

Toronto Disability Issues Committee
Status Report of the Outreach Subcommittee
June 27, 2014

Members

Melissa Graham, Helen Henderson, Stephanie Ozorio, Monica Winkler.

We would also like to acknowledge the contribution of Valentina Gal who was initially a member of the Outreach Subcommittee but had to withdraw for personal reasons. Monica Winkler joined the group in her place.

Mission

As the outreach subcommittee, we believe our role is to bring forward issues from the various disability communities in the City of Toronto – issues that fall within the mandate of the Disability Issues Committee but are outside the roles of the two other subcommittees, which focus on housing and transportation.

Each of us polled a number of disability communities, asking what priorities they would like to be brought to the attention of the Disability Issues Committee. Among their concerns:

- **Emergency Services**

Programs to promote understanding among Toronto Police and Emergency Services should be more transparent and accessible. They also should be audited.

We were particularly concerned about the well-being of people with disabilities during the December, 2013 ice storm when many parts of Toronto lost power for lengthy periods. We believe the outreach subcommittee could play an important role, liaising with city and hydro officials. Among other things, we

feel it is important that information be disseminated in ways that accommodate people who communicate or process information differently from what is considered to be “the norm, including those who are blind and/or deaf.

We also feel it is important to equip warming centres with the resources to help people with disabilities and the support workers who assist them. People who use wheelchairs or may be dependent on assistive devices, such as ventilators, must have access to re-charging power sources.

- **Employment**

The city should be fostering more employment programs, particularly for young people with disabilities, including developmental disabilities. Currently, they have one of the lowest representations in the workforce. Strategies that encourage (and support) employers would help get more people with disabilities into the workforce.

As chair of the disabilities issues commit, Adam Vaughan emphasised the need for ways to help people with disabilities find employment that is more substantial, so that they are not just marginally employed.

- **Education**

Although education is a provincial issue, the City should be promoting inclusion among school boards, trustees and those in charge of extra-curricular programs.

- **Developmental disabilities**

Interacting with people with developmental disabilities should be a focus, not just with police and emergency services but also with the TTC and other consumer services.

- **Liaison**

The outreach subcommittee also thinks it's important to liaise with the City's Inter-Divisional Staff Team on Access and Equity, offering whatever help we can in consulting on issues relating to people with disabilities.

Meetings

With the assistance of consultant Bernita Lee, in February, 2013, the Outreach subcommittee met with Melanie Smith, Employment Equity Consultant with the City of Toronto's Equity, Diversity and Human Rights division. We feel this is a connection that should be fostered.

Among points noted by Melanie Smith:

- The city has had an Employment Equity policy in place since 2000.
- Persons with Disabilities are one of the four designated groups under the Employment Equity Act. .
- The City still needs more information about how many people with disabilities work for the City, and where.
- The City did survey the entire workplace in 2003-2005 and 2011, but did not receive a significant response. (2003 received only a 28% response; 2011 response rate was 46.4%; the goal is to get an 80% response)
- Career Edge is one resource the City uses to search for candidates from three groups: paid interns, regent graduates, and persons with a self-declared disability.
- The Equity, Diversity and Human Rights division works with Career Edge to help them link with appropriate community connections to reach job seekers with disabilities.
- The Division can also start to work with Ability Edge to bring people in this way.
- One of the challenges is the unionised environment. 90 per cent of the City's workforce is unionised, with specific rules regarding recruiting and hiring. Only 10 per cent of the City's workforce is non-union.
- A 2007 survey that focussed on the City's non-unionised workforce. Out of the 3,900 responses 3.4 per cent were PWDs. Compared to the

2001 Ontario Census, the City's target should be 5.2 per cent. But Melanie Smith also emphasized that the survey response rate was very low and therefore the results not significantly measurable.

- The City's various Divisions have their own respective strategies in regard to recruitment and hiring procedures and practices relating to people with disabilities.
- The City's "People Plan" addresses workplace accommodation, recruitment and learning.
- A trust level needs to be established as well, so that PWD employees feel comfortable disclosing their accommodation requirements.
- The Outreach Committee (OC) could work with the Equity, Diversity and Human Rights Office to help the City understand the base issues regarding persons with disabilities