

## **Evolution of Accessibility - Transcript**

**Leo Plue, Executive Director, Abilities Centre:** I lived accessibility in my family. My two older sisters had Down Syndrome, my parents were told you should be putting them in an institution. At that time, that's kind of what happened, but my parents said no.

**Naz Husain, Region of Peel Accessibility Advisory Committee:** The biggest experience I had was again in the workplace. I felt that requesting for example, larger print, or requesting more time to complete certain tasks wasn't as acceptable. In some cases, I had to even explain what the white cane was.

**Sergio Vazquez, Program Assistant, Ontario Honours and Awards Secretariat, [using American Sign Language]:** When my wife was pregnant, we went to the hospital to take a neo-natal class to learn about what to expect when the baby is born, how to take care of it, how to breastfeed, and so on. We requested to have an interpreter there and they denied our request.

**Michelle Eby, Personal Support Worker:** When he was little, there were a lot of places that we couldn't take him in. In our own town there was a place we were out for a walk with our siblings and we couldn't get him into one of the shops downtown and we told them you need a ramp so that we can get in and they didn't think it was a very big deal.

**Judith Parisien, Executive Director, Le Phénix [speaking in French]:** At first, we worked a lot with municipalities. We still work with them. When we started to talk with employers and employees about accessibility, it was seen as an extra cost. People were concerned that it was going to be difficult, expensive and that few people would benefit.

**Quinn Martin Currie, High School Student:** I remember when I was in elementary school, I was excluded from playing soccer with my friends and I really wanted to play so I just sat there and watched them go up and down the field and have fun.

**Ann Marie McPhee, Quinn's Grandmother:** Bon Soo was a big event in the Sault here, and it was usually in February and he would be on the sled and he couldn't always go and we had to carry him up and down to get him on the slides.

**Kevin McShan, Program Development Facilitator, WeAreAble Project:** Living with a disability, I always believe that I have to work a thousand times harder to prove myself than an able-bodied person. I spent six years out of college unemployed.

**Michelle Eby, Personal Support Worker:** There would be more people staring at Danny and other people in wheelchairs and they're not sure how to act around him and how to treat him.

**Danny Steeves, Adult Student:** For someone like me, accessible washrooms, I need a table that I can lie down on, and most washrooms don't have any of that.

**Ann Marie Macdonald, Executive Director and CEO, Mood Disorders Association of Ontario:** At a very young age I had an opportunity to travel extensively for a company that I worked for. When I was travelling from Singapore to Hong Kong, someone put something into my Coke. I don't remember anything for about 3 days. When I woke up in my hotel room I couldn't walk. I was blind for a while and I had to go through 4 spinal taps trying to figure out what was actually wrong with me.

**Gail Campbell, Orangeville Town Councillor and Chair, Access Orangeville:** I'd always wanted to be in the Toronto Santa Claus Parade. As I was sitting in the chair someone came up to me and said, "Oh, isn't that nice, you're going to be able to be in the parade." And they didn't see me for me.

**Mathieu Lalonde, Owner, Mathieu Media Production [speaking in French]:** Attitudes have changed. In 2007 I would have liked to take a television programming course but they didn't let me because I couldn't lift and carry the equipment. This training would have helped me to find a job.

**Leo Plue, Executive Director, Abilities Centre:** One of the things that struck me as a high school principal, at the end of the year every year, I was sending these young people out into the world who had aged out of high school with really nowhere to go and I felt badly about that because parents talked to me about "Now what?" and I had no answers for them.

**Naz Husain, Region of Peel Accessibility Advisory Committee:** Apple products are very accessible because they have the built-in voiceover and enlargement if you want zoom. It was again a challenge because you reach a new learning curve. I recall my son

first telling me, “Why don’t you just write to Steve Jobs? He’s very open to reading his emails.”

**Gail Campbell, Orangeville Town Councillor and Chair, Access Orangeville:** I’ve been swimming in Orangeville for years, from the time I was diagnosed in 1992 until now, and things have changed so dramatically in the Town of Orangeville with our pools.

**Naz Husain, Region of Peel Accessibility Advisory Committee:** I thought, wow, why don’t I write to Steve Jobs, and I did! I mentioned that I love your products, but it’s like going to heaven only to find that it’s not accessible. Maybe he took delight in that and he had someone call me back the very next day. This individual was blind. It’s made a big difference in my life because it’s opened the door to print.

**Gail Campbell, Orangeville Town Councillor and Chair, Access Orangeville:** We have ramps into both of our pools. We also have a chair lift that can help people get into either pool. We have personal flotation devices and we have one for each size in both of our pools...I wanted to show you our bedroom. Our bed’s a little bit unusual, my husband made it for us. It’s elevated so that it’s right where my legs end. He put a ramp here, a step that I can get on to help me get into the bed as well.

**Patrice Dagenais, Canadian Paralympic Rugby Player [speaking in French]:** Since my accident 14 years ago, I’ve seen a great evolution for people with disabilities.

**Leo Plue, Executive Director, Abilities Centre:** At the Abilities Centre the largest space is our field house. Our field house includes a track and weights, and courts and opportunities for fitness, it’s really a health and wellness centre. But one of the things that sets us apart in our building is we’ve got an arts studio, a music studio, a theatre, a lounge, a teaching apartment, sensory room.

**Sergio Vazquez, Program Assistant, Ontario Honours and Awards Secretariat [using American Sign Language]:** My son is a hockey player. As a parent I get to go to all the games to see him play. A gentleman who was curious about my son asked around who the parents were of him, so he approached me and asked if we’d be interested in joining the camp. So I said, “yeah, sure.” We decided to go, of course, to support our son for the opening day. When we arrived we were surprised to see that they already had two professional sign language interpreters ready and two seats

reserved for us. So my wife and I looked at each other and we were actually quite surprised because we didn't even submit any kind of request.

**Patrice Dagenais, Canadian Paralympic Rugby Player [speaking in French]:** At the beginning not many people knew about Paralympic sports like wheelchair rugby. They've since become more and more visible on TV, in newspapers and even on the radio. In 2015, during Parapan American Games in Toronto the media coverage was the same for the Olympic and Paralympic sports. It was a major step for us Paralympians. Usually we see mostly Olympics sports on TV but this time we had the same coverage.

**Kevin McShan, Program Development Facilitator, WeAreAble Project:** I was looking for ways to become more involved. My personal YouTube channel, and then we transitioned into creating a sports show called the Two Man Advantage Podcast. [Conducting an interview] "And as far as Michigan State, can you tell me about some trends that you've seen from them, and why they've struggled so much this year?" An online sports show that allows me to earn money, travel to interview athletes.

**Leo Plue, Executive Director, Abilities Centre:** There is a girl who came to the Abilities Centre for a national bocce championship, and she came from New Brunswick. She has movement only above her shoulders. When she came into this building, this was the first time that she said that she's ever had the opportunity to freely move throughout a building by herself without somebody there to open doors for her. First time in her life that she's ever been able to do that. She had tears in her eyes.

**Kevin McShan, Program Development Facilitator, WeAreAble Project:** The We are Able Project, the goal of the project is to educate employers about the positive benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities by eliminating barriers and stereotypes.

**Mathieu Lalonde, Owner, Mathieu Media Production [speaking in French]:** In the last 20 years I've seen a lot of improvements like shopping malls have more elevators. Computer equipment and programs are more accessible. It gives me the opportunity to work from home and communicate through Internet.

**Reverend Viktor Kischak:** One of the challenges that we had was, we only had one washroom on the main level of the church, and that washroom had to serve absolutely everyone, and so there would often be a long lineup of people who wanted to get in. In

the new addition we put in barrier-free, fully accessible washrooms for both men and women with multiple stalls and so that created much better access for people.

**Danny Steeves, Adult Student:** I'm really enjoying being a voice for all those people who can't advocate for themselves.

**Reverend Viktor Kischak:** The old washroom, what we used that for, was the elevator shaft. As part of the design, for those who are in a scooter, they could come straight in here, and then once the lift reaches the floor above, that door opens on the other side and they can drive straight out.

**Ann Marie Macdonald, Executive Director and CEO, Mood Disorders Association of Ontario:** When we look at mental illness there is a higher tolerance now in workplaces for that. We still have a long way to go with that. And it's stigma. Stigma comes out of fear. So when we become fearful of something that we don't know. We always use the analogy if someone has broken their arm and they come back to work you can see that cast. With mental illness, when someone comes back and we don't know why they're away there's a fear. So we don't approach them and we keep away from them because we don't know what to say.

**Danny Steeves, Adult Student:** StopGap is a company out of Vancouver. What they do is provide a ramp for businesses that don't have wheelchair access. I partnered with them and I actually have 19 ramps in the Listowel area.

**Danny Steeves, Adult Student:** Ontario is supposed to be barrier-free by the year 2025.

**Gail Campbell, Orangeville Town Councillor and Chair, Access Orangeville:** I believe the AODA is certainly making everybody aware that everybody has the right to enjoy all the services that the province of Ontario offers.

**Leo Plue, Executive Director, Abilities Centre:** People are more accepting, I think there's been a dramatic change over the last twenty years. Now we're talking about things like increased print size on menus at restaurants and we're talking about lighting, we're talking about use of colour. We have to make sure that we're also talking about not just the physical as built environment, but accessibility in terms of being part of something.

**Naz Husain, Region of Peel Accessibility Advisory Committee:** Technology on TV is getting better with descriptive voice. I'm finding movies are becoming better...there's more description in movies, so I'm hoping the next ten years that it will always be there. Transportation is becoming more accessible.

**Reverend Viktor Kischak:** After we completed the physical accessibility review of the parish, we started to realize ways in which we needed to review accessibility in all areas of what we do here as a church. To make sure that not only were they physically accessible, but when it comes to knowledge and experience that we tried to make them as barrier-free as possible by installing monitors in the church, by having bulletins that were very easy for people to understand and use, so that they could follow the worship that we have here.

**Quinn Martin Currie, High School Student:** I have noticed now compared to when I was younger, it has been getting a lot better. I can go more places. I would like to see in the future more accessibility. Every place should have a ramp or some type of accessibility for people.

**Judith Parisien, Executive Director, Le Phénix [speaking in French]:** It's our responsibility as individuals, as Ontarians, to work or to guarantee that we live in an accessible Ontario. If I were an entrepreneur, it would be my role to promote and hire people with disability to let them join my team at work.

**Reverend Viktor Kischak:** We want to be inclusive. We want to be a loving, caring community. I think it's important that every organization consider accessibility, so that we can provide that kind of community that we say that we want.

**Ann Marie Macdonald, Executive Director and CEO, Mood Disorders Association of Ontario:** So the first thing is to educate ourselves on what mental illness is. And to have empathy, not sympathy. Anyone can be sympathetic to someone's situation. But to be empathetic means that you need to know – you need that knowledge to understand what someone is going through. If we can be empathetic about someone's situation, it's going to ensure we're giving them the space for them to be able to talk about it.

**Gail Campbell, Orangeville Town Councillor and Chair, Access Orangeville:** AODA is doing it very methodically, so that people know that the year 2025 is coming when our province is going to be totally accessible, and it's being done in a fashion that it is not coming down with a big "thunk," you were the way you were and now all of a sudden you have to be different. It's a progressive, orderly way of doing it that people are able to accommodate.

**Naz Husain, Region of Peel Accessibility Advisory Committee, Region of Peel:** It is a journey, and as we all know, what is a journey? Well, a journey means you go straight sometimes, you go around bends sometimes. It hasn't been a smooth journey and we still have a ways to go. Again, it's a journey which perhaps will never end, and that's fine but, as long as we make changes along the way, as long as it's towards improvement, I'm always looking forward to a better and better community and a better, better Ontario.