



SUMMARY REPORT: ROUNDTABLE ON INCLUSION 2018

Tuesday, April 17th, 2018

10:00 am – 4:00 pm

The Provincial Learning Centre, St. John's, NL

This document summarizes the discussions that took place at the Roundtable on Inclusion 2018 held in St. John's, NL on April 17th, 2018. Co-sponsored by the NL cluster of the Centre for Research on Work Disability Policy (CRWDP), the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities NL (COD-NL), the Inclusion NL program/division of Empower – The Disability Resource Centre, and the NL Federation of Labour, this event brought together community stakeholders, policymakers, corporate partners, and members of the academic community for a day of presentations, panels, and open discussions on the topic of inclusion for persons with disabilities in NL workplaces.

The event was facilitated by Barbara Neis (NL Provincial Co-Lead for CRWDP), Stephen Bornstein (NL Provincial Co-Lead for CRWDP), Emily Christy (Executive Director of COD-NL), and Kathy Hawkins (Manager of Inclusion NL at Empower). It opened with a few words from Barbara and Stephen, who provided a brief overview of the CRWDP initiative and then prompted attendees to introduce themselves. The following is a complete list of the 49 attendees, presented in alphabetical order by surname:

- Margaret Allan (Manager, Regulatory Affairs and Administration, Husky Energy)
- Shelley Andrews (Employment Counsellor, Avalon Employment)
- Pam Anstey (Executive Director, NL Association for Community Living)
- Robert Barker (Manager of Organizational Effectiveness, Department of HR, Memorial University)
- Allison Bartlett (Policy Analyst, Long-Term Care & Community Support Services, Government of NL)
- Stephen Bornstein (NL Provincial Co-Lead for CRWDP, Memorial University)
- Patti Bryant (Employment Equity and Diversity Advisory Committee, Memorial University)
- Joanne Callahan (Human Resources Talent Manager, Nalcor)
- Emily Christy (Executive Director, COD-NL)
- Melanie Cochrane (Manager of Strategic Staffing, Human Resources Secretariat, Government of NL)
- Bernie Coffey (Workers' Advisor, NL Federation of Labour)
- Ailsa Craig (Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Memorial University)
- Lori Dalley (Senior Policy and Research Advisor, Workplace NL)
- Bernard Doyle (Employment Equity & Diversity Advisory Committee, Memorial University)
- Grant Genova (Senior Architect, Fresh Fruit & Architecture)
- Natalie Godden (Manager, Family and Leisure Services, City of St. John's)
- Aisling Gogan (Director, Poverty Reduction Strategy Division, Government of NL)
- Noreen Golfman (Provost and Vice-President Academic, Memorial University)
- Vina Gould (Labour Relations Specialist, NAPE)
- Tina Griffin (Manager of Integrated Disability Management, Government of NL)



- Maureen Haan (President and CEO, Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work)
- Kathy Hawkins (Manager, Inclusion NL, Empower – The Disability Resource Centre)
- Derek Hayter (Manager, Newfound Cabs)
- Nicole Helwig (Manager, Centre for Social Enterprise, Memorial University)
- Gail Hickey (Executive Director, NL Fish Harvesting Safety Association)
- Tina Hickey (Employment Equity Officer, Department of HR, Memorial University)
- Dana Howse (CRWDP Post-Doctoral Fellow, Memorial University)
- Meghan Kelly (National Corporate Relations Manager, Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work)
- Cindy King (Operations and Quality Manager, Telelink)
- Chelsey MacNeil (Director of Social Enterprise, Choices for Youth)
- Carey Majid (Director, Human Rights Commission, Government of NL)
- Jackie Manuel (Chief Executive Officer, NL Construction Safety Association)
- Nina Mitchelmore (Engagement Planner, Office of Public Engagement, Government of NL)
- Patrick Molloy (Manager, Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities, Government of NL)
- Barbara Neis (NL Provincial Co-Lead for CRWDP, Memorial University)
- Isolde Neis-Evans (General Manager, Get Stuffed Restaurant)
- Adedoyin Odukoya (Employment Equity & Diversity Advisory Committee, Memorial University)
- Donna Power (Manager, Accessible Transit, Metrobus)
- Ted Power (Guidance Counsellor and Coordinator, Disability Services, College of the North Atlantic)
- Mary Reid (Director, Disability Policy Office, Government of NL)
- Rose Ricciardelli (Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Memorial University)
- Amy Sheppard (PhD Student and CRWDP Student Fellow, Memorial University)
- Aleksandra Stefanovic-Chafe (PhD Student and CRWDP Student Fellow, Memorial University)
- Taylor Stocks (Employment Equity and Diversity Advisory Committee, Memorial University)
- Elise Thorburn (Post-Doctoral Researcher, Memorial University)
- Tracey Thorpe (Manager, Policy and Planning, Public Service Commission, Government of NL)
- Chrissy Vincent (NL Provincial Coordinator, CRWDP)
- Amy Warren (Assistant Professor, Faculty of Business Administration, Memorial University)
- Helen Williamson (Department of Human Resources, City of St. John's)

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON DISABILITY AND WORK IN CANADA

Maureen Haan (President and CEO, Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work) and Kathy Hawkins (Manager, Inclusion NL, Empower – The Disability Resource Centre) delivered a short presentation focused on highlights and key outcomes from the National Conference on Disability and Work in Canada, which took place November 27th-29th, 2017, in Ottawa. The conference was a collaborative effort between the Centre for Research on Work Disability Policy, the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work, Empower's Inclusion NL, the Ontario Network of Injured Worker Groups, and representatives of national and provincial unions.

The conference began with an evening of thematic information sessions that functioned as an informal discussion forum and an opportunity for attendees from different parts of the country to network and share their visions for how to best move forward. It continued the next day with an address from keynote speaker Michael Prince, Landsdowne Professor of Social Policy at the University of Victoria, who spoke broadly about



reframing work disability policy to view it through the lens of accessibility rather than barriers. This was followed by a series of four panel discussions: 1) an employer panel, with champion employers sharing their experiences from across the country; 2) a panel dealing with innovations in services and supports in accommodations; 3) a panel of persons with lived experiences of disability sharing their stories; and 4) a visionary panel featuring prominent leaders in the area of disability inclusion. Finally, there was a series of visionary roundtable discussions focused on addressing the following questions:

- 1) **What are the pillars of a national strategy on the employment of people with disabilities?** One conclusion from this discussion was that this strategy needs to be developed through a collaborative approach among people with lived experience, employers, unions, non-profit organizations, health and safety experts, the research community, and all levels of government. Another was that it needs to be underpinned by values that are grounded in human rights and reflective of the intersectionalities of Canadian society.
- 2) **How can we improve the interface of disability programs to eliminate disincentives to employment?** The major conclusion from this discussion was that employers need to be equipped not only with the proper tools (such as assistive technology) but also with adequate training in their use. In order to develop the best training strategies, it would help to have strong partnerships with stakeholders in the community.
- 3) **What changes in funding strategy need to occur to ensure that people with disabilities are working? What is the role of community agencies in this?** One conclusion from this discussion was that it is important to make sure that labour market agreements contain funding for the employment of persons with disabilities, and that they include employment retention as an objective. Another was that all changes should be made in consultation with stakeholders, including people with disabilities, all levels of government, and First Nations communities.
- 4) **How can we improve navigation and portability of supports for income, employment, and health and well-being for sustainable employment?** One conclusion from this discussion was that there should be collaboration with private insurance companies, workers' compensation boards, and all levels of government to develop a national strategy that would include support for interprovincial portability. Another was that it is necessary to develop an income supplementation strategy that protects benefits for workers with disabilities when they undertake paid employment.
- 5) **What do employers need to learn to advance the employment of people with disabilities, differentiating between small to medium-sized enterprises and large corporations in Canada?** Key conclusions from this discussion were that there should be a focus on providing small to medium-sized enterprises with the proper tools to support recruitment, retention, and job customization for employees with disabilities, and that federal and provincial governments should be leading role models for best practices.
- 6) **How do we promote best practices to facilitate recruitment, retention, and advancement of workers with disabilities?** Key conclusions from this discussion were that more research is needed on best practices for wage subsidy programs and that all work needs to be undertaken in collaboration with important stakeholders.



Outcomes from the conference include the planning of a policy roundtable to be held in Ottawa on June 26th, 2018, and the formation of a working group that will develop the themes emerging from the conference's visionary discussions into a national strategy document that will be presented at a second national conference in Ottawa in December of 2018 and ultimately shared with the federal government.

At the conclusion of Maureen and Kathy's presentation, one attendee asked where Newfoundland and Labrador seems to be positioned in comparison to other provinces on issues related to work disability policy. The response was that we are probably on par with other provinces and even ahead of some. Some provinces have a premier's council on disability, which tends to lend them a little bit of an advantage. Others have formal legislation around disability, and, counterintuitively, these provinces tend to be behind rather than ahead. It seems that formal legislation can sometimes be something for governments to hide behind – the letter of the law is upheld rather than the spirit of it. Newfoundland and Labrador currently has neither and so is not particularly advantaged or disadvantaged.

Another attendee asked whether the national strategy would address potential costs to employers associated with its implementation. The response was that the talent pool of job-seekers with disabilities is vast and employers should understand the business case for hiring from this pool. The long-term gains of doing so would far outweigh any upfront costs that might be incurred.

PANEL DISCUSSION: ENHANCING INCLUSION IN THE PRIVATE AND NOT-FOR-PROFIT SECTORS

The panelists for our discussion on enhancing inclusion in the private and not-for-profit sectors were **Chelsey MacNeil** (Director of Social Enterprise, Choices for Youth), **Derek Hayter** (Manager, Newfound Cabs), **Margaret Allan** (Manager, Regulatory Affairs and Administration, Husky Energy), and **Gail Hickey** (Former Diversity Directory and Project Coordination Head, Hebron Topsides Project).

- 1) **Chelsey MacNeil** spoke about social enterprise as an effective catalyst for economic and social inclusion. Social enterprises are for-profit businesses or organizations that strive to maximize social impact alongside profits. Businesses that operate for the purpose of providing supported employment opportunities for workers who need them are one type of social enterprise. Such enterprises allow people with disabilities to learn how to navigate the complexities of employment in a safe and supported environment – something that current provincial employment programs don't do. In order for them to truly work, however, they need to be put to use. Our government could potentially be a role model with respect to this through the use of community impact agreements for all projects they undertake.
- 2) **Derek Hayter** spoke about how his local taxi company recently undertook an initiative to provide a fully accessible taxi service for St. John's and surrounding areas. To do this, they needed to purchase a fleet of accessible vans and provide the appropriate training for their drivers. Although this upfront cost acted as somewhat of a barrier to getting the initiative started, it has now paid for itself several times over. These vans are used not only for people requiring wheelchair accessibility but also for other purposes. For example, Newfound's accessible vans are now the only taxi service that is used by the organ transplant team of Eastern Health for safe and efficient delivery of donor organs to and from local hospitals. The initiative has also boosted business not only from people with disabilities themselves, but also from other people and from organizations that recognize that offering accessibility is the right thing to do and want to support a company that does so.



- 3) **Margaret Allan** spoke about the new office space that was designed and built by her company, Husky Energy, several years ago. The space was specifically engineered to be accessible, inclusive, and pleasant for all employees, including those with various types of disabilities. The office is primarily a collaborative space with open work stations, which are oriented to maximize exposure to natural light as much as possible. The office is open and spacious with wide corridors and low counters in order to be accessible to workers who use mobility aids, and all doors are equipped with accessible entry. Doors on each floor are uniquely colored in order to function as easily visible wayfinders, and desks are adjustable and equipped with a variety of enabling technology. Also, although the space is primarily open and collaborative, there are several privacy rooms that can be used for making personal phone calls, or even for prayer. The company believes that a highly accessible workplace is an important signal of inclusiveness, and wanted to strive toward eliminating physical barriers to diversity in the workplace.
- 4) **Gail Hickey** spoke about her own personal reason for becoming a champion for diversity in oil and gas projects – her brother experienced an industrial accident a number of years ago that left him injured and in need of support and advocacy, and she was the one who stepped in and helped him. He is now employed and doing well. She also spoke about the Hebron Project's goals for diversity, which were developed from the employment availability statistics published by Statistics Canada. The project hired multiple workers with disabilities in order to meet these goals. One of these hires was referred to them by the Helmets to Hardhats program, which offers veterans of the Canadian Forces the required apprenticeship training to achieve journey person status in trades within the construction industry. Another was referred to them by Empower. These employees were a fantastic addition to the project team, and accommodating them did not prove to be difficult. When in doubt as to what an employee needs for support and accommodation, all you need to do is ask the person.

During the question and answer session, Margaret Allan was asked whether the Husky building has gender-neutral washrooms. Her response was that it doesn't, but this wasn't something that was really on the radar several years ago when the space was built. If it were being built today, the situation would likely be different. She was also asked whether Husky has seen an increase in their proportion of employees with disabilities since building the new space. The response was that they do have some, but their metrics could be better. Many of the jobs for which they hire, however, are very specialized and have a very small pool of candidates, which makes meeting diversity goals more challenging. A comment was also made about the importance not only of incorporating accessible features into the built environment but also of ensuring that they are kept properly maintained and in good working condition. It does no good to have accessible entries on doors, for example, if they aren't functioning. This, we were told, is a problem that is widespread at Memorial University and needs to be addressed.

Derek Hayter was asked whether Newfound Cabs made any concerted effort to publicize their accessible taxi service. His response was that they are currently working on revamping their website, but other than that, not really – they are currently operating at capacity based on word of mouth alone. He was also asked if Newfound Cabs hires drivers with disabilities. The response was that they do have some, but the medical required in order to obtain a class four license can act as a barrier, since it can be harder for people with disabilities to pass this medical than it is for others. Someone also made a comment about the opportunity to incentivize consideration of accessibility at a policy level. If such consideration was required when organizations make decisions about awarding contracts, accessibility might be prioritized by more companies.



PANEL DISCUSSION: ENHANCING INCLUSION IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

The panelists for our discussion on enhancing inclusion in the public sector were **Vina Gould** (Labour Relations Specialist, NAPE), **Patrick Molloy** (Manager, Office of Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities, Government of NL), **Natalie Godden** and **Helen Williamson** (Department of Human Resources, City of St. John's), and **Rose Ricciardelli** (Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Memorial University).

- 1) **Vina Gould** spoke about the ways in which NAPE is making an effort to promote inclusion for people with disabilities within their union. Although she admits that not all collective agreements have particularly good language around disability, NAPE has been working closely with the Government of NL to ensure that people with disabilities have some representation. They have partnered with the Opening Doors program to earmark a certain number of NAPE jobs specifically for people who have disabilities – those jobs are paid for through government funding and protected from lay-offs. There are also some special positions within NAPE that are government-subsidized for up to one year and that exist for the purpose of allowing people with disabilities to get into the workforce and take advantage of opportunities to apply for other positions as internal applicants. There seem to be some issues, though, with the early and safe return to work process for injured workers. Employers are now performing functional evaluations and job matching analyses in such cases, and when they determine that there is no match between a worker's current abilities and their pre-injury job, they will often fail/refuse to accommodate the worker. These workers often end up asking NAPE for help with their situation.
- 2) **Patrick Molloy** spoke about the various programs that exist within the Government of NL to help get and keep people with disabilities employed. The best known of these is the Opening Doors program, which offers 77 fully funded public sector positions specifically for people with disabilities. In addition to this, there are also two short-term wage subsidy initiatives that offer opportunities for people with disabilities to enter public sector employment, as well as a summer student employment program targeted toward youth with disabilities. The Government of NL also offers career development support services that people with disabilities can use to help them hone their resumes and interview skills. There is a disability accommodation policy in place to ensure that the needs of all government workers are properly met, and there has been some collaboration with Empower to help improve accessibility to both the government's built environment and its website. Much of this work was originally inspired by the affirmative action movement in the 1980s which advocated for greater workforce inclusivity of all marginalized groups. Through its efforts on its own and in collaboration with other organizations, the Government of NL has come to be a role model for other jurisdictions with respect to disability inclusion.
- 3) **Natalie Godden** and **Helen Williamson** spoke about how the City of St. John's places a high priority on disability inclusion, both because it's the right thing to do and because it makes good business sense. City staff have all received training specifically focused on issues around inclusion, and there is a community advisory committee in place to help inform this training as well as to optimize policy and procedures. The city has also enlisted the help of Empower to conduct an accessibility audit of the city's summer hiring process and to make "mystery shopper" visits to its website in order to suggest potential improvements. The City of St. John's has had a disability management policy in place since 2003 and a disability management program that began in 2004. This policy and program address all types of disabilities, including non-work-related disabilities and mental health disabilities, although the latter do present some challenges with respect to non-disclosure.



- 4) **Rose Ricciardelli** spoke about her work with the Canadian Institute of Public Safety Research and Treatment (CIPSRT), for which she is the Associate Director and leader of the Community and Institutional Corrections sector. This is a federally funded, long-term, multi-stakeholder initiative to identify the tools required to support the recognition, prevention, and treatment of health concerns facing Canadian public safety personnel and their families. Public safety personnel include those employed in the corrections, policing, military, medical, and paramedical professions (among others), and their health concerns of interest include mental health issues and moral injury as well as physical injuries and illnesses. The CIPSRT initiative is working toward a number of important outcomes/goals, including the introduction of mental health screening tools for public safety personnel, internet-based cognitive behavioural therapy, and training modules focused on how to smoothly leave and return to work in order to ease stigma and eliminate barriers associated with taking time off to deal with health issues.

During the question and answer session, there was some more discussion of the early and safe return to work process for injured workers. As Vina Gould mentioned, employers will now usually perform functional evaluations and job matching analyses in such cases and, when they determine that there is no match between a worker's current abilities and their pre-injury job, they will generally fail/refuse to accommodate the worker and state that the worker cannot return to work. Moreover, these evaluations tend to be quite rigorous, to the point where some might be difficult to pass even for perfectly healthy, non-injured workers. When Workplace NL makes determinations about whether a worker is capable of returning to work, however, they do not take such matching into account. Often, what will happen is that a worker will be deemed capable of working by Workplace NL, but their former employer will not be held responsible to accommodate them to return to a position similar to the one held pre-injury. In such cases, workers will typically end up losing their benefits and thus be forced back to work but in extremely underpaid positions. In essence, the employer's duty to accommodate is not being adequately enforced, to the severe detriment of workers who have been injured.

Patrick Molloy was asked whether the Government of NL tracks retention and promotion for people with disabilities who become employed in the public sector through the Opening Doors program or through wage subsidies. His response was that this is not currently being done, but its importance is recognized and it is on the radar as something that should be tracked and analyzed in the future.

PANEL DISCUSSION: NL POLICY IN ACTION

The panelists for our discussion on NL policy in action were **Mary Reid** (Director, Disability Policy Office, Government of NL), **Aleksandra Stefanovic** (PhD Student, Community Health and Humanities), **Pam Anstey** (Executive Director, NL Association for Community Living), and **Emily Christy** (Executive Director, COD-NL).

- 1) **Mary Reid** spoke about the "Access, Inclusion, Equality" policy framework that the Government of NL has put forward to help promote inclusion for people with disabilities within the province. She highlighted the importance of community involvement and of consulting people with lived experience when developing these types of policies, and she explained that the goal of the current policy is to shift the focus from the individual with the disability to the surrounding environment. There is a strong emphasis on accessibility of the built environment (through universal design) as well as on the provision of disability-related supports and services in a way that is both respectful and fair. She also mentioned procurement, and how the procurement process can be an opportunity for the government to act as a role model by choosing to award tenders to those bidders who demonstrate commitment to inclusion and equality.



- 2) **Aleksandra Stefanovic** spoke about some of the academic work that she has done on work disability policy in NL. She recently contributed a piece to “The Democracy Cookbook – Recipes to Renew Governance in Newfoundland and Labrador” that was focused on civic engagement for people with disabilities, and the importance of ensuring that this segment of the population is fully engaged in democratic decision-making processes. She has also been the research assistant on two separate but related CRWDP-funded seed grant projects. The first of these was an in-depth examination of disability support services in NL and the ways in which they might impact labour market engagement for people with disabilities in the province. One key finding of that study was that coordination of services across different government departments is a major barrier to people with disabilities when trying to access the proper constellation of supports and services that they need. The second project compares support services and labour market participation of people with mental health disabilities and autism in NL and in NB. That study is still ongoing, but one key finding so far centers on the importance of carefully choosing outcome measurements – work itself is not always the end goal for all people. Sometimes it may be food security, increased self-esteem, or any number of other objectives. It is, therefore, always important to look at the bigger picture when considering policy. She also briefly mentioned education, and the importance of its being inclusive of everyone. All children should be taught about realities for all people, with or without disabilities.
- 3) **Pam Anstey** spoke about the importance of always remembering that policy affects the lives of real people. It is, therefore, crucial that policies reach all people who need them and support each individual’s goals. One key factor in helping to ensure this involves being cognizant of how policies are delivered. They should always support choice, promote agency, and allow individuals to have maximum self-direction. Individualized funding is one example of a way in which policy can achieve this. It is also important that policies exist to address critical periods of transition in people’s lives, such as the transition between school and the world of work. Transitional periods can be very challenging and tend to be a time when people need the most support to find their way.
- 4) **Emily Christy** spoke about some of the different types of work undertaken by COD-NL. Among other things, they offer local businesses fee-for-service inclusiveness training and universal design audits, and they aim to influence policy through systemic advocacy. To this end, one of their major goals is to help make sure that the voices of people with lived experiences are both heard and heeded – consultation holds little value if no one is truly listening. The individual should be at the root of everything, and policies and programs should be constantly changing and growing in a way that reflects the needs and experiences of real people. Issues such as poor coordination and integration of policies across government departments could be much more easily understood and addressed if we simply listened to the people who have had experience trying to navigate the system. They are the ones who know where the barriers are and could likely suggest ways in which some of the problems could be mitigated.

During the question and answer session, one question was whether individualized funding policies/programs would include the education system. The response was that with individualized funding, supports are always attached to a person rather than a classroom or a workplace. The goal is to equip a person with all of the supports, services and resources they need to be successful. They can then carry these with them for their entire lifespan.



There was also some discussion about the policy gap that exists with respect to supporting individuals with cognitive challenges. There currently seems to be very little offered to such individuals, and kids with cognitive disabilities are too often “graduating to a couch”. One factor contributing to this issue may be the fact that typical outcome measurements may be too narrow for this group. In some cases, an individual’s goal may not be as simple and straightforward as just simply employment; perhaps there are other ways that the person might like to be included in the community. For that reason, it is always a good idea to actually ask people what it is that they would like to be supported in achieving and to then shape supports and services around that.

Interestingly, someone mentioned that there seemed to be very few actual people with disabilities participating in this roundtable, and that this should not be the case. We really shouldn’t be having a dialogue about these issues without the input of those who have real lived experience: “Nothing about us without us.”

PANEL DISCUSSION: RETURN TO WORK PROCESSES

The panelists for our discussion on return to work processes were **Dana Howse** (CRWDP Post-Doctoral Fellow, Memorial University), **Amy Sheppard** (PhD Student and CRWDP Student Fellow, Memorial University), and **Bernie Coffey** (Workers’ Advisor, NL Federation of Labour).

- 1) **Dana Howse** spoke about her research on the effectiveness of early and safe return to work processes, which was carried out in the province of Ontario. Her findings indicated that although these processes usually work well, there is a small but disproportionately costly number of claims that do not go smoothly and become quite adversarial in nature. There are typically three reasons for the existence of these difficult claims. The first relates to the distinction between hurt and harm. In some cases, a worker may be deemed employable because they are no longer at risk for further injury or harm. The worker may, however, still be experiencing a significant amount of physical pain and other hardships (such as sleep deprivation) related to the injury, making a full return to work extremely challenging. The second relates to workplace norms around the policing of employees’ health and recovery. In some instances, employees returning to work post-injury feel as though they are under a microscope, or that the pace of their recovery is being called into question. This can, understandably, lead to a great deal of tension, as workers strive to “prove themselves” – both as truly injured and as still capable of performing their work. The third relates to the expectation for harmonious relations in the workplace, which unfortunately do not always exist in cases of early and safe return to work. Modifications to previously existing roles and responsibilities can sometimes disrupt workplace relationships and cause strain, occasionally even resulting in workers feeling harassed by their employers.
- 2) **Amy Sheppard** spoke about her planned PhD research, in which she intends to explore how the mental health disabilities of Newfoundland and Labrador women prisoners affect their opportunities to acquire and sustain employment following their release from prison, as well as policies that contribute to or mitigate the work-related challenges they encounter as a consequence of their disabilities. Her core research questions include: 1) What types of services/supports are available to women in prison and after their release in Newfoundland and Labrador that are designed to help them navigate any challenges related to mental illness or disability? 2) In such services, is there a focus on transition to work after prison, specifically for women with mental health related disabilities? 3) How do released women perceive their mental health issues as shaping their ability to find and keep different forms of employment? 4) Do released women have any awareness of actual services provided that meet their unique needs (histories of



substance use, mental health concerns, issues with childcare, and so on)? There is currently little to no research on this topic. This is a major gap, considering that most women prisoners have experienced some form of past trauma or mental health issue. In many cases, this trauma or mental health issue is part of what led them to criminal behavior in the first place. There are also very few treatment resources available to this population – a reality that might change if the topic were better researched and understood.

- 3) **Bernie Coffey** spoke about her experiences as a Workers' Advisor for the NL Federation of Labour. She feels as though she is unable to offer an opinion on exactly how well the return to work process is functioning. She has mostly dealt with non-unionized workers who, in her experience, do not tend to be highly educated and usually have absolutely no idea of what the return to work process entails or how to navigate it. Oftentimes, the labour market re-entry process puts workers back to work in minimum wage jobs and furthermore, many employers will not accept these workers at all if they disclose their previous injury. Interestingly, there is a re-employment obligation placed on previous employers, but it extends only to six months. After that, employers will sometimes fire or lay off a returning worker for what seems to be no reason. As a result, workers are often left either unemployed or underemployed and with no benefits. It is her view, therefore, that changes need to be made to the re-employment obligations placed on employers. Furthermore, these obligations must be properly enforced by Workplace NL.

During the question and answer session, Bernie was asked whether other provinces have better systems in place to facilitate return to work processes. Her response was that although the systems in different provinces are similar, other provinces have more worker advisors who can advocate for the rights of workers. This province currently has only two, and their caseloads are enormous.

There was also some discussion around the widespread societal attitude that workers who access compensation benefits are always trying to take advantage of the system. This is a widespread and pervasive perception that may have something to do with where and/or how human resources professionals receive their training. It was agreed that, if possible, changes to such training as well as to organizational structures and processes should be made in an effort to reduce such attitudes and beliefs, which are unfounded.

PANEL DISCUSSION: MOVING FORWARD

The panelists for our discussion on moving forward were **Maureen Haan** (President and CEO, Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work), **Cindy King** (Operations and Quality Manager, Telelink), **Nicole Helwig** (Manager, Centre for Social Enterprise, Memorial University), and **Noreen Golfman** (Provost and Vice-President Academic, Memorial University).

- 1) **Maureen Haan** spoke about some of the ways in which community organizations that support people with disabilities can successfully advocate for their inclusion in the labour market. She particularly emphasized the importance of always including employers as equal partners in the process. In order to do this, it is helpful to understand what it is that employers need and to work with them to help them achieve their goals. First and foremost, employers need good talent – something they can certainly obtain within the population of people with disabilities. Secondly, they need services (such as needs assessments and connections to potential employees), which most disability organizations are happy to provide. Thirdly, they need to plan for the future, and access to the vast and largely untapped talent pool of people with disabilities will be helpful as the baby boomer generation ages and retires.



- 2) **Cindy King** spoke about how choosing to hire people with disabilities was one of the best business decisions her company ever made. She also spoke about some of the potential barriers that may be keeping other companies from choosing to do the same. One issue is that many companies aren't even aware of the support services available to them through community organizations to help them in developing inclusive hiring practices. Cindy admitted that she herself wasn't aware of these services until someone from the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work walked into her office and talked to her about them. Another issue is that both recruitment and turnover are very costly to businesses, so that they are very driven to get it right, and this may lead them to have a fear of the unknown. There is obviously a huge need for education and awareness around inclusive hiring in order to help companies understand the business case involved and to mitigate such fears. Lastly, higher levels of support, encouragement, and consultation about the importance of inclusive hiring from all levels of government would be useful in helping companies overcome barriers and enjoy the benefits of a diverse workforce.
- 3) **Nicole Helwig** spoke about social enterprise as a pathway for social transformation, and the role that it can play in developing a more inclusive workforce. Her particular focus is on social enterprises that offer supported employment opportunities for their workers – something that she believes we should and will see more of in the future. The federal government held consultations this past January to inform the development of a new social innovation and social finance strategy, and there was a lot of discussion about social enterprise and inclusion during these talks. Provincially, the Government of NL's Department of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation is also in the process of developing a social enterprise action plan for the province. The idea is that the model of social enterprise can help remove some of the policy barriers that prevent people with disabilities from accessing the labour market, although it is important to note that, without certain other types of policy reform, such individuals could still face other barriers (such as the possibility of their benefits being clawed back).
- 4) **Noreen Golfman** spoke about how inclusiveness and diversity is one of Memorial University's core values, and how, as such, it is an institution that should both embrace and act on the responsibility to ensure that equity is always guaranteed. Furthermore, as a large university and the only one in the province, Memorial University should not only be in the business of knowledge generation, but should also be leading the charge for progressive social and cultural change. In 2016, the Vice Presidents' Council approved the creation of Memorial's first Employment Equity and Diversity Advisory Committee to provide advice, recommend strategies, and share best practices with respect to matters of inclusiveness. This committee is currently in the process of developing a three-year employment equity and diversity action plan aimed at eliminating disadvantage and discrimination. Systemic change, however, can be expected to be slow because of the importance of respecting the consultative process.

SYNTHESIS AND WRAP-UP

A few minutes were reserved at the conclusion of the event for some brief closing comments, which were provided by Barbara Neis and Stephen Bornstein.

Barbara Neis highlighted the need for greater general awareness around the issue of disability inclusion in the workplace. She pointed out that, before the start of the CRWDP initiative, even she herself was largely unaware of the network of community organizations that exist to enhance opportunities around inclusion. Clearly, there is still plenty of room to raise their profile and draw more public attention to these matters. She



also mentioned the obvious gap in curriculum and training that currently exists with respect to these issues. This gap plays a large role in perpetuating employers' fears around hiring people with disabilities and contributes to the lack of understanding that underlies many of the problems associated with return to work processes. If employers and policymakers received adequate training around disability inclusion from day one, many of the barriers embedded in our current systems and culture would be eliminated. In sum, disability inclusion in the workplace is fundamentally a human rights issue and it is one that we are not presently dealing with in a way that is appropriate, effective, or humane. If we did, we would have a much better society for all of us.

Stephen Bornstein echoed Barbara's comments about the critical need for more training and education around disability inclusion. He also talked about the important differences between legislation and policy. From the discussions at this event, it seems as though formal legislation often leads society to simply do the bare minimum, whereas policy – good policy, at least – provides the framework and tools to help support people with disabilities in meeting their goals. The best policy would provide individuals with disabilities as well as employers with tailored “backpacks” of supports and services that would function to enable and promote full inclusiveness in the workplace. He also mentioned the importance of issues such as disability rights being written into government and university procurement contracts, as this would allow such institutions to be leaders for change in the right direction. Finally, he emphasized the importance of small and medium-sized employers becoming leaders for change, too. Although governments, universities, and labour unions can all play a role, change in large institutions is often very slow. To see real change in a timely manner, everyone will need to do their part.