



PARTNERING TO BUILD A BETTER FUTURE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN SASKATCHEWAN

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Individual with Disability Equity Alliance, Regina
2220 Albert St.
Regina, SK. S4P 2V2

Email: info@idearegina.ca
Website: www.idearegina.ca

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Partnering to Build a Better Future For People with Disabilities in Saskatchewan

A vision of an effective working partnership between the Individuals with Disabilities Equity Alliance (IDEA) of Regina and the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission (SHRC).

Background

When the SHRC was established expectations were high that significant improvements would be made in the lives of people with disabilities. While some significant progress was made, as of more recent years SHRC's limited mandate, resources and reliance on an individual complaint driven process have lead to increasing levels of frustration in the disabled community in the face of the multi-faceted issues that need to be addressed. IDEA believes that given Canada's recent ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities a new opportunity exists to work in partnership towards promoting full citizenship of people with disabilities.

More information of the Convention can be found on [this](#)₁ web site.

Worthy of note is the fact that in its latest report (January, 2008) the United Nations Council for Social Development, which oversees the implementation of the Convention, recommended "*Continuing applicability of the Standard Rules in improving the lives of persons with disabilities*". In the Council's opinion the 22 Standard Rules, first developed in 1996, "*constitute a set of clear guidelines and procedures which complement perfectly the articles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*". The council [recommends](#)₂ using the Standard Rules as a guide for implementing the provisions of the Convention and monitoring progress.

1. <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?navid=4&pid=21>
2. <http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/srreports/srreport-ecn5-2008-3.doc>

Proposal

Given SHRC's renewed interest in "advocacy", to supplement the individual complaint process, IDEA is proposing that IDEA and SHRC form a partnership to work towards promoting full citizenship of people with disabilities. We believe that such efforts should be based on the United Nations Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities and the Standard Rules for implementation. We believe efforts to address the exclusion of people with disabilities must be comprehensive in nature and involve those impacted directly. Some approaches are outlined in this package that we believe could address these issues.

If there is any hesitation on the part of a provincial authority to move forward it should be noted that **Article 4 - General Obligations** – (5) states that: "The provisions of the present Convention shall extend to all parts of federal states without any limitations or exceptions". Given Canada's nature, with many of the programs and services that need to be addressed falling under provincial and even local jurisdiction, we see no need for delay. Liaison with other jurisdiction and potential partners can and must be explored as part of the partnership because given IDEA's volunteer base we are simply not in a position to do what needs to be done ourselves. Our interest is in building a focused, targeted, and dedicated network willing to work towards a shared vision and goal.

We feel it is time for the historic and current exclusion faced by people with disabilities in Saskatchewan to be aggressively addressed. We are asking the Commission to join us and assist in investigating how the Convention and related material could be used to ensure full citizenship for people in Saskatchewan who have disabilities. We would also like to explore the creation of a provincial Ministry/agency with the mandate and ability to promote and oversee the provisions of the Convention and the Standard Rules in Saskatchewan. Whatever is established must have sufficient legislative authority, resources, and expertise to carry out a substantial mandate from promotion, advocacy, economic incentives and compliance. IDEA is concerned that without the above not only would such an agency be ineffective but could encourage others partners to merely "wash their hands" of disability issues "because it is someone else's mandate".

We would like to explore several models for the proposed agency above including the powers of the “Childs Advocate”. Potentially useful models exist including the office of the Swedish Disability Ombudsman (Handikappombudsmannen - HO). This office:

Monitors the rights and interests of people with disability. The objective is that people with various kinds of disability should be able to participate fully in the life of the community and live on the same terms as others. The foundation for the operations of the HO are the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities.

Further information on the Disability Ombudsman can be found [here](#)³.

Although the Ombudsman is restrained by resources and legislation it at least has a responsibility to keep the government fully apprised of the consequences of its actions or inaction. If this model was adopted in Saskatchewan we would propose looking at other names such as the “Disabled Citizens Advocate” and expanding its mandate to include the rights of the temporarily disabled such as patients. We believe such an approach would reinforce the message “that disability is a normal part of life” and help to educate the public on the virtues of supporting active solutions.

The Swedish organizations of persons with disabilities have devised a package, known as **Agenda 22**, concerned with drawing up Disability Policy Plans based on the Standard Rules. This package provides a practical guideline for cooperation between groups representing people with disabilities and service providers of all kinds. This package has apparently been used in several European countries and we would like to explore with SHRC its possible application in Saskatchewan. More information can be found [here](#)⁴.

3. http://www.ho.se/Tpl/NormalPage_118.aspx

4. <http://www.hso.se/start.asp?sida=298>

Conclusion

What IDEA is proposing will be a significant challenge. However, we believe that the status quo for people with disabilities is unacceptable and that now is the time for courage and innovation. We look forward to discussing the content of this document with you. We are also hopeful that our meeting will provide an opportunity to discuss some related topics concerning SHRC's current mandate, material and operation. More information on IDEA's goals and objectives can be found on our [website](#)⁵.

Doug Tratch,
President, IDEA Regina
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5. <http://www.idearegina.ca/>