

Spring/Summer 2007

accessibility at brock

A newsletter to create awareness of accessibility planning at Brock and Niagara

Answering questions about accessibility planning



Margaret Sanderson

Hello, and welcome to the inaugural *Accessibility at Brock* Newsletter. I am Margaret Sanderson, Accessibility Co-ordinator at Brock

University, Office of the Associate Vice-President of Student Services, and a newcomer to the campus and community. By the time this newsletter is published, I will have been at Brock about six months. I want to take a

moment to thank all staff, student, faculty and community members for welcoming me to Brock and the Niagara region.

In my "rookie" time here, I have had the pleasure of listening to, sharing with, and talking with many people about accessibility planning, the role of the Accessibility Co-ordinator and the importance of a University-community collaboration to effectively remove barriers that hinder full participation by persons with disabilities.

The stories contained in this newsletter may provide answers to your questions surrounding accessibility planning.

What is Accessibility Planning?

A simple definition of accessibility planning is: "The actions and steps undertaken to identify, remove and prevent "barriers" that affect persons with disabilities."

Accessibility Planning is a relatively young field that has been emerging in Ontario over the last 10 years or more and

has occurred in many areas in response to provincial legislation. In 1998, the provincial government introduced accessibility legislation that was unanimously trounced by all parties as ineffective. However, lobbying efforts continued, and in 2001, the successful efforts of key

The *Accessibility at Brock Newsletter* is an information newsletter published by the Accessibility Co-ordinator, Office of Associate Vice-President of Student Services, at Brock University. The purpose of the publication is to create awareness of accessibility planning initiatives at Brock; profile staff, students, faculty and community members working to remove barriers to persons with disabilities; and to inform readers about University and Niagara region resources and services available to persons with disabilities.

The *Accessibility at Brock Newsletter* is available online at www.brocku.ca/accessibility. If you require this document in alternate formats, please contact 905-688-5550, ext 5454, or accessibility@brocku.ca

If you would like to be included on the *Accessibility at Brock* Newsletter mailing list, please call 905-688-5550, ext. 3418, or e-mail rdelazzer@brocku.ca

Accessibility legislation requirements at Brock



The Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA) requires all universities and colleges to produce an accessibility plan in consultation with persons with disabilities and others. Public sector organizations such as school boards and hospitals have similar requirements. Municipalities require the establishment of a legislated committee of council and annual accessibility plan development with input from persons with disabilities.

Brock produced its first Accessibility Plan in 2003 with successive plans following each year. The Brock plans are available at www.brocku.ca/accessibility

A second piece of accessibility legislation followed in June 2005, building upon the foundation of initial accessibility planning under the ODA 2001. The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) covers not only the public sector but for the first time in Canada, the private sector is required to implement mandated accessibility standards. The purpose of the AODA is "To benefit all Ontarians by developing, implementing and

enforcing accessibility standards in order to achieve accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities with respect to goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures and premises on or before Jan. 1, 2025 and, for providing for the involvement of persons with disabilities, of the government of Ontario and of representatives of industries and various sectors of the economy in the development of accessibility standards (AODA, 2005)."

To prepare Brock for the first proposed Accessibility Standard in customer service (available at www.gov.on.ca), input and feedback was gathered during November and December 2006 from key University stakeholders — the Brock University Barrier-Free Working Group and Students Services Management Committee. Smaller feedback sessions have also been held with various University departments. This report was then assembled and forwarded to the Ministry of Community and Social Services. The submission to the ministry on behalf of Brock University is available at www.brocku.ca/accessibility

The first Accessibility Standard is expected to pass later this year. When it does, a working group will begin the task of implementing the general and specific requirements of the legislation, enhancing the progress Brock has already achieved in the area of customer service.

Welcoming persons with visual impairments

- Identify yourself when you approach the person and speak directly to them.
- If you offer assistance, wait until you receive permission from the person
- If assistance is requested, offer your arm (elbow) to guide the person and walk slowly.
- Don't touch service animals (even though they are cute!) as they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Don't assume the person can't see you.
- Guide the person to a chair or a comfortable place — remember not to leave them in the middle of a room.
- Remember to say goodbye before walking away.

(Adapted from "What you need to know about customers with visual impairments" at www.mcsc.gov.on.ca)

Accessibility Co-ordinator has a diverse role

An Accessibility Co-ordinator has a diverse portfolio. The position requires working with all areas (academic and administrative at Brock) and within those frameworks the Accessibility Co-ordinator will work with stakeholders (faculty, staff, students, employees and community members) at all levels of the University to remove barriers. The work of Brock's Accessibility Co-ordinator falls into four main areas: planning, resource, facilitation, and administration.

Planning

The Accessibility Co-ordinator's planning role is to create an Accessibility Planning "infrastructure" at Brock. This involves bringing together key staff and faculty to establish a senior steering group responsible for University-wide implementation while at the same time identifying and motivating key staff and faculty to lead or participate in working groups across campus to address various barriers.

Importantly too, this role works closely with persons with disabilities to create a "consultative" voice for persons with disabilities at Brock - always keeping in mind that the purpose of the accessibility legislation is to involve persons with disabilities in the identification, prevention and removal of barriers.

Finally, Brock's Accessibility Co-ordinator brings these pieces together with the assistance of the steering group and working groups to produce an annual Accessibility Plan. This plan is then shared with the public for ongoing input and revision year after year.

Resource

Acting as a resource to staff, faculty, students and community members is an important role of Brock's Accessibility Co-ordinator. Accessibility

issues that may be brought forward to the Accessibility Co-ordinator can include:

- Providing assistance with accessibility-specific wording for University documents or publications
- Directing individuals to appropriate University departments to address their needs (for example an employee with a disability may contact the Accessibility Co-ordinator who would put them in contact with Human Resources)
- Researching ways to accommodate persons with disabilities in programs and services accessed by the community (for example, Youth University, Recreation Services, and so on).

Acting as a resource person requires having specific knowledge, such as key pieces of legislation, and general knowledge, such as how to research or tap into existing accessibility planning networks.



Facilitation

The Accessibility Co-ordinator is often in a position to see gaps and common barriers that may be best addressed by bringing key people together across the University to address the issue. The role of the Accessibility Co-ordinator at this time

is to suggest some possible solutions and assist the key people to bring about change to remove the barrier.

Administration

Finally, the Accessibility Co-ordinator is required to oversee the implementation of all mandated accessibility legislation requirements at the University.

How you can get involved

Contact the Accessibility Co-ordinator to:

- Identify an area of concern regarding physical or other barriers on campus
- Receive general or specific accessibility-awareness training geared to your area
- Find out how to get involved in any number of working groups.



What is Accessibility Planning? *continues from page 1.*

accessibility advocates across the province resulted in the passage of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA, 2001).

The purpose of the ODA "is to improve opportunities for persons with disabilities and to provide for their involvement in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to their full participation in the life of the province."

The legislation specifically defines barriers. Often most people think of physical barriers (for example, a doorknob that is difficult to turn for someone with arthritis) that affect persons with disabilities. These are obvious barriers, but there are others — architectural, information and communication, attitudinal, technological or systemic.

The Accessibility Co-ordinator hopes to highlight in future newsletters the individuals and groups at Brock or in the community who are taking steps along with us to remove these barriers (see Thumbs Up!).

Why is accessibility planning being undertaken?

There are several reasons why accessibility planning is an important consideration.

Persons with disabilities are a wealth of untapped employment potential and are ready, willing and able to participate in the workforce. More and more students with disabilities are graduating each year and want to become part of the workforce. In addition:

- Persons with disabilities have tremendous spending power — \$25 billion in Canada. Word of mouth travels about accessible facilities, whether in retail shops or at a college or university — persons with disabilities, their families, friends and caregivers want to spend their money in accessible facilities.
- We are an aging society. By 2020, it is estimated that 20 per cent of the population will have some form of disability, up from 13 per cent of the population today. To retain our workforce, it will become increasingly important to create built environments that are easy to manoeuvre.
- There are so many reasons to work systematically to remove barriers so that persons with disabilities may participate. Can you think of others?

Advocate renews commitment to Brock

Shelley Stewart believes a disability is the unfair limitation that society places on individuals and individuals place on themselves.

"The worst four-letter words are fear and can't," she says. "A healthy dose of fear can keep you grounded, safe and challenged. But it becomes unhealthy if it stops you from stepping outside of your comfort zone."

Stewart, a Brock graduate (BRLS, '86; BA, psyc, '87), is co-chair of the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Accessibility for the City of St. Catharines, and has been blind since the age of 27 as a result of diabetic retinopathy. She hasn't let living with blindness or diabetes slow her down.

Margaret Sanderson, Accessibility Co-ordinator at Brock (associated with the Office of Associate Vice-President, Student Services), has invited Stewart and other community representatives to act as resource persons as the University builds its resources and fine-tunes its accessibility planning processes in 2007, particularly with issues surrounding the proposed Customer Service Standard (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005) that Ontario is expected to release this year.

"Shelley, key University stakeholders, other community representatives and I will be

working with various departments and staff to implement the government's requirements and to explain the relevance of the standards to the University community," says Sanderson.

"I'm delighted to be making a renewed commitment to Brock," says Stewart, 43. "It's very exciting for me, for two reasons. First of all, the best time of my life was when I was a student here, and now I'm able to open doors for others as a resource person."

One method by which she remains connected to Brock is through *Surgite!*, the publication for Brock's graduates. *Surgite!* is provided by the Office of University Communications in a text file format for her screen reader, eliminating the need to have someone having to read it to her.

Stewart, the recipient of the 2005 Breaking the Barriers award from the Ontario March of Dimes, is accompanied by her constant companion Fozzie, a seven-year-old lab/retriever cross and a graduate of Guide Dogs for the Blind in San Raphael, Calif. The sweet-natured dog is "hard working, loyal and loving with a great sense of humour," Stewart says

with affection.

The advocate's greatest achievement, and a skill she suggests that all people with disabilities learn, is asking for help without feeling helpless.

"When one can do that, it is a sign of strength, not weakness."



Shelley Stewart and Fozzie

Contacts in the broader community

Are you interested in finding out more about local efforts to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities or to share an issue or concern about accessibility in your neighbourhood or municipality? Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committees (AAC) are mandated under the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001, and are in communities with a population of 10,000 or more and may in some cases be a Joint Accessibility Advisory committee reflecting a number of municipalities or other public organizations. Following is a partial list of local AACs:

- **City of St. Catharines:**
Accessibility Co-ordinator
Diana Lecinski — dlecinski@stcatharines.ca
- **Town of Fort Erie:**
Bev Bradnam — bbradnam@town.forterrie.on.ca
- **City of Welland:**
Richard Morwald — Richard.morwald@welland.ca
- **City of Niagara Falls:**
Dean Ioforia — dioforia@niagarafalls.ca
- **Region of Niagara:**
Diana Lecinski — dlecinski@stcatharines.ca
- **Lincoln, West Lincoln, Pelham, Thorold, Niagara on the Lake and Grimsby:**
Donna Herrington — donna@theherringtongroup.ca

Thumbs up to...

These areas are working towards removing barriers at Brock and the broader community:



- Office of Human Rights and Equity Services: closed captioning of all films at the Reel Life Film Festival in January.
- James A. Gibson Library staff: Customer Service Excellence training, including a section on the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and the proposed Customer Service Standard for persons with disabilities.
- Services for Students with disabilities: Academic Accommodation Process Document approved by Senate in December 2006.
- Brock Centre for the Arts: Undertaking a review of practices and policies regarding accessibility for patrons with disabilities.
- Facilities Management staff: working towards implementing the accessibility audit recommendations.
- Canadian Hearing Society of Niagara: co-hosted the screening of "It's All Gone Pete Tong" during the Reel Life Film Festival.
- Linda Crabtree: a tireless advocate for persons with disabilities and a recipient of a Thirty from the Past Thirty Award from the Brock University Alumni Association in March 2007.
- Office of University Communications: provides *Surgite!* in alternate formats.
- **If you know of persons or departments that deserve recognition for their work in removing barriers, please contact accessibility@brocku.ca**