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**Employees with Disabilities Network [EwDN]**

Teleconference 1-2:30pm, EST, January 30th, 2017

# Minutes/ Briefing Overview

## Welcome from Chair and Co-Chair

* Andre welcomed everybody to the meeting;
* Elections finalized in September 2016 and email with results went out to membership;
* Andre thanked Public Affairs and Stakeholder Relations Branch for their assistance with the elections process and setting up these network meetings;
* Elections finalized in September and our executive committee has been formed;
* Jennifer introduced herself as the new co-chair and welcomed everyone;
* Jennifer stated that if anyone has any questions or concerns they should email the EwDN general delivery mailbox
* Reason for the lateness of meeting with the new executive had to do with significant challenges with logistics getting room, translation and CART all lined up.

## Report from Chair/Co-Chair

* This is the first Network meeting since the elections and a substantial activity has taken place;
* Andre stated James Gilbert has been confirmed as the Champion for disability in ESDC;
* Andre stated we now have Minister Carla Qualtrough responsible for Sport and Disability;
	+ Minister Qualtrough has a mandate to create an accessibility act;
* Jennifer stated network executive have been involved in several activities;
* Oct 27th Andre and Jennifer attended the Interdepartmental Chairs and Champions meeting and they both had an opportunity to ask Minister Qualtrough some questions related to the upcoming accessibility legislation;
	+ It will apply to the federal public service;
	+ Jennifer raised the issue on Invisible Disabilities and Andre spoke/questioned about current accessibility challenges in the workplaces;
* Nov 21-22 Andre and Anne Simard attended a 2 day workshop to develop a GoC accessibility strategy;
	+ Workshop facilitated by Associate DM Yazmine Laroche GoiC disability Champion;
	+ 75 people from different departments participated;
	+ The workshop developed a strategy to move forward;
* Andre and Jennifer provided some advice for the Nov 30th accessibility event at the Canadian War museum;
* Jennifer has developed a Work plan that outlines the 3 main goals and key accountabilities for the Network;
* Jennifer participated in the public consultation session in Vancouver and Andre participated in the session in Ottawa;
	+ The consultation sessions were impressive because they were designed to be fully accessible;
* Jennifer and Andre were asked to appear in an ESDC [Blueprint 2020 progress report video](https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/reports/2016-renewal-progress.html) specifically on [respectful workplaces](https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/reports/2016-renewal-progress/respect.html) and both took different approaches to cover all bases;
* There will be 2 other full network meetings Feb 23 and March 23.

## Introduction of Executive Committee

The elected committee consists of regional representation across Canada as well as a Chair, Vice-Chair and Secretariat 1 & 2. Committee members introduced themselves. The executive has a diverse background/assets and bring to the network and a strong commitment.

Chair: Andre Demers

Vice Chair: Jennifer Leenhouts

Secretariat 1: Kelly Megyesi

Secretariat 2: Elizabeth Dussault

Atlantic representative 1: Carolyn Hynes

Atlantic representative 2: Caroline A. Gautreau

Ontario representative 1: Linda Mintz

Ontario representative 2: Sue Spooner

Québec representative 1: Lyne Cartier

Québec representative 2: Sonia Gauthier

West Territories representative 1: Crystal Williamson

West Territories representative 2: Megan Mah

National Capital representative 1: Anne Simard

National Capital representative 2: Sandy Macpherson

## Workplan

We have been developing a workplan, which we hope will go out to the network shortly. The workplan tracks our progress step by step and is a concrete planning tool in a highly developed format. Three main goals – Blueprint 2020, Progressive Standardization, and Supporting the Disability Implementation Strategy. Our goals are the bigger pictures and within the workplan it is broken down into key accountabilities.

### Workplan - Goals

Blueprint 2020– linking to the multi-year transformation. Building our evidence base, identifying the challenges, making proactive recommendations, and having inclusive technology

Support and Advocate for Progressive DTA Standardization– Working with all partners. This will involve union representation, management, and treasury board and will also entail policy. Symmetrical administration and stream lining procurement. Our champion believes that if “we build things for everybody instead of building for the majority then it will work for everybody*.”*

Supporting Accessibility Implementation Strategy– having a voice, providing recommendations, ensuring collaboration and integrity. This is the inclusion lens and it ensures we create a positive environment, which will enhance success.

### Workplan – Key Accountabilities

 Raise Awareness-of EwDN***:*** issues for ESDC employees with disabilities, promote inclusion, equity and diversity

Facilitate discussion***-*** have a supportive/responsive network that is safe, accessible forum for employees and outside parties that can contribute

Consultation***-*** on departmental issues (policies/services etc.) and advise manager/champions on concerns recruitment, staffing, training, talent management, accommodations

etc.

Planning and Reporting***-*** Develop action plan, track with our workplan and report on commitments

The workplan will capture all of our work and we want to be quite visible and bring issues and solutions to the forefront. We believe we have a golden opportunity to improve things for everyone. We anticipate a strong connection with diversity and the various group and committees representing diversity.

## Welcome from our Diversity Champion

* James Gilbert was able to join us on our network call;
* He talked about EwDN laying the groundwork for identifying issues and getting to know one another;
* He was impressed with the workplan that is being developed – “It is quite impressive. I think it’s a well-done document period. It’s got a lot of exciting things.”;
* He went on to say that what he loves about his relationship with the network of person with disabilities is the differences – “I think because we all come from such different places and we're dealing with such different things, that we're open to ideas wherever they come from, and we're saying this works for me but does this work for others too? And it might take us a bit longer to get with our work plan and with our action, but I know because of our diversity when we land in the right place it will be more permanent and more sustainable. I'm pleased to be part of this and thanks for taking me on the ride.”;
* James indicated that are linkage with the Diversity committee is great;
* He indicated that the communication and the consultation process was well prepared for accessibility;
* James spoke about the current system that accommodates the “outlier” and we see an environment where it is “one size fits all” (cumbersome process) instead of a more thoughtful accessibility workplace developed. This misplaces the burden on the individual and creates employee hardship and management a lot of work;
* James indicated that we need to look for promotional opportunities in a respectful positive and principled way.

## Questions and Answers

Good discussion on several topics in the Q&A segment.

* Question was raised on the recruitment process and the inability for individuals to express that they need an accommodation. While they may have spoken to their immediate reporting, in the majority of the selection processes they are individuals that they do not know or are not comfortable in disclosing;
	+ James indicated that promotional opportunities e.g. Exams it is difficult for persons with disabilities to express what they need. The processes currently are very structured. This is a red flag that in the boards mind they should be thinking about accessibility. He indicated that this needs to be a learning environment;
	+ Also raised that there is the perception that if you request more time this will be considered on your overall ability to meet the competency;
* Union rep. spoke about the accommodation issues and the challenges that the employees are facing. TBS indicates that it should be open to accommodation. It is difficult when there are mental health issues, as the person feels shame, anxiety, panic etc. and they are afraid of losing their jobs. In some cases they are advised not to disclose. Unfortunately without the disclosure these cases often end up in a disciplinary situation;
	+ He indicated that the service managers and team leaders (anyone who has a reporting relationship) receive education on these issues;
	+ James agreed and we spoke about developing a central repository for accommodations indicating the accommodation required and housing only the original or significantly changed medial documentation. This gives the manager a central point for this information. Therefore as leaders change the information does not have to go through the employee again;
	+ Aline Michaud from Office for Disability Issues office indicated that she will be plying a bigger role in the mental health aspects to bring forward the education not just “good will”;
	+ ODI (Office Disabilities Issues) does have a package for managers for disability training. (ex: Disability 101.);
* Sandy Vandal introduced the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) Service strategy implementation where there was a significant improvement to the CPP disability application. This took the application from 50+ pages to 19 pages. The application and the guidelines need to be reviewed and she requested volunteers from the EwDN for the review, looking at feedback on best practices and program policy.

## Bring forward topics:

* Taking another look at upcoming legislation – possibly bringing in a speaker from the office of Disability Issues;
* Exploring or reaching out to Diversity Steering Committees, Union Executives and others working with employees with disabilities (re workplan);
* Recruitment of persons with disabilities – Exploring what is being done and how we can advocate for improvement;
* Communication and possibly showing the video “What accessibility means” that was prepared for Minister Qaultrough;
* Continued work on internal network communications and increasing the network and the network visibility. Suggestions made for next conference call.

### Closing Remarks

The goal for Minister Qualtrough is a Barrier Free Canada – “It has to work for everybody!”. We will continue to see how we can affect change and make it look different. The network welcomes any and all input/suggestions, ideas, etc. Thank you for participation today and we look

forward to our next two network calls on February 23rd and March 23rd, 2017.