

Manitoba Access Awareness Week
(MAAW) 2021 May 30 - June 5

Beyond COVID-19: Creating a Culture of Accessibility in the Workplace



FREE WEBINAR

Keynote Speaker

Featuring **Yazmine Laroche**

Deputy Minister, Public Accessibility,
Government of Canada

Panel Discussion

Featuring **Manitobans with Disabilities**

A discussion on workplace barriers & solutions

Thursday, June 3, 2021

2 to 3:30 PM. CDT.

MORE INFORMATION: AccessibilityMB.ca

Manitoba Access Awareness Week – Panel Discussion

Thursday, June 3rd 2021 from 2 to 3:30 PM CDT

For more information, please visit www.accessibilitymb.ca

Speakers

- Yutta Fricke (MAO)
- Rosalie Best
- Erika Rodeck
- Bill Tucker
- Samantha Rayburn-Trubyk
- Josh Watt

[Clip Begins]

Yutta Fricke at 00:00:10

That ends my presentation about the standard. I loved what deputy minister Yazmine said, she said that it is with people with disabilities, asking, talking, finding out about their experience of your workplace, your

Manitoba Access Awareness Week 2021 – June 3rd Panel Discussion Transcript

organization, your client experience that you will have the best expertise to guide your way forward, and for that reason, I'm especially pleased that today I'm able to introduce Rosalie Best. Who is the accessibility services coordinator for the Manitoba league of persons with disabilities, who is the facilitator for our panel discussion. I want to add that the Manitoba league or MLPD is a provincial not for profit organization that promotes accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities and will MLPD educates and offers expertise on a wide range of topics and issues related to inclusion and accessibility so with that welcome Rosalie

Rosalie Best at 00:1:14

Hi, thank you so much for having me and having MLPD at this event. I might give a little bit of a background on myself really quickly. Before I was an accessibility services coordinator for MLPD, I was a career counselor for people with disabilities, I worked in a cross-disability and bilingual environment, and so I kind of got to see a lot of Manitoba employment kind of I guess practices. And I remember thinking oh if I could only get in the room, with the employers and just make them see why they should hire my people and so. now coming to MLPD and offering training for employers and being able to talk to them is a wonderful opportunity to do that. But I'm here to facilitate not talking about myself at length, so I will introduce our panelists and if I want to see your name, you could just kind of wave, so people know who I'm talking about So today we have Erika Rodeck.

Erika Rodeck at 00:02:21

Hi everyone!

Rosalie Best at 00:02:23

Erika has been blind since birth and she currently works as an intern with the Canadian National Institute for the blind foundation come to work program where she contacts employers to encourage them to hire individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Her previous work experience includes volunteering as an administrative assistant and a research intern in the newsroom of a local radio station. Erica has also been involved as an advocate in the disability community, looking for work has presented many challenges for her but her goal is to find permanent full time employment welcome Erica.

Erika Rodeck at 00:3:00

Thank you!

Rosalie Best at 3:02

Next up, we have Samantha Rayburn-Trubyk. Samantha is an HR advisor and accessibility manager at price industries limited. In her spare time she's President of Little People of Manitoba and spends much of

her free time advocating for little people in North America. In addition to her duties in Manitoba Samantha sits on the advocacy committee for little people of America and co hosts slash co created a zoom group for North American parents raising children born with dwarfism. The group saying is to ensure that all kids born with dwarfism are raised, knowing they are perfect in their bodies and don't need any sort of fix. Samantha and her son were born with I sorry I come to a place which is a form of dwarfism and she has much pride in her disability and wants to share it with everyone she meets. Samantha's completing a master's degree in disability studies at the University of Manitoba and lives in Winnipeg with her husband son and their few dogs.

Next up is Josh Watt and for the past six years josh has served as the Executive Director of the Manitoba school boards association. Following a 15 year career as a public servant for the federal and provincial governments. He's proud to serve as a member of the accessibility Advisory Council, and one of two public interest representatives on the continuing competency committee of the College of registered nurses of Manitoba. Josh holds a bachelor of arts and on with honors in law and political science from Carleton, masters of public administration, from the University of Winnipeg and a master of education from the University of Manitoba. And a master level certification and peace support operations through the United Nations Institute for training and research. He was recently named a fellow of the Royal Society of arts in the UK and is currently completing the final capstone for the public leadership credential at the Harvard Kennedy school of government. As a person with Asperger's syndrome josh has a profound believer in promoting accessibility for all Manitoba he believes there's always room for correct progress in recognizing those persons who said their abilities are visible and sometimes invisibles. Josh brings a lifetime firsthand experience concerning the opportunities our communities can provide for all persons who may be need of accessibility. And through today's panel, he hopes to share career lessons about what employers can do to accommodate those employees whose accessibility requirements might be obscure or overlooked, due to the end visibility of 13.

And last but certainly not least, we have Bill Tucker!

Bill Tucker at 00:5:50

Hi everybody.

Rosalie Best at 00:05:52

Bill joined the client service and support team environmental approvals branch conservation and climate at the Manitoba government on a second month from his role as career development consultant with skills and employment partnerships. Prior to the six years with the provincial government Bill spent 10 years with Manitoba liquor and lotteries and surveillance department and 10 years with Manitoba start. Bill enjoys spending time volunteering, including being on the board of directors of management possible and working with reaching equality employment services Inc, otherwise known as REES there's never a dull moment at Bills home, which includes his wife to teenagers and a variety of pets, including three dogs five aquariums two turtles to guinea pigs and two parrots. Bill, just a quick aside you're in good company I

have approximately the same amount of animals. I've never met anyone else so good to have you here today okay so let's just jump right into these questions.

I'm going to be alternating starting with Samantha. All right here we go. So Samantha What accessibility barriers to you or have you faced in the workplace?

Samantha Rayburn-Trubyk at 00:07:10

So for me most of my barriers are due to my height, I was born with achondroplasia, which is a form of dwarfism and so, most of my barriers are either things that are too high, things that are placed right or even just attitudinal barriers so most of my barriers really are limited to my physical disability.

Rosalie Best at 00:07:35

Thank you and Bill. What accessibility barriers do you face in the workplace?

Bill Tucker at 00:07:39

The majority of their barriers that I've been facing have been twofold. One of them comes from the fact that when I first started working, I was what you might call a normal person I had no there was no visible aspect to my disabilities and then I was diagnosed, three years ago. And once that diagnosis was disclosed it, I became a different person in the workplace, for some reason I'm not sure why. The second thing is, I have a service animal now that works with me and goes with me pretty much everywhere, she was here earlier but she decided that she wanted to quit and go and have a lay down.

And so, the barriers, there are primarily to having an animal with you in the workplace on a permanent basis and the workplace, not necessarily knowing how to work with that and how to accommodate an animal in the workplace.

Rosalie Best at 00:08:49

Thank you. Erika what accessibility barriers, do you face in the workplace?

Erika Rodeck at 00:08:53

Most of the barriers that I faced in the workplace in terms of accessibility relate to the recruitment process, and also the onboarding process. I use a screen reader called jaws and I find that a lot of the time when I apply for jobs, I'm able to submit my application and everything's great.

Until I get an email like an automated email saying that okay congratulations I've submitted my application now I need to do an assessment, and when I go into the link where they have the assessment. I find that it's not accessible and when I've contacted the employer to explain my situation. I

either don't get a response or I'm told that they can't accommodate me and sometimes I'm even challenged on whether or not I'd be able to do the job anyway.

I've also had some issues with interviews even prior to covid I found that sometimes, there was a reluctance to guide me to and from the interview room and within the building. And, of course, if I was hired I would take steps to learn to navigate a building independently, but when I've never been to a place before I'm going to need some assistance with navigation. And I also find that a lot of the time employers just aren't aware of how to interact with people who are blind or partially sighted, so I can think of one example, where I went to an interview, and I was entering the place where I was going to be interviewed. And suddenly, I felt this thing on my forehead I didn't know what it was I figured out fairly quickly that the woman was trying to take my temperature, but it would have been helpful if she would have told me that. So just those kind of things that just add up and make things a little bit more difficult. I also find that a lot of the time it's the technology. So, I was in a work situation where attitude wise, they were wonderful they were very inclusive, I was definitely part of the team, but I wasn't able to do the onboarding process because of the technology and the lack of accessibility.

Rosalie Best at 00:10:55

Thank you and Josh what accessibility barriers, do you face in the workplace?

Josh Watt at 00:11:00

Thank you so much Rosalie and it's a pleasure to be here, so thank you for the invitation. For me the manifestation of Asperger's is palpable in many different ways, and when you look at a job you'll often see that one of the big criteria for any job is having a driver's license or access to transportation. And for some people with Asperger's, including myself, the spatial temporal dimension of our cognitive processing the sensory inputs that are coming at us every second have prohibited me from ever acquiring a driver's license or being able to drive a car so during my lengthy career, which has taken me across the continent to various places. I have always had accommodations made in order to help me to get from place to place or city to city, and I have never felt the need. You know, to try and pursue that myself it's always been something that people have helped me with you know colleagues have been there to provide transportation when it is needed there's an expectation that if I'm going to attend a meeting you know I will have the time ability to take transit to go there. And those are pretty important accommodations you know, beyond the social emotional and behavioral cognitive dimensions of Asperger's. Which I can't tell you, if you've ever watched the good doctor or you know big bang theory or you've seen the Temple Grandin movie you know that those are many different manifestations of Asperger's based on the autism spectrum disorder spectrum.

So, I won't share all of the different accommodations that I've had, but I think in terms of the transportation piece that one, most of all, has had the largest impact on how I have experienced barriers and how employers have been able to accommodate that.

Rosalie Best at 00:13:07

Thank you Josh and I actually just going to quickly say I agree as a person who is a wheelchair user and doesn't have her license. I found my way around needing a driver's license many a time and it is definitely something that's come up for people disabilities who can't get a license or for people who can't get a license with disability or not. So Samantha What was it like to start the conversation about workplace accommodation and are you now comfortable disclosing a disability?

Samantha Rayburn-Trubyk at 00:13:34

So yeah, I'll go in two parts, my younger self was very awkward. You know when you meet me, I'm not somebody that can put on a fake mustache or top hat and hide in the crowd. You know when you meet me, you know, I have a disability either you see it, or you can hear that I'm coming from a less than average location. So it's not something that I can't disclose when it's just so obvious. When I've applied for jobs in the past and I'm talking to my younger self and I've disclosed it, there are times more times than not where I'm not getting a callback. When I haven't disclosed it in the past I've gotten a call back so you know take that for what it's worth. Now I haven't applied for a job in a very long time, so I'm hoping that that has changed. I'm a lot more comfortable in my skin now than I was you know in my early 20s and I'm somebody that's very. You know, I have a lot of pride in my disability and pride in who I am. So I have no issues disclosing it. I have no issues, having that conversation at work, I work for a great employer who wants to have that conversation with me who, you know my first two weeks hooked me up with an ergonomist, you know right out right out of the gate they wanted to accommodate me and make sure that I was comfortable here. That I was you know I had everything I needed cost wasn't a factor, they wanted to make sure that I knew that they knew that they wanted me to feel valuable and that goes a huge way that's so important for someone with a disability. I can tell you at past jobs where I've had that conversation about accommodations where they've initiated it. And perhaps it's come across you know I've made some recommendations, nothing outlandish but the comments that I've gotten where it's a little expensive here's your consolation prize of a stool. So, it's nice to know, you know it's nice to be somewhere where I've just felt so valued right from the get go.

Rosalie Best at 00:15:43

Yeah absolutely! Bill what was it like for you to start that conversation and are you comfortable disclosing your disability?

Bill Tucker at 00:15:51

Starting the conversation in the workplace, I was initially very open about it because I really didn't know the impact of having a hidden disability in the workplace. I didn't know I had one for 30 years. And so I'm, I have a very trusting nature, and I was very open, I was very honest and I disclosed as much as I could in the workplace and that kind of sort of came back and bit me in the butt a little bit. People didn't

understand necessarily what the disability was or what the expectations of that disability were. Or how to deal with it, and so that became sort of a bit of a tension between employee and employer, if you like as to my comfort with disclosing my disability, it depends on the environment, it depends on who I'm talking to where I am. Because of because of Jackie my service dog she is the visible part of my disability you see a dog walking up to you, and they have a service dog jacket on a service dog based on. The assumption is that the person with that dog has a disability of some kind, because it's not visible I very often get asked well what's wrong with you.

My knee jerk reaction to that is it's none of your business. But I also understand that people need to learn what it is to have a disability, when you see Jackie she's not a typical service dog she's a small Jack Russell terrier. So she's not a black lab she's not a golden retriever she's not a German shepherd, and so the assumption is that this isn't a real situation, so I understand that people need to be educated into that situation. But, I need to have the understanding during that conversation it's very difficult for me to talk about that because. For 50 odd years I thought of myself as being a normal person. And then somebody comes along and says Oh yes, you have this and it was a huge shock to me. As much to anyone else who has known me throughout those 50 years so.

Now I'm a little more comfortable with disclosing it. I kind of I've owned it I've learned how to respond to people. But it's still not I wouldn't go into a cocktail party and use as an icebreaker.

Rosalie Best at 00:19:03

Thank you, and not to put you on the spot, but I want to say when Bill uses normal it's in her inferred that it's quote unquote normal.

Bill Tucker at 00:19:09

Exactly.

Rosalie Best at 00:19:13

I know that, because from our last time we talked, and then Erica can you please tell us about starting conversations I was combination and just be cognizant of the time? Thank you!

Erika Rodeck at 00 :19:23

For me it really depends on the environment that I'm in this might sound a little bit strange to people but. I actually find that sometimes it's more difficult when I'm within a disability organization or a disability environment because I find that even unconsciously certain assumptions are being made about what people's needs are based on their disabilities and sometimes even though people are very well meaning and well intentioned. I feel that I'm sort of indirectly being compared to other people who have disabilities

or other people who have a disability that's seen a similar to mine. Whereas I find that when I'm not in a disability environmental organization. Maybe I'm the first disabled person that someone has met so everything's new and they're very open to learning and accommodating me in whatever way is needed in order for me to do my work. For me, the question of disclosure isn't really something that I think about a lot because I'm pretty much always out. People can tell by my white cane and the way my eyes are and the way that I navigate through space that, I have a vision impairment. So it's not really something that I can hide and even in my resume and cover letter because I don't have a lot of work experience, most of the experience that I list is related to volunteering with disability organizations. So, it's something that I feel like I'm always kind of disclosing but I don't emphasize it in a way that focuses on the things that I can't do or I don't frame it as a weakness. I just frame it as okay it's part of myself part of who I am it's not all of who I am it's the same as having brown hair and yes it's part of me but there's so much more to me.

Rosalie Best at 00:21:17

Thank you so much, Josh tell me about your experience with workers, accommodation and if you're comfortable disclosing.

Josh Watt at 00:21:25

Sure well like Bill for most of my life my diagnosis was not made, and so I went through life, you know with the manifestations of Asperger's not knowing what exactly it was, and neither did my mother who raised me as a single mother. And so having the conversation with employers, it can be challenging because, frankly, nobody who interacts with me beyond knowing that there's quirky behaviors or responses. Whatever assume that I'm a person who is in need of accommodations or accessibility so frankly the last job interview that I had which is my current job. I actually did not disclose to them during the interview process that I was in need of accommodation, because I was absolutely certain that that would prohibit me from obtaining the job. I disclosed it after the job offer was made and, as I pointed out to them, they did not specifically request a driver's license in the state of qualifications of the profile. And that was important for me to be able to prove myself to them and undertaking the work that I knew I could do without having my own transportation, and they accepted that/

And it was a bit of a challenging conversation at first, I can see that, when I disclose the need for the accommodation. There were some sideways glances between people on the hiring panel and yet at the same time, I think that's what has borne out during the last six years of my employment has confirmed that I am able to do that job. And so, really, I think it's unfortunate that you cannot feel open and having those conversations but having an employer. Who's able to create a culture where any job applicant knows that they will not be screened out of a competition or there will be no judgment or assessment against them as a result of having need of an accommodation, regardless of whether it's a visible or invisible ability is something that is a prime consideration.

Rosalie Best at 00:23:52

Thank you, I was often asked as a career coach from my clients with invisible disabilities, whether they should disclose, and I never had an answer for that Sam did you want to add something to that.

Samantha Rayburn-Trubyk at 00:24:05

I would just say I've often wrestled with myself in terms of not wanting to appear as being high maintenance and really having to work on that honestly from my younger self going don't ask for anything you're going to appear to high maintenance you don't want them to fire you like just grateful for the job. So you know currently going know I deserve that I need that accommodation I'll be better at my job without accommodation so it's switching the mindset yeah.

Rosalie Best at 00:24:33

I fully agree with that same thing here I would often buy my own thing sometimes it's just not tell them yeah okay so with that said, based on your experience in the workplace, what do you what are steps that you think a workplace can take to create a culture accessibility to everyone? What would be your message to employers and, if you want to throw something in there about COVID and what we've learned from it that accommodation wise, please do so Samantha go.

Samantha Rayburn-Trubyk at 00:25:05

I have, so much so, what I would say to employers is no you don't know what ableism means, understand that your words matter. Take a look at your policies or procedures or guidelines or signage and you're building all of that. And see and take a look and understand if you're being you know, ableist if you're having policies and procedures that are unknowingly excluding people or not being inclusive to everybody.

So that's where I would start for sure. I'd also say you know don't question somebody regarding the validity of their disability meaning, you know whether you believe them or not is irrelevant that's not your concern. I would also, you know work with your employee I know this has been said before, but work with your employee. Ask your employee how they can be accommodated they're going to be the best person to talk to don't assume that you know what's best for them in terms of an accommodation and work closely with your employee think of disability as any other marginalized group right.

And unfortunately, we know that disabilities still you know lag behind in the workplace, and we know that folks with disabilities have so much value and can contribute so much and want to contribute so much. So don't be scared of anything accommodate what you can accommodate everything and let your employees soar.

Finally, I'd say you know, be the leader that goes against the grain, again, we know that folks with disabilities have a difficult time in the workplace still. Don't be that leader that contributes to that you know

don't be that leader that says you value inclusiveness and you value diversity in the workplace, but then don't really actually value diversity and inclusion in the workplace, your actions matter wholeheartedly.

Rosalie Best at 00:26:56

Thank you, and then Bill, I just want to say, we only actually have a few more minutes so if you can share your experiences there for the rest of you just saying like maybe a minute or less, they'll be great starting with Bill.

Bill Tucker at 00:27:15

You really want to try and keep me short on that one.

Rosalie Best at 00:27:17

I don't want to I'm sorry we're running out of time.

Bill Tucker at 00:27:21

That's fine that's fine. So the advice I have for employers is what Samantha said ask what the needs are, my point to that would be asked the right questions learn what the right questions, are first. One of the things that one of the experiences I had when I first brought my service dog to work was does she have fleas or ticks? Where are you going to take her to the bathroom? Does she have all of her inoculations? Those aren't the concerns around my disability, those are my concerns with regard to the tool I use to manage my disability I don't think anyone would ask, have you greased your wheelchair wheels recently are the seats secured properly. You wouldn't ask that right, those are the wrong questions to be asking so as an employer, if you want to be helpful to someone asked the right question.

Rosalie Best at 00:28:22

Thank you Erica.

Erika Rodeck at 00:28:25

I would say understand that disability can be something of value and can really be an asset to the workplace, instead of thinking of it as a liability. All people need assistance from time to time, whether or not they have disabilities and most people with disabilities really strive for independence. So this idea that they're going to need help all the time and going to need to be guided, all the time, definitely isn't true.

Really normalize accommodation, I mean people don't question it when maybe Somebody needs an ergonomic chair or this person needs to be by the window and this other person likes the lights on, or off.

Or I mean I would like us to get to a point where something like a screen reader is just seen as normal, because a lot of these things aren't expensive there are actually screen readers that can be downloaded for free. And there are a lot of other accommodations there aren't expensive so don't assume that you're going to have to spend a fortune. And be creative as we've talked about throughout this discussion coven has really taught us that it is possible to work remotely and a lot of things that people thought weren't possible from home actually are so. As people are saying ask what people need don't assume and be really receptive and understand that somebody who experiences, the world in a different way from how you experience it can bring something really valuable to the table.

Rosalie Best at 00:29:46

Thank you, Josh.

Josh Watt at 00:29:50

No, I would really echo what all of the panelists have said but Sam said something that really resonated with me, based on my current studies in leadership and there's multiple dimensions of leadership that are exercised within the workplace every day. And some is formal authority and some as moral authority, but at the end of the day, everyone is a leader in their own right and everybody is called upon to exercise that moral leadership. And I think that what I learned the most out of Harvard University, which is very ironic for somebody who was processing of social emotional inputs is a little bit difficult is that the true ingredient of success the unifying theory of all leadership is love. And when you exercise that quality towards your fellow human being, when you recognize the inherent dignity and worth and value of all of your employees and those who applied to your position. You will realize that that in itself is a cultural shift that still has to be undertaken in the workplace, today, and I think bears repeat very carefully in this particular context.

Rosalie Best at 00:31:03

Thank you, Josh, I've just been told, we have some more minutes, I will do the last question, after all, and so what would your message be to employees with disabilities Sam?

Samantha Rayburn-Trubyk at 00:31:17

Sam's good. I would say a couple things, I would say, ask for what you need so really you know put your hand up or speak to your employer, but ask for what you need. And the second thing I would say is find yourself a mentor find yourself somebody who can you know you can talk to somebody who you can who gets it. Somebody who you can share experiences with and get some guidance from but find yourself a mentor and they can help guide you through some of these situations that are a bit you know sticky for lack of a better word. So I think those would be the two things that I would say you know.

Rosalie Best at 00:31:56

Thank you, Bill?

Bill Tucker at 00:32:00

My suggestion would be. Be brave. When I was first diagnosed, I was terrified it shocked me it frightened me people started to treat me differently, and so I started to shrink away from it cursing the disability being very, very upset and started eating starting to become depressed about it. I've learned that's just that's just a knee jerk reaction to it. Being brave standing up for yourself getting what you need to ask for is the best advice that I could give you you're not abnormal you're just other normal.

Rosalie Best at 00:32:44

Awesome Thank you and Erica.

Erika Rodeck at 00:32:47

I would definitely echo what Sam and bill have both said about being assertive I know firsthand that it can be difficult. Especially if you're new in a position and you're trying to impress people and you are a little bit self conscious and you don't want to seem like you can't do your job, but the truth is that you'll be better at your job if you have all the accommodations that you need. So really get to a place where you can ask for that, and I know that it's hard for a lot of people with disabilities to get to a place where they feel comfortable with who they are, I know, for many people that can take years and I think that's totally understandable. However, I think that the more comfortable that you are with yourself and the more comfortable, you are. Accepting yourself and your disability and all of the other ways that you identify that's going to show outwardly and the more comfortable, you are with yourself, the more comfortable people will be around you.

Rosalie Best at 00:33:37

Thank you, and finally Josh.

Josh Watt at 00:33:40

I would say, as somebody who's gone on 40 years now, without largely disclosing. The other abilities that I have certainly being assertive and speaking what your requirements and your needs might be is absolutely prime. I think that when you learn to communicate with others in a straightforward and frank manner, that is to everyone's mutual interest, then the workplaces enhanced and at you as an employee are enhanced as well by that so certainly I echo everything that Bill Erica and Sam have shared.

Rosalie Best at 00:34:18

Well, thank you so much for sharing and for being as I want to say, maybe quote unquote vulnerable with us, I know that it's important for people to hear our stories. And you know how important it is to have people with disabilities in the workplace, so with That being said, I'm going to pass it back over to you, oh sorry we're out of time, but I'm going to pass it over to you to, and thank you so much to our panelists.

[Clip Ends]