

Breaking Barriers: Unlocking Accessible Employment, Transcript

Manitoba Accessibility Office, October 22, 2024

Disability Employment Awareness Month Webinar

Darren Macdonald: Hi everyone and welcome to today's webinar. We are just letting everyone in from the lobby.

Darren Macdonald: So, give us a minute or two to get settled and get everybody in. It is great to see so many people joining us today. Give it one more minute and then start. We have a very packed agenda today which is great. We will give everyone a couple of minutes to get in. If you do have technical difficulties today, you can reach out to our office by email at mao@gov.mb.ca. And there are people behind the scenes that can assist you. So, we will let folks get in and get their screens set up.

Darren Macdonald: You will notice that your mics are muted, and your videos are turned off. When you join the call, this helps us with any background noise or any visual distractions during the zoom call. We are recording. One of the things we heard from folks who maybe missed part, and they want to go back to watch and take notes on our webinars, we like to record it and put it up for a period of time for people to have access to.

Darren Macdonald: You will notice that we also spotlighted and pinned the presenters and the captioner and asl.

Darren Macdonald: If you are using those features, you can set those up now. Live closed captioning is available. And it is an icon on the bottom right side, it has two letter Cs. You can activate closed captioning or ASL. It is also available by clicking the global icon which is also at the bottom right-hand side and selecting American Sign Language. Give you a couple of minutes to get your screens set up. And then we will jump in. As I said, it is a pretty packed agenda.

Darren Macdonald: We are very fortunate to have a panel discussion today. So, I think that seeing we are up to over 70 people, wow great, great to see so many folks joining us today.

Maybe start with introductions as people are joining. We probably have got everyone in from the lobby now.

Darren Macdonald: So welcome, everyone. My name is Darren Macdonald, and I'm the Executive Director at the Manitoba Accessibility Office. Welcome on behalf of our office. A couple of other housekeeping items to let you know about, we do welcome your questions, so, today we turned off the chat function. If you have questions, you will see that there is a q&a box at the bottom of your screen if you can access that. If you have any questions after the webinar or afterwards, email is the best way to contact us, mao@gov.mb.ca and we will answer your questions live if we can or after the webinar if we are not able to get to them today.

Darren Macdonald: So, we are so pleased to see up over 70 people today and that is great.

Obviously, we are all here to celebrate Disability Employment Awareness Month. If you have never heard of it or this is new to you, you are here for the first time, DEAM was first celebrated in Manitoba in 2012 I believe. It was a good opportunity to encourage employers to hire and places of employment to actively include people with disabilities you know, in our workplaces, in our communities. We recognize that there are accomplishments and, every October, we like to take this opportunity. It is also a good chance to confirm the accessibility legislation here in Manitoba. We're fortunate to have the Accessibility for Manitobans Act in place. We are one of the few provinces who do, but almost every province will have accessibility legislation in place in the coming years. And if you are aware this is a reminder if not, our office, we help to develop and implement the legislation. It is a good opportunity for us to humbly brag about the legislation and the five standards. So, we do have standards which are regulations in Manitoba. They are dealing with accessible customer service, employment, information and communication, just recently passed was our accessible transportation standard and one more to come is the accessible outdoor spaces standard.

We are quite proud of the work there.

Darren Macdonald: A bit of today's agenda. As I mentioned, we are looking forward to sort of the middle piece where we do the panel discussion. So today, our webinar is entitled "Breaking Barriers: Unlocking Accessible Employment". We will hear from three panelist who were past recipients of grants through the Manitoba Accessibility Fund. Our panelists, we will get them introduced in a moment.

Darren Macdonald: Before we get to that, we always like to start here at MAO, by showing our commitment to the spirit of reconciliation. And we feel it is important to talk the talk but walk the walk as they say, and a few ways we try to demonstrate this commitment to reconciliation is to open our events with a land acknowledgment that is pretty standard now, which is great to see, and then do an opening with a blessing from a knowledge keeper. Hopefully Vern joined the call, and we can get to that in a minute.

Darren Macdonald: We will jump into the agenda. Before we do, we like to start off with a bit of a poll to make sure that you are out there, listening, you are able to access things. You are able to communicate with us, which is good. Poll question number 1, interested to know, have you previously attended a Disability Employment Awareness Month event or how many of you are attending for the first time. The poll should pop up on your screen. Take a moment, select the icon have previously attended or first time. Just give everyone a minute to select that and review the results. First timers have taken the prize today, with well, almost two thirds attending for the first time and one third, well, welcome back if you have been here before. So, thank you for participating. We will have another poll coming up, again, we like to gather a bit of information about you, who is on the call and, you know, it is not scientific, we don't use the results for anything, it is helpful for us to know.

Darren Macdonald: As I said, first up we will do our land acknowledgement, and I will introduce Colleen Watters. Colleen Watters is a Policy Analyst with the Manitoba Accessibility Office, and she would like to talk to us about her connection to the traditional lands.

Colleen Watters: Welcome, everyone, to the Disability Employment Awareness Month webinar. I'm Colleen Watters, Policy Analyst with the Manitoba Accessibility Office.

I'm proud to be here today to present the land acknowledgment on behalf of our office. As a person with a disability, living in Canada, I am a Canadian settler with parental origins from England and Ireland and proud to call Treaty One Territory home.

Colleen Watters: On behalf of the Manitoba Accessibility Office , I would like to further acknowledge that we are presenting today from Treaty 1 Territory and that Manitoba is located on the treaty territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg, Anishinewuk, Dakota Oyate , Denesuline and Nehethowuk nations.

Colleen Watters: We acknowledge that Manitoba is located on the Homeland of the Red River Métis. We also acknowledge that northern Manitoba includes lands that were and are the ancestral lands of Inuit.

Colleen Watters: As we gather in celebration of Disability Employment Awareness Month, we recognize the advances Canada as a country has made to improve accessibility including accessible employment, while also acknowledging that work needs to continue. The Manitoba Accessibility Office strives to improve accessibility with the full implementation of The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA), including the Accessible Employment Standard. We respect the spirit and intent of treaties and treaty making and remain committed to working in partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples in the spirit of truth, reconciliation, collaboration and to make Manitoba more inclusive and accessible for all.

Darren Macdonald: Great, thank you Colleen, and nice that you tied in the team to the usual land acknowledgment and made it personal. I appreciate that.

Darren Macdonald: Next up, Vern Dano is joining us. He is an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper, and he is here to provide a blessing. Vern, thanks for joining us. Nice to see you again. Look forward to your opening, I learn something and something always sort of resonates with me after our talk. Hand it over to you. Welcome.

Vern Dano: Hi everybody. Hopefully you can hear me. I just want to share first off that it is an honour to be able to share a few words. I hope that you will all come out of this meeting today learning something that will benefit those that you serve. As an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper, my name is Vern Dano. My goal today is to find and build bridges among all of us and we as individuals, how can we better our communities. I want you to take a step back. I want you to think and feel and know your gifts of what and where you have been. What have you done in your life? And where do you plan to go in it and how will you succeed? As an Indigenous Person here on Treaty One Territory, it is my stewardship to make sure that we work with kindness and with love and with values that make and build a better voice for those that are not being heard. I want you to think about all of the teachers in your life, maybe they have been positive or negative, maybe they have been so instrumental or maybe they have been someone that believed in you when you didn't believe in yourself. Take this time, that by working together, we build a better community, a stronger community, a vibrant with more people in regard to all of the challenges that are not being heard that we can answer each one. And so, I just want to say as we continue to do this work, let's look at our values, let's look at our strengths, and let's find what we can build off. We know that we can hold differences we have in our lives. We know that we are unique in our own ways. Let's have the maturity to see other people's points of view and work better.

What we are doing today, I truly believe that when we work together, and we hear each other we accomplish greater things.

Vern Dano: In closing, I want you to know as humans, we as people are beautiful, we are strong, we are resilient and that when we can hold other people and work further, we get further for those not being heard. In closing, everyone, have a safe week, enjoy the fall weather, stay warm and help where you can and know that you are a gift, a gift from the Creator. Miigwech, have a great day, everyone.

Darren Macdonald: Thank you, Vern, great job and thanks for opening us up today on such a great note.

Darren Macdonald: Next, we do have greetings from the Honourable Nahanni Fontaine, Minister of Families and our Minister, Minister responsible for Accessibility.

Nahanni Fontaine was first elected as an MLA for St. John's back in 2016. A member of Sagkeeng Anishinaabe First Nation, she is globally recognized for her expertise in missing and murdered women and girls and Two Spirited individuals and Indigenous women's rights and Indigenous police relations and gender equity. I will hand it over to minister Fontaine and her recorded message today.

Nahanni Fontaine: (Video Message) I'm pleased to officially proclaim October as Disability Employment Awareness Month. As many of you know, Manitoba was one of the first provinces to enact accessibility legislation across Canada. The Accessibility Employment Standard was enacted in 2019 under the Accessibility for Manitobans Act. The goal of the standard is to remove and prevent employment related barriers experienced by current employees and job applicants with disabilities. Barriers may be affected by technology and could also be systemic when they are the result of policies and common practices. But attitudes can be one of the biggest barriers of all. We know that these barriers can be removed easily by providing work accommodations such as adjusting a rule, policy or practice or physical space to allow changes to the way that things are done.

Nahanni Fontaine: (Video Message) Throughout the summer and fall, the Accessibility Advisory Council held consultations with Manitobans with disabilities, business, and union and labour representatives, the education sector, municipalities, disability organization and members of the public to seek feedback on how well the Accessible Employment Standard is working to remove barriers to employment and what improvements can be made. There are still opportunities to have your voice heard by November 1, 2024, by filling out the survey on EngageMB website or submit feedback at access@gov.mb.ca.

Nahanni Fontaine: (Video Message) At the webinar today, we explore themes of breaking barriers and unlocking accessible employment. We will here from three different panelists. Each panelist received a grant to promote accessibility and compliance with the accessibility standards under the Accessibility for Manitobans Act. Today, the panel consists of representatives from Career Connections, Shakespeare in the Ruins and the St. Janes-Assiniboia School Division. I hope their successful stories will inspire others to remove barriers and support inclusion of all Manitobans. Your efforts are helping to shape a better future. Today we can make Manitoba an accessible province for everyone. I wish you happy Disability Employment Awareness Month and successful webinar, miigwech.

Darren Macdonald: Thank you, Minister Fontaine, great to have greetings from our Minister and if you have seen her speak before, she always has incredible earrings, and they did not let us down today. My team will be pleased to see those.

Darren Macdonald: Moving onto our panel discussion today, we are quite excited about our panelists. Heads up, coming in on two minutes. Get the video on, get the moderator on screen and get that working. Before we do, we will go to the second poll. Now we would like to know if your workplace, do you have an accessibility employment policy in your workplace? Spoiler, you should, we are wondering if you have an accessible employment policy, yes, no, fine if you are not sure, that is okay, too. Just wondering for those who are on the call, do you know if you have a workplace accessible employment policy. Give you a minute to fill those in. Here are the results, vast majority, 75 per cent say yes. 11 per cent say no and 14 per cent unsure. So, thank you for participating, that is interesting to see. Glad that it is the majority, not the other way and still work to do which is why our office is here and why we hold events like today.

Darren Macdonald: It is now my pleasure to introduce our moderator Kenny, manager of the Manitoba Accessibility Fund. And he will take over and introduce our panelists and talk more about our DEAM discussion today. Thank you, Kenny.

Kenny Huynh: Awesome, thanks Darren and thanks to everyone for joining us today. I'm excited to introduce our panelists who bring a wealth of experience to our discussion. As the Minister mentioned particularly, they are recipients of the Manitoba Accessibility Fund projects. You will quickly come to realize that their experience extends way beyond their projects, and their involvement in the community is impressive. Paul Deacon, Manager of Maintenance and Safety at St. James- Assiniboia school division. Paul oversees 95 staff and is responsible for the maintenance of 26 schools and another program. In 2015, Paul volunteered to develop the school accessibility policy and regulations and volunteered for this task in memory of his wife of 26 years. She had a profound hearing loss and other health issues. For Paul, it is personal, not just professional. In addition to advocating for accessibility at work, Paul worked to remove barriers at his church.

Kenny Huynh: Next, we welcome Joy Escalara, the executive director of Career Connections Inc (CCI) in Brandon, MB. Career Connections assists individuals living with disabilities to find meaningful employment. It is also the home of Avis's Place – a safe venue for individuals living with intellectual disabilities to socialize with their peers, gain pre-employment and life skills, and have community connections. Joy's work experience, affiliations, and education in psychology and non-profit management prove her passion for leadership in the non-profit sector. Her more than 20 years of experience provided her with opportunities to be involved in various sectors such as mental health, settlement and immigration, child welfare, domestic violence, and disabilities. Joy currently a Board Member of Abilities MB, Board secretary of the YWCA Westman, Chair of Westman Filipino Community, and just finished her 8-year term as Board Member with Child and Family Service of Western MB. Joy is happily married to Virgil and is a proud mother to her three children Josh (26), Venice (22), Brianni (12) and one fur baby, Bubbles (2).

Kenny Huynh: Finally, we have Sara Malabar, who is the Managing Director at Shakespeare in Ruins, the only professional theatre company in Manitoba dedicated to producing and revitalizing the works of William Shakespeare. Sara has extensive experience in Accessibility training and planning in the arts and events sector. She developed and provided Customer

Service Standard training to multiple arts organizations and events in Toronto while the Access for Ontarians with Disabilities Act was being developed and rolled out. She has personally trained more than 500 people in the arts and event sector in creating accessible experiences. Sara was also the producer of the opening and Closing Ceremonies for WorldPride, Producer for the 2010 Olympic Torch Relay in Toronto, and Project Manager for Toronto's Nuit Blanche.

Kenny Huynh: As you can see, our panelists have extensive resumes and dedication to our cause. If you don't mind, let's start with an overview about your accessibility projects.

Kenny Huynh: Sara, can I pick on you first?

Sara Malabar: I can do that. We were funded two years in a row through the Manitoba Accessibility Fund. The first year, we really were focused on the customer service standard and trying to make the experience at coming to our theatre more accessible for people, in every possible way. For us, that included live audio description of performances and ASL interpretation of performances. We added a free bus to come to the Ruins in St. Norbert to create an inclusive experience and invited youth to our website for young readers. We focused more on... and continued our commitment to the customer service standard by creating visual stories. Something that Manitoba theatres focus on is to create a story for people who are neurodivergent or live with anxiety disorders, so they understand the experience before they go into it. It is a detailed story of what you can expect when you come to our theatre to try to reduce anxiety around coming. And then we also invested in some safety around sun for people who are sensitive to sun exposure. In terms of the workplace, we provided training for staff on our initiative and what we facilitate. This is what the fund has helped us to do over the past number of years. I love to read and encouraging people to take part in shows and maybe you are in the business of creating entertainment opportunities. Thank you and welcome.

Kenny Huynh: So, let's jump over to Paul. If you can talk a bit about what St. James-Assiniboia School Division has done in regard to the MAF project?

Paul Deacon: Sure. Like, Sara was saying, we have also... Our project is kind of a mix between customer beliefs and the employment standard. Our project was to create accessible signs for one of our schools. You mentioned about my late wife. As she was in decline, we were at the Health Sciences Centre many, many, many times. And if you've been there and had to go from point A to point B, it is really difficult. But we noticed that they had this way finding signs to help to navigate. You could go from point A to some other place by following the signs. I found the same thing in our schools. I came up with the idea of way finding signs for students and staff to come in, so on, so forth. They are in large and raised letters with Braille on them and so on and so forth. And tied with the employment standard is emergency procedures. And so, in the schools as you know, we have fire drills, 10 a year, lock down drills two a year and tornado one a year. If you can't see or if your understanding is not too good, you might be heading for an exit. We have signs saying this is not an accessible exit. You go towards the exit to get out of a fire or whatever, and there is no... There are stairs at the end. That is what we did for our project. And the signs are very expensive. One sign is about \$100, and the schools are quite large, so we are able to do one school on that project.

Kenny Huynh: Great, I live adjacent to the school division and going through the schools and seeing the signs and seeing this progress is great.

Paul Deacon: We also work with a lot of other school divisions through the community and there is lots of work to be done, and awareness is great. I find that teachers are more aware of support and maintenance staff. The reports that I have been getting indicate this has been a successful project so far. I hope it continues.

Kenny Huynh: Last but not least, let's head to Westman, joy, can you maybe share about Career Connections?

Joy Escalara: Yes, we did a number of projects here in Brandon. We thought that we would start with the community connections, where we have had focus groups with individuals with disabilities and we have witnessed how they were engaged when they were told they were experts. They could let us know what they needed. We had consultations with employers and community partners to understand better how they can support the people that we serve. We worked on our website that is user friendly for individuals with disabilities. And we created some videos that focus on the success of our job seekers. These job seekers opened their doors for the clients that we're serving. We have created an accessible workstation, cci, where kids can come, and we try to support them to be independent. We have our counsellors here; we can work on ensuring young people have the skills they need. We reached out to employers. We talked about the accessibility standard and how Career Connections can help them with developing their policies or even supporting them with how to manage staff members who have disabilities.

[inaudible]

Kenny Huynh: This is awesome, obviously. In reading through your reports and stuff and going through your projects, you are a direct connection to people with lived experiences of disability and the skills of your clients and participants. That is an important education role to provide the tools to help in getting awareness out about management and working with these organizations to show them it is possible to hire someone with a disability.

Kenny Huynh: Joy, off the top of your head, are there any big challenges that kind of stuck out?

Joy Escalara: Not really a challenge, more of a learning for us, when we have had those events with employers, many still don't realize what is involved in hiring an individual with disability. Employees with disabilities don't always require accommodations. When employers hear we are disability-focussed, as well as helping businesses, they are pleased. That is one of the again not challenge but something that we learned from our project. It is always hard to invite -- to have people that talk about disabilities. We try to partner with other agencies. For example, for one of our events, we partnered with people with disabilities and those have helped us to face the challenges that we faced.

Kenny Huynh: Frankly, being rural, Brandon is not rural but being on that side of Westman, there are different challenges being outside of the major metropolitan area. Awesome, sara, anything that sticks out?

Sara Malabar: Our primary challenge is associated with maintaining services every year, audio described video and ASL. The Manitoba accessibility funding only funds you one time and after that, you need to figure it out. In our case, we merged training for Deaf people into our offerings the last two years. On the night we offered ASL, we had no-one come out. And in the community, we are trying to invite people in including audiences that don't have disabilities.

When we do a relaxed performance, other audience members don't want to come when we do these performances or offer American Sign Language. In our case, we don't have to change our performances for particular people. People can come and go as they need to. In a black box theatre, you sit down and watch the show and don't leave. For people who need a relaxed performance, they can't always sit down and watch the whole show. In your standard theatre, they can't vocalize. That is frowned upon, and we are creating a place where people can have a relaxed performance and do what they need to do. If that upsets audience members, that is unfortunate. It is more like changing the audience members' minds that all people should have opportunities to experience the theatre.

Kenny Huynh: For sure, and the community connection piece that you mentioned.

Sara Malabar: Something we try that should be default. If an audience member feels "I want to be in a relaxed performance," that should not be something that is frowned upon or turns anybody off from the theatre.

Kenny Huynh: Definitely hear you from that one. Or to you Paul, any challenges?

Paul Deacon: Yes, thanks to Sara and encourage her for that, in the fact that inclusion is a big deal here in the school divisions. And it may take a generation to get there to change the attitudes of people, but there were no challenges with it. The vendors are slow, but we have infrastructure in place, caretakers and tradesman to put things where they need to be. We don't have to hire somebody, to bring them in, we are willing to take care of it. We do not a lot of projects.

Kenny Huynh: All right. But, yeah, awesome. I have another question, feel free to pass on this question if it is esoteric. Of the things you discussed, do you see these challenges being a part of larger accessibility employer attitudes? Maybe there are things that have to be changed or there needs to be more education to make things better. But I wanted to throw it out there.

Paul Deacon: There were not many problems, department signs are expensive. Aside from the accessibility grants, I mean, school divisions get big funding for other big projects. But an elevator costs \$200,000 to make accessible. Some of the buildings are 100 years old. From when you went to school, you could go up five or six layers to get to a building. A repair to make a building accessible is not cheap. Like I said before, we have had inclusion with the school division for positive years. We have had to push getting door openers and getting lifts in and devices.

Kenny Huynh: We heard a lot of that. As the MAF manager, I get a lot of questions but how about Sara?

Sara Malabar: I think this will apply to a lot of other things and it describes the primary culture. It has a major impact on how people with disabilities are getting jobs. And in the arts centre, there are 120-hour weeks, not uncommon to perform 8 or 9 times a week, the pace of the work is a barrier to participation. As a result, we have to change the culture to accommodate. In an office environment, there is reasonable accommodation, and we have committed to looking at this. How can we be leaders in this area. At share spare we just made the fusion of a five-way deal with other theatres. When performers can only work so many hours, I have to pay them the difference in terms of salary. We have done this for three seasons now and they are successful despite the fact we made that decision. We provided shorter days, and we attempted to try to

make things more accessible for people, work with mental health or neurodivergence, with trying on my own hours and already you see how people need work to be accessible.

Kenny Huynh: For sure. It is a challenge but not that challenging to do it once you made those accommodations, like it is business as usual. joy do you have anything to add?

Joy Escalara: No, I don't think so. I think I answered the last question. It is kind of connected with your discussion.

Kenny Huynh: For sure. So, and connected to my last question and what sara did, have you implemented any specific policies or practices to enhance workplace accessibility for employers or clients. What has your organization done to implement the accessibility employment standard? We heard from sara, highlighted a couple of policies that touched upon that. I don't know, Paul, if you have anything to add to that.

Paul Deacon: Yes. As you mentioned, I developed the accessibility policy for the school division. And what we do is have a policy and underneath the policy are regulations. So, we kind of mirror the government's way of laws and regulations. We have accessibility policies and a customer service standard. We also have the employment standard that we developed for our own school division, and we have the accessible communication standard as well. So, when you develop something and it becomes the plan of the school division, divisions include training and education for everybody that is affected. We continue to do that. It is a culture change. We have had inclusion for students for 30 years, but we forgot employees. And so now we have for instance it is a requirement under the fire code to provide specific plans for people with challenges, barriers in case there is a fire or an emergency. We had that all documented for students, here is the plan, get them out of there. We find out the information by using a questionnaire. Do you have anything confidential, and we will make a plan for you. We do that now for employees as well as other things.

Kenny Huynh: Yes, it is as I started in this office recently, I found that the school divisions are actually more progressive in terms of implementing those policies. I think they sort of led the way in that regard despite the challenges, school divisions have been doing a good job, in terms of implementing those policies and ensuring that the employees and the students are safe. I have had the good fortune of speaking to other school divisions about MAF projects and yeah, the policies are a huge part of it and hopefully you know these policies continue to evolve with the changing demographics of students and the demographics of the employees and aging buildings and that as well. So, thank you for that Paul. Joy, anything else to add?

Joy Escalara: Yes. Our project has prompted us to review and look into our own policies so that is something that was identified by our board of directors, that is a priority for them this year that we look into that, walking the talk and not just asking employers to do these things when we are not doing it ourselves. That is a big project for us. And there is always the message we relay that we are open to documentations on access issues, they are safe to come to their coordinators, their supervisors.

[technical difficulties]

(video is frozen) if they feel they need any of these (accommodations).

Kenny Huynh: Awesome. You come from a unique perspective too for your own employees and for the people that you work with. So, that is great, and you are able to provide the

consulting practice for like you said, the other organizations to develop their policies, too. I was happy to read about that in your report as well Sara, is there anything else that you wanted to add? I think you are muted.

Sara Malabar: I would add working with people with disabilities specifically to develop those accommodations and to have those conversations. In our case, sometimes that has been with an artist or an actor. And it is just really important that they take the lead in those conversations. One in particular if people are interested in disability aesthetic, when something is completely reworked or reimagined through the lens of disabilities. We have a video called How We Crypt it, which is about a particular performance that we had during the pandemic. It was on video where the actor and the director completely reimagined the film through the lens of an actor, a wheelchair user. And they changed the play for that, and they were open to the feedback from people you know, with those lived experiences, telling us what they...

What needs to change for them to access those opportunities.

Kenny Huynh: Awesome. Maybe share the link to that video in the notes as well if you can forward it to me, happy to share it with the audience as well. Rounding off to our last two topics. End up on a high note.

Kenny Huynh: First question here do you have any success stories that show the impact of some of these initiatives that you have taken and anything that sticks out in your mind.

As a success? Big or small. Paul, anything that sticks out in your mind. Hard to say?

Paul Deacon: Like, I would say it is just like the culture is moving forward. And that is really slow. So, I don't know that I can highlight any specific here is a spectacular thing that happened, but just to see people sort of getting an understanding. My background for 20 years has been workplace safety and health. With that 20 some years ago, I developed... We created committees in every school. We have 26 committees with four or five people on every single committee to look at safety and so our school division over 20 years now it has a culture of safety. Everybody kind of gets it right, because...

And so, it is one thing if we wanted to see a major change, if you could have that sort of thing for access committees in all of the workplaces it would be a big change, workplace safety and health over 20 years. I mean, there are simple things like an attitudinal change. Hey, this cleaner is not working out here whatever and I say yeah, but I mean you can't disclose that there are issues here. And for this person I'm going to make a checklist that he knows.

And he can do the job. First day on the job, clean the desk keep going, you clean the desk bottom, top inside outside every part of fountains. He did not understand. Staff said quick wipe, show him and now he is one of our good guys here. He knows exactly what to do.

But it is changing that attitude here with the people around him so that he can work and have self respect and earn a good living just like everybody else, just by removing that barrier which is easy to do. That is a success story.

Kenny Huynh: Definitely. It takes an individual to take time and make the effort. For that, I applaud you for understanding that and having, you know, the wherewithal and the energy to do that, because that, you know, it should not go unnoticed. Individuals in the workplace that take

the time despite the fact it is law now; it is a regulation. It is law. You know, and it does take some gumption from employees to make changes in the workplace.

I do want to acknowledge that. I do appreciate that; you are sharing that as well.

Anything, joy, wins that you would like to share?

Joy Escalara: I think one of the wins that I would like to share this afternoon was when we had focus group discussions and gathered with people and people living with disabilities. Many of them realize that they are not alone. There are not many venues in Brandon where they can have conversations about their needs and they realized it is not just me, having this struggle and they are excited now to whenever we have, like invites for workshops and that, that they see their peers.

And there would be a conversation about things that they...

They feel that they can openly discuss with other people.

But there in that short session, they were able to hear similar, familiar stories and it kind of normalized their experience and to me that is a big win.

Kenny Huynh: Awesome.

You definitely need... Like we get a lot of that in our office, too, people like expressing sort of that need for a venue, need for an outlet to, of course, you know, us being a government office, people want their opinions heard. But we can't get to all of them, having an organization like yourself and the community is invaluable. Sara, over to you?

Sara Malabar: over the last few years with the help of the manitoba accessibility fund, we have seen increases in the number of people with disabilities who are coming to the theatre.

Particularly, people who use our live audio descriptions.

You also see people who use wheelchairs. The last performance this season, five people who used wheelchairs came to the show and a couple of sun sensitive people who needed to be in our tents, and it was rewarding to see the number of people who were interested in coming to the show. My staff knew what to do, how to respectfully communicate and we had users with motorized wheelchairs see you later and they zoom down in to where they are seated. Other users needed help because they didn't have a support person to get into the space. Our staff was adequately well trained to work with people in a respectful way.

As the manager who has been working on that for a while, I was like yay it is working, that is a success story for us.

Kenny Huynh: Awesome. Having that and you are sort of expressing that culture to your employees, too and making those accommodations.

I think empowering your employees to do that as well... As a manager, empowering your employees to do that is invaluable as well.

One last question, feel free to pass. I want to end this discussion on an aspirational note.

Perhaps maybe some ideas in the audience. In what ways can organizations continue to foster a culture of inclusivity and awareness of accessibility in the workplace. Whoever has any burning thoughts that they want to end on.

Paul Deacon: I think you have to... There are laws, regulations, rules, so on, so forth. You have to appeal to the people's hearts. You need to... because everybody is affected. And like I mean, we all, you know, that is the way it is. So, if somehow, like I know our different groups, the teachers, educational assistants, caretakers, they all get together for educational professional development.

I find if you... I have spoken to a few people on things.

Well, actually it was the administrators, principals and vice principals and so on so forth. If you can relay to them your own personal experience and what it means and you talk to their heart, they will do what is required. It will work more. Another thing to do is to have an accessibility committee or a couple of representatives in every location, same as workplace safety and health committees.

Kenny Huynh: Definitely. Agree with you wholeheartedly 100 per cent.

That is what we are trying to do here, maybe move away from the policy stuff a bit and return to standards and rules and hearing firsthand experiences from folks like yourselves to move this forward.

Sara?

Sara Malabar: Setting the tone at the very top of the organization is really important.

If people are in management, in their organizations, like, for our organization, because we're nonprofit, that direction came from the board of directors. Of course, as managers, we brought it to the board, but we can move on, we can, you know, go to different jobs.

So ultimately that commitment has to come from somewhere above the managers. The board put it into strategic planning for the next few years. Specific goals are being met. So having that commitment, making it a strategic priority. Putting it in print, specific goals that you are working towards, are all a part of being successful. If the commitment is coming from the top of the organization, then it makes it very clear to everybody else in the world, you know, what the values are and... We are committed to the accessibility.

That is one of the values of this organization. Kind of get on board.

If you need support or information to get on board, we are happy to bring that, but ultimately this is a kit that the organization made, and we will work towards that in a strategic way.

That is what I would say.

Kenny Huynh: For sure, if you need ammunition to get your boards on board, you know there are laws, and it is legislation. So hopefully, we here at our office will empower you that says I have to comply with these standards and running it up the food chain to the board, public sentiment as well. Definitely hear you on that one. And last but not least joy? If you have any final thoughts on that one?

Joy Escalera: Yes, in addition to those other points mentioned, the use of social media is really powerful in reaching many people.

But also, any opportunities for community connections like if there is volunteer opportunities in the committee, sometimes there is funding. To volunteer or they would ask us, are they capable of doing that, yes, they are. And they could do things that our staff could do.

Even having the practicum student, a nursing student still here. The student said, "I'm quite disappointed in my placement here." And I thought how come, what made you disappointed. And she said we were discussing disability in our classes, and I picture somebody who is incapable, who cannot do any work and be employed.

When she attended her practicum, she found out this is a whole new world. There is really more behind the classroom learning and the next books and for that she is grateful for the experience. That is, it for me.

Kenny Huynh: Exposing students, practicum students, we have students in our office and exposing different people to thinking about abilities is very important, and what you are doing through cci is important work and we appreciate you and thank you for that as well. Okay, so as we wrap up this portion of the webinar our discussion portion is over.

Kenny Huynh: I do want to extend a heartfelt thank you to all of the panelist, not only for their wonderful presentations today and continued contributions. I don't know if the rest of you felt it, I certainly felt it in how they spoke, that they are passionate about removing barriers, being inclusive, firsthand experience and sort of...

Removing barriers, but brick by brick, boots on the ground, this is inspiring like me in a community, and we develop the policies and roll them out and put them into practice. Getting direct feedback and supporting projects has been rewarding as well. On that note, thanks again to all of our wonderful presenter, shameless plug for me, be on the next intake of the Manitoba Accessibility Fund. I will get out that information for the next round of projects. That is all from me. Pass it back to Darren for the ama updates.

Darren Macdonald: Thanks Kenny. And echo that, Kenny, big thank you to Sara and Joy and Paul, thanks for enlightening us. A couple of messages I wanted to double down on.

This was really good to hear, and some themes emerged.

I like the concept of it starts from the top and we need our leaders when it comes to accessibility. And Paul, your call around accessibility or champions, somehow organizations have to embed this in the work we do and that is coming culture safety is show, I meet with counterparts from coast to coast. I get to meet with provinces and territories and folks from the federal government. There is a monumental shift.

It is starting slow and gradually picking up speed. In two years, I saw the speed pick up. You touched on this in your presentations and what you said, focus on not disability but removing barrier. And that is a good shift. You have a customer or staff person, or client come to you with an issue. You are building it, and it is shifting from that to take the way finding signs. That might have been thought of as a customer commerce approach that helps staff, it helps the courier who shows up, Universal design, if you build it at the beginning, it is accessible for everybody, and we can all benefit from it. Great, change takes time as we like to here, progress over

perfection. Don't be afraid to include things you will hear from those and adjust. Thanks to the panelists.

Darren Macdonald: A couple of updates before we go. The Minister mentioned, we are in the middle of our five-year review of the accessibility employment standard. There is still time to get in your feedback. There is a public survey on EngageMB, our survey website, you can formally respond. Or else, if you want to send your feedback or thoughts to the Council, their email address is access@gov.mb.ca.

Access@gov.mb.ca and Council will look at the feedback and report to the Minister with recommendations which are due in January.

Darren Macdonald: We are working on the accessibility outdoor spaces standard.

Council and government are currently working on that. That is exciting and it will impact sidewalks, crosswalks, beaches, parks, you know, the buildings that are outside. Keep your eye out for information also on that.

Darren Macdonald: Two other events to tell you about. November 7, celebrating Indigenous Disability Awareness Month with a webinar which features Shauna Joint. She will outline her experiences as a hearing-impaired Indigenous woman. And December 3rd, we will celebrate with a webinar on accessible parks and inclusive sport and recreation in Manitoba. We have a representative from Manitoba Parks. Also presenting that day is a former paralympic athlete.

A couple of things to let you know about. We appreciate everyone for being on the call. Thanks to Vern Dano, our Minister, the panelists and Kenny for introducing and moderating. Thanks for joining us. Thanks to our interpreters and captioner for doing a wonderful job.

Recordings will be available on our accessibilityMB website, and we will get it up there as soon as possible. Please subscribe to the newsletter and monthly updates on accessibility and hear about projects like the ones we heard about today. We like to promote the work that is being done. Happy disability employment awareness month and thanks for joining us. Take care!