



DISCUSSION SUMMARY

INAUGURAL MEETING OF MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY'S DISABILITY INCLUSION GROUP

Tuesday, May 10th, 2016

10:00 am – 12:00 pm

Boardroom, Coalition of Persons with Disabilities NL, 460 Torbay Road, St. John's

This document briefly summarizes the discussions that took place at the inaugural meeting of Memorial University's Disability Inclusion Group (DIG-MUN), held on May 10th, 2016. Formed in response to a suggestion made during the previous fall's CRWDP-sponsored Roundtable on Inclusion, this group's intention is to promote disability inclusion at Memorial University and work toward the development of a Disability Studies curriculum for Memorial students.

The meeting was chaired and facilitated by Barbara Neis (NL Provincial Co-Lead for the CRWDP). The following is a complete list of attendees, presented in alphabetical order by surname:

- Stephen Bornstein (NL Provincial Co-Lead, CRWDP)
- Emily Christy (Executive Director, COD-NL)
- Ailsa Craig (Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, MUN)
- Kathy Hawkins (Manager of Employer Supports and Services, Empower NL)
- Angela Loucks-Atkinson (Associate Professor, School of Human Kinetics and Recreation, MUN)
- Barbara Neis (NL Provincial Co-Lead, CRWDP)
- Mary Reid (Director, Disability Policy Office, Gov. of NL)
- Catherine Shortall (Program Policy Development Specialist, Disability Policy Office, Gov. of NL)
- Kathy Skinner (Academic Program Administrator, Glenn Roy Blundon Centre, MUN)
- Sandra Small (Associate Professor, School of Nursing, MUN)
- Aleksandra Stefanovic (PhD Student in Community Health and CRWDP Student Fellow, MUN)
- Anne-Marie Sullivan (Associate Professor, School of Human Kinetics and Recreation, MUN)
- Chrissy Vincent (NL Provincial Coordinator, CRWDP)

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The meeting opened with a few words from Barbara Neis, NL Provincial Co-Lead for the CRWDP. She provided a brief overview of the purpose for forming this group, including an explanation of the idea's original genesis at the Roundtable on Inclusion. ***(ACTION: Since not all meeting attendees were present at the Roundtable, Chrissy Vincent will forward the summary report from that event to all members of the current group.)***

Attendees were then given the opportunity to introduce themselves, as well as state why they were present at the meeting and why they believed the group's intention to be worthwhile. Most attendees expressed enthusiasm at the notion of having an opportunity to shape a dialogue on disability inclusion



from the ground up, by working together with people from different backgrounds who can approach the issue from a diversity of viewpoints/lenses. Attendees from academia all emphasized the value of incorporating disability inclusion into the course material that is taught at Memorial University, and some indicated that their students have frequently asked for information on what courses might be taken to learn about this topic. Overall, meeting participants agreed that this group will have the potential to enact some very positive changes that have been long overdue.

WHAT IS "IT"?

Since a Disability Studies curriculum could potentially take many different forms, it was recommended by one attendee that the group should reach a consensus on what "it" will actually look like – *what "it" is* that this particular group is really working toward. Most attendees seemed to agree that the creation of an undergraduate diploma or certificate program in Disability Studies would be a reasonable long-term goal. This would essentially comprise a collection of individual undergraduate courses relating to disability inclusion (either new or existing) offered by different departments within the university. Each course could be completed individually by any student interested in the subject matter, or the courses could be completed together to obtain a diploma or certificate. Although the courses offered in different departments would come from different perspectives, the common thread would be the examination of disability inclusion issues through a systemic, human rights lens. **(ACTION: Angela Loucks-Atkinson will do some background research to figure out the differences between a diploma and a certificate.)**

If the diploma or certificate program proves successful, it might then be worthwhile to consider building toward a full B.A. program with a research component. The advantage of a diploma or certificate program, however, is that it would appeal not only to new undergraduate students but also to alumni and other professionals as an opportunity for continuing education.

It was also suggested that once these courses are in place, it might be a good idea to introduce a new requirement that every undergraduate student complete at least one disability inclusion course in order to complete their program. A less prescriptive but related approach would be to incorporate material on these issues into so many courses that it would be impossible for any student to avoid. These ideas may be discussed in more detail in the future.

STEPS FORWARD

The majority of our inaugural meeting was spent discussing possible first steps that could be taken to move the group forward toward its longer-term goals. From this discussion, **8 major steps** emerged:

- 1) Compile a list of currently existing Memorial University courses that touch on issues of disability inclusion, which can be posted on the Glenn Roy Blundon Centre website for all interested students to access and use. To do this, each individual unit/department would need to be contacted and asked about specific course content. This is work that could be done by a MUCEP-funded student during the summer months. **(ACTION: Ailsa Craig, Anne-Marie Sullivan, and Kathy Skinner all may have MUCEP funding to hire students who could potentially do this work, so they will connect with one another and figure out the best approach.)**



- 2) Support Kathy Hawkins of Empower NL in the initiation of a program similar to “Businesses Open” at Memorial University. “Businesses Open” is an innovative program undertaken in partnership with various disability-related community organizations. Its goal is to help businesses maximize their inclusiveness and boost their disability inclusion confidence by promoting improved accessibility of their technologies, built environments, and customer service. If this could be done at Memorial University in partnership with the Glenn Roy Blundon Centre, it could serve the dual function of dramatically improving the institution’s disability inclusiveness while also “softening up” upper-level administration, rendering them more receptive to the idea of introducing a Disability Studies curriculum. Given that there is a review pertaining to student disability accommodation currently underway at Memorial, the timing for a program like this is likely ideal. **(ACTION: Kathy Hawkins, Kathy Skinner, and Barbara Neis will be in touch with one another to further discuss this possibility and how to move forward)**
- 3) Work toward improving the disability inclusion content within existing courses. This may mean revamping courses that already contain a disability-related component to ensure that these issues are examined through the lens of inclusion, and it may also mean convincing professors of courses that could conceivably contain material on disability inclusion (but currently do not) to add that component to their syllabi. It was suggested that even the simple act of compiling the list of existing courses mentioned above may be enough to provide some momentum for this, as it may get professors and lecturers thinking about these issues.
- 4) Make contact with representatives from a few of the Canadian universities that already have Disability Studies programs in place in order to learn about how such programs tend to get their start, as well as how they can be effectively governed once underway. The Disability Studies program at the University of Winnipeg, for example, has a governance structure that includes community members who have had their own lived experiences with disability, which seems like a very smart way of doing things. **(ACTION: Mary Reid has contacts within the University of Winnipeg and York University with whom she will have discussions; Angela Loucks-Atkinson and Anne-Marie Sullivan know somebody at Vancouver Island University with whom they will make contact and ask some questions as well.)**
- 5) Obtain and review accessibility plans of some of the universities that have them in place (the majority of which are located in Ontario, as this is a requirement under the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act*), and learn more about accessibility auditing more generally. **(ACTION: Catherine Shortall has the accessibility plan for Carleton University, which she will share with the group; Angela Loucks-Atkinson and Anne-Marie Sullivan will follow up with David Yi, a member of their department who currently has a grant to conduct some accessibility auditing at Memorial University.)**
- 6) Hold a mapping workshop this coming fall that will include, among others, students and community members with disabilities in an effort to answer the question “What problems do we ultimately want to solve?” **(ACTION: Ailsa Craig is willing to spearhead this, and will look into the possibility of obtaining funding from the Office of Public Engagement to help with the costs; Angela Loucks-Atkinson, Catherine Shortall, and Kathy Hawkins all expressed interest in having some involvement with the workshop.)**



- 7) Make an effort to expand our current group to include a presence from those university faculties that are not currently represented (Business Administration, Education, Engineering and Applied Science, Medicine, Science, Music, Pharmacy, Grenfell Campus, and the Centre for Innovation in Teaching and Learning), as well as any other groups that might be able to contribute (the MUN Advisory Council for Students with Disabilities, the MUN Counselling Centre, the MUN Office of Faculty Relations, and the Consumers' Health Awareness Network of Newfoundland and Labrador were all mentioned). **(ACTION: Sandra Small will check with the School of Pharmacy, Angela Loucks-Atkinson will check with CITL, Kathy Skinner will check with the MUN Advisory Council for Students with Disabilities, Kathy Hawkins will check with her contact person at CHANNAL, and Barbara Neis will arrange for contact to be made with the other listed faculties and groups to invite their participation.)**

- 8) Select an official name for our group, and an easy means through which our members can report back on activities. It was agreed that we would call our group the Disability Inclusion Group (DIG) of Memorial University, and that we would set up a listserv for greatest ease of communication and reporting. **(ACTION: Chrissy Vincent will put in a C&C request for the creation of a listserv for the Disability Inclusion Group.)**