

June 26, 2014

Transcription Christyne Allain

Introduction: A video interview with Christyne Allain, Executive Director of New Brunswick's Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons, about the inclusive postsecondary environment.

In order to be successful today every citizen needs to have full and complete access to all levels of educational opportunities. Successfully completing postsecondary education has significant benefits. Studies consistently show that graduates from post-secondary institutions enjoy a higher standard of living during their employment years and beyond into retirement.

Increasing the participation of persons with a disability in postsecondary education will have a profound impact on our communities in general and the workplace in particular.

Persons with disabilities face barriers created by the real limitations of their disability, and from the negative stereotyping and potential discrimination in the workplace. Education is crucial to meet these challenges.

The number of students with disabilities represented in our inclusive public school system has been growing but not enough students with disabilities are being adequately supported to continue to the postsecondary level.

Students with disabilities should be encouraged to consider options for post-secondary education and information should be provided to potential students during the high school time. High school counsellors need to look at the individual's strengths and interests and then figure out how to accommodate the disability, rather than focusing on a diagnosis or label first. More students with disabilities should have work exposure and job shadowing opportunities while still attending the public school system. Co-op education programs can provide options to try out careers before students enroll in a postsecondary institution.

Students need to make informed choices and then participate in the arrangements to prepare for those goals. Confirmation of necessary support services should not be assumed or delayed until classes start.

Some will need support services such as attendant care, note takers, sign language interpreters, adapted equipment, Braille books, tapes, and so on.

We encourage making those links with local disability groups, and it would be helpful to make those connections before entering postsecondary education.

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Instructors or professors may have little experience or training to specifically prepare them to meet the needs of certain types of disabilities. They must be willing to adapt and to ask for help from the student and other resources to fairly meet the student's needs. Materials and resource people are available.

Many universities, community colleges and other training facilities are not fully barrier-free in terms of physical access to their buildings and classrooms. In order to be inclusive, all facilities should be accessible and universities and community colleges should reserve a portion of their regular maintenance and capital budgets to address gaps in barrier-free facilities.

While most instructors would recognize a wheelchair user or person who is blind, many are not familiar with hidden disabilities. We need to work together to better meet the needs of all persons with disabilities. At the postsecondary level, information is the key for accessibility.

This online tool while designed to assist those working with students in the post-secondary environment will be useful to all educators. It is another step in supporting and accommodating persons with disabilities. It is definitely a step in the right direction in creating success for all persons in this province.

Learning is the key to opening doors for every citizen!