

International Day of Persons with Disabilities Webinar

Webinar Participant Questions & Answers from the keynote speaker Carly Fox

Question: What advice would you give our new Minister as she's preparing to take on being the Minister of Accessibility?

Answer: Speak to the person regardless of political affiliation because those are long standing relationships that you want to hear from. The Minister was elected into office for a reason, and it is important to stay true to your commitments and beliefs and work with the Manitoba Accessibility Office (MAO) and Accessibility Compliance Secretariat because they have so much knowledge and have been doing this work for a long time. The MAO website is a good source of information and resources.

Question: What do you think are the next steps for Manitoba or nationally regarding accessibility? Do you think that there are standards that need to be developed?

Answer: The federal government put out a study that states facial recognition technology will pose a barrier for people with disabilities. So in saying that, I feel that barriers need to be addressed, and remind ourselves that when it comes to accessibility legislation there is an important component to convention, not just identification and removal. We are still seeing the creation of new things without thinking about accessibility. So it is important to ensure we are going on the right path and ensuring that accessibility is in the forefront with new technology and environments being created and built. Ensuring there are accessibility plans in place and following through with the commitment.

Question: What is neurodivergence, and can you speak about it a little bit.

Answer: neurodivergence is when a person is on the autism spectrum or, more generally, to someone whose brain processes information in a way that is not typical of most individuals. Typically, this isn't considered when it comes to accessibility legislation and standards, they are often lumped in with disabilities when it comes to human rights protection. This is good that it is under the human rights code, but it is important to ensure that it is placed in legislation and standards and start to mainstream neurodivergence. We are seeing disabilities enter mainstream organizations but

there is still along way to go and needs to be paired with neurodiverergence as well, because there is a significant overlap.

Question: What is your opinion on harmonization across provinces, and is this required in making real change in Canada.

Answer: There are different circumstances across each province, for example the built environment in St John's Newfoundland was much different than in Winnipeg Manitoba, and there are so many considerations for each province. Harmonization is something we should look at, but there needs to be some flexibility for regional differences. Maybe it can be more informal, like best practice sharing. Also looking at the federal government as that leader, to work together to make Canada accessible by 2040.

Question: What is disability inclusion and can you expand on what this means to you?

Answer: Accessibility is one thing, it is about the awareness, prevention and removal of barriers. Disability inclusion tackles those attitudinal barriers more so then the other five standards (employment, customer service, information and communication, built environment and transportation). Disability inclusion is about dismantling our own biases and conclusions. Include and start having representation of people with disabilities, and not just working on accessibility because it makes people because we are not addressing those biases.

Question: What is your perspective. How important do you think regular reviews are? As part of the legislation?

Answer: Federally, they hadn't reviewed the Access Information Act in 40 years. So I got a participant review of it, and I think that just like embedded in me a belief that, like if you're not reviewing your Regulation like legislation regularly. You are setting yourself up for failure, because even in the gap of 5 years so much has changed, like looking at the Access Information act in 40 years the Internet was invented right? So just God! If we are not committed to making good legislation or reviewing it every 5 years, why, even make the legislation at all right. So big fan of reviews, do it? Please don't not do it.

Question: How can we get our autistic kids into daycare or preschool in rural Manitoba, if we can't hire the required support.

Answer: When it comes to services for autistic children and their families. There's a really big role for the government to play, both Federally and provincially. I recently looked at the fall. Economic statement 2023. And in the commitment to childcare provinces are supposed to, you know, with the help from Federal funding. You guys better be well positioned to look at those intersections between disability between rural communities and really provide that funding is definitely a rough spot. Really hoping you do have access to the resources you need, but always looking at the provincial Government to provide. The funding the resources, because there's really no excuse in 2023 for autistic children to be denied education and care and just inclusion in the community. So keep up the great work.

Question: How can we engage the medical system in a critical discussion regarding aba therapy for autistic kids? And the research does not support this as the gold standard, and many autistic adults feel that it is abusive. Yet it's the majority of the information that parents are given when they're identified as when their kids are identified as autistic.

Answer: All people call it autistic conversion therapy. For a reason it generally punishes children for acting autistic. And when we view autism through that neurotypicalism lens, we understand that their brains don't work wrong, they just work differently. So when ABA is designed to try to make their brains work in a way, neuro-typical people think it's really inhumane. And I think some governments internationally do view it as a human rights violation, and we do see that a lot of governments still promote ABA as the main service for autistic children. So I think when it comes to reckoning with the medical system, we need to look at alternatives. And there's so many great alternatives out there for autistic children, and it's mostly coming from direct support and inclusion in the community, because for so long autistic children have been segregated, and that's completely unacceptable. And again, a human rights violation. So yeah, and I guess when it comes to, especially when it comes to childcare services, children centered services for autistic and disabled children. We just have to hold them accountable. There has to be very clear expectations, and really having that relationship with your child, so that if something happens to them. If they are upset or harmed, they have a way to communicate with their own parents, and also setting safeguards in case they aren't able to communicate in that way.

Question: Do you feel that there should be a requirement that employers participate in a disabilities workshop annually, to keep up to date, accommodate, and be up to date on policies, and be more aware of when discrimination takes place, and how to deal with it.

Answer: I think when it comes to requirements that gets a little tricky because we also have to look at who's hosting the workshop? Can we really enforce the people attend it? So I think when it comes to sticks and carrots. Before I started working in new sectors, it was like, I'm a stick person. And now I'm Oh, my God, I'm a carrot person. What happened to me, but I find when it comes to businesses, especially just providing those resources, and there are so many good resources out there, but also reminding them of their human rights obligations, and making sure there is a very strong compliance and enforcement mechanism in place. So I would love if we just made them go to workshops all the time. Unfortunately, I'm not sure how practical that it look at me talking about practicality. What have I become?

Question: What do you have to say to people in positions of power who are not disabled and part of decision making on things that affect the disability community. What is your direction for strong allyship?

Answer: Allyship, approach it with an open heart and an open mind. And, first and foremost, just listen to the community. Make sure you're listening to diverse voices, and just, you know, also make space for someone with a disability to take over your job in the future. Okay, forget jobs stability. We're looking for representation here so honestly, if you are in a position of power, and you're not creating spaces for more disabled and early divergent and just marginalized people, you know, in those higher ranks. Are you really doing your job? So looking at creating representation that you can't provide yourself well, also, working with the community, compensating them, of course, to get that as a bit of a gap while you look for more sustainable solutions there.