local effort to promote Disability Awareness Week in the city in order to “let people get to know us [OACPH] and what our problems are.”\(^99\) The well-attended forum, which attracted national media attention, found disability activists, local and provincial officials, individual people with disabilities, and others from across the city collaborating in a

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\(^{96}\) Ibid

\(^{97}\) AO, RG 74-30, Box B167563, File “Labour Study (1),” Letter, OACPH to SDP, 28 April 1986.


\(^{99}\) “Disabled Don't Want Sympathy”
forum that led to the formulation of new recommendations to improve the employment of disabled people in the province.\textsuperscript{100}

![Participants in wheelchairs at the public forum organized by the OACPH during Disability Awareness Week. The packed auditorium demonstrated the extent to which Torontonians with disabilities actively participated in the promotion of disability issues and advancement of their rights in the city.\textsuperscript{101} (© Sidney Katz/Getstock.com, 1979. Reproduced with permission).]

As a relatively new organization with a broad mandate, the success and optimism of the Toronto forum was later tempered by the reality expressed by OACPH members


\textsuperscript{101} “Disabled Don’t Want Sympathy,”
who came to “reluctantly appreciate the necessity for the slow pace of change.”\textsuperscript{102} The
council believed that the primary obstacle to economic integration had been a complex
web of obstacles to obtaining employment and resolved that public policies should focus
on encouraging employers to hire disabled people, ensure job opportunities exist, and
motivate disabled people to acquire skills in order to be more competitive.\textsuperscript{103} By 1980,
following five years of consultations with disabled Ontarians, the council determined that
the major obstacle to labour market integration was centered around the process of
obtaining employment because the existing system of employment supports for disabled
people was generally oriented toward protecting workers who became disabled.\textsuperscript{104} It was
concluded that once employed, disabled people “seem to be able to continue satisfactorily
provided that the necessary adaptations to their work facilities are made.”\textsuperscript{105} As a result,
the council sought to develop a closer working relationship with HEP, assisting in the
development of employer resource kits and recommending policies that revolved around
the improvement of training and job placement services for disabled people.

A major test of the four-year-old OACPH emerged suddenly in 1979 when
Progressive Conservative Minister of Labour Dr. Robert Elgie introduced Bill 188 to
create the Handicapped Persons’ Rights Act.\textsuperscript{106} The bill was devised as a response to the
1977 report \textit{Life Together} in which the Ontario Human Rights Commission cited the
province’s “proud record” as a leader in protecting human rights but lamented the extent
to which Ontario had recently lagged behind other provinces in the development of

\textsuperscript{102} AO, RG 7-148, Box B217563, File “Professional Outreach,” Report, OACPH, “3rd Annual Report,” 31
March 1978.

\textsuperscript{103} AO, RG 7-148, Box B217563, File “Professional Outreach,” Report, OACPH, “4th Annual Report,”
September 1979.


\textsuperscript{105} Ibid

\textsuperscript{106} Ontario Legislative Assembly, “An Act to Provide for the Rights of Handicapped Persons,” 31\textsuperscript{st}
session, 3\textsuperscript{rd} session, 1979, [Toronto]: The Assembly, 1979.
human rights legislation. As David Lepofsky explains, the separate legislation was devised as a “parliamentary sleight of hand” in order to avoid amending the Ontario Human Rights Code to include the protection of sexual orientation. Concurrently to the rise of disability rights activism in Ontario, gay rights activists had been lobbying policymakers since the early 1970s for new human rights protections for gays and lesbians at the provincial level but hitherto had met with stiff resistance from the Davis government. In order to avoid new concessions to the gay and lesbian community, Bill 188 was proposed in order to provide the disability community with new rights protections without opening what Davis saw as a legislative filibuster to the advancement of human rights in the province. The bill provided for the protection of disabled people against discrimination and the establishment of an Office for the Handicapped to administer the Act. Despite these promises, the legislation effectively sidestepped the issue of amending the Ontario Human Rights Code to include disability as a protected category, which disability activists in the province had been demanding for years, and rocked the disability community into active opposition.

Critics argued that Elgie’s bill legitimated a “separate-but-equal” approach to disability rights issues and lacked the strength of primacy over all other legislation in the province that would be imparted through inclusion in the Code. An ad hoc alliance of individuals and organizations led by disability activists and supported by service agency officials quickly emerged, determined to defeat Bill 188 and the consideration of separate

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107 Life Together; AO, RG 7-149, Box B363026, File “Publications,” Article, Advocacy Research Center for the Handicapped, ARCH Type 1:1 (January 1981).
legislation for disability rights.\textsuperscript{112} The coalition, called the Ontario Coalition for Human Rights for the Handicapped was led in part by BOOST leader and future HEP employee John Rae as well as Ontario March of Dimes Executive Director Lee Rullman.\textsuperscript{113} The coalition initially navigated internal divisions between activists and agency officials over whether to seek amendments to the legislation to secure immediate gains, but finally settled on a unified position that demanded the withdrawal of the bill and consultation to amend the Code.\textsuperscript{114} The extraordinary alliance not only marked a first in the evolution of disability rights activism in Ontario, but also demonstrated the extent to which the disability community opposed separate human rights legislation.

Despite the unprecedented consensus between disability rights activists and service agencies regarding the necessary withdrawal of separate legislation, the OACPH backed the government’s position and endorsed the legislation as a welcome advancement of disability rights in the province.\textsuperscript{115} Disability activists responded to the endorsement in disbelief, arguing that the OACPH was either aloof from the significance of Bill 188 and the controversy that surrounded the introduction of separate legislation, or that the council issued its decision in rejection of the new coalition.\textsuperscript{116} Premier Bill Davis distanced himself from the political snare by declaring that he had in fact consulted with the OACPH and secured its approval prior to MPP Elgie’s introduction of the bill, further undermining the council’s position among disability activists as the representative voice

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{112} Lepofsky, “The Long and Arduous Road,” 135-136.
\textsuperscript{114} “History of Human Rights Protection for Persons with Disabilities in Ontario”
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid
\end{footnotes}
of the disability community to policymakers.\textsuperscript{117} Faced with overwhelming opposition coordinated by an unprecedented alliance of disability activists and service agencies and unable to rely on the guidance provided by the OACPH in the matter, MPP Elgie withdrew Bill 188 and Premier Davis entered into consultations directly with the Coalition to amend the Ontario Human Rights Code. The move, which circumvented the OACPH, represented a major victory for disability activists in the province and the first time disability rights activists and service agencies had come together to successfully defend a shared position on disability rights legislation.\textsuperscript{118}

The conflict prompted disability activists within the Coalition to question the legitimacy of the OACPH as a representative communicative vehicle since its views on fundamental questions of disability rights differed so markedly from the broader consensus in the disability community. The Ontario March of Dimes (OMOD) responded to the debate by issuing a “report card” on the OACPH exposing general dissatisfaction with the council.\textsuperscript{119} Disability activists complained that while the council had taken strong advocacy positions on a variety of topics like assistive devices and amendments to the provincial building code, its members did “not have a grasp of basic issues or knowledge of relevant programs.”\textsuperscript{120} The OMOD argued that council’s structure was ultimately problematic because members were appointed and thus not exactly accountable to the disabled constituency which they purported to represent. Individuals who submitted briefs to the OACPH also reported that they encountered an adversarial atmosphere and were made to feel unwelcome at council meetings, reflecting a general

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid
\textsuperscript{118} “History of Human Rights Protection for Persons with Disabilities in Ontario,”
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid
lack of dialogue at public forums held across the province as part of the council’s mandate. The critique noted that while the seminal *Obstacles* report had been used as a basis for establishing federal legislation and resulted in extensive consultations with disability activists at the federal level, no similar process had taken place at the provincial level as evidenced by the OACPH’s track record in “not adequately serving disabled Ontarians.”

Publicly undermined by the controversy, the OACPH needed to rebuild its stature within the disability community, which it did by releasing a conciliatory memo acknowledging that the success of the Coalition and PUSH Ontario helped the council learn how to operate more effectively. Later, the council released a paper as part of its first scheduled sunset review in which it defended its continuation as an advisory council given that the needs of disabled people in the province had not changed substantially since the Council was first established and that its innovative consumer-led structure had made it a “successful public-private partnership.” The council minimized its conflict with disability activists over Bill 188, dismissing the controversy as the result of an erroneous misunderstanding on the part of disability activists regarding the council's mandate as an advisory body and not an “overall problem solving focal point with multifaceted responsibilities.” Granted an additional term, the Council was reduced in size and renamed the Ontario Advisory Council for Disabled Persons (OACDP), but it continued to experience strained relations with the wider disability community due to

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121 Ibid
124 Ibid
conflicting views about its mandate. In its second term, the OACDP continued its rounds of consultations and circulated its views in the Ontario March of Dimes newsletter Advocate, regularly promoting the enactment of employment equity and universal disability insurance for all disabled workers, and it held a conference of local advisory councils from across the province to develop a coordinated approach around employment issues. Yet, the Council argued that “voluntary sector groups do not always recognize the fine distinction between advocacy and lobbying” and believed that the Council’s mandate did not necessarily reflect a position of advocacy.

‘COMMON SENSE’ AND THE WITHDRAWAL FROM DISABILITY ACTIVISM

The “activist state” that had developed during the 1970s and 1980s eroded during the 1990s as the political environment that was conducive to the advancement of disability rights and promoted an energetic dialogue on the economic problem of disability quickly declined. Disability-related ministerial posts were revised or disappeared while specialized bureaus and advisory councils were dramatically scaled back or abolished completely. Severe cutbacks drastically altered many areas of the state that supported various disability initiatives thus comprising the relationship between government and the wider disability community. The dissolution of structured relations between the state and disability community through specialized bureaus and advisory

councils exposed a harsher political paradigm of engagement with disability issues during this period. A pattern of steadily retreating resources for disability programs was also partly concealed by pervasive state restructuring that transformed the government’s approach to disability issues.

In a massive round of restructuring at the federal level, the DPU, which had coordinated initiatives to improve the labour market participation of disabled people since the late 1970s, was effectively abolished in 1993 when it was subsumed within a new “super-department” called Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC). Progressive Conservative Prime Minister Kim Campbell wrote to the Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD; formerly COPOH before changing its name in 1994) about the drastic cutbacks and mergers. Campbell explained, “the major restructuring of government that I announced on June 25 [1993] reduced the number of departments from 32 to 23 and … are designed to ensure disability issues are considered within the wider context of human resource development, and in particular are linked strategically to programs such as income security and employment services.”

The HRDC was now responsible for an extensive range of labour issues in addition to the complex handling of employment initiatives affecting disabled persons. The ministerial conduit between the DPU and federal government was also eliminated and responsibilities transferred to the respective HRDC Minister with restricted capacity to effectively respond to the unemployment of disabled people.

These changes reflected the diminished prioritization of resources at the federal level devoted to the employment of disabled people as successive Progressive Conservative and Liberal governments nurtured the development of a new political

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economy in Canada. A product of austerity measures to reduce the size of government in order to deal with an escalating federal deficit, the inclusion of disability alongside a broader human resources mandate meant that specialized initiatives and close consultation with the disability community which had taken place since the late 1970s was increasingly unlikely. While the CCD was initially supportive of the inclusion of the disability portfolio within the new HRDC, which promised to “include both welfare and employment focuses,” it soon observed that disability issues appeared “to have become lost” within the department.129 Letters to Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chretien sent by the CCD in 1996 and 1997 complained about the “dramatic off-loading of responsibility to other levels of government and the reduction of federal standards and principles” and protested that “The CCD should be celebrating its 20 years of achievement, but instead we are witnessing the systematic dismantling of the successes of the past twenty years.”130

A similar process took place during the mid-1990s in Ontario when the newly installed Progressive Conservative government under Premier Mike Harris initiated an infamous campaign of budgetary cutbacks and departmental closures that rocked the public sector. Dubbed a “Common Sense Revolution” by the Tories, the extensive cutbacks involved rolling back most existing disability programming and employment initiatives introduced since the mid-1980s by the previous NDP and Liberal provincial

governments.\textsuperscript{131} Some disability activists and commentators anticipated that Harris, whose son lived with cerebral palsy, would demonstrate a particular sensitivity to disability issues.\textsuperscript{132} A vocal opponent of employment equity legislation, Harris instead believed that the existing approach to the chronic unemployment of disabled people replaced “merit and fairness in the workplace” with “arbitrary government intervention.”\textsuperscript{133} The NDP repeatedly attempted since the 1970s to bring affirmative action legislation to Ontario. In fact, prior to taking office on October 1\textsuperscript{st}, 1990, NDP Leader Bob Rae proposed to the Progressive Conservative government Bill 172, “An act to provide for employment equity for women, people with disabilities, native people and members of visible minorities,” in response to the OACDP’s recent recommendation for employment equity legislation in the province.\textsuperscript{134} However, it was not until 1993 that such legislation was finally passed by the provincial NDP government, encouraging employers to voluntarily eliminate practices, policies and job requirements that constituted barriers to disadvantaged groups.\textsuperscript{135} The Ontario Employment Equity Act (EEA) also required employers to institute comprehensive plans to revise recruitment, job qualifications, hiring, training, transfer and promotion, hours of work, compensation, workplace design and access, organization of work, technology, seniority, childcare,

\textsuperscript{131} Chouinard and Crooks, “Negotiating Neoliberal Environments,” 176; Storey, “Social Assistance or a Worker’s Right,” 87; Lepofsky, “The Long, Arduous Road to a Barrier-Free Ontario for People with Disabilities,” 150.
\textsuperscript{134} Ontario Legislative Assembly, “An Act to Provide for Employment Equity for Women, People with Disabilities, Native People and Members of Visible Minorities,” 34\textsuperscript{th} Legislature, 2\textsuperscript{nd} session, [Toronto]: The Assembly, 1990.; OACDP, \textit{Workable: Fulfilling the Potential of People with Disabilities}, Toronto: Queen’s Printer, 1990.
Premier Rae created the Employment Equity Commission (EEC) which was responsible for administering the EEA and lay fines against non-compliant employers who failed to adhere to mandatory reporting stipulations. In his role as Leader of the Opposition, Harris consistently argued that employment equity legislation was inherently discriminatory and divisive in that it focused too heavily on supporting minority groups, echoing sentiment in the business community and parts of the labour movement that labelled such measures “reverse discrimination.” The Tories argued that such legislation was unnecessary when support of “good business practices” prevailed, which the government could achieve through non-punitive measures outside a free market setting. Employment equity was framed as an unfair obstruction to employers who sought to operate freely in the hiring process and threatened to create onerous financial burdens on small businesses or scare off potential investment revenue in the province. As a result, Harris repealed the EEA and abolished the EEC in his first act as premier in 1995, citing his support of free-market economic ideologies in opposition the imposition of supposed hiring quotas in Ontario. Harris believed that employment equity threatened the Tories’ larger scheme to stimulate economic development by shrinking the size of government and choreographing the state’s progressive retooling of its involvement in the economic sphere.

Harris interpreted his election, which won the Progressive Conservatives a large majority due to the extreme unpopularity of the NDP government and lacklustre Liberal
platform, as an enthusiastic endorsement of his economic neo-liberal ideologies. The NDP government had introduced a “social contract” in 1993 that involved reigning in an escalating annual budgetary deficit through extensive program cuts, tax increases, and administrative restructuring, but such measures alienated the NDP from their traditional base of support. Elected on a platform to reduce the size and scope of government as part of an effort to reduce the runaway provincial deficit, Harris’ plans in fact cut much deeper into existing programming affecting people with disabilities than the NDP “social contract.” Harris proposed an “Equal Opportunity Plan” (EOP) as part of an attempt to “restore the merit principle to Ontario’s workplaces” and move away from the NDP’s controlled reduction in spending which did not involve a dramatic restructuring of government. Despite PC Minister of Labour Robert Elgie’s warning when he introduced Bill 188 in the early 1980s that “equal treatment won’t necessarily guarantee equal opportunity,” Tory policy under Harris shifted markedly toward unfettered deregulation of the economy which could only offer “equal treatment” to disabled people and other disadvantaged minorities in the labour market.

Part of Harris’ wide electoral success came from the province’s substantial disability community whom he promised would enjoy new measures to improve their social and economic integration. In particular, Harris committed to introducing an Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA) that would establish timelines for the imposition

144 “Untapped Resource”
of accessibility standards in public spaces and workplaces. Harris’ EOP involved “redirecting resources to training programs” to emphasize the importance of self-reliance in disabled people’s engagement with the labour market. An important proviso which accompanied the EOP and the introduction of an ODA limited the introduction of new disability programming within the confines of “the economic goalposts of the Common Sense Revolution.” As disability activist David Lepofsky observed, the EOP effectively involved the repackaging of existing programs and other employment programs for disabled people and presenting them as new initiatives while dramatically scaling back other programming affecting disabled people. The acclaimed Innovations Fund, for example, which supported “pilot initiatives to demonstrate new and non-traditional approaches to employment” and funded many organizations providing employment to disabled people was determined to be outside the “economic goalposts” of the Common Sense Revolution, and was promptly eliminated during an initial round of cuts to social programming.

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147 Lepofsky, “The Long, Arduous Road to a Barrier-Free Ontario for People with Disabilities,” 149.; “Promise Letter to the ODA Committee.”
148 “The Long, Arduous Road to a Barrier-Free Ontario for People with Disabilities”
Spectators in at the Ontario Legislature in May 1996, watching MPPs debate the future of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act—a key electoral promise made by Progressive Conservative leader Mike Harris in 1995 shortly before being elected Premier. Wheelchair users were forced to watch the debate on a television screen outside the visitor’s gallery which only had room for four wheelchairs. Although the non-binding resolution to move forward with the legislation passed 56-0, disability rights activists and their allies waited until the year 2001 when Harris finally relented and enacted the ODA after many amendments.150 (© Andrew Stawick/Getstock.com, 1996. Reproduced with permission.)

The new approach to disability issues harkened by the Harris government also represented a major setback to the existing mode of engagement with the disability community. The Ontario Advisory Council for Disability Issues (OACDI; formerly the OACDP) and the Centre for Disability and Work (CDW; formerly the HEP) were both abolished, leaving an unrecognizable residual framework in which disability issues could

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be advanced within the provincial government.\textsuperscript{151} Without the OACDI as the official vehicle in which to communicate their concerns to policymakers, the decision to eliminate the council literally set back twenty years of disability advocacy. While the CDW was an unlikely target for austerity measures since its mandate historically revolved around increasing employment rates for disabled people in order to move out from chronic dependence on welfare rolls, the office’s disappearance severely undermined the method in which the promotion of labour market integration had previously occurred within the provincial government. Prior to its elimination, CDW regularly delivered training seminars to private sector employers and maintained a strong relationship with business community, streamlining its activities to focus on core programming in employer training, student education initiatives, and accommodation in employment.\textsuperscript{152} When the announcement finally came that the unit was to close, CDW staff worried that “whether intentionally or not, the move to dismember the unit represented yet another step over the past years in this government’s dismemberment of its infrastructure to deal with disability policy issues.”\textsuperscript{153} The loss of CDW following on heels of loss of OACDI meant a dwindling policy infrastructure “diminished beyond recognition” to deal with disability issues.\textsuperscript{154}

The provincial cuts manifested as social costs at the local level where municipal authorities were forced to deal with the fallout of the Common Sense Revolution. In a paper titled “The Disabled and the Common Sense Revolution,” the Daily Bread Food

\textsuperscript{152} AO, RG 74-30, Box B419190, File “OPS Advisory Group,” Letter, Centre for Disability and Work to David Lepofsky, 7 December 1994.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid
Bank in Toronto, which had previously reported that disabled people constituted at least one quarter of its client base, pointed to the sudden cutbacks as responsible for a sudden demand in their services by disabled people. The organization profiled over twenty clients with disabilities in Toronto whose reliance on the Daily Bread became necessary following cutbacks to social assistance and the introduction of a stricter definition of disability in welfare eligibility rules to limit access to welfare benefits. In an interview with The Disability Network following several media interviews about the reorganization of the provincial government, David Crombie, former Toronto mayor and Minister Responsible for Disabled Persons, noted that the provincial cuts effectively downloaded provincial responsibilities to municipalities. As chair of a special committee in the expanded Ministry of Citizenship, Culture, and Recreation designed to guide transitioning provincial-municipal relations due to the provincial cuts, Crombie argued that responsibilities for disability issues were more properly kept at the provincial level in the context of austerity where the impact on disabled people could be more consistent.

While many groups were incensed by the cuts to social programming, the disability activist community in Ontario was relatively silent bystanders (with the exception of the ODA Committee) during that preceded the storm of government restructuring. The Daily Bread report attempted to represent the concerns of the disability

156 Ibid
community in the Toronto region given that immediately prior to the election of the Harris government, the landscape of disability activism in the province underwent a major transformation. In the midst of the provincial electoral campaign in 1994, People United for Self Help Ontario (PUSH Ontario), the provincial affiliate of the CCD, suddenly disbanded, leaving a gap in the representation of disability rights lobbyists at the provincial level. As the *Toronto Star* observed, “PUSH’s downfall comes at a bad time for the disabled. With a provincial election looming, the disabled will be without a unified advocacy group to ask tough questions.”159 An investigation into the organization’s downfall by the *Toronto Star* revealed a rapidly ballooning $137,000 deficit despite having received over one-million-dollars in public funding over the preceding four years and $69,000 in emergency financing.160 Following the election of the NDP government in 1990-1991, public sector grants to PUSH Ontario doubled from $216,000 to $423,675 as staff increased nearly fourfold and moved to a more expensive office location at University Avenue and Dundas Street in downtown Toronto.161 Following reports about the quality of financial reporting in 1993, an audit conducted by the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture which concluded that the financial concerns were not substantiated. In contrast, another government audit in 1994 found PUSH Ontario in a state of complete financial disorganization, with no assurances of accuracy or completeness of records, and excessive administration costs.162 A split vote by the organization’s Board of Directors on the dismissal of the Executive Director, who was

160 “Financial Fiasco Sinks Group Uniting 1.6 Million Disabled”
161 “Financial Fiasco Sinks Group Uniting 1.6 Million Disabled”
blamed for the situation, led to the resignations of half the board members and effective dissolution of the organization. The failure of PUSH Ontario represented a major embarrassment for the NDP and left the disabled community without an effective provincial lobby group during the electoral campaign. *Ability Network* magazine, a popular source of news for people with disabilities in the province, reprinted the *Toronto Star* investigation, noting that “there are obviously some valuable lessons to be learned.”

In a frantic attempt to substitute the provincial lobby role, PUSH Northwest (which was registered as a separate charitable organization than PUSH Ontario) made a submission to Harris one day before he was formally installed. The submission, titled “Ontarians with Disabilities: Common Sense Solutions,” made strategic use of Progressive Conservative rhetoric by emphasizing that unemployed disabled Ontarians represented a “vast waste of professional human resources at great cost to the system.”

In line with self-help consumer principles, the submission stressed the need to transfer decision-making and control of services directly to disabled people themselves in order to “reduce waste” and improve efficient service delivery. In a follow up letter to Premier Harris, PUSH Northwest noted, “Many of our ideas are parallel to the PC policy of eliminating duplication and unnecessary spending,” and expressed its wish to initiate dialogue as representatives of disability rights activists and of the larger disability community in Ontario. Despite this impassioned last-minute plea, but without any

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163 “When the Shove Came to PUSH,” *Abilities* 3:3 (Spring 1995).
165 Ibid
166 AO, RG 74-30, Box B419190, File “PUSH,” Letter, PUSH Northwest to Premier Michael Harris, 8 December 1995.
substantive rapport with the new government, plans that had already been made to
drastically restructure the terms of the relationship between the state and disability
community soon played out as the death of the activist state loomed large on the horizon.

CONCLUSION

The 1975 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons and
accompanying announcement that 1981 would be the IYDP sparked a flurry of activity in
Canada as various levels of government responded by installing a new framework that
would help facilitate the social and economic integration of people with disabilities. New
partnerships with disability activists were forged as special offices and advisory
committees were established in municipal, provincial, and federal governments to
coordinate activities and initiatives to encourage “full participation” in society and the
economy. As the IYDP came and went, the offices and committees remained, expanding
the political influence of disability activists who directed their energies toward achieving
change from within the state as public servants and committee members. The inherent
tension in pairing social activism with public service was initially obscured by the fact
that during the late 1970s and early 1980s each level of government assumed a proactive
stance on disability issues. But as the state progressively retreated from direct
interventions in the economy during the 1980s and 1990s under political parties of all
stripes, but particularly under the ideologically-driven economic neoliberalism of the
Progressive Conservative Mulroney and Harris governments, the capacity for improving
labour market integration for disabled people waned and the situation for the “last hired,
first fired” became increasingly precarious. By the mid-1990s, a revolution in “common
“sense” took place in Ontario that effectively terminated the existing relationship between
the state and disability activism as special offices were closed and committees were
disbanded. The attendant loss of the disability community’s voice in government
jeopardized the future of disability activism and marked a shift toward a new politics of
disability.

A national trade union has its own self-interest in trying to overcome the employment discrimination encountered by disabled persons. Many of our members now have a disability of one type or another; all of them face the possibility of becoming disabled. It is our responsibility to fight for the social and economic well-being of all our members.¹

Disability rights are a mainstream issue for our union in much the same way as contracting out or workplace safety and health issues … Our working group is active with other labour groups … and with groups outside of our union because our group is advancing the rights of disabled workers and indeed all members of society.²

Separated by over twenty-five years of periodic ad hoc coalitions with disability rights activists, the above statements reflect an evolving politics of disability in the labour movement during the late twentieth century that situated employment integration at the center of full participation in society. Motivated in large part by a desire to maintain their relevance as key players in the labour market while remaining committed to their membership, Canadian labour leaders tentatively reached out to disability rights activists during the mid-1970s as disability rights organizations, service organizations, employers and the state initiated a new collaborative relationship. Unions were naturally wary of how disability rights might disrupt the bargaining process and upset essential provisions within collective agreements, leading union leaders to publicly support disability rights while extending only half-hearted support of a social movement which sought to

dismantle medical authority over disabled bodies. The defence of seniority provisions through collective bargaining remained a fundamental aspect of union work, reflecting the fact that union leaders focused primarily on advancing the interests of their members, most of whom were able-bodied. The shift toward social unionism during this period, however, created new opportunities for the labour movement to engage disability rights activism and for disability activists in unions to organize themselves in pursuit of their own goals. In an attempt to synthesize traditional union priorities with the rejuvenating potential of social unionism, the Canadian labour movement attempted to harness countervailing sources of activism while dealing with its own dilemmas around disability issues. Core union practices such as collective bargaining and advocacy on behalf of injured workers reinforced the traditional medical pathology of disability and diminished the enthusiasm of unions’ response to disability rights. The medical complex within which employers and insurance providers operated to provide accommodations and benefits to injured workers meant labour leaders were compelled to take a cautious approach to disability issues in order to avoid upsetting these arrangements.

The following chapter examines the Canadian labour movement’s responses to disability activism from the mid-1970s to early 2000s and the ideological dilemmas this engagement presented. Often hesitant and occasionally counterproductive, labour leaders and individual unions took a progressive public stance in the rhetorical celebration of disability rights activism while repeatedly falling short of concerted action. A thematic, as opposed to chronological, analysis follows the labour movement’s involvement with disability rights activism during this period. The chapter begins with the influence of public sector unions in the promotion of disability rights, emergent conflicts between
disability rights and collective bargaining, the role of injured worker activism, and examples of strategic partnerships between disability and labour activists.

DEVELOPING A PROGRESSIVE DISCOURSE ON DISABILITY RIGHTS

The Canadian labour movement underwent a remarkable transformation in the postwar period. Public sector unions secured progressive wage increases for members who staffed expanding government bureaucracies during the 1960s, soon outnumbering the traditional base of union membership in “blue collar” work.\(^3\) Clerical workers, professionals and para-professionals, hospital workers, social workers, teachers, and others in the growing public sector flocked to unions as relations with management became increasingly detached and hostile. Federal and provincial legislation passed in the mid-1960s and 1970s stimulated the unionization of the public sector by granting the right to certification, collective bargaining, and to strike.\(^4\) Union growth in the public sector coincided with the declining strength of private sector unions as employment rates fell in core unionized sectors such as manufacturing and employers engaged in a vigorous anti-union offensive.\(^5\) By 1975, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) was the largest union in Canada followed by the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) and the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE).\(^6\)

Public sector unions breathed new life into the Canadian labour movement by breaking down longstanding domination by American unions and imparting a reinvigorated sense of militancy gained by a new position of strength and national

\(^3\) Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement* (Toronto: Lorimer & Co., 1996), 95.
\(^4\) Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement*, 96.
leadership. By the 1970s and 1980s, women represented roughly half the membership of
public sector unions and steadily filled key leadership positions. Shifting gender and
racial dynamics in unions dramatically altered the labour movement. CUPE, for example,
elected the first female national union president in 1975, established a National Women’s
Task Force in 1981, held a National Women’s Conference in 1984, and created the
‘Rainbow Committee’ in 1988 to coordinate efforts to promote employment equity.7
Historian Craig Heron observes, “Women played a crucial role in sensitizing their union
leaders to the fact that not all members were white, English-speaking, heterosexual
men.”8 The democratic structure of unions meant that women used their numerical
strength to initiate an energetic and decisive dialogue on equality. A new generation of
labour activists nurtured the idea that the labour movement should prioritize a
reconnection with its roots in social justice at a time when unions were grappling with the
emerging threat of neoliberal politics.

The growth of unionized public sector work presented new opportunities for
disabled persons in terms of available work, type of workplace, and nature of employer.
Exclusion and liminality with respect to the economic dimension of citizenship has been
a consistent feature in the history of disability rights as activists emphasized the need to
integrate disabled persons into the workforce.9 Many persons with disabilities were
considered members of a “surplus population” whose difficulty selling their labour for
wages at once rendered them as liminal figures in the competitive labour market and

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8 Heron, The Canadian Labour Movement, 147.
9 Driedger, The Last Civil Rights Movement; Paul Longmore and Lauri Umansky, “Disability History:
From the Margins to the Mainstream,” in The New Disability History: American Perspectives, ed. Paul
Longmore and Lauri Umansky (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Lord, Impact
made them dependent on the “productive” able-bodied population.\textsuperscript{10} The expansion of
government bureaucracies, schools, hospitals, social services and affiliated work created
an extraordinary demand for workers in a variety of workplaces. On one hand, most of
this work was presumably out of reach for disabled persons because public sector
workplaces were just as likely to be physically inaccessible and unaccommodating to
people with cognitive or developmental disabilities. Alternatively, public sector
employers were often leaders in developing employment equity and accommodation
policies as they were held to a higher standard than the private sector in terms of the
visibility and political pressure affecting public sector employment. Metropolitan
Toronto, for example, was one of the first “equal employment opportunity employers” in
Canada to declare its support in 1980 for the principles of employment equity.\textsuperscript{11} In a
study of disability policy development in the Canadian labour movement David Rayside
and Fraser Valentine found, “Union federations and public sector unions are more likely
than others to respond favourably. White-collar unions are generally more advanced than
blue-collar; female-dominated unions more than male-dominated.”\textsuperscript{12} The public sector,
then, provided a climate that was especially ripe for the development of progressive
responses to disability activism.

Disability was stigmatized in the labour market given that many factors often
stacked up against other sources of social prejudice surrounding disabled people, such as
hiring practices that were shaped by an employer’s calculation of a worker’s potential

\textsuperscript{10} Charlton, \textit{Nothing About Us Without Us}, 149.
the 90s,” June 1989
\textsuperscript{12} David Rayside and Fraser Valentine, “Broadening the Labour Movement’s Disability Agenda,” in
\textit{Equity, Diversity, and Canadian Labour}, ed. Gerald Hunt and David Rayside (Toronto: University of
Toronto Press, 2007), 178.
profitability minus costs of training and compensation.\textsuperscript{13} The social construction and categorization of people with disabilities incorporated multiple interpretations of disability, including those of employers and unions that informed interactions with the economy and broader labour market. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson observes, “The problem of how to formulate disability as a social category arises from a conflict between the need to preserve a social hierarchy linked to individual economic condition and the need to recognize the freedom from divine intervention that makes individual achievement tenable.”\textsuperscript{14} Disability highlighted tension surrounding formulations of the “working body” and an uncompromising ethic of individualism that underpinned industrial and post-industrial capitalism.\textsuperscript{15} Although labour market status was fundamental to the process of self-definition in capitalist societies, bodily or mental differences and limitations prevented many disabled people from becoming employed. Disturbingly, these barriers also reinforced the belief that disability and economic marginality were natural correlates.\textsuperscript{16}

By the early 1980s the discourse of equality evolved toward the notion of “equity” with its more comprehensive focus on securing equal opportunity for women, visible minorities, Aboriginals, and persons with disabilities. The 1984 report of the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment (also known as the Abella commission) coined the term “employment equity” to move away from the concept of job quotas that


\textsuperscript{14} Garland-Thompson, \textit{Extraordinary Bodies} 47.


\textsuperscript{16} See Chapter Eight for discussion of the relationship between labour market status and the construction of identity for people with disabilities.
was associated with the existing term “affirmative action.” Employment equity was concerned with addressing and eliminating workforce barriers while allowing for special measures that would accommodate differences between target groups and the normative working population. An ostensibly pragmatic approach to social justice issues in the labour movement, however, legitimated an emphasis on improving the lot of unionized women. The discourse of equity that developed in the labour movement strategically prioritized women’s equality over other target groups. Ruth O’Brien explains, “Unlike women and people of color, persons with disabilities did not have equal standing with the rest of society. Persons with disabilities had to demonstrate that they could work before any demands could be imposed on employers.”

Unionists also felt compelled to focus on the most attainable and least divisive goals in a period of concerted attacks on unionized jobs. A CUPE education manual from 1976 explained to readers, “To attack all problems at once may result in none being solved. Furthermore the large number of women in CUPE suffering from discrimination assures us that concentrating our energies on them – at least for the time being – will bear the most fruit.”

Although women’s issues initially took the lead in promoting union policies on equality issues, people with disabilities contributed to the development of a progressive discourse on equity as union leaders became increasingly responsive to concerns and issues affecting groups that were disadvantaged in the labour movement. As the national voice of the labour movement, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) resolved in a special policy statement to commemorate the IYDP and beginning of the UN Decade of Disabled Persons (DRDP) by encouraging its affiliates to demonstrate commitment to

17 O’Brien, “From a Doctor’s to a Judge’s Gaze,” 339.
social justice and disability rights in recognition of the struggles of injured and disabled workers.\textsuperscript{19} In their policy statement, the CLC prioritized income security for all disabled union members, creation of fair and appropriate jobs, development of guidelines to enable members and affiliates to work with the disability community and their organizations, and the pursuit of other activities that would stimulate greater opportunities for people with disabilities in the labour market.\textsuperscript{20} Disability and labour activist Patty Holmes observed in 1981 that the CLC intended to codify the labour movement’s longstanding commitment to actively support disabled people beyond its own rank-and-file.\textsuperscript{21} Holmes warned, however, that while unions can exert their influence through collective bargaining, the implementation of CLC policy required the full participation and cooperation of all activists.

Meanwhile, the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) received a grant from the Ontario Ministry of Labour (MOL) to produce and distribute promotional literature to increase the visibility of people with physical disabilities and pressure employers to make their workplaces accessible.\textsuperscript{22} In line with CLC policy regarding disability rights and the OFL’s own policy statement to guide unions in Ontario, the OFL used its network of labour organizations in the province as a conduit to initiate discussion of disability rights within the context of labour market integration. The OFL used part of its grant to produce pamphlets that were distributed at labour conventions and other events. The cover page of one pamphlet, which read “The Disabled are Able” and subsequent slogan “Retain.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid
Retrain. Re-Employ,” featured a picture of a diverse group of people in suits, uniforms, construction gear—some with obvious impairments, most without—moving together in one direction.23 The pamphlet graphically conveyed a sense of solidarity around the subject of ability/disability and connected with the labour movement’s prioritized objectives; namely, “To retain those who because of physical or other barriers would have to terminate their employment and to offer opportunity for employment and advancement to those who so far have been excluded from the workplace.”24

By the end of the DRDP in 1992 CUPE concluded, “As the decade started out [...] there was a rise in expectations – that there would be an increasing awareness about disabilities, leading to meaningful change, especially in the area of employment. This has not been the case, and the persistent realities in the lives of disabled persons have given way to new levels of bitterness and frustration.” A 1998 background paper for the CLC also concluded, “The question of income security for persons with disabilities, regardless of their origin, has been waning and waxing in Canada for at least two decades. [...] While CLC interest in this issue has been consistent over time, it has also been a relatively low priority.”25 Also in conjunction with the end of the DRDP, disability activist Yvonne Peters submitted a report commissioned by CUPE concluding that there were indeed union members with disabilities, that some locals were devising strategies to address the needs of these members, but that most locals needed more resources and

21 Ibid
24 Ibid
information on strategies and methods for protecting the rights of members with disabilities.\textsuperscript{26}

The political discourse of disability rights directly influenced the heavily unionized public sector where it combined with existing pressure from women and visible minorities in both public and private sector unions to prioritize employment equity. Social activists and equity-seeking groups pushed against the traditional organizational culture of unions in order to create space for disadvantaged groups. Unions, however, perceived social movement activism as peripheral to their primary work, such as collective bargaining, which stunted the development of stable connections with disability rights organizations. The politics of business unionism thus limited the extent to which unions were willing to engage in proactive measures on disability rights issues.

CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND THE POLITICS OF COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

The introduction of constitutional changes during the early 1980s that prohibited discrimination on the basis of disability coincided with an upsurge of social movement activism in the disability community, which attracted the attention of unionists across Canada. The \textit{Charter of Rights and Freedoms} (Charter) was one of the key vehicles that supported legal protection of disabled people from discrimination, but it also presented a major obstacle for the incorporation of disability activism in the Canadian labour movement.\textsuperscript{27} Section fifteen of the Charter included the provision of equality rights that stipulated, “Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{27} Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Section 2, Part I of the Constitution Act, 1982. Section 15 of the Charter provided for the protection from discrimination of people with a mental or physical disability.
\end{itemize}
equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.”\(^{28}\) Many unionists believed that the equality provisions of the Charter represented an attack on the collective rights of labour unions and a move to undermine the foundation of the Canadian labour relations system. Justice Rosalie Abella, architect of federal employment equity legislation, noted that the Charter contributed to the tension between individual and collective rights. Abella observed, “We imposed unelected, unaccountable jurists to decide whether rights and freedoms no one understood, but everyone passionately believed in, were being violated.”\(^{29}\) Unionists worried that individuals and other equity-seeking social groups might use the Charter’s protection of individuals as a tool to advance social change at the expense of collective enterprises, such as unions, and mire them in catastrophically expensive legal proceedings.\(^{30}\)

Unionists argued that the Charter advanced a particularly individualistic notion of rights that was incompatible with the collective basis that unions relied upon to represent workers. The case of *Lavigne v OPSEU*, for example, demonstrated the worst fears of many unionists when Francis Lavigne, a schoolteacher and member of the Ontario Public Service Employees’ Union (OPSEU), reasoned that when the union used part of his dues to finance political campaigns for which he did not necessarily agree that his individual right to freedom of association under the Charter was effectively curtailed.\(^{31}\) The case essentially pitted the lynchpin of the postwar labour relations system—union security

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\(^{28}\) *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, Section 15(1).


through the collection of dues—against the *Charter*. Although the case eventually failed at the Supreme Court of Canada, it aroused serious anxiety among labour leaders about how legislation representing the cause of equity and human rights might be used against unions. The OFL reflected upon these general concerns, “The *Charter*, then, could turn out to be a two-edged sword. The leading edge may well carve out decisions that end discrimination against disadvantaged groups of people, or complete the economic and political freedoms of public sector workers now denied both the right to strike and political activity as citizens. The trailing edge of the sword, however, when wielded by reactionary minorities would cut down the whole framework of modern industrial society within which trade unions have helped to build a more humane environment.”

Unionists argued that the *Charter* should provide a “proper balance between collective and individual rights” rather than weighing heavily on individual rights and undermining the basis of collective action in a democratic society. Disability rights commitments in union policy statements therefore raised an underlying concern about how those rights might be exercised to the detriment of the labour movement.

Widespread uncertainty existed among unionists regarding the impact on seniority provisions in collective agreements by employment equity legislation and the disability rights movement. Despite the strategic incorporation of social justice issues into a larger plan of action, many unions eschewed implementing concrete measures to increase workforce participation rates of disabled people. Many unionists felt that the duty to accommodate conflicted with seniority rights and that *Charter* equality protections

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Cases such as the closure of the Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital (LPH) in 1979, for example, demonstrated how unions chose to protect seniority ahead of larger social issues affecting people with disabilities. The closure of LPH positioned disability activists in Toronto that promoted deinstitutionalization against unionists who were concerned about the loss of unionized jobs that would result from the closure of residential hospitals. In 1978 the Canadian Council on Hospital Accreditation (CCHA) described LPH, situated on the shores of Lake Ontario in southern Etobicoke, Ontario, as an “excellent hospital” and provided a rare three-year extension on its accreditation.\footnote{Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (hereafter CAMH) Archives, Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital Fonds, File 2-12, Paper, Walther Melamet-Vetter, “The Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital: A World in its Own, Another Cooocoos Nest in New Toronto,” 1989.}

The catchment area for LPH was the largest in the province at the end of the 1970s, handling approximately 230 admissions per month from individuals, families, hospitals, and police in the City of Toronto, Etobicoke, Scarborough, North York, and surrounding Greater Toronto Area.\footnote{CAMH Archives, Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital Fonds, File 2-17, Brief, Ministry of Health, 17 February 1979.} In the case against closure, LPH was described as a “truly community hospital” that had developed extensive linkages with local service networks and was responsible for handling the admissions of community-based programming that had developed through their association with the hospital.\footnote{CAMH Archives, Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital Fonds, File 2-12, Paper, Ontario Public Service Employees Union, “The Closing of Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital: The Case for Reconsideration,” 1979.} Satellite programs such as...
DARE (Daycare, Assessment, Rehabilitative Education) provided vocational skills training and counselling to 200 in-patients, day out-patients, and ex-patients in conjunction with the Workers’ Compensation Board, CNIB, Canadian Paraplegic Association, Goodwill Industries, and other community organizations.39

As a result of his commitment to expand the public health system during the 1977 provincial election, Progressive Conservative Premier Bill Davis commissioned a study of LPH to assess the potential (political) impact on mental health services that would result from the hospital closure.40 The investigation, undertaken by McKinsey & Company consultants, determined that psychiatric hospitals served a key function in the provision of mental health services in the province which could not be met by any existing or alternative services.41 Yet, as was noted in the Legislative Assembly debate in 1982, the McKinsey consultants “acknowledged a defect of their role study in not being able, because of limited terms of reference, to look at the role of the psychiatric units in general hospitals as part of the total picture.”42 Despite McKinsey’s assertion that psychiatric hospitals served a key function in the mental health care system, the report concluded that the LPH closure could proceed since existing institutional services across the province could accommodate the extra demand on services while the government stood to collect significant savings.43 In the months following the report, the Minister of Health stated that the decision to close LPH was made during the McKinsey investigation when it was determined that “there were more excess beds at the Queen Street Mental

39 Ibid
41 Ibid
43 “A Role Study of Lakeshore, Queen Street and Whitby Psychiatric Hospitals”
Health Centre and Hamilton Psychiatric Hospital than there were patients at Lakeshore.” The Queen Street Mental Health Centre had been undergoing extensive renovation since 1970 and was proposed as the new “super site” in which community-based care initiatives could be undertaken.

Alarmed at the prospect of extensive layoffs, OPSEU, which primarily represented rehabilitation workers and support staff at the hospital, commissioned its own study of the closure. The OPSEU study found the reorganization or elimination of bargaining units that would result from the hospital closure would negatively impact a large provincial labour pool of healthcare workers. The OPSEU study tread a fine line between supporting the concept of deinstitutionalization while condemning the manner in which the philosophy had been materialized in the province, arguing that the hasty closure of large institutions such as LPH was accompanied by a failure to replace them with community-based services staffed by qualified, experienced (and unionized) workers. Minister of Health and MPP for Don Mills, Dennis Timbrell, assured OPSEU that the government would assist staff who could not be hired at other facilities by imposing a province-wide hiring freeze, prioritized transfers to other jobs in the Ontario Public Service and provide additional assistance identifying and accessing employment.

In a speech to Metro Toronto Mental Health Services on January 22, 1979 Timbrell asserted that LPH had long been considered a “substandard” hospital, despite recent

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44 CAMH Archives, Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital Fonds, File 2-17, Speech, Minister of Health to Metro Toronto Mental Health Services, 22 January 1979.
45 The Queen Street Mental Health Centre was subsequently renamed the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. For background on the facility and its role in the provincial public health system, see: Geoffrey Reaume, “999 Queen Street West: Patient Life at the Toronto Hospital for the Insane, 1870-1940” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1997).
47 CAMH Archives, Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital Fonds, File 2-17, Speech, Minister of Health, 1979.
CCHA accreditation. OPSEU’s investigation concluded, however, that LPH’s closure meant 189 staff and several unit directors would be laid off and the concentration of patients at the Queen Street Mental Health Centre had more to do with achieving cost savings for the province than seriously addressing the principles of deinstitutionalization. The report argued that hospital closures often occurred prematurely and without adequate consideration of the impact on existing services. In opposition to the provincial government’s decision to close LPH, OPSEU warned that many staff would inevitably be laid off and the cost of renovating or rebuilding the LPH would pale in comparison to the projected cost of building a new hospital in the future.

Similarly concerned by the impact of disability rights initiatives on unions, the OFL undertook a comprehensive investigation of its membership in 1978 to determine how collective agreements responded to disability issues. Although the study did not identify specific unions, OFL membership included a wide range of public and private sector workers and selected representative examples for each type of clause. The study found that most unions included provisions regarding disability, but contract clauses regarding disabled workers generally fell into two broad categories: those dealing with recruitment or employment conditions and others that concerned the retention of employees who became disabled. Contracts regarding recruitment included the establishment of hiring ratios, such as “For every 50 workers the employer employs he must hire at least 1 who is handicapped.” While many collective agreements included

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48 Ibid
50 Ibid
52 Ibid
53 Ibid
anti-discrimination provisions, some unions negotiated wage adjustment clauses which provided special wage concessions in order to provide incentives to employers to hire disabled people below the typical wage in a given department. Cognizant of the possibility that such clauses threatened to undermine the collective agreement, unions were careful to restrict their use by including the proviso “Subject to the approval in each instance of the employee and the union.”

Finally, many collective agreements established special jobs for disabled workers. For example, one clause read “The company agrees with the union that all future employees who are hired into the Cleaning and Lubricating Department shall be 40 years of age or over and/or handicapped persons.”

The OFL study found that most collective agreements established conditions that dealt with the issue of employee retention of people who became disabled or were injured on the job. Typical clauses included the transfer of disabled workers to “lighter” or “more suitable” work. A typical clause read, “The Company shall make every reasonable effort to find work for handicapped or superannuated employees which they are able to perform.” Where disabled workers were transferred to different work, many contracts attempted to limit the negative effects on wage rates through the establishment of structured wage rate adjustments “at appropriate rates of pay by mutual agreement between the company, the union, and the employee.” In cases where alternative work was unavailable to disabled workers, some collective agreements protected employees from being fired through clauses that read, “Employees producing less than 90 per cent

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54 Ibid
55 Ibid
56 Ibid
57 Ibid
58 Ibid
efficiency are subject to dismissal. However, in the cases of aged or handicapped employees now on the payroll, a reduction in wages comparable to the rate of efficiency can be adopted by mutual agreement of the company and union.”59 While the study found that most contracts respected the importance of seniority as a principle in collective bargaining, some collective agreements expressly exempted disabled workers from seniority rights. One typical clause read, “In the event of any layoff, handicapped or superannuated employees will be retained regardless of seniority and will be exempt from the seniority provisions of this agreement in that respect.”60

Disability activists and labour market analysts increasingly argued that seniority provisions in collective agreements often had the effect of restricting disabled people’s access to some workplaces when entry level work was typically more physically intensive than work reserved for employees with greater seniority. COPOH, for example, found that disabled people were often found working in limited term contracts and union contracts that protected senior employees from layoffs which effectively discriminated against disabled people who were forced to remain in entry-level positions as a result of their disability.61 Disability activists, service agencies, employers, unionists, and government officials across Ontario gathered at Queen’s University in 1979 under the auspices of the United Handicapped Groups of Ontario (UHGO) to discuss employment issues affecting the disability community. A general consensus was reached among delegates, including provincial union representatives, that both employer attitudes and seniority rules inhibited disabled people’s ability to acquire employment in unionized

59 Ibid
60 Ibid
61 MA, CCD Fonds, Box Q012242, File 11, Letter, COPOH to Treasury Board of Canada, 4 March 1986.
workplaces. The coordinator of the Ontario Handicapped Employment Program (HEP) told approximately 130 conference participants that it was common for people with disabilities to be “screened out when union contracts require that a worker's first job with a company involve heavy physical work. Those workers usually are promoted into less physically demanding jobs as they gain seniority.”

Jean Sparling, a rehabilitation consultant and disability rights activist in attendance at the conference expressed her frustration to the *Globe and Mail*, exclaiming, “Companies and unions do not discriminate against a handicapped person after the person has a job” but rather it is in the attempt to acquire a job that they encounter problems. As a result, HEP began working more closely with unions in Ontario to help them reform their collective agreements in order to promote the negotiation of clauses that protected disabled members without necessarily contravening the interests of disabled people outside the labour movement or workforce.

In Metropolitan Toronto, union leaders and public sector officials were determined to respect the terms of the municipal corporations’ various union contracts. A Human Resources Development Committee was struck in 1978 chaired by disability advocate and reformist Alderman Anne Johnston as well as representatives from the city’s unions, human resource workers, public works, and the Coordinator of the Office on the Disabled and Elderly. The committee discussed issues affecting injured and

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[63] “Union Seniority Rules Have Shut Us Out”
[67] Ibid
disabled employees and concluded, “As a public sector employer, the City of Toronto has an obligation both to its own employees and to society at large to set an example in its treatment of injured and disabled workers into the workforce as full participants, those gains must begin with public employers.”68 Under Johnston’s tutelage, Metro Toronto began to open up dialogue on the role collective agreements played in the lives of disabled workers and jobseekers in the city. In spite of their social justice agenda, however, Johnston’s committee discovered that any progress on disability issues in the municipal public service would have to occur at the bargaining table. The committee was forced to concede that recruitment, transfers and promotions should be based strictly on merit and the terms of existing collective agreements regardless of concerns about their social impact.

By the mid-1980s, the OFL assured its members, “We believe that we do not have to give up seniority in order to achieve affirmative action. In fact, women and minorities need stronger seniority clauses to break out of job ghettos. A weakening of seniority would be of no benefit to them.”69 The OFL argued, “Union support of affirmative action therefore can be seen as a means to round out the union's collective bargaining objectives: to retain those, who, because of physical or other barriers would have to terminate their employment and to offer opportunity for employment and advancement to those who so far have been excluded from the workforce.”70 Despite the existence of “seniority-bumping” clauses, such as those cited by the OFL study, it was uncommon to encounter such clauses given the politics of collective bargaining that regarded the

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68 Ibid
principle of seniority to be hallowed ground. As legal scholar Michael Lynk noted, “Seniority is considered a prized employee right and only very clear collective agreement language would permit an override … The prevailing view is that seniority is a cornerstone of any collective agreement, and cannot be interfered with lightly.”

In his study of accommodation practices by Canadian employers, unions and labour arbitrators, Lynk found that arbitrators largely denied grievances from disabled employees seeking to circumvent seniority provisions in collective agreements by bumping more senior employees in order to access accommodations. Legal scholar Ravi Malhotra and sociologist Mark Thomas similarly found that Canadian unions often benefited and actively utilized legal protections for disabled people in the arbitration process as a means to protect members from discrimination without necessarily supporting or participating in the social movement activism that gave rise to those rights. Lynk discovered that consideration of the “disruption of a collective agreement” was included in tests of undue hardship in cases where disabled employees sought accommodations from the employer. In other words, a union could claim undue hardship on the basis of the contravention of contract provisions even if an employer theoretically agreed to the accommodation, as was confirmed in the 1992 landmark Supreme Court case of *Central Okanagan School District No. 23 v Renaud* in which the union objected to a human rights-based accommodation.

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72 “Accommodating Disabilities in the Canadian Workplace”
74 “Accommodating Disabilities in the Canadian Workplace”
Indeed, language in collective agreements was often blamed by disability activists and their allies for limiting the economic integration of disabled people by preventing them from accessing unionized job opportunities. At the 1990 conference organized by the Canadian Council for Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW) delegates heard from one clerical worker with multiple sclerosis who found that the absence of terms in the collective agreement that provided for flexibility around working arrangements in her workplace effectively kept her on long-term sick leave to avoid losing her job.75 Similarly, the Canadian Society for the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps (CSICIDH) in its deliberations on determining the accepted definition of disability among professionals and policymakers, developed a conceptual model to examine the effect of labour policies and practices on disabled workers. The CSICIDH provided the fictionalized case study of “Roger, aged 53, has been working for 15 years as a shearing machine operator for a company that produces sheet metal” who acquired “severe neurosensory deafness.”76 Among the “environmental factors” that contributed to the “handicapping” of Roger—defined as the translation of his physical impairment into limited engagement in his line of work—including the terms of the collective agreement in his workplace which contained “no specific provision for adaptation of work stations or for occupational retraining.”77 Although the nature of his impairment did not change, the obstacle presented by the terms of the collective agreement that governed the workplace increased the limitations of Roger’s condition.78

75 An Emerging Workforce
77 “The Handicaps Creation Process”
78 The Handicaps Creation Process”
The CSICIDH, being rather detached from the politics of collective bargaining, observed that unions often contributed to the exclusion of disabled people from opportunities in the labour market.

By the early 1990s, union leaders mounted a successful campaign to ensure that the Ontario Employment Equity Act treated seniority arrangements as paramount. In August 1993 CUPE issued a submission to the Ontario government recommending that the provincial Employment Equity Act, called Bill 79, be amended to ensure seniority rights were treated as inalienable rights.\textsuperscript{79} Other unions and labour federations filed similar petitions and by February 1994 CUPE Ontario reported that Bill 79 was amended to ensure that equity provisions did not undermine seniority entitlements.\textsuperscript{80} Although employment equity legislation was short-lived in Ontario, the final wording of the Act stipulated, “Employee seniority rights with respect to a layoff or recall to employment after a layoff that are acquired through a collective agreement or an established practice of an employer are deemed not to be barriers to the recruitment, hiring, retention, treatment or promotion of members of the designated groups.”\textsuperscript{81} Such persistent concern about seniority in spite of the stated transition to social unionism revealed that rhetorical commitments to engage disability activists did not distract unions from their chief objective protecting members, especially against elusive threats to collective security as embodied in employment equity legislation and Charter protections. Beyond the

\textsuperscript{79} TA, Fonds 1011, Box 431328, Paper, Canadian Union of Public Employees Equal Opportunities Branch, August 1993.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid
\textsuperscript{81} Legislative Assembly of Ontario, \textit{Employment Equity Act}, 1993, Repealed 14 December 1995: Section 11(3). The Act also limited the protection of seniority rights, stipulating in section 11(4) that a board of inquiry under the Ontario Human Rights Code could deem seniority rights to be discriminatory and in section 37(4) it granted the Employment Equity Tribunal the power to amend collective agreements that failed to comply with the Act.
bargaining table, however, unions were compelled to address a developing disability rights movement that sought greater engagement with the labour movement.

INJURED WORKERS AND DISABILITY RIGHTS ACTIVISM

“Being a disability activist in the trade union movement was lonely,” declared one interview participant in Toronto. Interview participant “David,” who began working in the provincial public sector during the early 1980s noted, “As an activist and advocate for disability, I saw some definite similarities in the work I did in the community and the work of labour unions … When unions did work back then, they did not really see their work as working with folks with disabilities.” Another disability activist in the labour movement, interview participant “Lisa,” found in her experience working in the municipal public sector since the mid-1970s that there was little participation from a variety of people with disabilities in the labour movement. Lisa encountered little conversation about disability rights at the local level beyond issues that affected injured workers and current employees such as worker’s compensation and occupational health and safety, partly due to the low visibility of disabled people in union circles. Both David and Lisa observed that the culture of unions encouraged distinctions between employees injured on or as a result of the job and other people with disabilities whose

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82 “David,” Interview with Author, 27 June 2011. Following Research Ethics Board approval, thirty people with disabilities were recruited through various advertisements and word-of-mouth to conduct semi-structured oral interviews about how work and employment shaped their lived experience of disability. Interview transcripts were processed and coded using NVivo 9.0 and participants were given full control over the content of their testimonies. See Chapter Eight and Appendix C for a more detailed explanation of the oral history component used in this study.
83 “David”
84 “Lisa”
85 “Lisa”
physical or mental conditions were unrelated to their employment. Such distinctions created a gulf between emerging social movements among injured workers and those of disability rights activists whose shared goals were clouded by separate sites of allegiance.

Indeed, Patty Holmes, a disability rights activist and labour researcher, stepped into the spotlight during the early 1980s at a critical juncture in the development of disability rights in Canada. Hired by the CLC in 1980, Holmes was responsible for implementing the CLC’s recent policy statement on disability rights which included the task of developing closer relations with disability rights organizations. Holmes undertook a flurry of activity in her brief contract job, including the publication of various articles that highlighted the labour movement’s progressive stance on disability rights activism as well as several presentations as a CLC representative, such as at the 1980 World Rehabilitation Congress in Winnipeg, various human rights commissions and in a submission to the Special Parliamentary Committee on the Disabled and Handicapped. Despite this work and with less than two years into her formidable mandate, Holmes’ contract expired with no apparent replacement, cutting short an important conduit for maintaining a consistent relationship with disability organizations lapsed. Given her position as an activist who straddled two clearly different movements, Holmes continued her freelance work bridging labour and disability activism by helping COPOH and NUPGE develop their landmark report “Together for Social Change” which

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86 “Lisa”; “David”
87 MA, CCD Fonds, Box Q012249, File 3, Letter, Canadian Labour Congress to COPOH, 3 July 1980.
established a framework for collaboration between the disability and labour movements.  

Cover and inset image of the Canadian Labour magazine published by the Canadian Labour Congress juxtaposing conventional symbols of disability and work. Beneath the apparently hand-written caption “There are no handicapped” sits an empty wheelchair and various work tools, including a hammer, crowbar, work boots and other “tools of the trade.” The message communicates a sense of solidarity with disabled workers whose impairments prevent them from working.  

Despite commitments to advance disability rights, the Canadian labour movement straddled an increasingly divisive and politicized medical and social model of disability. On one hand, unions supported injured workers that endorsed the medical categorization of their impaired bodies in order to qualify for access to workers’ compensation, job accommodations, seniority entitlements, and to facilitate dialogue on occupational health and safety issues. Workers who experienced an injury in the course of employment also

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90 Together For Social Change
found a labour movement anxious to protect workers through strong collective agreements and social activism on behalf of these “soldiers of industry” who sacrificed health and well-being for their job. Ubiquitous union slogans such as “An injury to one is an injury to all” spoke to the emotional resilience of union solidarity that transcended ability and reflected the widespread expectation that labour organizations were obliged to protect injured workers.

Unlike injured workers who used the medical model to highlight their demands, people with pre-existing or congenital disabilities within and outside unions sought to redirect attention to the impact of systemic barriers in the workplace and broader society. The conventional understanding of disability as a medical impairment that afflicted the individual was challenged by disability rights with its underlying commitment to seeing disability in terms of the sociocultural construction of barriers and arbitrary notions of able-bodiedness. Many disability rights activists held that the conceptualization of disability as a matter of individual impairments reinforced the medicalization of disability while ignoring or minimizing the role of social processes whereby impairments become obstacles to social and economic participation.

In response to these opposing agendas, unions chose largely to deal with measures that affected injured workers because they felt compelled to focus on practical union matters in an era of downsizing, outsourcing, and the scaling back of historic wins at the

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bargaining table. The relationship between injured workers and other disabled persons reflected broader tensions in the disability community between those with congenital disabilities and others who acquired their disability later in life. Within some social and professional circles, a “hierarchy of disability” placed paraplegics and other wheelchair users on top and persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities somewhere near the bottom.\footnote{Snyder and Mitchell, *Cultural Locations of Disability*, 166.; Jay Dolmage and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson, “Refiguring Rhetorica: Linking Feminist Rhetoric and Disability Studies,” in *Rhetorica in Motion: Feminist Rhetorical Methods & Methodologies*, ed. Eileen Schell and K.J. Rawson (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 33.} This hierarchy reflected differences in the experience of disability according to the magnitude of barriers, public visibility and popularity, political influence, and organizational funding. The characterization of a hierarchy also extended to assessments of disabled people’s labour market experiences where some people, particularly those with physical disabilities, were often seen to be more employable than those with intellectual or psychiatric disabilities.\footnote{Brigida Hernandez et al, “Employer Attitudes Toward Workers with Disabilities and Their ADA Employment Rights: A Literature Review,” *Journal of Rehabilitation* 66:4 (2000): 4.} Similar to the hierarchical arrangement of disability issues, unions situated injured workers and other people with disabilities within discursive structures that prioritized their relevance to typical union business.

Injured workers in Toronto led a social movement composed primarily of Italian immigrants during the late 1970s and early 1980s against perceived attempts to dismantle an existing system of pensions for disabled workers.\footnote{Storey, “Their Only Power Was Moral,” 128.; Storey, “Social Assistance or a Worker's Right,” 86.} A precipitous rise in workplace accident rates during the 1970s put pressure on the workers’ compensation system which led to a stiffening of payment and benefit structures, provoking protest from a vocal cohort of injured workers.\footnote{Storey, “Their Only Power Was Moral,” 120} Injured workers argued they did not receive the proper rehabilitation and training appropriate to labour market conditions. Another common
complaint included the argument that workers’ compensation board wage subsidies that were provided on a time-limited sliding scale encouraged employers to fire workers when their subsidies expired, meaning many injured workers were exploited by subsidy provisions and trained in jobs with no future for them. In one incident memorialized in the documentary film *A Right To Live*, injured workers led a protest to the Ontario Legislature at Queen’s Park on October 28, 1975 where protestors threw themselves on the floor of the legislature in a desperate attempt to attract attention to their arguments for greater entitlement to adequate levels of compensation, accommodation and measures to reintegrate in the paid workforce.

Activism by injured workers in Canada stretched back to the origins of workers’ compensation at the turn of the twentieth century, but its contemporary resurgence coincided with an upsurge in disability rights activism. Compared to a less influential minority of workers with self-identified pre-existing or congenital disabilities, injured workers were far better organized and insinuated within union culture. Injured workers formed their own unions, for example, while energizing labour activism on a number of relevant issues, including job accommodation, modified work schemes, and workplace accessibility. Union leaders believed they were obliged to negotiate on behalf of their members for higher disability pensions and modified work schemes. Workers’ Compensation Boards drew up payment schedules, derogatorily referred to as “meat charts,” which ascribed monetary figures to the loss of digits, limbs, range of motion, and

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100 *A Right to Live: The Union of Injured Workers*, VHS (Toronto, ON: Right Now Films, 1977).
101 *A Right to Live*
102 Ontario Federation of Labour, “Persons with Disabilities: Labour’s View,” 2 December 2001: 5, 8. This policy statement from the OFL in 2001 spoke of the need to continue to develop close relationships with disability organizations and how the labour movement has been much more successful in developing formal institutional links with injured workers organizations such as the Canadian Injured Workers Alliance, Ontario Network of Injured Workers, and affiliate organizations than with disability rights organizations.
other physical impairments. In 1986 the Toronto Star reported that over 100,000 injured workers in Ontario and an additional 10,000 per year get one lump sum payment (or “lifetime pension”) calculated on the basis of universal “meat chart” payment schedules.

Ruth O’Brien observed in 1986, “Disability rights activists abhorred the idea that people must compensate for their disabilities, particularly so that they can accommodate the so-called normal workplace.” The idea that physical disability was somehow a loss in need of financial reimbursement or could be so plainly quantified through medical testing and “meat charts” was clearly at odds with the ideologies underpinning much disability rights activism. The conventional understanding that disability was a medical impairment that afflicted individuals was fundamentally challenged by the social model which saw disability as part of the sociocultural construction of barriers based upon allegedly arbitrary standards of able-bodiedness. Many disability activists also held that the conceptualization of disability in purely medical terms legitimated longstanding institutional mechanisms of social control and oppression.

Even though their causes were largely considered separate in the labour movement, the manifestation of injured workers advocacy groups and disability rights organizations during the 1970s followed similar paths. Both injured workers and disability activists perceived the importance of formulating legal advocacy fronts that would push their agendas through the court system by sponsoring key cases in the hope

105 O’Brien, “From a Doctor’s to a Judge’s Gaze,” 328.
106 O’Brien, “From a Doctor’s to a Judge’s Gaze,” 328.
of establishing favourable precedence. Established as a legal clinic in Toronto in 1973, the Injured Workman’s Consultants (IWC) assisted injured workers in their dealings with the Worker’s Compensation Board, courts, and employers in the pursuit of compensation, accommodation, re-employment, and other matters. After the IWC merged with local groups of Italian injured workers, the organization became the Union of Injured Workers (UIW), uniting social movement activism with legal advocacy. With 900 founding members, the UIW was established to “fight to bring about needed changes” to the workers’ compensation system with four major demands: job security, cost of living increases, no workers’ compensation board doctors, and better safety conditions. Similarly, the Advocacy Resource Centre for the Handicapped (ARCH) was established in the late 1970s by a coalition of disability rights activists, disability rights groups, and service agencies that perceived the need for an organization dedicated to law reform and test litigation that would help entrench disability rights in the legislative framework of the country.

As a cooperative venture involving disability activists and service agencies, ARCH was born in the spirit of collaboration, whereas the UIW and other injured workers group reflected a more antagonistic relationship with employers and the Ontario Worker’s Compensation Board. Despite their shared goals around transforming disabled people’s access to economic opportunities, disability rights activists lamented by 1990 that an effective relationship had not been established with injured workers. COPOH noted it had not established a liaison with the UIW or other injured workers groups, while

107 Storey, “Social Assistance or a Worker's Right,” 72.
108 Storey, “Social Assistance or a Worker's Right,” 72.
109 A Right to Live
ARCH blamed the situation on disability activists, stating “The disabled community has not included injured workers in its work. It is essential to have them involved.”\textsuperscript{111} The Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL) pointed to a “dual track system” for the employed and unemployed disabled people that worked to separate injured workers from the rest of the disability community.\textsuperscript{112} Notwithstanding these divisions, ARCH did begin to make inroads with injured workers’ groups in the early 2000s when it intervened on behalf of the Ontario Network of Injured Workers’ Groups in two cases against the Nova Scotia Worker’s Compensation Board, signalling the move toward a common understanding of how equality provisions affected all people with disabilities regardless of the origins of their impairments.\textsuperscript{113}

By the late 1980s, injured workers’ groups established a national caucus to coordinate their lobbying efforts. Jurisdictional jockeying between provincial and federal workers’ compensation systems had long been a source of contention among injured workers groups and the need for a national voice was seen as increasingly necessary.\textsuperscript{114} As a result, the Canadian Injured Workers’ Alliance (CIWA) was founded in 1989 with its headquarters in Thunder Bay, Ontario. CIWA held its inaugural conference in 1990 with 158 representatives from injured workers groups, community legal aid clinics, unions, health and safety professionals, and government officials.\textsuperscript{115} The conference was funded by the federal and provincial governments and focused on re-employment, noting

\textsuperscript{111} MA, CCD Fonds, Box T1288, File 1, Minutes, Steering Committee for Study Group on Employment and Disability, 6 December 1990.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid
\textsuperscript{114} A Right to Live
\textsuperscript{115} CCRW, “Canadian Injured Workers Alliance,” Ability & Enterprise 6:1 (March 1993).
that “Being injured at work is much more than a medical event” and involves a loss of income and self-esteem as well.\textsuperscript{116} Solidarity in the face of serious injury was reflected in the introduction to the conference report which stated, “I am a logger, a nurse, a welder, a miner. I was on the job when: ‘a tree swung around and caught me in the back’; ‘I lifted one too many patients’; ‘I slipped off a roof’; ‘I got hit in the back of the head with a steel rod.’ Now I am an injured worker. In an instant my life has been dramatically changed. What do I need now?”\textsuperscript{117} Perhaps reflecting the growing influence of disability rights activism and the social model of disability, CIWA adopted several resolutions at the conference that revolved around disability rights and consumer control in the realm of rehabilitation, compensation, re-employment, and pursuit of universal disability insurance.\textsuperscript{118}

CIWA’s second conference in 1992, called \textit{Voice of Injured Workers}, brought together 136 participants who were primarily injured workers and representatives mainly from Ontario-based organizations.\textsuperscript{119} The conference focused on workers’ compensation reform, including proposals for universal disability insurance, control over vocational rehabilitation programs, improved litigation rights, and an emphasis on promoting the voice of disadvantaged groups such as immigrants, women, and illiterate workers.\textsuperscript{120} CIWA identified predominantly sociopolitical obstacles to injured workers, including a new economic world order and inadequate compensation system that spoke to many disability rights activists’ social constructionist ideology that informed their lobbying

\textsuperscript{116} “Canadian Injured Workers Alliance”
\textsuperscript{118} LAC, RG 29, Box 210, File 4315-06-92/12, Brief, CIWA, “Strategic Plan,” December 1991.
\textsuperscript{119} LAC, RG 29, Box 210, File 4315-06-92/12, Letter, CIWA to DPU, 6 July 1993.
efforts. CIWA’s call for a universal disability insurance regime also reflected a progressive approach to workers within and external to the labour movement by reaching outside the rank-and-file to include greater numbers of people with acquired disabilities who demanded greater financial protection regardless of where or when their injury occurred.

By the 1990s and early 2000s, unions and labour federations established disability caucuses with the express purpose of building a strong and progressive dialogue on equity issues that affected disabled people. Delegates at labour conventions were required to self-identify as having a disability in order to attend caucus meetings and vote on pertinent matters. It was unclear, however, whether disability caucuses were the most attractive venue for most injured workers as they had often their own groups to attend separate from disability caucuses. Many injured workers likely did not see themselves as disabled in the sense that they identified with or shared a common purpose with the larger disability community. Instead, injured workers largely envisioned themselves to be “fallen workers” rather than internalizing a new identity as a disabled person. As injured workers in the film *A Right To Live* noted in reference to the creation of the UIW, they “chose the name union because they believe injured workers are workers and should be treated as workers, not like charity cases.” Part of this likely reflected the natural process of psychological readjustment in self-awareness accompanying the “loss” of ability, as well as the fact that many disabled workers were also part of a community of

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121 Ibid
122 “Lisa”; “David”
123 *A Right to Live*
injured workers groups within the union movement that shared a common set of ethics and self-identity.\textsuperscript{124}

Historical sociologist Robert Storey observes that in developing a “master frame of injustice” the injured worker developed a new self-identity as the “proud but beaten man who, because of a disabling workplace injury, could no longer provide for his family as he wanted and was supposed to do.”\textsuperscript{125} For example, one worker interviewed in \textit{A Right To Live} named Manuel, who lost his job at a mattress manufacturing company after sustaining a back injury, spoke to the “physical and emotional side effects” of his injury where he tearfully exclaimed that he did not “feel like a man” or “useful” to his family.\textsuperscript{126} Preoccupied with their experience of disease or injury and drawing strength from their peers in the union movement and injured workers’ associations, injured workers aligned themselves with a collective outlook that was quite distinct from the identity associated with disability rights and equity activism. While the labour movement was attuned first and foremost to the needs of its able-bodied and disabled members, the transition to social unionism, however, led to the formation of impromptu partnerships with disability activists.

BUILDING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS WITH DISABILITY ACTIVISM

Despite its predisposition toward the support of other groups operating within unions, the Canadian labour movement engaged in a series of strategic alliances with disability activists from the late 1970s to 1990s as part of its transition toward social unionism. HEP reported in 1979 that its office observed increased activity and

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\item \textsuperscript{124} Driedger et al, “Engaging in the Disablement Process,” 120.
\item \textsuperscript{125} Storey, “Their Only Power Was Moral,” 114.
\item \textsuperscript{126} \textit{A Right to Live}
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
cooperation with labour organizations in the promotion of disability rights over the preceding year.\textsuperscript{127} As part of its general mandate to stimulate the visibility of the disability community and facilitate linkages in the labour market, HEP established a liaison with local, provincial and national labour officials within the Metro Toronto Labour Council, OFL and CLC.\textsuperscript{128} Between 1979 and 1982, HEP also collaborated with the OFL in a labour awareness campaign entitled “The Able Disabled” which involved the development and dissemination of a series of promotional pamphlets to celebrate the IYDP.\textsuperscript{129}

As labour organizations increased their involvement in the promotion of disability rights and labour market integration, they came into conflict with service agencies that employed disabled workers and disability advocacy organizations promoting sheltered employment. One conflict arose in 1979 when unionized blind workers who were members of the Canadian Union of Blind and Sighted Merchants (CUBSM) went on strike in Edmonton, Alberta. Strikers alleged that wages, working conditions, vocational training and placement services at CNIB and its Caterplan retail outlets were grossly substandard.\textsuperscript{130} Some CNIB workshops were alleged to have gaping holes in the floor, narrow aisles between stacks of sharply pointed surveyor stakes and sawdust in the air. CUBSM also argued that while workers earned approximately $0.40 an hour as a result of being classified as trainees in a rehabilitation program, the CNIB reaped considerable

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{130} MA, CCD Fonds, Box P5367, File 30, Newsletter, Handicapped Communications Society, \textit{The Spokesman}, 12:9 (September 1979).
profits from the sale of goods and services and savings from labour costs.\textsuperscript{131} The strike began in August and quickly escalated as other blind workers and disability rights activists across the country railed against local CNIB offices, alleging that the CNIB was a secretive and dictatorial monopoly that dominated services for blind people in Canada while failing to improve the social and economic integration of people with visual impairments.\textsuperscript{132}

In response to the strike, CUPE National sent delegates to march alongside strikers in support and pledged to provide financial support in solidarity with CUBSM’s

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid
struggle against Caterplan. CUPE’s move to support blind workers dovetailed with the labour movement’s growing opposition to sheltered workshops, which was perceived by labour activists as inherently exploitative and potentially undermining to wage workers in the competitive labour market. Opposition to sheltered employment by Canadian unions created an opportunity for the labour movement to demonstrate its support of disability activists who rejected the notion that workshops were a legitimate part of the rehabilitation industry and threatened to undermine labour standards. As part of the fallout from the strike, NUPGE announced a national campaign in 1981 to lobby all levels of government to review and abolish legislation that permitted exemptions from minimum wage standards, calling such permits hypocritical and exploitative. NUPGE argued that the notion offered by service agencies that sheltered work was therapy and not proper paid work was a fallacy since many workers worked full days in regular work settings, were supervised, punched time clocks, took regular lunch hours, and produced products that were sold for profit. NUPGE President John Fryer stated, “If the work is indeed therapeutic, and prepares them for other employment, then why are so many of them in these workshops for so many years? They are in fact dead-end jobs, with no hope for advancement.” In opposition to the state of workshops, NUPGE and the CLC instituted a plan to organize sheltered workers across the country in order to press for better wages and working conditions. In another example, ARC Industries, a sheltered workshop in Fort Erie that specialized in recycling paper waste, nearly shut down when

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134 Ibid
136 Ibid
137 Ibid
138 Ibid
civil service staffers represented by CUPE demanded a fifty percent wage increase for their members whom they argued were extremely underpaid by provincial standards.\textsuperscript{139}

Workshop advocates and service agencies reacted to the campaign to organize sheltered workers with a combination of anger and disbelief. The CCRW resented unions’ incursion into social service programming and rebuffed the proposal to organize sheltered workshops, citing the fact that workshop clients were classified as trainees in vocational rehabilitation programs.\textsuperscript{140} CCRW President Kenneth Cope told the \textit{Globe and Mail} that his organization was “very disappointed that the labor movement appears to be limiting itself simply to organizing disabled workers who ask for help, while there are other actions labor could also take which would be of far greater benefit to all disabled people whether they are employed in workshops or not.”\textsuperscript{141} Cope argued that unions were ignorant about the realities of sheltered work and the rehabilitation industry, pointing out that while the CCRW supported the principle of upholding minimum wage legislation, it was impossible to justify the payment of minimum wages in workshops since the average worker contributes approximately fifty percent below the productivity relative to the minimum wage.\textsuperscript{142} The CCRW concluded that it would develop ways to cooperate with the labour movement in order to facilitate a meaningful exchange regarding the labour market integration of disabled people. By 1990, however, it became apparent that this collaborative relationship failed to materialize as the CCRW repeated the argument that


\textsuperscript{140} “Group Rejects Union Scheme for Disabled,” \textit{Globe & Mail} (16 October 1981).

\textsuperscript{141} “Group Rejects Union Scheme for Disabled”

\textsuperscript{142} “Group Rejects Union Scheme for Disabled"
unions “generally frown on arrangements where workshops and supported employment agencies receive non-union subcontracting work from unionized employers.”

Despite these assurances, the escalation of the minimum wage exemption issue had the effect of driving labour organizations into closer association with disability rights activists. COPOH encouraged the CLC to boycott the 1982 CCRW conference and highlight their shared opposition to sheltered workshops by presenting their views at a press forum held simultaneously with the conference. The CLC adopted a resolution in the early 1980s that recognized COPOH “as the representative voice of disabled Canadians” and called for “a strong working relationship” with COPOH to bring about “social justice for all disabled Canadians.” The resolution motivated COPOH to reach out to labour unions, encouraging the CLC to appeal to affiliates about the need to prioritize the negotiation of clauses in collective agreements that protected all people with disabilities to ensure they have access to training. The CLC also resolved to focus on recruiting disabled unionists as activists and to ensure that its labour conventions were fully accessible. The CLC collaborated with COPOH on a number of consultations with federal Ministers regarding changes to the federal labour code and asked for assistance in developing a one-week training course for labour activists on disability issues. A notable example of the new relationship between disability activists and the labour movement included the CLC’s solicitation of input for the Canadian delegation to

144 MA, CCD Fonds, Box Q012249, File 3, Letter, COPOH to CLC, 23 September 1982.
145 Ibid
147 Ibid
148 MA, CCD Fonds, Box Q012249, File 3, Letter, CLC to COPOH, 29 April 1981.
the International Labour Organization in its deliberations on vocational rehabilitation policy.\textsuperscript{149}

The early 1980s also saw Canadian labour organizations develop a new consensus on employment equity issues and the role of disability rights. In 1980 the CLC called on the broader labour movement to encourage and support the employment of disabled people.\textsuperscript{150} The CLC noted that “One only has to look at the many thousands of disabled Canadians who are employable but not working to realize that they have not been given the chance to use their abilities.”\textsuperscript{151} The CLC conceived of its role as a “catalyst among groups or services representing the disabled, for the purpose of developing a national body to deal with all matters of concern to the disabled.”\textsuperscript{152} The CLC also made a submission to the Special Parliamentary Committee on the Disabled and Handicapped in 1980 which called for full protection of people with disabilities under federal and provincial human rights acts, full employment and job opportunities for disabled people, income security, affirmative action programs, employment incentive programs, review of sheltered workshops for evidence of exploitation, improved accessibility to public and private buildings, consultation with disabled people, and generally more consideration of people with disabilities.\textsuperscript{153} The following year the OFL issued its \textit{Statement on Employment of the Disabled}, noting “Labour’s goal must be the same as the personal goal of every disabled person: total social integration and well-being. We all know a job

\textsuperscript{149} MA, CCD Fonds, Box Q012249, File 3, Submission, CLC, “For the Canadian Government Delegation Attending the 68th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, Switzerland,” 1982
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid
is important. For the disabled, it is a precious right, long-denied.”154 The OFL pointed to discriminatory hiring practices and attitudinal barriers as the principal culprits for high unemployment rates and recommended that the *Statement* be interpreted as a guideline for unions to identify and eliminate workforce barriers for disabled workers.155

In 1983 NUPGE and COPOH issued a joint report entitled *Together for Social Change* that represented the culmination of an unprecedented collaboration between disability rights activists and the labour movement.156 The report promoted awareness of workforce barriers faced by disabled people and included a set of recommendations that served as a framework for policymakers, unionists, and disability activists undertaking a more informed plan of action to increase the employment of persons with disabilities. In particular, the report recommended the enactment of employment equity legislation, development of accessibility policies, more education on disability rights, and a commitment toward ongoing cooperation. As important as the collaboration appeared to be, the absence of follow-up reports or similar collaboration revealed the ad hoc nature of the partnership which undermined the potential significance of the venture.

By the early 1990s, the Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD; formerly COPOH) observed, “there were many more instances when unions appeared to be more interested in getting involved with charity boosting, even to the extent of supporting telethons, than they were in making their employers sit down at the bargaining table and hammer out employment equity provisions.”157 The Ontario Public Service Advisory Committee on Employment Equity for People with Disabilities (CEEPD), which included

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156 *Together for Social Change*
leading disability activists working in the provincial public service, encountered a persistent disinclination on the part of OPSEU as they attempted to insert themselves in the labour relations process. In 1991, CEEPD argued that the “current definition of the merit principle, which states that the ‘best qualified’ candidate obtains the job, is incompatible with employment equity objectives” because it reinforces the status quo and subjective terms such as “best qualified” and “relatively equal” failed to encourage managers to seek alternative practices. CEEPD determined that the “point system” which rated applicants according to issues such as “record of continuous paid employment” discriminated against people with disabilities whose conditions often delayed or blocked continuous employment. CEEPD, however, was dismissed out of hand by the new Progressive Conservative government by the mid-1990s, which adopted the traditional approach of dealing with disability issues at the bargaining table. The Committee wrote to newly-installed members of the Management Board of Cabinet (MBC) regarding their concerns about government downsizing. An internal MBC memo noted its reluctance to engage disability activists outside union structures, observing that the committee “wants to be actively involved in discussions between employer and bargaining agents, but we aren't interested in opening up collective agreement negotiations to outside parties.”

By the 1990s, disability activists articulated their frustration with the lack of change in the unemployment rate of disabled people and their noncommittal relationship with the labour movement. In a study of how Canadian unions responded to social

159 Ibid
movement activism, Carroll and Ratner argued that the labour movement carried a certain amount of responsibility to take the initiative by virtue of its dominant position in terms of size and funding.\textsuperscript{161} They discovered a labour movement in the process of dynamic change in 1995, presumably balancing its primary objective to defend its members as well as grassroots activism presented by social movements.\textsuperscript{162} Reminiscent of the \textit{Together for Social Change} collaboration between NUPGE and COPOH, a conference held in 1994 involving the Manitoba Federation of Labour and the Manitoba League of the Physically Handicapped observed, “an underlying tension that, in spite of all the good will [sic] in the world, is bound to exist between ‘haves’ – those with jobs, trade unionists in this case – and ‘have nots,’ the vast majority of the population of people with disabilities.”\textsuperscript{163} The first National Workplace Equity organized by Human Resource Development Canada Symposium in 1998, for example, reported that despite years of lobbying by social activists to set the labour movement on a fundamentally social unionist path, it was instead the introduction of employment equity legislation that in fact motivated unions to include equity provisions in collective bargaining despite.\textsuperscript{164} One employer in attendance at the conference cited the example of a labour relations committee consisting of management, union representatives and disabled employees in his workplace that “worked closely together to establish and review employee plans on a regular basis. Employees were invited to volunteer to participate on a task force to

\textsuperscript{162} Carroll and Ratner, “Old Unions and New Social Movements,” 196.
\textsuperscript{163} Carroll and Ratner, “Old Unions and New Social Movements,” 196.
identify and reduce barriers, and the collective agreement includes language about accommodation.”

By the turn of the century, labour organizations realized that passive and impromptu relationships with disability rights activists and organizations did not cultivate productive and valuable partnerships. In 2000 the CLC held its first Disability Rights Conference, bringing together labour leaders and disability activists to establish a more formal dialogue on disability rights in the labour movement. The result was an ongoing campaign entitled MORE (Mobilize, Organize, Represent and Educate), which culminated in the publication of the aptly named *The MORE We Get Together: Disability Rights and Collective Bargaining Manual*. The manual, researched and written in large part by leading disability activist Pat Danforth, outlined what unions were doing to assist members with disabilities access accommodations, worker’s compensation, contract benefits, return-to-work arrangements, and prevention of disability through health and safety provisions. The manual was intended to facilitate further understanding of persons with disabilities and the discourse of disability rights while guiding union locals as to the best means of identifying and lowering workplace barriers. The manual also demonstrated the shift toward inclusive dialogue with disability activists since the late 1990s and early 2000s with the establishment of disability rights working groups in many major public sector unions and labour federations, and shared several case studies where

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165 Ibid
167 The MORE We Get Together, 16-32.
labour organizations had initiated programs to protect disabled workers and established partnerships with community organizations.  

CONCLUSION

A central player in a changing labour market, the Canadian labour movement reflected the extent to which disability rights penetrated the world of work from the mid-1970s onward. The emergence of disability rights in Canada coincided with unprecedented changes in the organization of work and the transformation of union membership. Among union leaders, these changes facilitated purposeful dialogue about the role of disability rights in the workplace and within union structures. However, as social institutions embedded in local communities, unions reflected an understanding that disability affected the individual rather than being a manifestation of exclusionary sociocultural systems. Inherent divisions in the broader disability community also manifested themselves in unions. Core union practices, such as advocacy on behalf of injured workers, reinforced the medical pathology of disability which undercut declarations in support of disability rights. The business of union work increasingly ran up against a new generation of labour activists championing social justice and the extension of civil rights to traditionally disadvantaged groups. In an attempt to combine union business with social movement activism, the Canadian labour movement struck a fine balance in its support of medical authority and the social model of disability.

The labour movement was larger, more stable, and better funded than the loose coalition of volunteers leading the Canadian disability rights movement. These differences in structure and size meant labour organizations tended to solicit the input of

\[168 \text{ The MORE We Get Together} \]
disability activists and rights organizations when the opportunity arose and forced the terms of these momentary partnerships to fit within an existing set of priorities. Disability activists in the labour movement also pointed to this unidirectional power relationship as the source of inherent tension and chronic inaction on disability rights.\textsuperscript{169} Despite these disappointments, however, social activists and equity-seeking groups continually pushed against the traditional organizational culture of unions in order to create space for disabled workers regardless of the origin of one’s disability. As a result, the labour movement afforded greater attention to the advancement of disability rights issues in response to a new generation of labour activists that sought to extend the boundaries of social unionism to include all people with disabilities.

\textsuperscript{169} Rayside and Valentine, “Broadening the Labour Movement’s Disability Agenda,” 178-179.
Chapter Eight: People with Disabilities and the Construction of Working Identities in Toronto, 1960s-2000s

I am a person with dreams and ambitions
And I have a song to be sung
I am determined that when it is over
I will have only begun
To show to the world my potential
To show to the world what I’ve done
I am a child of the universe too
Out of every seven I’m one

... I need so much more than just sheltered employment
I need less than pity and tears
I need your respect and I need your compassion
Lend me your eyes and your ears
Then see me and touch me and feel as I feel
Hear what I say can’t you see I am real

...
So look beyond what I am not
And you will see just what I am
I’m a woman, I’m a child, I’m a man


The appeal to “look beyond” disability in order to appreciate the true nature of one’s humanity, as suggested in the above excerpt from Canada’s official song for the 1981 International Year for Disabled Persons, was intended to encourage the reassignment of socially-constructed disabled identities into more inclusive categories. Disability and identity were particularly entwined in the sphere of employment where able-bodied “working bodies” were often separated from disabled “non-working bodies.” Janet Zandy found that work played an integral part in shaping the development of identity, noting, “Laboring bodies harbour an epistemology, a way of knowing and understanding the

1 Pat McKee, Look beyond, © 1981 by Greenview Publishing Co.; “Look Beyond” was written and recorded by Pat McKee and arranged by John Hudson.
world that comes out of the physicality of work." People with disabilities during the late twentieth century were often unable to develop their identity through work due to physical and social barriers that prevented meaningful participation in the labour market. Working-age adults with disabilities were often liminal and marginal figures in the labour market. A dissociative relationship between paid work and identity existed for many people with disabilities, exempted from mainstream expectations to work and thus unable to fully incorporate labour into the process of identity development. Yet many people with disabilities in Canada during the late twentieth century did not exempt themselves from the conventional cultural expectation to work. Disabled people generally shared the mainstream ethos that participation in the competitive workforce constituted a primary feature of their identity and undertook opportunities to develop themselves through paid employment. Narratives of people with disabilities in Toronto whose working-life histories traversed the 1960s to 2000s reflected a desire to be productive, autonomous and independent individuals whose participation in the competitive workforce constituted a primary feature of their identity. Despite barriers to labour-market participation, many individuals with disabilities rejected the notion that they constituted a burden on others, pointing to skills and capabilities that empowered them to resist powerful forces of social and economic exclusion.

The following chapter explores the role of work within the historical praxis of identity formation among people with disabilities in Toronto during a period in which disability activism in Canada created a highly-charged political identity of disability. The

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2 Zandy, Hands, 3.
first section discusses relevant theoretical constructions of work and identity, including
the evolution of processes that ascribed a collective or politicized identity to disabled
people within the context of employment. The second section examines the relationship
between disabled sporting events and the promotional project to challenge longstanding
stereotypes of disability by redefining disabled people as skilled, capable, and thus
employable. The final section deconstructs selected life history narratives of people with
disabilities interviewed as part of this study in order to analyze how and why personal
identities were constituted around work during this period.

DISABILITY, WORK AND IDENTITY POLITICS

Upon reflection about how his work experiences from the 1960s impacted his
self-development, interview participant “Robert” responded that work was inextricably
linked to the projection and internalization of his identity. Robert explained, “The first
question that most of us ask (I try not to) is, ‘What do you do for a living?’ We identify
ourselves by what we do for a living. It was very difficult to answer the question because
we take on the broader attitude of society which identifies us by what we do in paid
employment. That's how we identify ourselves.” As Robert suggested, the ubiquitous
question “What do you do?” during initial social encounters signified an attempt to
resolve the complexity of individual identity through a determination of employment
status. Other characteristics and social markers aside, the underlying question suggested
“Who are you?” which ascribed social identity and value to an individual while situating
them within certain socio-political and economic structures. The question reflected a

4 “Robert”
particularly utilitarian perspective of identity formation that emerged from one’s employment position or engagement within the paid labour market. The allegorical respondent was forced to self-reflexively consider “Who am I?” by relating to others through experiences of paid work. While the conflation of identity with occupational status was not necessarily a universal experience, it did underscore the importance placed on work in the process of identity formation. Without work as an element in one’s history, individuals were seen (or saw themselves) to lack the means to develop a “working identity” which was based upon the valuation of productivity and independence sought within this figurative line of questioning.

The conceptualization of work during the latter twentieth century in Canada assumed a central position in the development of personal and social identity. Work identities were often created and reinforced through social interaction such that people forced to describe their work to others identified themselves as subjects within various work roles. John Budd envisioned work as part of a multifaceted process of self-identity formation in which personal identity emerged from biographical aspects of an individual’s work history. Yet self-discovery also emerged from interrelated associations between the self, identity, and work roles, constituting a process of self-actualization that situated identity formation within the terrain of labour market participation. Work provided intrinsic meaning to individuals as well as outward representation to others such that the pursuit of work reflected a search for identity. Self-identity involved a process of self-objectification or reflexive self-consciousness whereby people perceived themselves

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as others saw them. People with disabilities in particular possessed fluid identities and did not necessarily see themselves as disabled since self-identity emerged from a constantly evolving process of self-discovery that defied fixed or essential categories imposed on them by a disability “master status.”

Disability historian Paul Longmore asserts that the precarious relationship between identity formation and work status during the twentieth century reflected the predominance of a particularly individualist ethos in Western society that marginalized disabled people. Longmore suggests that because “disease and disability seem so self-evidently matters of biology, rather than sociology or public policy, the disadvantaging social and economic consequences endured by sick or disabled individuals are perceived as ‘natural,’ the inevitable social outcomes of biological ‘facts.’” For many people with acquired disabilities, self-identity was firmly anchored to employment status such that the interruption of employment or modification of work roles due to ill-health or impairment often led to the unhinging of a sense of self. Kathy Charmaz argues that the body and self are not identical and tension exists between the two regardless of when disability presents itself in the life cycle or the nature of interference with typical social roles. As a result, the assignment of a disability identity to people with acquired or congenital disabilities forced individuals to reconcile their internalized sense of selves with the outward

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9 Watson, “Well, I Know This Is Going To Sound Very Strange,” 509.
projection of a socially-constructed self.\textsuperscript{13} A contemporary study of workers with multiple sclerosis in Ottawa, Ontario, for example, found that participants’ self-identities were often conflated with work roles, partly arising from the fact that multiple sclerosis is a degenerative condition that occurs when individuals are working-age adults actively participating in the labour market.\textsuperscript{14} For study participants, functional abilities as expressed and internalized through employment status mitigated a “loss of self” when work activities were reintroduced following the onset of various symptoms, demonstrating the extent to which self-identity was closely structured around work and health.\textsuperscript{15}

Self-determination and independence leading to the attainment of the liberal ideal in Western capitalism were important cultural values during the twentieth century that emphasized the importance of work in the development of individual identities.\textsuperscript{16} Within this sociocultural framework, where economic success through individual achievement constituted a primary identity goal, individuals thought to have achieved a degree of independence through paid work were considered “normal.”\textsuperscript{17} One school of thought in the Marxist tradition promoted by critical disability studies scholars locates the roots of the modern concept of disability as a marginal state of being in the social and economic upheaval that accompanied the transition to industrialization.\textsuperscript{18} As part of Marx’s

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item Overboe, “Difference In Itself,” 75-88.
\item Overboe, “Difference In Itself,” 75-88.
\end{thebibliography}
Lumpenproletariat, which included orphans, widows, and sick and injured individuals, disabled bodies were socially stigmatized and considered economically unproductive in industrialized capitalist production paradigm that regulated working bodies according to expected standards of productivity.  

Marxist scholarship in fact situated disabled people within the “central contradiction of capitalism” where categories of disablement were fashioned and subjects within those categories oppressed by modern industrial economic and social arrangements. Indeed, the longstanding exclusion and liminality of people with disabilities in the labour market stimulated disability activists and their allies in Canada to promote a new perspective of disability as a social construction shaped by social, political, and economic forces. As a result, economic participation and workforce inclusion were top priorities among disability rights activists who believed high unemployment and chronic poverty in the disability community substantiated the need for greater inclusivity in an otherwise inaccessible pursuit of the liberal ideal.

An unresolved tension existed in the latter twentieth century between self-identity, which was grounded in the multiplicity of individual characteristics and experiences of disability, and the ethos of disability rights activism which sought to claim an empowered collective disability identity. Disability rights activism challenged work-based identities predicated on liberal individualism by promoting a politicized group identity based upon common experiences of exclusion and oppression. The assertion of an empowered disability identity from the early 1970s transcended the medical pathology

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of individual conditions that limited access to work as part of a larger project to develop new rights and freedoms for different categories of people with disabilities seeking greater political recognition and economic participation. As David Engel and Frank Munger affirm, “Alternative perceptions of the relationship between disability and employment—and consequently identity—have emerged from contemporary movements for more benefits and broader rights for persons with disabilities.”

The assertion of a politicized cross-disability identity, however, was complicated by the reality of an extraordinarily diverse population of people with disabilities who did not necessarily identify with the political priorities of relatively small groups of disability activists. According to Canadian political scientists Fraser Valentine and Jill Vickers, “Disablement is a highly complex and contradictory process that affects people differently according to their age, sex/gender, race, class, sexual orientation and geographic location.” Similar to other civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, disability activism captured the activities of a relative minority of individuals from a wider population of people with disabilities. As a result, disability rights activists invited scepticism regarding the degree to which they accurately represented the interests of the disabled population.

25 Valentine and Vickers, “Released From the Yoke of Paternalism,” 159.
26 Shakespeare, Disability Rights and Wrongs
Many people with disabilities and their allies rejected a politicized disability identity. British disability studies scholar Tom Shakespeare warns, “Disability movements should be cautious about assuming that either disability identity or disability rights are robust foundations for emancipation.”

American disability activist Susan Peters called for “a disability consciousness that would drive a new discourse on disability identity that is preconditional to political identity and applicable to disabled people as they live their everyday lives.” Peters found she was depersonalized by a disability movement that pursued a politicized identity based largely on a negative critique of exclusionary social forces. She envisions a movement that was more tolerant of individuality as the potential key to independence without necessarily denying the reality of collective experiences of impairment or the social construction of disability that encouraged the categorization of people with different medical conditions. Tom Feigan similarly describes himself as having an “unsettled” disability identity, opposing binary distinctions between ‘disabled’ and ‘able-bodied’ which he argued “did not seem to me a coherent or justifiable explanation for radical differences in life's opportunities.”

Instead of a collective politicized disability identity marked by the assertion of a fabricated community of individuals as part of a political project to assert the promotion of disability rights, Peters promotes a “syncretic view of disability culture” that allowed for various identities to coexist simultaneously with disability, promising people with disabilities greater self-determination and freedom in the identity-creation process. In

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27 Shakespeare, Disability Rights and Wrongs, 198-199.
doing so, individuals would be permitted to control their engagement with disability
culture(s) as an “active Subject” rather than drawing attention to the experiences of an
“objectified or marginalised Other.” For Peters, a politicized identity could still be
asserted within subcultural associations of disabled people without necessarily
reinforcing a disability master status which disability politics in fact sought to break
down in the pursuit of social and economic integration. Indeed, the politicization of
disabled people’s experiences exposed the complexity of personal identity formation as
disabled people and the broader public responded to a developing discourse around the
rights and abilities of people with disabilities. One such example of a project to construct
a politicized identity for people with disabilities during the late twentieth century
included the widespread promotion of disabled sporting events in Canada. Disabled
sports interacted with disability activism, fuelling the development of a new image of
disability marked by various employable characteristics.

DISABLED SPORTS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF EMPLOYABLE IDENTITIES

Organizers of the fifth Paralympic Games, held in Toronto in August 1976
believed the important event would help craft a new identity for disabled people “through
the common medium of sport,” resulting in “better job opportunities” and a “better
appreciation of the abilities of the disabled … in the minds of the able-bodied public.”
Dr. Robert Jackson, chair of the organizing committee, asserted that the Games would
inspire attitudinal changes toward disability that promised to promote the employability

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32 Peters, “Is There a Disability Culture?” 599.
33 Peters, “Is There a Disability Culture?” 599.
of disabled people through the language of sport. The Paralympics, also called the “Torontolympiad,” was an enormous undertaking that featured approximately 1,700 athletes from forty countries living with various degrees of paraplegia, amputation and visual impairments competing in 447 sporting events. The Torontolympiad in fact made Olympic history by representing the first cross-disability athletic event that brought people with different types of disabilities together under the same event.\textsuperscript{35} Jackson argued, “While recognizing that the individuals participating in the Olympiad were physically, mentally and emotionally fully rehabilitated and of exceptional ability, we reasoned that their achievements could be used as a prime example of what can be achieved by other people with similar disabilities.”\textsuperscript{36}

Disabled sporting events were used by disability activists and their allies to promote awareness of disability issues, supporting an array of initiatives to improve the social and economic integration of disabled people. Disabled sports were initially devised as part of the rehabilitation process in order to stimulate patients to improve their physical abilities through competition. The Paralympic Games emerged from the sports therapy approach adopted by Dr. Ludwig Guttmann during the Second World War at Stoke Mandeville Hospital in Aylesbury, England.\textsuperscript{37} The international Paraplegic Games were similarly inspired by informal matches arranged by rehabilitation hospitals to treat

\textsuperscript{36} Jackson, “Sports for the Physically Disabled,” 293-296.
patients with spinal cord injuries.\textsuperscript{38} By the 1970s, however, disabled sports had evolved into much more than part of an individual’s rehabilitation. In addition to the Paralympic Games, there also existed the Canada Games for the Disabled (hosted in Scarborough in 1981) and the Ontario Games for the Disabled, which collectively demonstrated the “wealth of talent and ability of the disabled when given the much-desired opportunity.”\textsuperscript{39}

The Ontario Games for the Disabled, which was first held in 1975, enabled disabled athletes in Ontario to compete in a different city across the province each year.\textsuperscript{40} The Canadian Paraplegic Association (CPA) conducted a study in 1979 that examined the impact of the event on local attitudes toward disability through the distribution of pre- and post-event surveys in the host city (Windsor) and control city (Sarnia) where the events were not broadcast on radio or local cable television.\textsuperscript{41} The CPA considered how general attitudes toward disabled people were influenced by “out-of-role behaviour;” in this case, how disabled athletes influenced attitudes toward disability in general. The study concluded that exposure to disabled athletes directly or through media coverage resulted in significant positive change regarding public attitudes toward the abilities of people with paralysis, amputation, blindness, and cerebral palsy.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{38} Reaume, \textit{Lyndhurst}, 141.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid
Spectators and participants at the opening ceremony of the 1976 Paralympic Games at the Woodbine Racetrack in Etobicoke, Ontario. The event stimulated the development of new physical accessibility projects across Metropolitan Toronto and provided an opportunity to demonstrate the capabilities of disabled people to the public as part of a broader project by disability activists and their allies to counteract negative stereotypes of disability. © Canadian Paralympic Committee, 1976. Reproduced with permission.

Sports events featuring disabled athletes advanced a shared agenda to reconstruct the social and physical landscape in Toronto. Dr. Jackson of the Torontolympiad organizing committee stated that the most important result of the Games was its ability to “improve the quality of living” of people with disabilities in Toronto that benefited from increased accessibility and awareness of disability issues in the city. Local disability

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44 Jackson, “What Did We Learn from the Torontolympiad?” 586-589.
rights groups seized the opportunity offered by the event to promote its accessibility agenda, arguing that it was “extremely appropriate to direct attention to the accessibility aspects of the City” in advance of the international attention directed upon the region. The Toronto Mayor’s Task Force on the Disabled and Elderly similarly noted there was a "sense of urgency to create a proper environment for the contestants and visitors to the 1976 Olympiad for the Physically Disabled." The Task Force found that the Games resulted in “increased awareness towards the needs of the handicapped in the City of Toronto” and used the momentum generated by the event to push for the implementation of its far-reaching recommendations to promote the social and economic integration of people with disabilities in the city. Indicating a shift toward contemporary accessibility plans, by 1981 the Task Force reported that Toronto city council was well on its way to implementing most of its recommendations and profiled several people with disabilities who had found work in the municipal public service and local industry as a result of a transformed set of expectations.

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48 TA, SC 361, Box 21, File 21, Article, Access (Fall 1981).
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<td>Pioneer Village</td>
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List of sites sorted by jurisdiction in the Toronto Region targeted by the organization Accessibility for the Disabled Action Program Toronto (ADAPT) for the development of accessibility plans in time for the 1976 Torontolympiad. ADAPT worked closely with the Toronto Mayor’s Task Force on the Disabled and Elderly to ensure that the bulk of sites identified above were made fully or partially accessible to accommodate thousands of disabled athletes and spectators that were anticipated to flood the city during the event. As the extensive list demonstrates, disability activists seized the opportunity to push
forward an agenda to retrofit Toronto in order to make the city more socially and economically inclusive for people with disabilities.\textsuperscript{49}

Advocates of disabled sports, which included event organizers, medical authorities, rehabilitation professionals and many parts of the disability community, argued that in addition to rehabilitative benefits sports events broadcast an empowered disabled identity to a wider audience. Conventional representations of disability in popular culture were often one-dimensional and perpetuated negative stereotypes of disabled people as dependent, incapable, even threatening in the case of deinstitutionalized people with mental health issues.\textsuperscript{50} In reference to the transference of media depictions of disability in televised charity telethons, for example, one interview participant in the present study named “David” noted, “Consider having your heart strings pulled on a Saturday afternoon by those who are deemed—and you consider—less fortunate. Then on Monday you, as an [employer or human resources worker], interview a person with a disability. I submit that the effects of Saturday afternoon may well influence your hiring decision Monday morning.”\textsuperscript{51} Organizers of disabled sporting events asserted that televised sporting events operated in much the same way as charitable telethons, yet presented a more utilitarian image of disability based upon positive themes of ability.\textsuperscript{52} Proponents argued that disabled athletes presented an image of people with disabilities as skilled, competitive, and capable, which were characteristics of employable individuals. While perhaps indirectly enabling a certain voyeurism of the disabled body, disabled sports forced spectators to focus on participants’ abilities and


\textsuperscript{50} Shakespeare, “Cultural Representation of Disabled People,” 286.; Fleischer and Zames, The Disability Rights Movement, 208.

\textsuperscript{51} “David”

\textsuperscript{52} “Torontoylmpiad 1976: A Time to be Together”
competencies rather than drawing on a reserve of conventional stereotypes about disability.

Disability rights activists critical of the image of disability presented in sports, however, argued that disabled athletes perpetuated the development of new stereotypes about disabled people that were unhelpful to the construction of an inclusive disability identity. Critics maintained that disabled athletes created a “super crip” image that subverted the abilities of ordinary disabled people within an idealized and arguably unrealistic version of disability. For these critics, the “super crip” represented a vaguely patriarchal figure upon which disabled people were intended to model themselves, promoting an enlightened perspective of disability marked by individual feats of strength and endurance. In this view, disabled athletes such as Rick Hansen and Terry Fox simultaneously challenged conventional depictions of disability while introducing expectations about the representation of disability that were unattainable for many people with disabilities. Disabled people who successfully redefined themselves through physical struggle and athletic competition were rewarded in disabled sports, while ordinary disabled people with any degree of dependency on others failed to present a sufficient portrayal of empowerment. As a result, critics argued that disabled “heroes” such as the “super crip” were seen to portray disabled people as “more or less than human” but rarely as ordinary individuals.

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Between these opposing perspectives about the impact of disabled sports on disability identity, some disability activists perceived an opportunity to advance a disability rights agenda. The presentation of a one-dimensional image of disability in disabled sporting events—the athletic, competitive, skilled, and enviable “super crip”—exposed the complex relationship between individual identities and the collective project of disability rights activism. Sandra Carpenter, for example, commented during Paralympian Rick Hansen’s Man in Motion World Tour, “On the one hand, the runners are held in awe, seen as pathetic, and/or superheroes. On the other hand, with so much camera and media attention, other things come out. Disabled persons are given opportunities to be seen and to talk about the fact that most are still poor, unemployed and excluded.”

As Carpenter observed, the greatest impact of disabled sports was its effect in attracting public attention to the collective project of disability rights activism while underscoring the development of individual working identities. A full appreciation of the development of “working identities” during this period, however, requires a closer analysis of actual people with disabilities regarding the ways in which work shaped their identity.

DECONSTRUCTION OF WORKING IDENTITIES IN TORONTO

Inspired by James Charlton’s call for “no more about us without us,” the present study involved the collection of oral narratives from people with disabilities whose memories of work refined an analysis of historical events and accounts provided by

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various archival records.\textsuperscript{57} Charlton appealed for academic work which not only reflected the experiences of people with disabilities, but involved them as active participants in the research process. Charlton’s appeal sought to move research about disabled people away from an historically extractive approach that objectified individuals, contributing to their social categorization as ‘Others.’\textsuperscript{58} The present writer embarked upon this study with Charlton’s approach in mind, striving to include people with disabilities whose individually variable personal experiences and observations about the relationship between work and disability contained broader historical importance. It became clear during the process of collection and analysis of narratives that the personal identity goals of many interview participants in this study reflected the conflicting dynamics of individual and collective identity formation in the disability community discussed above.

While disability activists from the 1970s struggled to craft an empowered identity instilled with certain legal rights, interview participants in the present study largely identified with the liberal individualism upon which participation in the capitalist labour market was largely based. Aside from other circumstances and events that shaped an individual’s course of development, interview participants partly defined themselves by their personal history of various struggles and accomplishments in the labour market.

Oral narratives of study participants suggested the existence of tension between individuals with disabilities who constructed their identities through the pursuit of work, versus the collective project of disability activists and their allies to improve labour market opportunity structures for an imagined “cross-disability community.” Without necessarily rejecting the validity of a politicized disability identity, most participants

\textsuperscript{57} Charlton, \textit{Nothing About Us Without Us}

\textsuperscript{58} Charlton, \textit{Nothing About Us Without Us}
articulated their identity within the context of evolving labour market roles. This apparent contradiction between liberal individualism and collective identity formation in fact found resolution in the desire for economic integration and independence which was held in common by participants who asserted their identities through work-based roles and the historical record of disability activism. Regardless of whether an individual or politicized identity was claimed, analysis of participant narratives regarding work experiences and attitudes toward paid employment revealed that the pursuit of personal autonomy and independence was fully compatible, and in fact reinforced, the emancipatory goals of disability activists. Individuals with disabilities sought not simply to shrug off an identity defined by burden, as was sometimes alleged of disability activists, but to claim an identity marked by self-fulfillment. Within the world of paid work, then, tension and compatibility uneasily co-existed between disability activism and individuals with disabilities who expressed the value of employment in personal terms while ostensibly developing their identity through work roles.

Participants in the present study were recruited through advertisements for individuals with disabilities with current or former work experiences during the study time period. Ads were placed in cross-disability and disability-specific forums and newsletters, word-of-mouth, personal and professional contacts, and the non-probability “snowball method” of population sampling. Individuals were selected based on the agreement that the bulk of their work experiences occurred in the Toronto area in order to provide a reasonably restricted geographical scope in which to cross-analyze the historical experiences of participants. While this sampling technique does not lead to a

59 Snowball sampling techniques involve using existing study participants to recruit additional participants through personal networks.
statically representative sample of the disabled population in Toronto, it does afford exploratory insights into a cross-disability assortment of individuals with experiences of acquired and/or congenital physical, sensory, intellectual, and developmental disabilities as well as various mental health issues. The present study in fact includes the narratives of individuals living with one or more experiences of visual impairment or blindness, hearing impairment, D/deafness, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, polio and post-polio syndrome, muscular dystrophy, spinal cord injury, scoliosis, back injuries, paraplegia, quadriplegia, fibromyalgia, brain injury, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, learning disabilities, chronic depression, schizophrenia, autism, other mental health issues, and a number of concurrent disorders. Interestingly, while the parameters of the project advertisement did not seek to exclude injured workers as potential applicants, nearly all participants lived with congenital disabilities or acquired disability outside the context of work.

Eleven male and nineteen female participants ranged in age from twenty-six to seventy-three, with an average age of fifty-three years old, effectively representing approximately three generations of workers in Toronto. The average age of participants entering the workforce was seventeen-years-old, with the youngest at eleven-years-old and the eldest at twenty-nine-years-old. Approximately fifty per cent of participants had entered the workforce before 1980 and another thirty percent between 1980 and 1984, indicating that the participant population was weighted comparatively in favour of the eldest generation followed by middle-aged workers. Of the seven participants who were retired or had stopped working at the time of the interview, most had retired after the year 2000 at the average age of fifty-five. One explanation for the older average age of the
participant population may be that participants were recruited as part of a disability *history*, which may have discouraged younger participants who either did not relate to the history of the disability rights movement or considered themselves to have unsubstantial personal work histories in which to recount. Although there was no attempt to solicit the input of any particular ethnic or racial group, and the language contained in advertisements for interview participants was constructed to avoid racial bias as best as possible, only two participants (or seven per cent) identified themselves as belonging to a racial minority. The vast majority (ninety-three per cent) of participants identified as “white,” “Caucasian,” “European,” or “Anglo Saxon.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Year started working</th>
<th>Age started working</th>
<th>Year stopped working/ last in workforce</th>
<th>Age stopped working/ last in workforce</th>
<th>Age at time of interview</th>
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<td>1967</td>
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<tr>
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<td>----</td>
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<td>------</td>
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Participant employment trajectories illustrating temporal timelines for workforce entry and exit and age at time of interview. See Appendix C for more information about individual participants.

* All participant names were randomly assigned pseudonyms with no bearing on the actual identities of interviewees. Participant identities were protected by a University of Toronto Office of Research Ethics-sanctioned informed consent agreement (see Appendix A) which prohibited the disclosure of participant information.

** “----” denotes participant who had not permanently left the workforce

*** “n/a” denotes information not disclosed or otherwise unavailable

<table>
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<th>Generation*</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Non-profit</th>
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<td>3 (50%)</td>
<td>2 (33%)</td>
<td>1 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 2 (1970-1979)</td>
<td>2 (22%)</td>
<td>3 (33%)</td>
<td>4 (44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 3 (1980-1989)</td>
<td>2 (18%)</td>
<td>5 (45%)</td>
<td>4 (36%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 4 (1990-2000s)</td>
<td>1 (25%)</td>
<td>2 (50%)</td>
<td>1 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8 (27%)</td>
<td>12 (40%)</td>
<td>10 (33%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Employment profile of participants based on job histories (see Appendix B) sorted demonstrating the bulk of employment experience in the public, private and non-profit sectors.

*Note: Participants were sorted into clusters based upon data indicating decade in which they first entered the workforce.

Participants were asked to convey various aspects of their work histories, career trajectories, and attitudes toward work within the context of an evolving disability rights movement in Canada. Participants shared many common responses, experiences, and perceptions of work that crossed individual characteristics such as generation, socioeconomic background, gender, race, and type of disability. When cross-referenced
with individual work trajectories and developments affecting disabled Canadians since
the 1960s, participants’ responses to questions about how work and a disability identity
interacted demonstrated the importance employment played in their lives. In particular,
participants were encouraged to consider why work was important to them and how they
felt employment affected the evolution of their identity within the context of a changing
disability rights landscape. Given that participants had been selected on the basis of an
active or former work history, generally believed that work was a primary feature of their
aspirational and actual identities that shaped their experience of disability in addition to
the influence of ideologically-charged political group identities. In her study on the
influence of disability rights on the employment of Americans with disabilities, Karen
Hirsch found that while disability rights activism fostered the development of a cross-
disability identity, “Many disabled workers have employment experiences that show why
passing—denying or hiding the disability as much as possible—is still the best choice
when a career and a respectable income are important goals.”

In confirmation of Hirsch’s assertion about selective identification with a
politcized identity, participants in the present study did not deny the accuracy of
collective experiences of chronic unemployment and poverty among disabled people as
well as political solutions proposed by disability activists. However, collective struggles
were largely conceptualized within the context of an individual struggle to contribute to
the economy, achieve independence, and participate in mainstream society. Most
participants acknowledged the existence and influence of various barriers to labour
market participation in their own lives, but articulated these barriers as obstacles to
individual employment objectives without necessarily relating to these experiences to

60 Hirsch, “From Colonization to Civil Rights,” 429.
hurdles faced by the wider disability community. While participants shared the overarching aim of disability rights activism to assert the citizenship of disabled people, work experiences were envisioned as an outgrowth of individual characteristics and circumstances that constituted one’s ‘working identity.’ Analysis of participant narratives revealed individual ‘working identities’ that only secondarily interacted with socially-constructed barriers in the labour market as envisioned by disability rights activism. As a result, a certain confluence existed in the minds of participants between individual and politicized identity projects from the 1960s focused on overcoming the historical associations between disability and the concept of burden that promoted the exclusion and liminality of a wider disability community.
Nvivo 9.0-generated cluster analysis of interview transcripts based on substantive word similarity (Pearson coefficient). As the above diagram illustrates, interview participants shared many similarities in the conceptualization of employment issues in response to standardized questions about employment despite wide variances in individual experiences of disability and work histories. The analysis suggests that a cross-disability analysis is particularly salient in the examination of employment experiences given that participants who belong to separate disability groups nevertheless provided similar accounts of opportunities and barriers in the labour market.^[61]

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The following section provides key findings from semi-structured, in-depth oral interviews I conducted with thirty people with disabilities in Toronto and southern Ontario regarding their engagement with the labour market. Three generations of work experiences from the 1960s to early 2000s were condensed into three pairs of selected participants arranged chronologically in order to reveal significant insights regarding the impact of a changing disability rights movement on participants’ individual identities. Despite varying levels of engagement with an evolving discourse of disability rights during the late twentieth century, interview participants in each generation constructed their identity explicitly around work roles and values that emerged from their employment experiences. As the subsequent narratives demonstrate, interview participants in Toronto confirm many of the key conclusions reached in a recent Canadian study by Ravi Malhotra and Morgan Rowe that built on a landmark American study by David Engel and Frank Munger which examined the relationship between disability rights, employment, and the construction of individual identities of study participants with disabilities.62 Both studies found that identity was inseparable from the realm of employment and work indeed assumed a central position in the development of self-identity.63 While legal rights and disability activism developed to help transform conventional identities ascribed to disabled people, Engel and Munger found that “rights have rarely become active in the lives of our interviewees through formal processes,” insisting on the relevance and importance of dynamic individual life histories.64 As such, the following pairs of interview participants demonstrate how self-identities were created

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through individual biographies, work experiences, and selective engagement with an evolving discourse of disability rights.

*William and Grace*

Reared during a period in which political activism around disability issues belonged more to their able-bodied parents than to disabled peers, “William” and “Grace,” though separated by experiences of paralysis and visual impairment respectively, shared an understanding that work was a central constitutive element in the formation of personal identity. While people with disabilities had not yet affirmatively developed an alternative model of disability during the 1960s in Toronto, parents forged an initial path toward the pursuit of social and economic inclusion that included political activism and the projection of such ideologies upon their children.65 Both William and Grace began working at an early age—William as a farm labourer and Grace shining shoes—when they first responded to the encouragement of family and caregivers to view work as part of a natural trajectory of personal development. Both cited the importance of work as something which superseded the variable experience of disability, despite William’s growing up “able-bodied” and acquiring a spinal cord injury at age sixteen and Grace’s having lost most of her eyesight by age five. William noted, “I had the sense that I had to work as everybody else did, as my parents did. The idea of sitting in my parent's house with my hand out was really repugnant to me … My family were independent workers. It was a matter of personal pride really.”66 Grace similarly found, “All those really early jobs I had were low pay but it helped build a work ethic. Also, I was just

65 See Chapter One
66 “William”
expected to work. I was from a very poor family and my parents frowned on welfare and any form of it. So it was: ‘Get off your butt and do something, kid.’”67 For William and Grace, the importance of work as a primary mechanism through which intrinsic meaning and personal identity would be cultivated, which was communicated to them during their formative years by parents and elders, motivated the pursuit of work regardless of barriers to labour market participation presented by the interaction of individual impairments and inaccessible environments.

Work provided William and Grace an opportunity to construct an identity separate from disability in the absence of a political framework in which to develop an empowered disability identity that emerged from within the disability community. With personal identities firmly anchored to strong work ethics and labour market status, they both believed that despite the availability of supposed economic security through the provision of acceptance of welfare benefits, acceptance of such benefits represented the “easy road” that did not address the desire for self-development and fulfillment through continuous and progressive participation in the workforce. Grace perceived a choice between a life of subsistence on welfare or one of paid work, having grown up surrounded by visually impaired peers and adults. She noted, “When I finished school I was younger than other students so I was too young to go on the Blind Person’s Allowance. So I was never on a government pension like that. I know some kids were as soon as they turned eighteen … But work has always been important to me. What we do is who we are, eh?”68 William similarly interpreted the ‘work-or-welfare’ dilemma as a test of his work ethic, fearful that dependency would compromise his identity as an

67 “Grace”
68 “Grace”
independent wage earner. He recalled, “After I went away […] to university I never went back home to live. I missed quite a lot of meals in the early days but still didn't go back. I just kept at it until I got a job and could support myself. I had no sense that it was because of my disability.”

Rehabilitation impacted the formation of William and Grace’s personal identities in different ways. Given that William’s injury occurred during his adolescent years, he described the intensive two-year rehabilitation program as an event or obstacle followed by the resumption of a normal life cycle. A retrospective assessment of his peers in the rehabilitation process confirmed to William that his focus on developing a work-based identity insulated him from the negative influence which was seen to emerge from typical experiences of paralysis. He observed, “I know one person who went through Lyndhurst with me in 1960-61, the rest are dead. Dead from personal neglect and alcohol and drugs. It’s a difficult thing for some people to get over. A large portion become quite angry, have bad attitudes.” For Grace, however, rehabilitation was more loosely defined given that she attended a separate school for the blind from a very young age and found employment with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, cultivating her work identity, experience and professional networks around others in the blind community. Despite employment within the arena of services for her peers with visual impairments, however, Grace’s focus on self-development through work did not dissuade her from taking progressively responsible positions that took her outside the blind community.

Despite their similar values and experience finding upward advancement in professional and managerial positions, William and Grace adopted dissimilar attitudes

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69 “William”
70 “William”
toward identification with an emerging politicized identity as members of an imagined disability community. William rejected the notion that his visible mobility impairment defined him in any meaningful way, particularly within the context of the work. He eschewed participation in equity groups who “met and discussed their problems” and believed such people were generally “incompetent or hiding behind their disability to get things they shouldn't get.” William asserted, “I didn't want any part of that. I just did my job and applied and got this job and got that job.”

He even found that employment equity provisions introduced during the 1980s and 1990s represented “reverse discrimination,” arguing that such legislation directly threatened his hard-won identity as an experienced professional. William recounted one experience that led him to reassert his identity during an application for a job promotion: “They actually put in a policy whereby anybody with an ethnic singularity or a disability automatically had ten points given to them in the interview, which I found really insulting. In fact, one time I applied for a high profile project job which would have lasted about a year. I won the competition. I asked the HR guy what the second person's score was. He wouldn't tell me; said it was private. I asked if I won by more than ten points. He said no. So I rejected the job.”

In contrast to William, but similarly protective of an identity shaped by work experience and competence, Grace expressed more confidence in the potential for legal rights and disability activism to promote, rather than negate, positive disability identities. Rather than undermining her accomplishments, Grace described the introduction of legal rights for disabled workers since the 1970s as a matter of creating awareness of issues.

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71 “William”
72 See Chapter Five and Chapter Six
73 “William”
affecting disabled people and equalizing the playing field in the labour market. She explained, “Initially when I was hired as a consultant I had to fight to get on as a permanent employee. I had to fight for that even though I was doing the same job as other nondisabled people … But that was the mid-‘70s and when we got to 1981, which was the IYDP, a lot of work was done around that time and a lot of things changed; much for the better.” Grace found that during the 1970s there was limited access to accommodations or assistive devices in her public sector policy analysis work, forcing her to supply her own devices or practice forms of self-limitation. By the 1980s, however, she found that growing awareness of disability issues simultaneously resulted in positive changes to public policy that only served to enhance her ability and confidence in her work.

Nathan and Michael

“Nathan’s” adolescent working years during the 1970s found him labelling paint cans, stocking shelves at a grocery store, assembling products on assembly lines, and bartending—all while relishing the individual freedom of hitchhiking across the country. Having left home and school at age sixteen, paid work was not only a matter of survival for Nathan, but a key feature in his bid for independence and an assertion of adult masculinity. He argued, “Men worked. Men are obliged to work … While I took little or no satisfaction or fulfilment from the work tasks, the income was important. In my family and in my social circle, everyone worked and men worked for money and they began working at what some would consider being an early age. So emulating those around me

74 “Grace”
and wishing to be a man, I had to work.” As a qualified mechanic by the early 1980s, Nathan appeared to have secured his personal identity goals through employment status.

The pursuit of identity through work, however, exacerbated the effects of Nathan’s mental health issues, which included bipolar spectrum disorder, anxiety, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and depression. Despite the advent of legal rights and heightened public awareness of disability issues during the 1980s, Nathan refused to disclose his mental health issues to employers or coworkers, confident that accommodations would not be forthcoming and in anticipation of a loss of job security. Instead, Nathan believed that he was obliged to conceal his mental health issues given the liberal individualism characteristic of mainstream employment which forced disabled workers to self-manage their limitations in socially-inaccessible workplaces. He explained, “Having been in many, many workplaces, I have an understanding of what is required of the task, the demands. I self-limit. Any place I go where I don't believe I could cope, I don't apply for the job.”

In addition to mental health issues, Nathan sustained a workplace injury in the 1990s which resulted in chronic musculoskeletal disorders that forced him to abandon his career as a mechanic when his employer refused to accommodate him. Although Nathan eventually found employment in the legal profession, his experience of an abrupt dislocation of work identity caused him to distrust the capacity of legal rights to protect him in employment, further distancing him from identification with a disability identity. He concluded, “I have experience of how people deal in the workforce, how people interact and deal with individuals with disabilities. How employers don't want to accommodate … My research and personal experience tells

75 “Nathan,” Interview with Author, 16 June 2011.
76 “Nathan”
me that the vast majority of workplaces do not accommodate individuals with disabilities.”

In contrast to Nathan, but careful to avoid acceptance of a disability identity, “Michael” discovered an empowered identity and self-realization through the assertion of his mental health issues within the context of employment and an evolving disability rights framework. Michael used “person-first” terminology to identify himself as “a person with experience of schizophrenia” in order to simultaneously demarcate the pathology of mental health status from the complexity of his individuality. He explained, “It’s a generational thing. The Schizophrenia Society of Ontario was called, not that long ago, Ontario Friends of Schizophrenics. It's just mainly ‘the label defines you.’ It was comfortable for a certain generation to define it that way.” Similar to Nathan and William, Michael referred to the influence of his family upbringing as the root of a desire to develop his personal identity through work. He asserted, “I come from a middle-class family where my parents worked hard and my sister has been successful. I come from this ethic of ‘work hard.’” Unlike Nathan, however, Michael did not describe work as providing confirmation of his masculinity, but rather, as part of a search for self-fulfillment of deeply-rooted personal values. He declared, “It’s part of my identity because I’m a giving person. I was raised to be generous … I find that I want to contribute and I find that’s what I’m doing.”

Both Nathan and Michael found that disability shaped the trajectory of their employment history and altered their sense of self. While Nathan’s physical injuries

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77 “Nathan”
78 “Michael”
79 “Michael”
80 “Michael”
prompted a sudden career change despite hidden ongoing experience of mental health issues, Michael’s career in “information science” was transformed by a period of hospitalization during the early 1990s in which he sought treatment for his mental health issues. Unlike William, who perceived his physical rehabilitation in the early 1960s as a singular event, Michael found that acute medical intervention in his life began a relatively prolonged process of recovery and increased self-awareness about the relationship between his mental health issues and work that eventually led him back to the workforce on completely new terms. Although driven by a similar set of “work ethics” as Nathan, William and Grace, Michael did not find his personal values were compromised by acceptance of welfare benefits. Instead, he preferred to view such benefits as the means by which he could selectively engage the labour market in work that was both rewarding and accommodating for his needs and abilities. He recalled, “I did make the point with somebody who was helping me with my personal experience speech and we were coming to the part where I was talking about the past. I said that I had difficulty with finding work. Her suggestion was, ‘You weren’t able to work.’ I said, ‘No, I had difficulty working.’”

Michael crafted his own path toward reintegration in the workforce by securing employment in non-profit organizations that operated within a consumer-survivor peer-support context that were particularly flexible, supportive and understanding about the need to provide certain accommodations. In contrast to Nathan who felt his job security would be jeopardized by claiming an identity and set of needs marked by mental health issues, Michael felt comfortable disclosing his mental health issues up front in working environments in order to establish working terms that were acceptable to both himself

81 “Michael”
and his employer. As Nathan found, “I feel my biggest obstacle I have to overcome is my inability to identify as a person who needs accommodation … Dealing with most of my colleagues, I have the impression that it's not the place that would not be accommodating to my particular type of disability. My physical disabilities, they have no problems with. I can get assistive technology, if I was in a wheelchair they could widen the doors or whatever. My mental illness—that’s another thing. My experiences are such that I cannot declare as a person with a mental illness without risking my employment.”

Mary and Danielle

“Mary” and “Danielle” entered the workforce during the mid to late-1980s amidst the development of legal rights for women and people with disabilities entrenched in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and unprecedented wave of public awareness about disability issues. Unlike their peer Grace who entered the workforce during the early 1960s, social activism during the 1970s and early 1980s cultivated empowered identities for women with disabilities in the wider public sphere. Similar to Grace’s upbringing, Mary grew up with a visual impairment in a separate school where she was educated apart from her able-bodied peers, subjected to a different set of expectations about her capabilities and potential. While Mary and Grace shared similar family-based reassurances of their ability to construct self-identities through work, Mary entered the workforce during a period in which important developments in rights, benefits, and technology transformed access to employment opportunities for people with visual impairments. Widespread transition to new computerized work stations transformed many Canadian workplaces while emerging assistive technologies for blind computer

82 “Nathan”
users promised to allow people with visual impairments to compete on a level playing field with their sighted colleagues.\(^{83}\)

As work environments were progressively reshaped by the “computer revolution” Mary rejected her family’s encouragement to pursue university, instead opting to quickly obtain a college diploma that qualified her for a job in the growing technology sector. She recalled her enthusiasm, “When I started working I was 23 and really excited. I thought, 'Oh boy, I'm going to bring home a paycheque, I'm contributing to a company, and helping people.'”\(^{84}\) Proud of her status as the first blind customer service representative in her large national company, Mary also understood that she benefited from an unprecedented interface of the employment equity regulations that governed her workplace, relatively new government subsidization of assistive devices, and the increased availability of new accessible technologies that enabled her to use the company’s computer systems.\(^{85}\) The intersection of these circumstances with Mary’s ambition to succeed in the labour market enabled her to manoeuvre herself into various management positions within the company. Although trained separately as a result of the need to understand how the accessible system worked, Mary worked alongside her able-bodied colleagues and attended training sessions with her peers. For Mary, visual impairment did not appear to inhibit the development of a working identity, nor did she feel the need to assert her legal rights or a disability identity.

In contrast to Mary, Danielle grew up able-bodied and found that following the onset of a physical disability, legal rights meant to protect disabled people from discrimination in the workplace failed to provide a suitable remedy. While Danielle

\(^{83}\) See Chapter Five
\(^{84}\) "Mary"
\(^{85}\) See Chapter Six
found empowerment through assertion of a disability identity and engagement with a politicized movement of people with disabilities, her attempt to exercise her rights as a disabled person ultimately undermined the basis of her new identity. As a working woman during the late 1980s with a self-described “Type A personality,” Danielle excelled in her field of administrative and financial services where she developed a reputation as a dynamic and highly effective professional. Despite her success, Danielle found herself locked in a perpetual struggle with undisclosed mental health issues. She explained, “I was living with major depression all of that time but pretty functional. I was always the employee that had the most sick-time. I always lost one or two days a month to depression. None of my employers were ever very tolerant of that. Of course, back then one didn't necessarily talk about staying home from work because you were depressed.” Danielle believed that a general lack of awareness and respect for mental health issues meant that it was her reputation as an effective professional that insulated her from major reprisals from her employers.

By the early 1990s, Danielle was also diagnosed with multiple sclerosis following an extended period of uncertainty in which she was on sick leave to secure a diagnosis for her undetermined illness. When her employer engaged in a series of actions that concluded in wrongful dismissal, Danielle reluctantly filed a human rights complaint, alleging her employer discriminated against her on the basis of disability. She recalled, “It was the most horrific experience. With a chronic illness or disability and you have an employer who doesn't support you, you start feeling guilty for being sick. I was devastated.” An ensuing protracted legal struggle ended with minimal compensation for

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86 “Danielle,” Interview with Author, 30 June 2011.
87 “Danielle”
the loss of her job, coupled with an eroded sense of self. She explained, “When I lost my job, not only did I lose my job, I lost a career. I lost who I was. The energy and emotional fortitude it takes to rediscover or recreate a self-image; that took me… I had no self-image for eight years.”88 Although Danielle had sought accommodations for her developing health issues in order that she could continue to maintain her self-identity as a competent and capable professional, the discriminatory actions of her employer forced her to engage legal rights and a politicized identity that she had not set out to acquire.

By the time Danielle’s legal struggle with her employer concluded in the late 1990s, Mary similarly discovered that the constellation of factors which had enabled her to nurture her self-identity through advancement in her company quickly eroded when her employer suddenly switched to an inaccessible computer system. The introduction graphic user interfaces in the early 1990s brought about by the popularization of the Microsoft Windows operating systems replaced standard text-based DOS (Disk Operating System) computer systems.89 As disability activist David Lepofsky argued at the time, “The Windows operating system was premised on assumption that users could see the technology they have introduced … People who are victims of the current practices of the mainstream computer industry need to use the legal mechanisms they have available to them now to bring claims.”90 Mary similarly argued, “I was more equal in 1987 back in the DOS and ‘dumb terminal’ days than I am now because back then it

88 “Danielle”
89 Microsoft Corporation, “A History of Windows,” accessed 21 June 2013, http://windows.microsoft.com/en-CA/windows/history. Although Microsoft had developed and released Windows 1.0 in 1985 as an extension of DOS, it was not until the introduction of Windows 3.1 in May 1992, with add-on features such as Windows for Workgroups that enabled businesses to use key networking features, that a graphic user interface achieved widespread popularity as a viable alternative to the text-based DOS. Unprecedented success followed from the introduction of Windows 95 in August 1995, which was incompatible on DOS-only computers, signalled the rapid decline of accessible technologies on a primarily text-based OS.
was easier to make something accessible because the original was simpler … The screen reading technology just can't keep up.” While Mary avoided availing herself of a disability identity, having constructed her identity primarily around work during a period in which early computer technology created a welcoming work environment, her employer’s decision to adopt a new inaccessible operating system thrust Mary into the same position as other blind employees. She recalled, “The company decided they needed a new computer system and they ignored the needs of their blind employees. Basically the bottom line was they didn't care enough to expend time and money to find an application that would work for everyone.” As an experienced employee with qualifications now inaccessible to her job profile, Mary was effectively made redundant and transferred to various “make-work” projects before eventually deciding to resign. Similar to Danielle, the process of developing a working identity followed by forced disengagement resulted in a devastating effect on Mary’s self-identity. Mary concluded, “It became very demoralizing. Employment has the possibility of being a really good thing and a really bad thing at the same time depending on how it goes and what your employer is like.”

CONCLUSION

As idealized figures in disabled sporting events, activists in identity politics, workers, people with disabilities sought to cultivate working identities in the late twentieth century. Despite the existence of social barriers to labour market participation, disabled people did not exempt themselves from the mainstream expectation to contribute

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91 “Mary”
92 “Mary”
to the economy and cultural imperative to develop one’s self-identity through the pursuit of paid work. The risks of associating identity development with employment status, however, were augmented by the reality that many people with disabilities represented economically marginal figures during this period. The liberal individualism which motivated these expectations and imperatives convinced many people with disabilities that work was a necessary component of full citizenship despite the prevalence of ‘disabling’ social attitudes and physical environments. As a nascent disability rights movement promoted a cross-disability identity and worked to erect a political framework in which to support this identity, many people with disabilities constructed individual identities apart from this collective project.

Narratives of interview participants living with various disabilities regarding their employment experiences and perceptions of work from the 1960s to 2000s demonstrated the extent to which employment was a central component in the process of individual and collective identity formation. Multiple generations of interview participants in Toronto whose work experiences traversed decades of disability rights activism expressed a shared desire to achieve material success and personal fulfillment through work. Analysis of participants’ oral narratives in the present study revealed a general ambition to be productive, autonomous, and financially independent in opposition to conventional notions that disability historically entailed a burden on others. Participants rejected the stereotypical association of disability with the concept of ‘burden,’ instead pointing to skills and intrinsic resources that enabled them to resist forces of social and economic exclusion. Realization of certain employment goals were thus seen by participants as a
primary mechanism to achieve conventional mainstream value of independence through paid work.

Interview participants in Toronto represented multiple generations of disabled workers demonstrated an internalization of the predominant social valuation of paid employment during a period in which disability activists sought to harness this motivation to a larger political platform. Disability rights activists based their attempt to reconfigure labour market opportunity structures through a politicized identity and shared experiences of oppression. Activists sought to overturn the longstanding cultural exemption of people with disabilities from paid work. Immersed in a society that placed a heavy emphasis on the importance of work, many people with disabilities identified with the liberal individualism of the mainstream and sought to distance themselves from the ‘burden’ ethos through individual effort and achievement. Where identity politics reflected the dynamic interplay of a relatively few people with disabilities, it also lent wider expression to the prioritization of work at an individual level. A reciprocal relationship thus existed in which employment was situated at the centre of both individual and collective efforts to substitute longstanding stereotypes of disability as a social or public burden with empowered, productive, “working” identities of people with disabilities.
Conclusion

Family advocates, rehabilitation professionals, disability rights activists as well as employers, governments and labour leaders participated in the redefinition of the social and economic problem of disability in the late twentieth century. Multiple disability movements and manifestations of disability activism collectively challenged longstanding mechanisms that perpetuated the segregation of disabled people. While disability organizations were decidedly grassroots, their energy fed into a diverse national social movement seeking new rights and protections accompanied by a greater range of employment opportunities. The charisma of many disability rights activists led to their recruitment by special government bureaus and labour organizations where they were provided with the enormous task of reconditioning the attitudes and practices of policymakers and employers. Physical and social obstacles that hindered disabled people from opportunities to undertake mainstream education, skill development and other factors essential for typical career trajectories were reconceptualised as socially constructed barriers. If barriers were socially created, however, they could also be socially dismantled. Within and outside structures of power, disability activists and their allies defended a progressive and unrelenting dialogue on the role of people with disabilities in the community and importance of their increased participation in the labour market. A multitude of divisions within the disability community did not distract from this central pursuit as it was believed that economic integration was the crux upon which disabled people relied to achieve full citizenship. Waves of awareness about disability issues advanced and retreated from the 1960s to 2000s as management of business
enterprises changed hands, governments rose and fell, and the field of disability activism evolved. Yet the social roots of the economic problem of disability remained relatively intact, prompting a search for evermore creative solutions to the under- and unemployment of disabled people.

The reality of chronic poverty and unemployment in the disability community despite forty-years of contemporary disability activism in Canada prompts us to question the degree to which people with disabilities and their allies actually impacted the labour market and broader cultural responses to disability. This study demonstrates that there were a variety of responses to disability activism that produced many new changes. While the disability community spoke with many voices, often in cooperation but sometimes in conflict, the message remained the same: people with disabilities are capable of more than common stereotypes allow and should be provided unobstructed opportunities to develop their capabilities. Despite the varied experience of disability and nebulous character of disability movements, disability activists found common ground in the struggle for access to employment opportunities. This struggle produced widespread changes in the built environment, policy landscape, and social discourse of disability that made it possible for people with disabilities to find jobs. An important battleground in disabled peoples’ struggle for integration was fought at the workplace by individuals and groups that sought to create new identities for people with disabilities based upon the provision of gainful employment. Individual struggles for employment were complemented by a collective project by disability organizations and government bureaus to highlight the employability of disabled people, initially by simple hiring campaigns and later through broad spectrum awareness-building campaigns. Activists’ employment
initiatives evolved in response to changing labour conditions and legislative protections. Whether on the picket line protesting wages and working conditions in sheltered workshops or in conference roundtables discussing their concerns with employers and policymakers, disabled people and their allies focused their energies on devising solutions to labour market accessibility.

In many ways, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) reflected the outcome of evolving strategies and perspectives held by disability rights activism and advocacy to address the economic problem of disability in contemporary Canada. The discourse of disability initiated by deinstitutionalization and the parents’ movement represented a first step toward developing alternatives to segregation in part by promoting the reconceptualization of disabled people. This movement confronted the challenges of residential institutions and other forms of social and economic exclusion with the practicalities of achieving community living. While family advocates and rehabilitation professionals were largely informed by a progressive-minded approach to disability, they did not embody a civil rights movement rooted in radical identity politics that came later by the 1970s with the arrival of disability rights activism. By the mid-1970s the parents’ movement already reflected a modified approach in response to consumer philosophies, as demonstrated in Chapter Six’s discussion of the United Nations’ acknowledgment of Canada and the role of family advocates in the 1975 Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons. Disability rights activists powered an evolving discourse of disability by carving out a role for people with disabilities in existing social movements and labour institutions. This proved to be a vital development as disabled people demonstrated their ability to make meaningful contributions to society
in their own right rather than their allies simply articulating these capacities on their behalf. If people with disabilities wanted better access to paid employment, they would eventually have to take it upon themselves to promote this objective.

The political structure of federalism in Canada meant that seemingly major advances in disability rights such as the AODA were restricted by jurisdictional limitations. Disability activists and scholars alike lamented the degree to which a federalist government structure inhibited the coordinated advancement of changes to the political and economic landscape; yet in the absence of fundamental constitutional changes, disability activists resolved to work within this system to produce effective change.¹ As a provincial statute, the AODA could not be expected to have as widespread an influence on policy development as its model, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).² Indeed, even the ADA has been criticized for failing to produce substantive improvement in employment rates.³ Yet, supporters of this legislation argue that its comprehensive scope established the necessary policy environment for the realization of new standards as well as the need for an integrated response to the removal of barriers to social integration. This approach was rooted in the lived reality of economic marginality and social liminality which disability rights activists brought to the table as representatives of the disability community, as discussed in Chapter Eight. Outward-looking in terms of their desire for greater participation in mainstream life, consumer-

² Lepofsky, “The Long and Arduous Road to a Barrier-Free Ontario”
oriented disability movements drew upon deep reservoirs of personal experience and energy within the disability community.

Repeated studies documenting a pattern of under- and unemployment in the disability community hardened this resolve among disability movements to engineer progressive changes to the cultural and economic landscape. Following the introduction of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons, the World Health Organization released its first World Report on Disability in 2012 to ascertain the state of disability and determine possible solutions to widespread social and economic dislocation. The report found that only fifty-six per cent of working-age adults with disabilities in Canada were employed, although this employment rate was generally better than other developed and developing countries. The report concluded that labour market outcomes for disabled people depend on a constellation of factors, but “given the right environment, most PWD [persons with disabilities] can be productive.” In 2013, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada published a report called Rethinking Disability in the Private Sector based on extensive consultations with private sector employers in Canada. Echoing conclusions heard from previous reports on the attitudes and practices of employers, as discussed in Chapter Five, the report documented the persistence of a discriminatory mythology of disability among employers that discouraged them from hiring disabled people. Even more disturbing is the use of language and strategies, such as “Hiring people with disabilities is good for business.”

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4 World Report on Disability, xxii.
5 World Report on Disability, 238.
6 World Report on Disability, 235.
that signal a return to antiquated “hire the handicapped” campaigns initiated *more than seventy years ago.*

An older generation of disability activists was not necessarily replaced by a younger generation willing to engage in alternative forms of disability activism. Many of the leading disability rights activists of the late 1970s and early 1980s continued to lead the fight thirty years later. Key activists that emerged from this period went on to achieve legal degrees that enabled them to focus their energies on advancing the pursuit of precedent-setting disability rights legislation. Yet many of these early leaders continued to lead disability movements into the twenty-first century. What happened to a subsequent generation of disability rights leaders? As Christine Kelly reminds us, there were many more forms of activism than accepted forms of disability rights organizations spearheading awareness campaigns and lobbying for legislative changes. Yet many developments in the advancement of legal rights for people with disabilities continued to accrue under the leadership of a generation of activists that came of age during the emergence of civil rights activism.

Disability organizations held fast to established patterns of activism that had enabled them to exert a degree of political influence on the national stage in the past. The Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD; formerly COPOH) continued to lead in the provision of consumer input to federal and provincial policymakers through its committees and provincial affiliates. Access to high-ranking government officials living with visible physical disabilities, such as Conservative Member of Parliament Steven Fletcher and Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario David Onley, assured some level of

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8 Ibid, 6.
sustained attention to disability rights lobbyists in the public sector. Recent initiatives by the CCD also indicate the continued prioritization of economic integration in a sweeping platform that includes social policy, human rights, transportation, technology and international issues. Faced with continued widespread poverty and unemployment in the disability community, the CCD’s Social Policy committee initiated a major research project in 2008 called *Disabling Poverty/Enabling Citizenship* that examines the impact of various political institutions and programs on the economic opportunities of people with disabilities. The project, which also spawned an annual community forum and rally called End Exclusion, builds on longstanding efforts by disability activists to reconceptualise widespread poverty and unemployment in the disability community as being primarily the effect of socially constructed barriers. Indeed, disability rights activists’ continued focus on this message indicates that this ideological work is far from over.

Optimism generated by disability activists for full participation in the community ultimately rested upon the shoulders of individuals with disabilities whose struggles and achievements in the labour market during the late twentieth century ultimately represented important contributions to the objectives of disability movements. Amid the rise and fall of disability organizations, political initiatives and social movement alliances, generations of people with disabilities sought to live and work free from constant struggle against social and physical barriers. They had seen many developments: the establishment of consumer-controlled disability organizations and advisory councils, new government bureaus dedicated to helping them find jobs, new legislative protections

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http://www.ccdonline.ca/en/socialpolicy/poverty-citizenship
in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and other statutes, employment equity legislation at the national and provincial level, and new alliances between disability activists and labour leaders. They also watched as attention to disability issues ascended and fell according to waves of awareness. Despite evolving political and economic conditions over time, many people with disabilities managed to ensconce themselves in workplaces, cultivating their own circles of awareness as they confronted new and old barriers to full participation. While individual work experiences and trials were not necessarily seen as acts of disability activism, they did not exist entirely apart from disability movements. Similar to the unionized worker who eschews unionization but reaps the benefits of union wages, individual work experiences in the labour market were inseparable from collective action as both shaped the identity politics of disability during the late twentieth century.

It was within the sphere of labour that disability movements and individual actions ultimately converged. While disability activists lamented the fact that decades of “hire the handicapped” campaigns had produced little statistical change in unemployment rates, as discussed in Chapter Two, many people with disabilities found their way into the workforce partly on account of subsequent awareness-building and accessibility projects. With each new addition of disabled people to the workplace, ripples of awareness were created that reverberated back to the collective vision of disability movements to break down social barriers to meaningful inclusion. As the employment agency The World of One in Seven discovered, discussed in Chapter Five, attitudinal change was best achieved through personal interaction with disabled people rather than passive acknowledgment of disability issues articulated by disability organizations. Specialized employment counsellors such as those at The World of One in Seven cultivated a roster of employers
willing to hire people with disabilities, thus engineering local or regional conditions favourable to economic integration. The employment of people with disabilities was intimately connected with the goals of disability activism, whether or not individual participants understood their crucial role in the larger scheme of things.

Disability activism was not restricted to one group of people, as this dissertation has emphatically argued. Instead, activism was a shared undertaking across a broad spectrum of institutions surrounding the labour market, and so responsibility for change (or the lack thereof) in the economic integration of disabled people must be distributed equally. Employers were certainly culpable of failing to hire disabled people in numbers significant enough to alter the fortunes of many working-age adults with disabilities seeking employment. Governments, regardless of party distinctions, were similarly responsible in their role as public sector employers but also in terms of their progressive retreat from the sphere of labour. The transition toward a neoliberal style of politics from the 1980s onward undermined the state’s ability to effect change in the labour market through policy and program mechanisms, upon which many disabled people had relied for access to job opportunities.11 Labour organizations could have chosen to engage disability organizations more emphatically despite their conceptual dilemmas. Disabled people and their allies in various disability organizations and service agencies could also have worked harder at speaking with a unified voice rather than being distracted by ideological differences, professional hubris and organizational insularity.

While there were important differences motivating different disability movements and players in the labour market, there was also a shared desire for increased participation of disabled people in mainstream society. Many employers did hire disabled

people and shared their experiences with their peers in business associations and employment conferences. Governments did undertake many initiatives to raise awareness of disability issues, passed legislative changes such as employment equity and new human rights protections, and promoted a progressive model of employment practices to a much larger private sector. Labour leaders and some unions forged temporary alliances with disability rights activists in response to mutually beneficial objectives, such as in their shared opposition to sheltered workshops. Disability rights activists, parents and rehabilitation professionals even waded into uncertain waters of identity politics and consumer control to reach a new consensus on the importance of supported employment for people with disabilities seeking independent living.

Despite this shared perspective on the importance of economic integration, however, cooperation between these major institutions and influences on the employment of disabled people remained tenuous and required constant maintenance. This was particularly conspicuous in the relationship between disability rights activists and the labour movement as discussed in Chapter Seven. Whereas the struggle to defeat Bill 188 in Ontario marked the beginning of a rapprochement between disability rights activists and service agencies, discussed in Chapter Six, the alliance with labour suffered from a combination of differences in priority and benign neglect. Disability activists similarly found that productive working relations with federal cabinet ministers, members of provincial parliament, and city councillors that took years to mature could be erased with the installation of new officials and political parties. The terms of relationships between disability activists and centres of power in the labour market were continually being renegotiated by political and managerial “changes of the guard” that interrupted sustained
attention to deep-rooted barriers to economic participation. A devastating example of this followed from the election of the Progressive Conservative government in Ontario in 1995 which resulted in the radical disfigurement of social policy and associated departure from decades of advancements in disability policy and programming. An increasingly hostile political and economic environment forced disability activists to redouble their efforts while regrouping to confront new challenges.

Of course, circumstances unfolded differently on the national, provincial and local stages as responses to disability activism were shaped by particular political configurations and histories. Certainly, future studies of local and provincial responses to disability activism would help clarify the ways in which activists’ relationships with policymakers affected employment opportunity structures for people with disabilities. As Chapter Three emphasized, individual activists such as Scarborough’s Beryl Potter played a critical role influencing the course of events at the local and regional level. The state-focused orientation of disability activism also meant that provincial governments played a key role in the advancement of disability rights. Activists watched for developments in disability policy and accessibility in other parts of the country and attempted to implement them locally. This was particularly so in the sphere of labour where vocational rehabilitation, assistive devices and other social programming that shaped the employability of disabled people fell within the jurisdiction of the provinces. While the federal government looked to the provinces for disability policy development, municipalities were dependent on provincial funding for the implementation of social and vocational programs at the local level. The Ontario Handicapped Employment Program, discussed in Chapter Five, was a creature of the provincial government even though its
promotional activities held national significance and awareness-building work with employers helped disabled workers on the ground in Toronto and elsewhere. The interplay of federal, provincial and local authorities and dynamics thus had a distinctly local and regional flavour that requires further study.

Disability activism during the late twentieth century was driven by the individual and collective pursuit of economic integration. From sheltered workshops to debates between rehabilitation organizations and disability rights activists over the meaning of consumer control to differences between organized and unemployed disabled people, to questions of self-identity and the role of identity politics in the workplace, the pursuit of a new approach to disability during this period was ultimately determined by labour. The refusal by a generation of parents to accept that disability should be associated with institutional mechanisms of exclusion opened the door to a completely revised approach to disability that empowered people with disabilities to question and challenge obstacles in their life’s path rather than begrudgingly accepting them as commensurate with the realities of impairment. The relocation of disability outside oneself to the surrounding environment created enormous potential for a revised way of thinking about causes and solutions to the social and economic dislocation of people with disabilities. The articulation and creative application of social constructionist philosophies during this period demonstrated that “disabled” and “able-bodied” represented a continuum in the human experience and that living and working arrangements could (and should) be adapted to meet our changing needs rather than the other way around. As a new movement of disability rights activists grappled with the problem of sorting rhetoric from reality in support of a social model of disability, they found themselves developing closer
relations with existing disability movements in order to achieve meaningful change. Widespread poverty and unemployment in the disability community was a shared problem that crossed jurisdictional and ideological boundaries and it was here that disability rights activists, advocates and allies found a common platform to pursue a collaborative agenda.

As a younger generation of people with disabilities come of age in a climate of economic instability and declining labour standards, prospective disability activists must be able to sort out meaningful action from rhetorical insignificance when it comes to determining the intentions of policymakers, employers and allies. Potential strategies and logistical pitfalls may be avoided by an understanding of the history and the lessons learned from previous manifestations of disability activism. This is particularly important if an older generation of activists is indeed failing to be replaced by a younger cohort of people with disabilities averse to identity politics and collective action. Indeed, the pursuit of independence and self-determination, reflected by the prioritization of paid work by disability rights activists and their allies as a conduit to social integration, was never meant to separate disabled people from the moral accountability of others in community. If people with disabilities and their allies continue to seek full participation in the work and life of the community, they need to have a solid understanding of their own histories in order to recognize new developments in social and economic policy that threaten to roll back historic victories earned by disability activists. Nothing is sacred in the realm of labour, as union leaders can certainly attest, and the preservation of past successes requires constant vigilance by a well-informed population.
As disability history continues to evolve within Canadian and international historiography and disability gains traction as a necessary category in which to analyze contemporary and historical questions, there is a pressing need to ensure the field maintains its roots as an emancipatory field of research while continuing to be relevant to a broader audience. The example set by a feminist historiography may offer a way forward. Gender history similarly emerged from emancipatory roots in second-wave women’s rights movements during the 1960s and 1970s that sought to impart a revisionist perspective in the historiographical record. Gender historians incisively demonstrated ways in which gender could be used as a category of historical analysis and thus integrated into existing scholarship in order to deepen our knowledge of new and conventional historical themes. Disability historians can learn much from this approach, but we must also make our own case for “another ‘Other.’” Uncovering the hidden labour history of people with disabilities reflects a methodology that seeks to synthesize disability studies scholarship with other fields of historical inquiry in order to highlight the ways in which historians can use disability in the broader practice of social and cultural history. Through the incorporation of disability into the existing historiography we are forced to revisit past assessments of historical events and approaches in order to arrive at a fuller understanding of the individual and social experience of cultural and economic systems of work.


This study has shown how work can be conceived as a fundamental arena where we can gain a greater understanding of some aspects of the lived experience of disability. Work has been shown to animate a belief in citizens with disabilities as employable producers and consumers capable of participating in ordinary life, such as it was. Paid and unpaid work of people with disabilities ought to be understood as an outcome of these struggles, given that consideration of the aspirations of many people in the labour market remain unfulfilled. Physical and attitudinal barriers to labour market participation prevented many people with disabilities from exercising their full citizenship and formed the principal basis upon which social movements of disabled people and their allies emerged. Energized by different ideological and applied approaches to disability, distinct disability movements nevertheless had a common desire for social and economic integration. In fact, work and employment provided a common language in which disability activists, employers, labour institutions and the state could communicate about a broader platform of disability rights and citizenship. As disability identity politics developed, partly in response to shared experiences of poverty and unemployment, this common language of work integration proved particularly useful as a unifying theme. Disability activists advanced a shared agenda to break down social and physical barriers in Canadian society to enable people with disabilities to access the world of work. The reconceptualization of disability as primarily the result of barriers, provided activists with a roadmap for reconfiguring cultural, political and economic conditions surrounding competitive employment. The presentation of an entirely new way of thinking about disability, one that proposed sweeping changes to Canadian social, political and
economic institutions, is perhaps the greatest contribution of disability activists during this period.
APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

This is to state that I, _______________________, agree to participate in the research being conducted by Dustin Galer of the Department of History at the University of Toronto.

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to examine how work and employment shaped the lived experience of disability in Toronto and rural Ontario since the 1960s. Oral history interviews will be combined with archival and textual research to produce papers, articles, and ultimately a doctoral dissertation.

B. PROCEDURES

This component of the research consists of a series of interviews conducted between the researcher, Dustin Galer, and the interviewee, _______________________. The interview(s) will be audio taped through the use of a digital voice recorder. In the event that the participant is unwilling to be audio taped, Dustin will instead take notes during the interview and share those notes with the participant at their request. In the resulting papers and publications the interviewee will not be identified by name.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

There are minimal risks to participate in this interview. However, the interviewee can withdraw from the interview at any time without prejudice. During the interview the interviewee may request to stop the recording at any time to discuss or clarify how he/she wishes to respond to a question or topic before proceeding. In the event that the interviewee chooses to withdraw during the interview, any tape made of the interview will be either given to him/her or destroyed and no transcript will be made of the interview.

If so desired, the researcher will provide to the interviewee copies of the interviews and any/all related papers and publications written by the researcher.
Upon completion of the interview the tape and content of the interview belong to Dustin Galer and the information in the interview can be used by him for the purposes of the dissertation research and in any future publication or presentation of research.

D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

☐ I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without negative consequences.

☐ I agree to be tape-recorded ☐ I do not wish to be tape-recorded

☐ I agree to be quoted anonymously

E. QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS

Questions or concerns can be directed to Dustin Galer at xxx-xxx-xxxx or xxxxx@utoronto.ca or his supervisor, Professor Ian Radforth at xxx-xxx-xxxx or xxxxx@utoronto.ca. For those with questions about their rights as research participants questions may be directed to the Office for Research Ethics at 416-946-3273 or ethics.review@utoronto.ca.

I HAVE CAREFULLY READ THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

Participant Signature _____________________________________________________

Date___________________ Location__________________

Age:___ Race:_______ Male ☐ Female ☐ City/town of residence:______________
APPENDIX B

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Participant name:

Your participation in this portion of the interview is completely voluntary. You are not required to answer any or all of the questions. For those questions you do answer, you are free to provide as much or as little information as you like. **Please begin with the most recent position and work your way back in time.**

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APPENDIX C

Generational Profile of Interview Participants

The following profiles document some of the representative working experiences of thirty interview participants in Toronto during the 1950s-1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s-2000s as they struggled against the prospect of lifelong unemployment and poverty that awaited many people with disabilities. While not necessarily representative of the disabled population in Toronto at the time, the individual narratives and collective experiences recounted here use actual lived experiences of barriers and opportunities in employment as a reflection of changes in the city’s infrastructure and discourse of disability. Individual and generational profiles give way to broader conclusions about how work consistently constituted a primary feature in disabled people’s personal identities as they struggled to make ends meet or prospered during a period of extensive change in Toronto’s labour market.

Cluster 1: 1950s-1960s

Six participants (or twenty per cent) began their working lives during the 1950s and 1960s, mostly as teenagers and young adults whose families expected participation in the paid workforce or whose financial circumstances demanded work as a necessity. Most participants experienced some form of institutional-based treatment or rehabilitation for visual impairment, spinal cord injury, poliomyelitis, and fibromyalgia. Yet, nearly all participants maintained that institutional education or treatment did not fundamentally disrupt their personal goal of finding paid work or pursuing a career. Half
of the participants found their way into a booming public sector as civil servants at all levels of government, while the remainder found jobs in the private and non-profit sectors. Despite growing up with the belief that paid work was a natural part of the life cycle, participants in this eldest generation faced longstanding negative stereotypes about disability among employers and the broader public that manifested in the pervasive inaccessibility of Toronto’s local communities and workplaces. Nevertheless, participants confronted sets of barriers with the determination to forge careers for themselves, maximizing their abilities and downplaying the needs that accompanied their disabilities.

Growing up during the 1940s and 1950s, “Sofia” learned that surviving the polio virus as a young child and the resulting scoliosis and mobility impairment that required her to use arm crutches and a wheelchair did not exempt her from personal and family expectations to find paid employment. “Sofía” described herself as belonging to a unique cohort of polio survivors that collectively entered young adulthood together with greater expectations of labour market participation. She found that if “you could do the job you got the job,” but this was partly related to the widespread awareness of polio which may have created a conditional level of acceptance among employers. While she understood that significant attitudinal and architectural barriers existed in the community and most workplaces, she managed to find a job at age nineteen working for a major retailer in Toronto in their telephone catalogue department. With employment options during the 1950s and 1960s already highly circumscribed for women, Sofia nevertheless quit her retail job to attend a local business college and took various jobs in the non-profit sector before becoming a teacher and librarian. At one school where she worked, the principal advised her, “I don't care how you do the job as long as you do it”—an ideology of work
that Sofia in fact shared. While some informal accommodations were made, such as exemption from outside duties during recess, she was expected to access and move about the school on her own. Sofia described how most schools where she worked in Toronto during the 1960s were inaccessible and children in wheelchairs would have to be carried up and down the stairs. Despite her mobility impairment and not wishing to be treated differently than others, Sofia often worked on second floor classrooms—a situation that required her to take her lunch breaks in her classroom in order to avoid the physical energy and pain of joining her colleagues in the downstairs lunchroom.

“Grace” was born in the early 1940s and secured her first job—at age eleven—shining shoes for $2.00 a month\(^1\) at the Brantford School for the Blind. A testament to the cultivation of a strong work ethic at an early age, she spent her summers through the remainder of the 1950s working for the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) in a variety of age- and gender-appropriate jobs, caring for younger students at the Brantford School, as a camp counsellor, and vendor at CNIB’s Caterplan operations. As a young woman with high school diploma in hand, she taught Braille reading and life skills to CNIB clients on Bayview Avenue in Toronto. Eager to expand her horizons, she returned to school to earn undergraduate and graduate degrees that enabled her to secure a highly competitive position with the provincial government where she began the steady climb up the career ladder. With limited access to assistive technology that would enable her to function effectively and competitively in the labour market, Grace purchased her own expensive equipment, including a Perkins Brailler, specialized typewriter, and talking calculator to supplement the services of a reader hired by the government to relay vast amounts of paperwork that was otherwise inaccessible to her.

\(^1\) Approximately $17 when adjusted for inflation.
“William,” also born in the early 1940s, grew up as an able-bodied boy working summer vacations as a farm labourer until, at age sixteen, he sustained a spinal cord injury in a diving accident and spent the next two years in Lyndhurst Rehabilitation Hospital in midtown Toronto where he regained partial use of his arms and hands. Back at home and two years behind his peers academically, he quickly finished high school before moving on to pursue a university education. As a student in downtown Toronto, William confronted widespread lack of accessible sidewalks, transportation, and limited housing options with the assistance of social workers at Lyndhurst who helped bridge the gap between rehabilitation and community living. However, upon graduating in the mid-1960s William set out into the workforce, surviving on jobs below his competency level while attending countless interviews and few call-backs. William described physical and attitudinal barriers as compounding issues that likely prevented him from landing a job. “Finding somebody who would hire me, and then to work in a building I could get into in the first place was not an easy thing.” Unwilling to pursue a job that was literally inaccessible, he restricted his applications to workplaces in accessible buildings, eventually landing a job with the provincial government where he held a series of progressively responsible managerial positions.

Born in the late 1940s, “Dan” lost most of his sight when a common medical practice at the time for premature infants resulted in overexposure to oxygen which irreparably damaged his eyesight. By age fourteen, Dan worked for a short time in an industrial workplace but soon found it was too dangerous given his visual impairment. He completed his high school years working summers at the CNIB’s Caterplan tuck shops in
various places throughout Toronto for $60 a week. After a stint at a machine shop, he began a contract position with the provincial government that led into permanent full-time employment for the following five years. He returned to the non-profit sector where he acquired managerial experience that eventually led him to find various management positions in the federal government where he stayed for the remainder of his career. While Dan qualified as having a Bachelor of Arts, it was the result of an equivalency rating based on his extensive work experience and in-house training to which he attributed years of hard work and professional advancement.

“Robert,” a baby boomer of the late 1940s with a visual impairment, got his first job in 1960 at age thirteen working weekends and summers at the counter at one of the CNIB’s confectionary stands. Unable to find a job elsewhere, Robert knew he could get some extra money and work experience through the CNIB’s Caterplan business, but soon learned he had an aptitude as a manager. This discovery was buoyed by the understanding that other opportunities for advancement within the organization at the services and administrative levels—opportunities that he understands existed only for a short time at the CNIB during the 1960s and early 1970s for his age cohort. Determined to become a working professional and confident of his competitive ability to access information through various assistive devices, Robert earned a university degree and returned to the CNIB as a supervisor while he progressively worked his way into upper management.

“Isabelle” entered the labour market in the late 1960s as an able-bodied teenage girl working the cash register at a local grocery store. An early high school graduate, she completed additional college business courses and immediately set to work in various

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2 Approximately $370 when adjusted for inflation.
research, secretarial, and writing jobs—all of which involved her skills as a typist. Isabelle discovered she had an affinity for technology and word processing, a career choice that demanded extensive typing that would eventually cause her excruciating chronic pain aggravated by the onset of fibromyalgia. Unable to function in her chosen career path, Isabelle was forced into self-employment while pursuing a human rights complaint against her former employer.

**Cluster 2: 1970s**

Nine participants who grew up during the 1960s entered the workforce during the 1970s within a context of tremendous changes affecting the labour market in Toronto. In contrast to previous decades, fewer participants found work in a shrinking public service while more found themselves working in the non-profit sector, owing largely to an expanding rehabilitation industry which handled the influx of people with disabilities expecting to live and work in the community. As the infrastructure of Toronto became more accessible with the advent of new policies and building projects, public awareness of disability resulted from the activities of family advocates, rehabilitation professionals and disability rights activists. The initiation of a public discourse on disability issues during the 1970s promised future improvements in access to jobs, but such changes were slow or nonexistent in the eyes of many participants who began working during this decade.

Despite having a degenerative visual impairment from an early age, “Jacob” found he was able to “pass” as fully-sighted. As a late baby boomer, he had trouble finding employment but found work at the local YMCA where he gained enough
experience to qualify for full-time as a childcare worker at a residential youth treatment centre. As the decade wore on, Jacob’s visual impairment worsened and he found it increasingly difficult to hide his disability from his employer and coworkers, which caused him to apply for Canada Pension Plan Disability (CPP-D) benefits and quit his job. Jacob described how the process of becoming legally blind negatively impacted his ability to find a suitable job in the private sector and caused him to seek frontline work with the CNIB, assured that his needs would be accommodated.

“Nathan” started working at age thirteen relabeling paint cans to comply with the recent introduction of regulations requiring products sold in Canada to display both official languages. A variety of industrial and service jobs eventually led him become an apprentice in a growing trade as where he eventually expected to earn good wages as a skilled worker. Before completing his apprenticeship, however, Nathan sustained various physical injuries from an accident that forced him to abandon his trade and highly competitive wages when his employer refused to accommodate him. As a result, Nathan returned to school to pursue a career in the legal profession where his physical injuries would not act as a barrier in his work. After some time in his new career, Nathan discovered he was experiencing a number of mental health issues that frustrated his ability to meet the demands of working in the legal sector. Eventually finding a degree of equilibrium, Nathan was unwilling to disclose his mental health issues to his employer or colleagues, fearing negative consequences for his career.

As a baby boomer, “Lisa” did not join the workforce until her mid-twenties, owing partly to the influence of a visual impairment and cerebral palsy. Discontented to accept a future of unemployment and reliance on welfare benefits, Lisa attempted various
jobs in the retail and services sectors. Many of these jobs did not work out on account of the demands of the job exceeding the limitations presented by her disability in a largely inaccessible environment and a general disregard for accommodations. Unable to find a job that suited her interests and abilities, Lisa returned to school and eventually found employment with the public sector in the early 1970s in an entry level position. Despite the advantages of a competitive salary and pension, Lisa found herself effectively working longer days than her peers as a result of transportation difficulties, limited access within the building in which she works, continuous struggles to access assistive technology, and pervasive attitudinal barriers of coworkers and managers that create a poisonous workplace culture.

“Paul” began his work life as a teenager in a sheltered workshop operated by the CNIB where he remained for “all of a week,” packaging pipe filters for approximately $1.60 per day.\(^3\) Disgruntled with the lack of employment options, he waited two years until being provided with the opportunity to work on a special employment project producing Braille textbooks for $90 per week,\(^4\) which he described as “Fabulous money. The first time I actually earned money, so to speak.” The experience had a transformative effect on young Paul, stimulating his enthusiasm to advance himself in the workforce. Working summers at the CNIB while attending university, he acquired experience in the technological aspects of converting transcribed materials to tape that led him to further education and employment in the public sector where he acquired various skills and confidence working with assistive technology for people with visual impairments. Disappointed with the lack of internal advancement in the public sector, he opted for self-
employment in the technology sector where he found that his skills, experience and interests provided the foundations for a successful and rewarding career.

Fresh out of college in the early 1970s and looking for work, “Lucy” attempted to find entry level positions in the private sector. As a person with a visual impairment, she described how “at that time I used a cane but I could fake it and roam around with my cane folded up and I didn't appear to be visually impaired.” Lucy described being cautioned “not to put in our resume or cover letter that we had a disability because your resume was pretty certain to go in the garbage.” Despite her ability to hide her visual impairment, she consistently found that interviews ended abruptly when she disclosed that she lived with vision loss. Unable to find work elsewhere, she found work with the CNIB and as a counsellor in a local sheltered workshop and for the next few years moved between the private sector and what she described as the “safety net” of the nonprofit sector while attending university. In retrospect, Lucy believes that “had it been later I would have had a lot more options open.” However, with her university degree, employment experience and renewed confidence, Lucy finally secured a career as a professional in the private sector where she held a series of progressively responsible positions.

Like other young blind Canadians in the early 1970s, “Alex” began his employment history as a twenty-year-old working summer vacations at the CNIB’s Caterplan business. But, focused on forging his own path, he found work as a technician in the private sector. When the factory where he was working closed, Alex decided to return to school where he earned a college diploma and shortly thereafter found work in the banking industry. The degenerative nature of his visual impairment meant Alex
encountered fewer difficulties obtaining a job than maintaining employment as his condition worsened and financial support for expensive assistive technology waned. Alex also described a shifting set of expectations of his employer following the provision of assistive equipment. “Lots of time their particular systems are not usable out of the box. There has to be scripting--which can be extremely costly, in the thousands of dollars that were spent over the years to set me up and be competitive. There tends to be that mindset, well we've already spent X number of dollars on him/her so they have a job. What more do they want?”

A young woman in the early 1970s, “Emily” was determined to “get out in the workforce” as soon as possible, having been raised and educated in mainstream environments all her life. As a Braille reader and user of assistive technologies from a young age due to a congenital visual impairment, Emily became interested in the technical aspects of producing Braille and other accessible information prior to the proliferation of computer technology. She adopted a philosophy regarding employment accommodations to “as for as little as I need and get the most out of it” as a personal challenge and to avoid presenting employers with too many demands. Emily began working during her early twenties at various summer projects for employers in the education sector before moving into full-time employment with the CNIB where she held a series of positions that utilized her skills and training.

Inspired by the growing disability rights movement in the United States, “David” entered the workforce in the mid-1970s in the area of nonprofit community services where he became involved in various aspects of disability activism. As a person with a visual impairment, David collaborated with others in the blind community and helped to
establish coalitions with other disability activists motivated to forge an effective discourse on disability rights in Ontario. As a young activist, David poured his energy and talent into organizational development and cultivating networks of activists to improve the social and economic integration of disabled people. Ironically, but like many other activists in North America, David caught the attention of public sector employers. Encouraged by the deinstitutionalization movement, disability activism, and international developments in disability rights, various levels of government hired many disability activists to supply expertise in the area of disability issues. David explained that being a disability activist and public servant was “not the easiest … because the movement's goal was to lobby external aid for changes in legislation programs and policies and I, as a civil servant, was expected and actually succeeded in delivering programs to the best of my ability as a non-biased civil servant.” Nonetheless, David spent the remainder of his career balancing disability and labour activism with public service.

“Ashley” got her first job as a teenager during a period of technological innovation as computer technology revolutionized library science and other information technology. As a member of the Deaf community, Ashley found while attending post-secondary education that language and communication barriers that caused her to choose and remain in an entry level job below her level of competency and ambition. Ashley learned that the lack of accommodation for Sign Language interpretation in her workplace and in other jobs limited her ability to advance within the labour market. When a physical injury forced her to leave her job, she encountered a labour market of underpaid contract work in the nonprofit sector that encouraged her to return to work with the Deaf community where her linguistic abilities and life experiences were valued.
Cluster 3: 1980s

The largest cohort of participants (eleven) entered the workforce during the 1980s, a decade in which disability rights, awareness of disability issues, and rapid technological change transformed expectations of disabled people seeking labour market integration. Most participants found work in the private sector, encouraged by the belief that an increasing number of companies declared themselves “equal opportunity employers” and many federally regulated businesses were subject to the (voluntary) provisions of employment equity legislation. Successive media campaigns that followed the IYDP were coordinated by service agencies and new provincial and federal departments focused on highlighting the needs of disabled people in employment matters. The prospect that technological innovation would erase most employment barriers for disabled people, particularly with the advent of computerized workstations, meant that many people who might have avoided the mainstream labour market sought greater independence in the community through paid work.

Introduced to paid work as a teenage camp counsellor in the early 1980s, “Mary” worked summers while completing her high school and college education in technical arts. Although her parents encouraged her to attend university, she “had enough of the school system and trying to get accessible course material. It was just driving me nuts!” As a young blind woman, Mary perceived a wealth of opportunities in technical services where, with the help of computerized workstations, she could compete on a level playing field with her colleagues. However, just as sidewalks and transportation systems could be inaccessible, computer systems were often constructed so that people with visual
impairments and physical disabilities required special software and equipment to gain access. Hired by a major cable company, she liaised with a new accessible technology company in Toronto to install and train her on software calibrated to communicate with the company’s settings. While Mary was indeed able to work on par with others in her department, she described how repeated changes in software packages used by the company frustrated her ability to do her job until one day the company switched to an entirely new (and inaccessible) computer system. Reassigned to various “make work” projects, Mary eventually found employment elsewhere in the technology sector.

“Lily” entered the workforce at the height of public awareness during the early 1980s as a post-secondary student on a placement in the public sector. As a woman living with quadriplegia, she faced “a lot of scepticism as to whether I could do all the job duties satisfactorily and had to demonstrate I could do that through an unpaid position.” With an obvious physical impairment and incumbent accommodations, Lily believed, “I don't think if I just applied I would have gotten the job.” Determined not to let her physical impairments impede her ability to excel in her new job, Lily confronted barriers in virtually every facet of her employment. An inflexible work schedule, unreliable parallel transit system known as Wheel Trans, inaccessible buildings and washrooms, inaccessible computer systems and work stations, and an unaccepting workplace culture all presented potential barriers for her. Fortunately, most of Lily’s needs were met through formal and informal accommodations that she believed was the result of a culture of change in the public sector where people with disabilities were increasingly seen as competent workers.
“Ruby” got her first job in the early 1980s working as a secretary and filing clerk. As a person with a learning disability, memory problems, and fibromyalgia, she concealed her non-visible disabilities to her private sector employer for fear of losing her job. Ruby described being in a workplace culture where disability was not accepted and employees were never encouraged to come forward with accommodations should they require them. While Ruby constantly struggled with information overload, miscommunication, fatigue, and time management, she understood that her employer and coworkers believed she was “not trying hard enough” or “couldn’t be that stupid” when she would make mistakes or ask for extra time. Unable to continue in her job, she returned to school but had difficulty finding subsequent employment that accommodated her disabilities.

Growing up in a residential institution, “Olivia” defied low expectations of her by others as a result of her muscular dystrophy and enrolled in a local university. Working summers as a student to build an employment history denied her as a result of her institutionalization, she landed a job in the public sector after finishing school despite intense competition during a time of government downsizing. Olivia described entering the workforce during a unique period. “At the time in the 1980s there was a lot of interest in trying to hire people with disability … If you had a visible disability, employers seemed welcoming and more interested in hiring you so they could show off that they were more welcoming of people with disabilities.” Confident, competent and presentable, Olivia enjoyed upward advancement in her career, owing to an increasingly acceptable workplace culture, fewer physical barriers, and a greater accommodation as her mobility and dexterity needs shifted.
“Rachel” entered the workforce as a seemingly able-bodied teenager in the early 1980s working at a variety of service sector jobs. She learned the value of paid employment at an early age when her father’s physical disability removed him from the workforce and her family lived below the poverty line. An intelligent young woman, she attended university and completed a series of internships that qualified her to work in a traditionally male-dominated field. Determined to succeed, she devoted all her mental and physical energy to advancing herself within her field, taking on increasingly responsible and stressful jobs that caused longstanding mental health issues to escalate. Aware of her employer’s duty to accommodate but afraid of jeopardizing her career, Rachel declined to disclose her disability to her employer until she reached a point of climax and was eventually fired. Forced to change career directions, Rachel returned to school and pursued various jobs in the nonprofit sector where her mental health issues were accommodated.

“Katie” grew up in “a working-class family” during the 1980s, always cognizant of the need to “work hard.” As a result, she always held multiple jobs as a teenager and aspired to become a working professional. Shortly into her freshman year in university, Katie sustained a spinal cord injury that “messed up my goals as to what I was going to do and how.” During rehabilitation where she learned to live with paraplegia, Katie was approached to do some modelling and commercials because there was an awareness wave going on.” The experience sparked a new passion that led her to return to school and begin a career in the media industry. Despite infrastructural barriers that occasionally limited her access within various workplaces, such as accessible parking, ramps, and
accessible doors, Katie found her disability rarely presented an obstacle to her career
goals and enabled her to pursue most of her personal and professional goals.

“Danielle” started working in the early 1980s in the financial services industry.
She described having always worked while living with chronic depression. “I was always
the employee that had the most sick time. I always lost one or two days a month to
depression.” As a professional with experience in leading companies, she confidently
advanced herself in various management positions until she was finally diagnosed with a
central nervous system disorder. Danielle described a series of events that led her
employer to fire her and deny compensation. Confident that she was the victim of
discrimination on the basis of disability, Danielle lodged a complaint with the relevant
Human Rights Commission. Despite ample evidence in her favour, she suffered a lengthy
and ultimately under-compensated process while her disability progressed. Unable to
earn much beyond her limited welfare benefits, Danielle pursued self-employment where
her disability could be self-accommodated.

“Linda” grew up in a family environment where she was taught to have low
expectations of her ability to be productive and independent as a result of her cerebral
palsy and learning disability. Linda described how “significant people” in her life taught
her to feel “inadequate” about her prospects in the workforce. Despite her upbringing and
dissatisfied with the prospect of living on welfare benefits, Linda attended university
where she earned a degree in social services. Upon graduation, however, Linda
encountered multiple barriers in the workforce that forced her to hold a series of multiple
paid and unpaid jobs. She explained how her learning disability frustrated her ability to
maintain employment. In one example where she was being trained in the banking
industry, she recalled “I just couldn't learn fast enough. It depends on the patience level of the person teaching me. If a person is frustrated and angry, nobody is going to take in what they're learning. It made my learning disability more heightened when I knew they were frustrated.” As a result, Linda found herself working in the nonprofit sector where she felt employers where workplace cultures are often more accepting.

“Michael” found work in the service industry as a teenager fresh out of high school in the early 1980s as he saved money to attend university. While at university he held a number of jobs where he built an employment history while living with “the experience of schizophrenia.” While he originally refrained from seeking accommodations in various jobs he has held, Michael found that he is more willing to disclose his mental health issues since his hospitalization and recovery. Despite qualifying for work in a variety of industries, however, Michael found that the necessity for flexibility in employment scheduling and work organization was more readily acceptable in the mental health field than other areas of the private sector. One entry level position he held in the private sector while completing a vocational rehabilitation program following his recovery demanded long hours and repetitive tasks that he described as “intense” and ultimately inappropriate. While numerous applications in the private sector failed at the interview stage, which he suspected was due to his mental health issue, Michael found a satisfying (albeit underpaid) career in the nonprofit sector.

“Richard” entered the workforce in the mid-1980s as an able-bodied teenager delivering pizzas in his neighbourhood before attending college to work in the Information Technology sector. As part of his post-secondary training, Richard held several internships in the public and private sectors as he accumulated experience and
contacts to build his work history. As an adult, however, Richard experienced the onset of muscular dystrophy where he eventually required the fulltime use of a wheelchair. While never encountering discrimination directly, Richard believed that his disability prevented him from obtaining employment. Richard described how since his disability became visible, he would go to many interviews but rarely “second interviews,” indicating to him that the visibility of his disability removed him from the competition. In the workplace where he eventually found employment, Richard noted how despite thousands of employees, he was the only person who used a wheelchair.

“Charlotte” began working in the retail sector during the late 1980s to save money in order to attend university. Born with cerebral palsy that limited her mobility, she earned a university degree and sought work in the social services sector. Despite having “all the good qualities of a good employee” and with a personal strategy not to go to an employer with a “list of demands” outlining accommodation needs, Charlotte encountered difficulty securing a fulltime position, finding only contract work. Regardless of her difficulties, Charlotte stated, “Thank goodness I was born when I was because if I was born earlier my life could have been very different … I'm not saying there's not a struggle now, but that was very limited.”

Cluster 4: 1990s-2000s
Four participants entered the labour market during the 1990s and 2000s when disability rights and growing awareness of disability issues were met by enormous changes in the labour market, government restructuring, and accessible infrastructure. People with disabilities entering the workforce during this period encountered unprecedented levels of
awareness about disability owing partly to years of awareness campaigns designed to sensitize employers and the broader public. Employment equity and “equal opportunity” provisions in various sectors of the economy coupled with the rise in access to assistive technologies and duty-to-accommodate jurisprudence created pathways into an otherwise inaccessible job market. However, widespread government restructuring at the federal and provincial levels and regulations guiding the construction of accessible environments resulted in shifting access to employment for people with mental and physical disabilities as some existing barriers receded and new barriers emerged.

“Sarah” started working in the early 1990s in the social services sector after completing vocational rehabilitation programs that prepared her to work in the mainstream labour market. As a person living with cerebral palsy, Sarah was supplied and trained on various assistive devices provided to her through benefit programs that enabled her to function effectively in the competitive workforce. Despite her university education, Sarah encountered barriers in the application and interview process. “When I was searching for jobs I would call the organization before I actually started working on a resume and cover letter to send off to them and find out if the building was even wheelchair accessible and I found that many times in most cases the buildings are not.” Like other job applicants with visible disabilities, Sarah found herself going to many interviews but very few job offers. Once she finally landed a job in the non-profit sector, she found that she needed to advocate herself. “When I first came on the job nothing was accessible. There was just an elevator and a lift to get in the building. When you go into the office space a lot of improvements needed to be made and I was very vocal about that.”
“Marge” began working in the 1990s in a variety of industrial and service sector jobs. While she possessed a university degree, Marge was able to find employment in entry level positions and was forced to leave when managers became frustrated with the manner in which she performed her work. As a person living with an acquired brain injury, Marge felt that her employers “tend to forget the limitations because my disability is non-visible,” which caused them to become frustrated and angry when she did not work as expected.

“Leanne” got her first job as a teenager in the service industry in order to save money for university. As a young Deaf woman, Leanne discovered a passion for teaching others in the Deaf community and alternated between post-secondary education and employment in the public sector. Despite always achieving a “good reputation” in each workplace, Leanne described a litany of barriers revolving around employers’ attitudes about her ability and competency level. She described how general bias against her method of communication was often augmented by the fact that most employers were not willing to pay for sign language interpretation services. As a result, Leanne found herself working with the Deaf community and in self-employment where she could manage her own accommodations.

“Thomas” began his working life in the early 2000s in the service industry where he consistently worked while attending post-secondary school. As a young man with Autism Spectrum Disorder at the beginning of his employment history, Thomas demonstrated an adept awareness of human rights protections available to him but admitted he would only disclose his disability to an employer provided he felt “safe enough” to do so. Never having been accommodated or requesting accommodation,
Thomas believed that his disability was a personal matter and that he had become very good at masking or hiding his condition “when necessary.”
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- Community Folk Art Council of Toronto Fonds. F 53
- Howard Moscoe Fonds. F 301
- Patrick Corrigan Fonds. F 69
- Larry Becker Fonds. F 70
- Arts Etobicoke Fonds. F 272
Private Collections

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Gary Annable
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