

accessibility at brock

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

Changing seasons, changing attitudinal barriers



Margaret Sanderson

The leaves have turned colour and dropped from the trees, and winter apparel has been pulled out of closets as we prepare for the cold winter

months ahead. Seasonal transitions often mirror the movement we experience in life as we grow, learn and change as individuals.

As I transition from my first year into my second year as the Brock University Accessibility Co-ordinator, I thought it timely to profile an individual with a disability who has successfully made the transition from high school to Brock. I learned of Kyle McGiverin when I attended the seventh annual Making a Difference Awards, hosted by the Student Development Centre — Services for Students with disabilities (SSWD) this past spring. These awards provide an opportunity to recognize

members of the Brock community who have made a significant contribution to the successful academic life of students with disabilities. Kyle moved many of us when he spoke passionately about a professor who made a difference in his academic life at Brock and why he nominated her for an award.

Later, Kyle and I sat down to talk over a coffee, and we found no lack of conversation topics! Kyle shared with me examples of the attitudinal barriers* he faces living with an invisible disability — a learning disability in his case. Our discussion left me eager to share with you his story and to focus this edition of Access Brock upon the barriers faced by persons living with invisible disabilities.

Central to this issue is a feature on the power of words and how we may inadvertently use words that create attitudinal barriers and further disable an individual. By shifting our thinking and embracing the use of "person first" language, we become far more positive and

Accessibility at Brock 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.

Accessibility at Brock 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* mailing list, please call 905-688-5550, ext. 3418, or e-mail rdelazzer@brocku.ca

Welcoming persons with learning disabilities

Learning disabilities can result in a host of different communications difficulties for people. They can be subtle, as in having difficulty reading, or more pronounced, but they often interfere with a person's ability to receive, express or process information. You may not realize that someone has one of these "invisible" disabilities unless you are told, or you may notice the way people act, ask questions or use body language.

Here are some tips on welcoming persons with learning disabilities:

- Be patient and willing to find a way to communicate.
- When you know that someone with a learning disability needs help, ask how you can best help.
- Speak normally, clearly and directly to the person.
- Take some time — people with some kinds of learning disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond.
- Try to find ways to provide information in a way that works best for them. For example, have a paper and pen handy.
- Be patient, encouraging and supportive — not overbearing.
- Be courteous and patient and the person will let you know how to best assist them in a way that works for them.

Adapted from "What you need to know about Customers who have Learning Disabilities" at www.mcass.gov.on.ca

STRATEGIES a transition program for students with learning disabilities

Held for the second time this past July, the STRATEGIES Conference is specifically designed to assist qualified incoming Brock students with learning disabilities to make the transition to University life. Topics held during the three-day conference included: time management, self-advocacy, understanding your learning disability, study skills and much more. Quotes from some of the attendees after participating in this year's STRATEGIES conference illustrate its success!

"I think students should attend because it was very helpful and informative."

"Do it! It will definitely relieve your worries."

"Definitely come. It's a great way to become familiar with Brock and some of the people we will be working with next year."

For more information about STRATEGIES and other services available to students with disabilities at Brock, please visit www.brocku.ca/sdc/dISABILITIES/

Words with Dignity

The following terms are suggested to describe people with disabilities

Instead of...	Use...
Disabled, handicapped, crippled	Person with a disability, People with disabilities
Crippled by, afflicted with, suffering from, deformed	Person who has...Or, person with
Lame	Person who has a mobility impairment
Confined, bound, restricted to a wheelchair	Person who uses a wheelchair
Deaf and dumb, deaf mute, hearing impaired	Person who is...deaf; hard of hearing
Retarded, mentally retarded	Person with an intellectual disability
Spastic (as a noun)	Person with cerebral palsy
Physically Challenged disability	Person with a physical disability
Mental patient, mentally ill, mental, insane	Person who has...a mental illness; schizophrenia
Learning disabled, learning difficulty	Person with a learning disability
Visually impaired (as a collective noun), blind	People who have a visual impairment
Disabled sport disabilities	Sport for athletes with disabilities
Disabled community	Disability community

Remember, appropriate terminology changes with the times...if in doubt, ask.

Students moving...
continues from page 5.

enough."

Because of these attitudinal barriers, McGiverin said he learned early the importance of self-advocacy, a skill he has carried to Brock and recommends to everyone.

"I told my professors and my teaching assistants about these challenges and the reception was very positive," he said. "I'm also really tight with the Student Development Centre and have to commend the people who have understood and have assisted me. The services are exceptional."

In the 2006-07 academic year, McGiverin nominated part-time French Professor Zineb Sebbane for a Making a Difference award for the academic help and support she offered him.

McGiverin, who is Vice-President, Marketing, of Brock Pride (a campus club for the gender- and sexual-diverse community and its allies) and a member of Brock Improv (improvisational skits), also says he is very aware of the power of words. He constantly challenges individuals who use comments like 'that's so gay' or 'that's so retarded'.

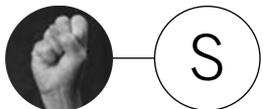
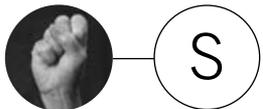
"People have no idea how much those words can hurt," he said.

McGiverin, who hung out with students with physical disabilities because they understood what it was like to be ostracized, also comments on society's need to place people into tidy little boxes.

"In high school, when I came out as an openly gay student, I was known as the gay guy," he said. "My friends and I were identified by our differences, as if that's all we were.

"We were, and are, much more than that."

The Power of Words (The Story of The "H" Word)



Historically, persons with disabilities have been negatively portrayed as helpless or burdensome or in need of pity. Consider this - there is one historical belief that the origin of the word "handicap" was attributed to a person with a disability begging on a street corner with his "cap in his hand" or his "handy cap" stretched out for others to fill with coin out of pity. Hence the evolution and use of the modern day term "handicapped" that perpetuates the stereotype of persons with disabilities as one homogeneous group of people who should be pitied. Certainly not a legacy many people living with disabilities would want to be associated with in 2007!

In more recent years there has been a movement towards the use of "person first" language as persons with disabilities are moving towards achieving equality and full participation in society. A number of organizations across Canada promote the use of person first language — that is, remembering we are all people first and if one has a disability — the disability is only one part of themselves and certainly not what makes them the person they are.

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Changing seasons...
continues from page 1.

respectful because we treat the disability as secondary and just another "hat that is worn" by the individual. I have had the pleasure of sharing my thoughts on the use of "person first" language as it pertains to people with disabilities with many students, faculty, staff, new employees, and community members.

In keeping with the purpose of the newsletter, I also wanted to provide you with some tips for welcoming persons with learning disabilities, following last issue's tips on welcoming persons with visual impairments.

To conclude the theme of this issue, I am briefly highlighting Strategies, a program offered at Brock through the Student Development Centre-SSWD to assist students with learning disabilities to successfully make the transition from high school to their first year of university.

Finally, thank you to those who contacted me after the first issue of *Accessibility at Brock* was published with questions, comments, and suggestions or for more information about accessibility planning and our legislative requirements. Please contact me at any time at msanderson@brocku.ca or accessibility@brocku.ca

** Attitudinal barriers refer to persons who do not know how to communicate with people with disabilities, or persons who display discriminatory behaviours.*

Student moving out of the shadows

It seems oddly appropriate that Kyle McGiverin should wear a T-shirt during an interview that says: "You can't see me". After all, the 19-year-old Brock University student has spent a good chunk of his life trying to make himself seen, and more importantly, heard, by others.

McGiverin lives with invisible disabilities — attention deficit disorder (ADD) and a learning disability that makes it difficult for him to process information.

"And I wouldn't be at all surprised if I was mildly obsessive-compulsive," he said. "I'm a perfectionist; my writing, for example, has to look like it's visually part of a pattern."

He admitted it is very hard for

him to focus when taking notes and "I have a horrible lack of organizational skills. Every system I ever tried was dropped within a month," he said. "If I forgot to use my planner even once, I would become so discouraged I'd drop that system altogether. I was trying to reach incredibly unrealistic standards."

What does work for him, he said, is a palm-held organizational device given to him by his parents, a filing cabinet and a bulletin board.

Teachers often make exceptions for students who are visibly disabled, he said, but they often have difficulty understanding that students

with invisible learning disabilities also need assistance and support.

"When I asked some of my high school teachers for help, such as taking longer to write an exam, they said that would be unfair to the other students. But those other students didn't have a learning disability," said McGiverin. "I was just asking to be placed alongside my peers on a level playing field."

The student, who is in his second year in the Concurrent Education program with a focus in Drama and French, said "it always bugged me that my word, and the fact I was on a list identifying me as having a learning disability, wasn't good

continues on page 3

Kyle McGiverin, left and Amy Graham, Student Development Centre



Accessibility Milestones in the broader community

- The Region of Niagara Council has approved the 2008 Accessibility Plan that was put forward by its Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC). This continues to form the foundation and promotion of accessibility and inclusion within the corporation. Council also endorsed a measure put forward by the AAC in collaboration with Niagara Specialized Transit to **extend trip criteria for qualified persons with disabilities using specialized transit to include booking specialized transit rides for employment and education purposes.**

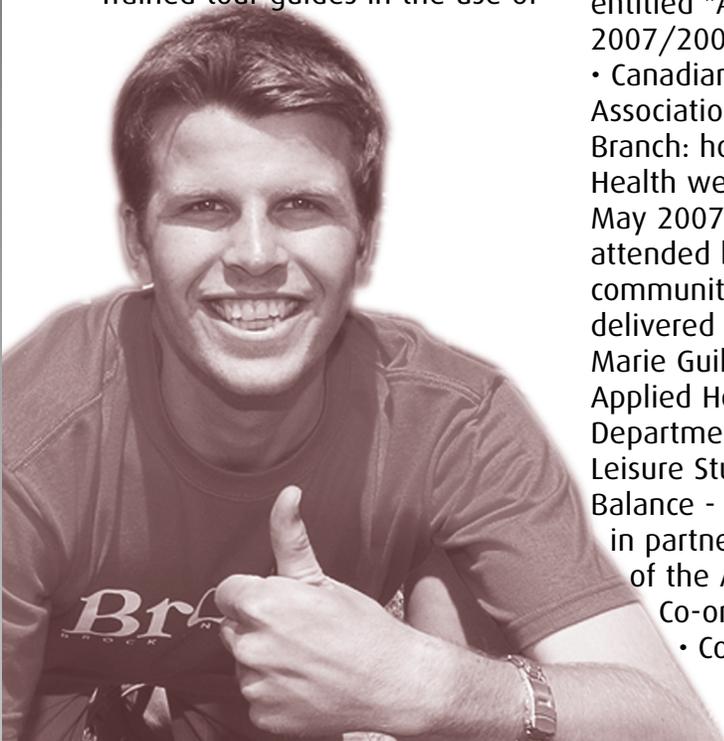
- Members from Niagara Region's AAC, representatives from other AAC's in Niagara, as well as accessibility representatives from Brock University, participated in a workshop organized by Heritage Ontario and hosted by the Region of Niagara. It was a great opportunity to share information and resources and make new contacts for groups involved with museums and heritage sites throughout Niagara. The goal of this workshop was to provide greater accessibility and inclusion for persons with disabilities.

- The City of St. Catharines AAC was pleased to lend its expertise to the City's development of a corporate-wide Customer Service program. This program includes a segment dedicated to customer service for persons with disabilities and information regarding the province's Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)
 - An accessibility audit has recently been undertaken for City of St. Catharines owned facilities. The Region of Niagara's Facility Accessibility Design Standards is the guiding document for this assessment.

Thumbs up to...

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

- Recruitment and Liaison: Trained tour guides in the use of



"person first" language; filmed a member of the Brock Barrier Free Working Group conversing in American Sign Language (ASL) with a colleague on campus to illustrate accessibility at Brock for the new recruitment video; included a highlight column entitled "Accessible Brock" in the 2007/2008 Viewbook.

- Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) - Niagara Branch: hosted a CMHA Mental Health week event at Brock in May 2007 with a public lecture attended by more than 100 local community members and delivered by Professor Anne Marie Guilmette (Faculty of Applied Health Sciences, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies) — "Work/Life Balance - It's a Matter of Time" in partnership with the Office of the Accessibility Co-ordinator at Brock.

- Conference & Event Services: Addition of a

feedback section in its Meeting/Event Satisfaction Survey and Guest Comment Card asking for feedback from conference guests about the physical accessibility of meeting facilities.

- Residence: Residence Life staff received training and information about barriers encountered by persons with disabilities and how to make Residence Life events accessible to students with disabilities during August 2007 training.
- Brock University Students' Union: Orientation Week Events included contact information for students with disabilities to inquire about the accessibility of Orientation week events on its website.

If you know of persons or departments that deserve recognition for their work in removing barriers please contact accessibility@brocku.ca