

PRESENTATION

To

Legislative Review Committee

May 20<sup>th</sup> 2004

Presented by

The Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities

The Manitoba League is a self-help advocacy organization dedicated to establishing public policy, which ensures program and physical access to persons with disabilities across the Province of Manitoba. The Manitoba League works collaboratively with all other Provinces through the Council of Canadian with Disabilities addressing Federal jurisdictional issues, which affect the lives of individuals and their families daily. Global issues are worked on through Disabled People's International. The disabled movement in Manitoba is nearly thirty years old. Much of the work done by Manitobans has been duplicated nationally and internationally.

### **Representation of W.C.B. Staffing**

An inclusive society means more than gaining access to a building, being in a classroom, or being offered a singular employment opportunity. An inclusive society means programming, housing and employment opportunities, which provides choices for the individual with a disability or with several disabilities. The choice is what we all strive for: choosing where to

live, where to be educated and where to work. In order to offer choices several significant public policies must be in place. The most important policies and programs include:

- Commitment to and practice of "Barrier Free Design"
- Person centered practices, structuring traditional methods of learning and working to a person centered approach accommodating an individual's skills and limitations.
- Commitment to changing how person with disabilities are perceived by their neighbour, teacher, employer and direct supervisor and co--worker

During this past year the Manitoba League has been given the opportunity to conduct Employer Disability Awareness Training and Best/Preferred Practice training sessions to employers in rural Manitoba. This has been made possible with financial resources from the Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba

As we set out to tackle the task of gaining the attention of employers, there were immediate barriers to be removed. Consideration was given as to how to best address myths and initial perceptions that occur at first meetings and interviews and who should best make this approach. Employers are often faced with situations, in which they are uncomfortable. Limited experience coupled with questioning their personal feelings of having to live with a personal difference is difficult for employers. Choosing to avoid these situations is an

option which many choose.

It was our choice to use a variety of persons with differing skills and disabilities. Individual employers were at times challenged, having to adapt to new ways of presenting. Initial hesitations were felt and worked through. We learned time and time again, the effective awareness occurs from personal connections. When people have a opportunity to meet, discuss, and/or work with a persons with a disability the greatest understand and level of comfort is reached. As is the appreciation of the lifestyles and employment attributes of persons with disabilities or injured workers. These personal encounters have the greatest impact in influencing attitudinal change. This fact influences the approach which we take as we work with employers.

The Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba is in a unique position of being in contact with most Manitoba employers. The time of contact is not only at time of crisis, but also at regular intervals of time. The importance of this contact should be built upon and the Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba should consider how to maximize their opportunity for public education by connecting persons with disabilities, injured workers and employers during the times of "doing daily business." Addressing the initial fears, change perception through demonstrations, and through routine contact is a most effective way of addressing the attitudinal barrier which impede many training and employment plans.

## **Recommendation 1**

The Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba ensure its own workforce, and those in routine contact with employers have representation from person with disabilities and injured workers.

### **DISABILITY AWARENESS TRAINING**

As we met employers we consistently heard the same questions, which concerned their reluctance to either employ a young person with a disability or reintroduce an injured worker to the workplace, these included:

- Will co-workers accept the individual and support to re-structuring of the assigned work?
- Can I effectively supervise the persons with a disability, there is truly a discomfort level regarding taking discipline action, and completing work performance evaluations.

Most employers, we met had experience with injured workers. Some employers were unwilling to pursue disability Awareness Training to bring new workers with disabilities into their workplace; as they were continuing to have problems re-introducing injured workers back to the workplace. Having heard this from prominent employers in Manitoba, puts the Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba in the position of having to take the responsibility of ensuring that their policies, programs and employer/employee interventions do not limit

employment opportunities for people who are disabled due to circumstances other than work related activities.

The Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba needs to acknowledge the present level of social awareness. Those of us who live with a disability are aware of the difference; each disability creates for the individuals. It is an often-used phrase that one person with a disability would not choose to have another person's disability. Why? We become comfortable in "our own skin". Having adjusted, we know ourselves and can get on with living. Considering having a different level of skills and limitations appear more difficult to achieve the same comfort with oneself. Service Providers and Rehabilitation Specialists have achieved an understanding of the medical difference and the impact, which is felt. The level of understanding of employers and coworkers are often extremely limited. For much of the time a blanket of preconceived notions prevail. The one experience with one person with a disability is blanketed to cover all person with disabilities. Is it right? Of course not, as a society of progressive thinkers we believe that we are understanding and compassionate. Reality is people use limited experience to make judgments on others whom they have not yet met. This fact puts responsibility upon the Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba for a segment of the community, which they are not mandated to serve, and perhaps due not wish to serve. The Board has a direct and powerful impact on persons with disabilities who never have contact or affiliation with your services.

What you do with this responsibility is important. From time to time the Board has selected persons with disabilities as a group to be funded for a designated year. Another year other

priority groups will be selected by the W.C.B. The Manitoba League has been the recipient of these funds and has used them to promote employment and other opportunities. The community always appreciates project funding. However, yearly project funding does not ensure consistent program and disability awareness training on a continual basis, failing to acknowledge the true impact, which your service delivery activities have upon people who are not part of your clientele and utilizing the valued employer connection to change perception.

## **Recommendation 2**

The Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba review their current scope of service delivery with the intent of expanding the educational component, reinforcing the individualized training and employment approaches to persons with disabilities. A strategy be implemented to address the questions of employers, addressing and removing attitudinal barriers. As an approach, established community partnerships should be maintained for a community network to deliver programming.

### **Perceived Barrier to Work Experience**

Most important to young persons is the need to establish a work history. Work experience is key to many community employment support programs for person with disabilities. Work experience is further an integral part of high school curriculum programming. It is often found that employers are often hesitant to grant individuals work experience as they feel their Workers Compensation costs will be severely affected causing a rise in costs. While some

agencies have purchased Workers Compensation packages to cover their clients as they attend a work experience, not all situations have been satisfactory resolved.

As noted W.C.B. provides funding supporting for many community based activities. Further, individuals and service providers recognizes the importance of gaining a work experience.

### **Recommendation 3**

The Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba commit to establishing a grant process which is administratively uncomplicated to fund short periods of work experience for individuals who are not associated with an support service which has coverage under Workers Compensation. It would be necessary that the individual's eligibility is the same as people receiving employment support from agencies who have coverage for Workers Compensation