



Holiday Stars Set the Stage for Access Awareness Day



Access Awareness Day will soon be here! Thanks to our response from our direct campaign mail campaign, our members have helped set the stage for change! BY KAREN THOMPSON (SPARC BC)

Thank you SPARC BC members who participated in our “Who is your Holiday Star?” campaign! In December 2007, we asked SPARC BC members to recognize a business that is really accessible or a person who has made a special effort to assist them. We are delighted by the enthusiastic response. We received over 100 responses from 39 different communities in BC. Thanks to your efforts, we will connect with all of these businesses as part of this year’s Access Awareness Day campaign with a note that they’ve been thanked by a member and our Access Awareness Day materials.

Access Awareness Day will take place on June 7th, 2008. We are proud to announce that our theme for this year is “Access Is Everyone’s Business”. Our focus for this campaign is the business community. We want to provide them with tips and resources on how they can improve their business to better serve people with disabilities. We intend to send them engaging materials so that they can learn to be aware and take action to improve the customer experience of people with disabilities.

In previous years, Access Awareness Day focused on connecting with likeminded organizations, municipalities, public sector institutions, and the general public. Our message was concerned largely with increasing awareness of the social model of disability where it is not individual impairment which leads to disability, but the barriers created by society which leads to people being “disabled.” Thus, we have a societal responsibility to consider the mobility and service needs of persons with disabilities when we design spaces and services. SPARC BC will continue to align itself with likeminded organizations and to communicate this message to our traditional target audiences and the broader community.

However, it is becoming increasingly apparent that it is impossible to develop fully inclusive communities without engaging the business community on the issue of accessibility. We all have a right to be full participants in mainstream society and we all need to access goods, services, amenities, recreation, and employment opportunities. Many of the products and services we use

Accessibility

► in our day-to-day life are provided by private sector companies. The private sector also has the ability to hire persons with disabilities. Thus, if the business community took into consideration persons with disabilities, the private sector would be a powerful vehicle for social change. Currently, SPARC BC is establishing partnerships with large-scale business organizations for the upcoming Access Awareness Day campaign, which will take place on June 7th, 2008. Communications with the business community will include the business case for accessibility and strategies for making businesses more accessible.

Demographic and economic trends suggest that there is a strong business case for providing accessible products and services. In 2002, the Canadian Standards Association reported that persons with disabilities in Canada comprised \$25 billion in purchasing power.¹ Most persons with disabilities are seniors with age-related disabilities, not young people. As the “aging” or “greying” of the Canadian population progresses, the market share of persons with disabilities will also increase. The next generation of seniors will be the “baby boomer” cohort, a relatively large and affluent demographic group. The Canadian Standards Association predicts that in the next few years and beyond, people with

disabilities will represent 20% to 25% of the recreation, retail, entertainment, workplace and housing markets.¹ Persons with disabilities also have an impact on the spending habits of others without disabilities; the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services estimates that on average, five or six personal contacts such as family members, friends, colleagues, business owners, and service providers will regularly have a demand for accessible products and services.²

The concept of physical access is well understood in the field of accessibility. However, there are limited resources explaining how to meet the customer service needs of persons with disabilities and how businesses can create a welcoming environment for consumers with disabilities. We will be exploring this concept as we prepare for Access Awareness Day 2008.

In 2009, we will continue to target the private sector; however this campaign will focus on encouraging businesses to hire persons with disabilities. A study produced by the Minister’s Council on Employment for Persons with Disabilities suggests that persons with disabilities have not been well integrated into the labour market, and that “persons with disabilities experience significant challenges in their ability to achieve employment, acquire skills, and locate long range career

¹ Canadian Standards Association. B480-02 Customer Service Standards for People with Disabilities. (Toronto: Canadian Standards Association, 2002)

² Ministry of Community and Social Services, Ontario. Why Is Accessibility Good For Your Business? <http://www.mcscs.gov.on.ca/mcss/english/pillars/accessibilityOntario/business/why_access_bus.htm (1 Jan 2008)>.

³ Minister’s Council on Employment for Persons with Disabilities, A Profile of Persons with Disabilities in British Columbia: Employment, Labour Market Needs and Occupational Projection, (2003), 1 <<http://www.eia.gov.bc.ca/epwd/docs/AProfileofPWDreport.pdf> (1 Nov 2007)>

opportunities.”³ Differences in educational attainment do not account for the substantial difference in labour market participation between persons with disabilities and persons without disabilities, as there is only a very slight difference between the level of education achieved by persons with disabilities relative to persons without disability.⁴ Thus, the findings suggest that employers are “not utilizing the skills and abilities of persons with disabilities to their fullest potential.”⁵ Economic and demographic projections suggest that skilled workers will become increasingly scarce in British Columbia⁶ and there will be a movement towards considering non-traditional labour market groups in the province.⁷ As part of the 2009 campaign, SPARC BC will work to raise awareness of the skills and abilities that persons with disabilities can bring to the workplace.

Thank you once again to all of our members who sent us replies for “Who is your Holiday Star.” We are excited to launch “Access is Everyone’s Business.” We hope to have your support throughout the campaign. By working together and spreading the message as far and wide as possible, we will make a difference! Visit <www.sparc.bc.ca> for more information about Access Awareness Day.



Congratulations!

Doreen Barth
You’ve won our
Holiday Star draw!

London Drugs at Park Royal North
was her holiday star.

Doreen wrote to us:

I am blind in one eye and have a balance problem once in awhile. I know I can always count on some employee to walk me to my car with my purchases. Staff people have always been kind.

Thank you to everyone who
participated!



4 Ibid. 2.

5 Ibid. 3.

6 Ibid. 3.

7 British Columbia Chamber of Commerce. Closing the Skills Gap: A Report of the British Columbia Chamber of Commerce Skills Shortage Initiative, (April 2002), 9-10 <http://www.bcchamber.org/files/PDF/Closing_the_Skills_Gap.pdf (1 Nov 2007)>.