International Day of Persons with Disabilities Transcript

December 3, 2025

Kenny Huynh: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome. We're just going to give it 30 seconds here for people to file in and connect. And my name is Kenny Huynh; I'm a policy analyst here at the Manitoba Accessibility Office. Thanks again to everyone for joining us today. I know it's a little cold out here in Winnipeg, for those of us in Winnipeg. Nice to be on zoom and warm in the comfort of our offices and desks. So hopefully you're staying warm as well. It's nice to see some familiar names joining. I see folks from Brandon, folks from Thompson, a couple of rural municipalities, so that's very awesome to see. Again, I love seeing names that I recognize because we have a lot of events, and I know we're very appreciative of all the people that show up to these things. So it looks like we've levelled off. So again, my name is Kenny. I'm the policy analyst here at Manitoba Accessibility Office. Thank you for joining our webinar today to celebrate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

Before we get going, there are a few housekeeping items to go over. If you have any technical difficulties, please contact our office by email at mao@gov.mb.ca. To access live closed captioning, click on the icon at the bottom with the two letter Cs. We do have a live captioner here today and Rhonda does a great job. For ASL interpretation, click on the globe icon which is also at the bottom right side. I've also spotlit our interpreters on the screen here so if you have issues with that, let me know in the chat. I'm going to put some instructions from zoom as well in case you're having issues with the ASL interpreter, the ASL interpretation feature, I should say. This webinar is being recorded, and we will post the recording and the transcript on accessibilityMB.ca as soon as possible. So I've turned off the chat today but please put your comments and questions in the Q&A function. We'll try to answer as many questions as we can during the webinar if we have time. If not, we'll take them away, we'll send them to the panellists and we'll get the answers back to you as soon as possible.

So again, I'm pleased to see that we have over 130 people registered for this session. Again, it's nice to see some familiar names and nice to see new people and people from all over the province.

Before we begin, I want to acknowledge that I am speaking to you today from Treaty One Territory. Manitoba is located on the Treaty Territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg, Anishininewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline, and Nehethowuk Nations. I acknowledge that Manitoba is located on the homeland of the Red River Metis and that our water is sourced from Shoal Lake Forty First Nation. Additionally, we recognize that northern Manitoba includes lands that were and are the ancestral lands of the Inuit. As we gather here today, I want to reaffirm my commitment to the ongoing journey of

seeking truth and working toward reconciliation. So I have a very special guest today, I welcome Frances Sinclair-Kaspick to share a few words.

Frances Sinclair-Kaspick: Hello. Yes. My Aboriginal spiritual name is Red Rainbow Woman, and you can only get a spiritual name through ceremony, which I did, and I have been following our cultural traditional ways for about 25 to 30 years and still I practice it, yes. So I would like to, I'm very honoured to be here so here I go, I'm going to start. I would like to say Miigwech and thank you to the Manitoba Accessibility Office for inviting me to bless this powerful, honourable day of International Day of People with Disabilities. So here's our prayer.

Creator, each of us are placed on mother earth for a reason. Our soul, our stories give us encouragement, our purpose for the future. We all come together today to plan better tomorrows, to raise the awareness of our talents, dignity and self worth, living our lives on a daily basis in our unique bodies, managing the fast-paced world. Our lived experience with disabilities are knowledgeable of the barriers. We have innovative ideas and understanding of barriers yet to be removed, improving standards for all, and diversities to benefit in society. Creator, guide us to teach our allies effective working tools to succeed implementing programs in our urban and northern communities. Allies are needed to help balance our disability progress. Bring our minds together as one to create beneficial accomplishments of the efforts and hard work of past and present and more celebrations for the future of working teams, various programs, policies, housing, employment. Creator, we ask you to continue paving the way to inclusion of the circle of life. Celebrating International Day of People with disabilities is beautiful for our spirit, our spark, our specialness. Creator, we are grateful and give thanks for the many blessings for our disabilities and our amazing various skills, making society inclusive and normalized. Disabilities are everywhere. We are blessed to celebrate International Day of People with Disabilities. In ending, I'll just say hay hay in my culture. Miigwech.

Kenny Huynh: Thank you, Frances, for those beautiful words. We've had the pleasure of having you for the last couple of events, and I always learn a lot from hearing you speak so I do really appreciate you being here today. Next, we have some remarks from Minister Nahanni Fontaine. I'd like to welcome my wonderful colleague Chantal to deliver those on her behalf.

Chantal Boissonneault: Hello, everyone. My name is Chantal, and I want to share that Minister Fontaine is unable to join us today and deeply regrets not being able to attend this important event. She values the work being done to advance accessibility in Manitoba and has asked us to share her remarks on her behalf. So welcome to today's webinar. We are pleased Manitoba has proclaimed December 3rd as International Day of Persons with Disabilities. On this day, we join people across Canada and the world in promoting the rights of people with disabilities and recognizing and celebrating their accomplishments. This year, the United Nations theme is "Fostering Disability, Inclusive Societies for Advancing Social Progress." This theme reminds us that inclusion begins with listening and valuing every voice. A community cannot thrive without the

contributions and experiences of individuals with disabilities. Inclusion is not just a responsibility, it is how we create spaces where everyone is seen, heard, and empowered. Inclusivity also means addressing the systems that shape our communities. We need to break down cultural and structural barriers that prevent full participation in school, work, decision making and community life. Real change happens when we work together to transform these systems. Inclusion is a shared commitment. It is not the work of one group alone but of all of us: governments, businesses, schools, families and individuals. When we come together with a common purpose, we can build a Manitoba where every person is valued and included. During today's webinar titled "Funding Accessibility: Celebrating Successful Manitoba Accessibility Fund Grant Projects in Action," we will hear directly from past Manitoba Accessibility Fund Grant recipients. We will learn how their projects are working to remove barriers and gain insight into how their work is highlighting the voices of individuals with disabilities and creating a more inclusive province. The Manitoba Accessibility Fund was launched in 2021 and has supported 142 accessibility projects throughout the province with approximately $3 million. We congratulate all of the grant recipients for the work you are doing. Each of these organizations are showing us what is possible when we centre accessibility, inclusion, and human rights in everything we do. Thank you for being part of this important event. Your presence, your voices and your commitment are helping to shape a more accessible future for everyone.

Kenny Huynh: Awesome. Thank you, Minister Fontaine. And thank you, Chantal, for reading those on her behalf. So like the Minister said, International Day of Persons with Disabilities is a time to reaffirm Manitoba's commitment to United Nations Conventions on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as the Accessibility for Manitobans Act which includes the implementation of five accessibility standards, Customer Service, Employment, Information and Communication, Transportation, which are all enacted now, and the upcoming Design of Outdoor Public Spaces Standard. So again, you'll hear some thoughtful insights from our panellists who have taken on projects to further compliance and foster an inclusive society for all Manitobans. I've had the absolute privilege of watching their projects take shape from afar through the Manitoba Accessibility Fund. I'm very happy that we get to celebrate and learn from their accomplishments today. Personally, I've seen the work that these panellists have put towards their projects and their sort of passionate advocacy for their industries and ensuring that barriers are being removed. So without further ado, I'd like to introduce my brand-new colleague, Regie Reyes who recently took over my responsibilities as manager of the Manitoba Accessibility Fund to introduce the guests. So welcome, Regie.

Regie Reyes: Thanks, Kenny. Our first panellist today, Jenel Shaw, is a self-taught visual artist with a Master's in Disability Studies whose research examined art, empowerment and lived experience. She advocates for accessible arts practises and is the Executive Director of Arts AccessAbility Network Manitoba and Co-Chair of the

Manitoba Artist-Run Centres Coalition. Arts AccessAbility Network Manitoba was the recipient of the 2025 Manitoba Accessibility Award.

Second, Abilities Manitoba, Margo Powell. Margo Powell is the Executive Director of Abilities Manitoba, an umbrella organization representing nonprofit service providers who support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Margo has worked in the disability sector for 33 years and has been at Abilities Manitoba for ten years. Abilities Manitoba was also the winner of the 2024 Manitoba Accessibility Award.

Third, we have Jennifer Rodrigue, the Executive Director of CoHabit and the Chief Innovation Strategy Officer with Action marguerite where she is disrupting the status quo in service delivery models for people with disabilities and seniors. With 20 years of experience working for, and with people with disabilities, Jennifer is passionate advocate for social justice and human rights with a particular interest in accessibility, autonomy, literacy, and belonging. Over to you.

Kenny Huynh: Let me get back on video here. So we did provide the panellists with some questions ahead of time. So hopefully these questions will touch on the projects that you have taken on, like Regie mentioned, you are all the recipients of accessibility awards in the past. So I might have had a bit of influence in picking the panellists for this event. I might have chosen folks that I know have been very passionate in pursuing the projects and really pushing the envelope and coming up with innovative ideas to reduce barriers. Regie, I'm not sure if you have the questions so I'll let you take over with the first question.

Regie Reyes: Perfect, thanks, Kenny. So I probably just have to choose any one of you to start and maybe the three of you can get those answers going, if we have enough time allowed for us. So the first question here, "Can you provide a brief overview of your Manitoba Accessibility Fund project and any related initiatives?"

Jenel Shaw: I'll go ahead and jump in and start us off if you'd like.

Regie Reyes: Thank you.

Jenel Shaw: The project that we applied to the Manitoba Accessibility Fund was for an accessibility audit of arts venues. So that came about in 2020 when we realized that we needed to have this information available for our community members to be able to participate fully in the arts and so we created an accessibility audit from the community, so the community told us what they needed. We created that audit. We shared it with them, so it was a very co creation and then we went out and audited venues. So far, we have audited 45 places, 42 in Winnipeg and 3 in Brandon.

Regie Reyes: Wonderful. Did you want to add to that, Margo or Jennifer?

Margo Powell: Yeah, I can add to that. So our project at Abilities Manitoba was to create an educational video, and we really wanted to highlight the wide array of accessibility barriers that people face every day. The video that we created is called

"Barrier Town" and the tagline, or, if you will, the sign that you would be reading as you drove into town, would say "Welcome to Barrier Town. If you aren't with us now, you will be one day." The reality is that if we're fortunate enough to be on this earth for a long time, there's a pretty good chance that we will acquire disabilities as we go. Certainly, I found that to be true. So the video is intended to be this light, quirky kind of funny approach to relay the message that Barrier Town is not a place that you want to live, though, many do. And when we think about accessibility, we often easily can think about physical access and those physical barriers that people face, but we also wanted to show that it also includes digital barriers, communication barriers, even design choices that exclude people unnecessarily. So that's kind of, in a nutshell, what our project was all about.

Regie Reyes: Thank you, Margo. Jennifer, would you like to be the next?

Jennifer Rodrigue: Sure. Thank you. So thanks for having me today, and it's lovely to spend some time on this important day with all of you. So our project is called "Building Inclusive Communities," and it really was the foundational research and information gathering that has formed the background for the vision and the strategy behind CoHabit, and CoHabit is an accessible, inclusive, and affordable building project with the goal of meeting the needs of housing and service delivery for people with physical or other significant disabilities who don't qualify for funding through Manitoba's Disability Services. So it's a big, broad project, and we are extremely grateful for the funding that we received because it did sort of lay out that framework that we're following in order to bring this dream to reality.

Regie Reyes: Wonderful. I just have a follow-up question, and anyone can jump in. “What specific goals were set for your project?

Jenel Shaw: Well, for us, this is a project that started quite some time ago so some of our goals were to create an audit that was created by the community, most audits aren't created by the community, they're created by experts and architects and doctors and therapists and so we wanted to make sure that it was the community who, the disability community in Manitoba informing that audit. One of the other goals we had was to try to audit at least 30 places in the city. So we've hit that goal, which is exciting. And all in all, the support from the Manitoba Accessibility Fund has made this possible. And we are still conducting audits. They're no longer free. Now you have to pay for the audits but, yeah, it's been really wonderful to be able to take all accessibility information and put it in one place. One thing we heard from some of our members is that when they do try to call or look online for accessibility information from arts venues, that the information isn't there, it's incomplete or when they call, people don't know. So having it all in one little database which is on our website makes it so much simpler for folks. So those are the three goals, created by the community, a database for everyone and at least 30 places audited.

Regie Reyes: Lovely. Margo or Jennifer, do you want to add on to that follow up? If not, I have another follow up question for the main question.

Jennifer Rodrigue: Yeah, so the key goals for the building inclusive communities project were to create the sort of template to move the project forward and then also based on that template and then also the experience of bringing the project to life to create a resource that we will share with anyone else who wants to, you know, sort of work in the space and help to advance inclusive housing.

Regie Reyes: Thank you. And maybe this is for you, Margo, just a follow up, how do these initiatives connect with broader accessibility efforts in your field?

Margo Powell: Well, I think they all dovetail together so I think all of those efforts and all of the work that's happening province wide like on the individual level and various levels, organizations and governments and systems, it all comes together in the end to create a better, more accessible province with people who have an understanding of what accessibility is and that ultimately, that we all benefit from accessibility.

Regie Reyes: Thank you. And stepping back a bit now, “what initially inspired your organization to apply for a grant with the Manitoba Accessibility Fund? I know Jenel is the most recent awardee for that, maybe you can start. I think you're still on mute. There you go.

Jenel Shaw: Yeah, so the reason why we applied to the Manitoba Accessibility Fund, the project was originally funded by the Winnipeg Foundation so they helped us support creating the project and then we were trying to find where we could get money to conduct these audits because a lot of times, we thought it might be easier to approach venues if we say this is a free audit versus, you know, that you have to pay money for it. And so we were so excited when the Manitoba Accessibility Fund opened because this felt just made for it. Yeah, so we applied and we got the funding. So it was yeah, I just find that the Manitoba Accessibility Fund was so needed. There's so many projects where there's not a grant that would cover it, especially these accessibility kinds of projects. So it was really wonderful that the province stepped up and created this fund, and it's been, I think utilized very well by quite a few folks in the community.

Regie Reyes: Thank you. And maybe I can ask Jennifer a follow up on this theme. “Can you outline the planning process your organization undertook prior to submitting the grant application?”

Jennifer Rodrigue: Well, that's a really good question. I wasn't with the organization leading up to applying for this grant. But I do know that Margie Nelson is the founder of CoHabit and that this dream lived in her head for a long time as an option to support her son Bryce who lives at home with her and he's in his 30s. And so, you know, from all of the documentation that I've seen, I think there was a lot of conversations with people with lived experience of disability who are still living either in their homes with their families and who are looking for options and aren't able to find what they're looking for

in the community. And then also conversations with those family members who, you know, are aware that the living option and the care is not sustainable long term for their family. So I think just a lot of sorts of grass roots community input is what really laid the foundation prior to applying.

Regie Reyes: That's insightful. And maybe the third follow-up question for Margo, “What guidance would you have for anyone currently in the planning phase of their accessibility projects?”

Margo Powell: Include people. Include people in your planning. Make sure that people are at the table that are going to be involved in, impacted by, connected to the work that you're going to be doing. I think that's the most single most important piece of advice I could offer.

Regie Reyes: Thank you. That's very helpful. As I know there's probably a lot of listeners here who would like to apply for the next intake. So the third question here, and anyone can jump in, “What measurable impacts have you observed since the implementation of your project? Can you share any success stories that illustrate this impact?”

Jenel Shaw: Yeah, I could jump in and get us started. So for measurable impacts, it's the creation of the database that folks can access at any point. And we've been monitoring the traffic on our website, so we see that folks are actually using that and using that information. And some of the success stories that we've seen is that when we've approached organizations to do these audits, that once the audit is done, we've had quite a few who have turned around and come back to us and said, okay, thank you for addressing these areas where we're lacking. Now, we want to take the next step to go even further, you know, so they're reaching out to either get a support letter from us, to apply for the manitoba accessibility funding or other projects so they can improve the spaces, to connect with disability consultants who can give them really kind of detailed, precise work, so that's kind of been the most exciting part. We thought we would go in, do these audits and that would kind of be the end, but we've seen a lot of folks want to continue the conversation. And really try to make an impact and really try to make those changes and remove those barriers that we've identified so, for me, that's been the most rewarding part of it.

Regie Reyes: Margo or Jennifer, did you want to add anything? If not, I have a follow up question that you might want to share.

Margo Powell: I'll kind of build on that. I think, you know, when we set out, we were we were kind of guided also by the fact that there's a lack of meaningful employment for people with disabilities in our province. And so we wanted to hire folks with lived experience of disability to be a part of the video and expect it to have an impact in our province and had hoped that we would have an impact in our province. But beyond receiving the accessibility award from you folks, we received two international awards for the video which was like just blew us like we were not expecting that at all. So one

was a Shorty Impact Award, and we won gold in the disability awareness category for that. And so Shorty Impact Awards are, they honour initiatives that spark positive change in the world, and Uphouse is the company that we contracted with to create the video. They went down to Los Angeles to receive this award. And in our category, we were up against the Lincoln Centre for Performing Arts, the Oscars, and Starbucks in our category. And so I think that just little moment of fame, like, went well beyond what we expected. And then we also won a bronze International Anthem Award for local community engagement. So those anthem awards are also international awards, and they recognize purpose driven work that aims to make the world a better place. So we were just tickled to be, you know, have that recognition and to kind of spread it that much further.

Regie Reyes: That's a hard one to follow, Margo.

[laughter] Those awards, it's so awesome.

Jennifer Rodrigue: We have a few successes that we're excited about too. We were able to bring a partner on board who's willing to build a building for us, a fully accessible building. And together, we were able to apply and get land through the Housing Accelerator Fund for the City of Winnipeg. So we have a builder, and we have land. We have some other things we need to line up before the project is fully a go, but that's been exciting. And I think the other things that have been exciting are the interest from other sectors who also are representing underserved people who are interested in the model so very happy to be able to share anything that we learn and any work that we've done with others so that we can see this work sort of grow in other sectors too. And then also, we have a really good partner in the architect an architectural firm that we're working with who is very excited to learn and to get the accessibility right. And so they have been, you know, coming and meeting with people with lived experience and learning about what their true needs are in accessibility while following the Canadian Accessibility Standards and just really, really trying to get that right. And then also track and document from a cost perspective because I don't think there's really good literature around, you know, what would this building cost if it wasn't accessible versus it being fully accessible, and so we're really excited to be able to contribute to that body of knowledge as we move along as well.

Regie Reyes: Wonderful. I know, Jennifer, you mentioned about assessing the effectiveness of your project. Jenel, did you want to add on something to that?

Jenel Shaw: Sure, yeah. I mean, in terms of effectiveness, I suppose we've had folks who have heard about our audits who have reached out so folks that we didn't connect with who wanted to have the audit done, which kind of illustrated that there was a want for it within the community. And just having folks being able to access the database and see that they're using the database and that it's being utilized for us has been a really big plus. And show that we do need to expand the places that we're auditing so, in the future, we're very excited, hopefully, we applied for a grant and we'll hopefully be

auditing four rural arts organizations over the summer just because there's a lot of so many rural centres out there and the community centres usually that they utilize is a meeting place for the whole community so we want to help guide them to make those spaces more accessible so everyone in the community can participate in the arts and their spaces.

Regie Reyes: Thank you. And I want to go back to Margo, and I want to congratulate her as well with those awards. And just kind of lean on that.

“What feedback have you received from the community or stakeholders?”

Margo Powell: We've received positive feedback for sure, and I think one of the interesting things is that it starts dialogues. And it expands, as people start to understand what accessibility can mean, like all of the things. I know I'm not the only one that has to take a photo of a label and then expand it on my phone so that I can properly read it, right? Accessibility means lots of things and so it's kind of having those conversations to demystify it almost.

Regie Reyes: Wow, that's a really deep thought there and we'll probably continue with this question just so you're already mentioning that. What has been the most rewarding part of seeing your organization's accessibility project come to life?

Jenel Shaw: I think for us, one of the most rewarding things is that this has kind of been a project in the back of our mind since 2012 so we're coming on to 14 years since we had this idea of creating the project. So just to have it successfully funded and finally to have done it and to continue to do it, it's just rewarding to see a 10, 15-year project come to life and how exciting that is. And this is being utilized by the community has been the most impactful thing. And yeah, one of the most rewarding things was when Breakout West, which is a music conference and performance kind of three day conference kind of event, they were coming to Winnipeg for this year, and they reached out to us and asked us to audit every single venue that they were using, which was just amazing. So it was really exciting when you get organizations who are not necessarily from Winnipeg but, you know, are Canadian or something like that, who have heard of the project and reach out to say this is great, how can we fund you to do more, how can we include this in ours. So just mainly the feedback from the entire arts community who seems very excited about accessibility, maybe not as knowledgeable but want to learn. So just seeing that response from the arts community has been really lovely.

Regie Reyes: Thank you. Do you want to add on to that, Margo or Jennifer?

Margo Powell: Yeah, I think that one of the things that has been really rewarding is that we've had a lot of conversations outside of the disability sector and a lot of people that we need to sort of bring along on this vision with us and I think seeing the attitudinal shift in people who accessibility or disability hasn't really been like a part of their work or a part of their life, and bringing people along from sort of these quizzical looks to not totally understanding the reason and the importance to then sort of getting to know them

for three and six months and having many conversations and then, like, just seeing it click for them and having them become advocates and champions has been like really, really rewarding.

Regie Reyes: That's good to know. And this question might be for margo, as you have been with 33 years experience, this is a good insight for you. “What have been the most significant challenges you've encountered during the implementation of your accessibility project and how did you address them?”

Margo Powell: So I think that it's one of the challenges for sure was overcoming that perception that accessibility is complicated, expensive, only for a small group of people, and I can't say that we've completely overcome that challenge by any stretch, but certainly that's work that continues. And I do think that we're getting there, you know. That conversation is happening. And greater understanding is happening there. And we just the way that we addressed that challenge was to just focus on giving real life practical examples in our video, like a tag that you can't read, a website that you're just clicking endlessly to try to get to where you need and your anger is just rising as you're, you know, that frustration of the inaccessibility. And then another challenge, which really, we've learned a tremendous amount from, of course, we wanted our video to really meet accessibility standards and beyond, right? Like we wanted so we considered that in captioning, in asl interpretation, clarity, inclusive design, and we also, at the same time, were aiming to have this really grass roots feel to the video as well. And so we've just recently learned, just this past fall, that in an effort to keep the video grass roots, that we could that we did not get the highest standard we could have around asl. And so we too are continuously learning and growing, and we're just committed to continue doing that.

Regie Reyes: Thank you. I like the grass root’s part there. And maybe this question is for Jenel, I’m very interested with your project. “Looking back on your project, is there anything that you would change about it?”

Jenel Shaw: No, not at all. Yeah, I just love the way everything went and just how welcoming the community was to take on this project, you know, the wonderful feedback that they gave us. And, you know, kind of like with challenges wise, I mean, we kind of had very similar to what Margo said, a lot of it is just confronting that idea that people have that accessibility is difficult and for a small group, right? And when we work with organizations to increase their accessibility, the first thing I tell them is, like, you don't have to do everything all at once, right? It's about doing the small things well and building on that, right? You know, and a good example of that is, you know, including ASL at events. That's fantastic, but unless you do the outreach to the deaf community, ensure that you're hiring interpreters that they want to see, and those kinds of things, you need to do those background things. So the idea that it's you know, it takes time and care and to do it properly, but you don't have to do everything at once. That, you know, you should take a slow and caring approach to it and, you know, adopt clip time, something we use. The idea that nothing has to get done immediately, that there's no

big deadlines, the idea that you take time and care with what you're doing to ensure that you're doing it appropriately with everyone included. Yeah, I hope that kind of answers the question.

Regie Reyes: Thank you, it does. And maybe for Jennifer, “were there any unexpected obstacles that changed your initial approach?”

Jennifer Rodrigue: Not that I'm aware of. I think that some of the timelines became a bit more challenging. I mean, I think when you're working with lots of people and you want to consult and bring people in in a meaningful way into the project, like I think the timelines, you always have to double what you think it's going to take in order to gather people or have one on one interviews or conversations. That was probably the biggest thing. But yeah, nothing else.

Regie Reyes: Thank you. Yeah, for sure, timeline is always a challenge for everyone. And then the last follow-up question for this, and anyone can jump in, “if you have anything to share, can you share a specific example of a challenge and how it influenced a project's trajectory?”

Jenel Shaw: I find that tough because we didn't really have many challenges. The project went really smoothly. Everyone was really excited and happy to be involved so it's a hard one to answer because we didn't really have any challenges. We were very lucky.

Regie Reyes: That's good to hear. Anyone from Margo or Jennifer?

Margo Powell: I would say we're similar. One of the things that we did right from the start of the project was we had focus groups to understand, from people who have lived experience of disabilities, what those barriers were. And how we wanted to talk about them and how they impacted their life. And we built all of our material off of that and, in fact, a number of people that were in those focus groups ended up in the video itself. So I think that kind of set our tone, and we had a few kinds of very minor workable delays, but it really no, it was a fun project from start to end. And it was yeah; it was just a pleasure to be a part of.

Regie Reyes: That's good to hear. And maybe I’ll go back to Jennifer a bit when you mention about a bit of the timelines challenge there, but in your sector, what barriers could you see the need to be addressed and how do you believe these barriers could be removed?

Jennifer Rodrigue: I love that you asked me that question, Regie, because I talk about it every single day in both the disability side of my work and in the elder care side of my work. The biggest probably two barriers but the biggest one I talk about all the time is just the physical accessibility of our housing. You know, like seniors want to age in place and one of the biggest barriers, why we can't bring supports in, is because we don't have accessible houses and fully accessible apartments and accessible supported housing. And so as much as we want and can bring services to people, the

environments that they're in are not supportive or barrier free. And it's one thing for the older and aging infrastructure but every time I see a new building or a new house being built and I know that it's not fully accessible, it just sort of like frosts me. Because it's a huge limit and a huge barrier to being able to offer innovative services and to give people a lot of choice in where they want to live. And then the second one I think is just sort of like this pervasive ageism and ableism. And it's really like an undercurrent in our work, and it's not always super easy to pinpoint. But I think that often when you're facing barriers or, you know, struggling to get people like on side with a vision, it often can come down to like ageism and ableism and that one I think is harder to point to and harder to address in some ways. But I would say that that like those attitudes and like, you know, just the fact that we've had segregated spaces for so long and people haven't been and spent time and have friends who experience disability just really is I think what contributes to people's sort of like not unwillingness or sort of inability to vision themselves in integrated spaces.

Regie Reyes: Wow, that's an eye-opening answer there. Did you want to add on to that question, Jenel or Margo.

Margo Powell: I'll add on to that. I agree, I definitely agree with everything that Jennifer said. And certainly, you know, that pervasive ableism and stigma, outdated assumptions about people particularly with intellectual or developmental disabilities, that still is pervasive. And so we aim to see this change. Like it's time. It's time for us to step up as a society and figure out ways to include all of our citizens and stop kind of parallel systems that keep people segregated. I think, as well, the barrier around employment, I think that that's one of the outcomes, negative outcomes of that ableism and stigma, is underemployment. Other barriers would be plain language. Plain language is another thing that everybody benefits from. We have a high population of newcomers to Canada in our country and plain language makes an incredible difference. Accessible websites, accessible online processes, every one of us would benefit if we could streamline some of that. And then I just echo the lack of accessible housing. Universal design should be universal. It shouldn't be something we opt into now and then. I think it should just become the standard instead of an exception. And finally, I would say that we still need to really focus on accessible public spaces. It's, you know, accessibility is in outdoor spaces is fantastic if you can get out and get to the door, but we need to get people past doors and into things to be able to connect at that level that we all need to have access to.

Jenel Shaw: Yeah, and I really agree with what both margo and Jennifer have said, that the attitudinal barriers tend to be the ones that are most pervasive, right? And not only in the arts community, you know, sometimes arts centres are hesitant to work with disabled artists because they're unsure of, you know, what they think it's going to be too expensive or it's going to take too long or things like that or they just don't know what the protocols are for working with the deaf community and the disability community. Little things like, you know, someone's with an attendant, you speak to them, you don't

speak to the attendant. Same with an ASL interpreter, you don't speak to the interpreter, you speak to the individual. So some ways we address those are anti-ableism courses with the arts, even those it's geared towards the arts, it can be in any sector. It talks about what are the protocols for working with those communities, what are the access needs, how to create accessible events. Yeah, I find over and over again it's the attitudinal barriers of us not being at the table or people don't know how to work with us or they think it's too expensive or too difficult. Yeah, for me it always comes down to the attitude.

Regie Reyes: Thank you, Jenel. And I know you mention about, you know, your arts population mostly and specifically for your project, but aside from that, was there any specific populations or issues that are being overlooked?

Jenel Shaw: Yeah, I mean, the arts is kind of what we focus on so we're always talking about the arts. I find for us the biggest the people who are hardest to reach are those in the rural communities. It's part of the reason why we are taking that rural outreach in the summer. Because we find that, you know, when you are in a rural area, you know, a lot of times, maybe access isn't as important to those rural communities, they have limited funds that they have to use. They're often isolated. So we try to do a lot of online programming and phone calls to try to connect with the community. Yeah, so I find the rural disabled artists tend to have the most challenges.

Regie Reyes: Thank you. And maybe this follow-up question for Jennifer. I know you've always worked with several communities, but how do you envision collaboration with other organizations to improve accessibility?

Jennifer Rodrigue: I think that, I mean, we're really hoping that the CoHabit build will be sort of like a demonstration project that demonstrates that the fully accessible building with all apartment suites being fully accessible is not a barrier to marketability. And so I think if we can, you know, bring this project to life and sort of demonstrate that it's fully rented and that people who weren't a part of the segment of people that will receive 24/7 wrap around disability support services, that there's lots of people that rent those spaces because of the accessibility as well because it's something that I think is marketable and is a need. And then also, they're renting the spaces regardless of whether it's accessible, maybe they don't even notice that it's accessible. But I think there's this perception in our mind that somebody who doesn't require accessibility wouldn't want to rent or spend money on something that is fully accessible. So I think if we can sort of like crack that nut, I feel like that's then applicable across our community, it doesn't really matter, it's not disability-specific then, it's just like community, it's just people specific, humanity-specific, right?

Regie Reyes: Wow, with 50 minutes of hearing your wonderful advice, I also am curious with the three of you, anyone can jump in right away, “what advice would you give others who are embarking on similar accessibility projects, especially those organizations that may be facing similar barriers?”

Jenel Shaw: Yeah, I think I got to echo what margo said at the beginning. You have to consult with the community. You know, we've been left out of the conversation for so long, which is very confusing because when services are directed towards the disability community, you know, we should be consulted. I was talking about this at another meeting. You wouldn't make a toy without having kids test it or have kids give feedback, right? But in the same way that, you know, we have doctors who are saying this is what the size of the wrap should be, this is what the angle it should be. Well, those who use it every day, they are the ones who know what the angles that actually work for them. So number one, connect with the community. If you're doing a project in the arts, connect with us. We can connect you with the community. If you're doing you know, like these organizations like mine and Margo and Jennifer, we're here to help guide the community. Reach out to us and we have those connections with the community to connect you with. So if you don't know where to start, start with a disability organization and say, hey, we're thinking of this project, who should I talk to?

Margo Powell: I'll add to that, too. I first of all, I we talk about innovation being like offering person-centred service delivery and supports. And it just cracks me up that we think it's innovative to ask the person what might work best for them. Right? How innovative? Like it's not innovative at all. It should be just how it is. But the advice I would give is just keep going. The progress, it's a slow train. And it doesn't happen overnight, but all of the step's matter and they all add up to change and progress. I would also say break barriers wherever you can. Show what's possible, expand understanding, keep learning, as we are. I think, too, ultimately, we all need to remember that we are more alike than different, all of us. And accessibility shouldn't just be an add on or an initiative. It should just be embedded in everything that we do. And when that happens, as I've said throughout, we all benefit when it's just what we do. So keep going.

Jennifer Rodrigue: I really can't say anything more than what Jenel and Margo already said. You know, including people, I think, is absolutely number one, right? It has to be person-led. And a really smart person taught me a number of years ago that a microaggression looks like when someone with lived experience tells you something and you don't believe them 100%. So I think that's also just a really important thing to keep in mind and to remember, is we ask people to tell us and then we must listen to their words and take them as they are. And then the last thing, and it's only because I always have to remind myself, is to be patient. And compassionate. And there's been many, many, many people with a lot more experience, lived experience of disability and people who have worked in disability who have been patient and gentle with me, bringing me along on my journey, and so it's, you know, a reminder to be patient and gentle with others.

Regie Reyes: Wow, that's wonderful to hear. I know the three of you mention about grass roots, you know, you listen, be patient. “Was there any resources or strategies that you found to be most helpful aside from those, do you wish to add?”

Jennifer Rodrigue: I feel like Barrier-Free Manitoba has some resources on consulting and engaging with people, but, again, I would go back to Jenel's advice, and if you want to know the best way to get in touch and consult with people with specific disabilities, find someone within that group who has lived experience and ask them.

Regie Reyes: That's wonderful. And maybe, Margo or Jenel, just on the last follow up question here, and maybe Jennifer you can add, can you share a lesson learned that could benefit others in the space who are listening in?

Jennifer Rodrigue: Yeah, I guess one thing that I've learned is to take your time with things and, you know, we've kind of mentioned this before, but it's about progression and not doing things right. And you will probably make mistakes. And it's important to acknowledge those mistakes, you know. We do. There's a lot of talk lately about safe spaces, for example. Which I find kind of funny because you can't make any space safe for everyone, but you can make accountable spaces. So the ideas that acknowledging we're all human, we're all going to make mistakes, but you got to, it's okay, don't beat yourself up, just okay, that was a misstep, how can I address it, how can I move forward. So, yeah, the idea of slow progression and just be accountable, if you can, to the community.

Jenel Shaw: I think that's certainly what we learned around our accessibility thing with ASL, is that whole being accountable and going back and teaching the people that made that decision, right, so that they know and they're now informed and that, yeah, we are all in this together, and we all can continue to learn and grow. Nobody, anyone has at any particular time, we all continue to learn and grow.

Regie Reyes: Absolutely. Jennifer, did you want to add on anything? If not, we have some Q&A in the chat that I can read. So the first one here, it's for Jenel actually, you mention something about venue audits no longer being free, must pay for them now. Can you say more? It sounds exciting, is venue audit now a service your org provides for sale, if so, who is the customer, is it the venue?

Jenel Shaw: Absolutely. Before, when we had grants, we were able to cover the cost that it takes to hire an individual to go down and to do those audits. The person that we work with is Peter Tonge who has a consulting program. So now that we no longer have funding to provide free audits, the cost for that is $300, and that's the cost that's taken on by the venue itself. So if they want their space audited, they will reach out to us, we will go there, conduct the audit, give them the information about it, included in the database that we have. But, yeah, it's a cost that would go towards the venue. But we might get more funding and we might be able to provide more free ones, like I said in the summer when we're providing those rural outreach audits, we're hoping to have those covered by the grants because we recognized rural arts centres have very low

budgets and often cannot afford these services. So we're trying ways to address that financial barrier that a lot of places are facing, which is why we offer them free in the beginning. But of course this is a program where we do have to hire outside consultants for it so there is a fee that goes towards them, so now we have to unfortunately pass that fee on to the venues.

Regie Reyes: Thank you. I have a follow up question to that. I ask because I wonder if you've thought about starting a business that has a goal of providing employment to your clients, members, users or participants.

Jenel Shaw: Absolutely. I mean, it's something that we do. We do try to provide employment for the disability community, whether that's through arts workshops, talks, that's what right now as I mention, we have a contract with Peter Tonge who is our consultant who's done excellent work with the audits. And any time that we hire anyone for anything, we always pull from the disability community or the Deaf community. We have so many talented and skilled folks there and a lot of times, the reason why they don't get employment is because they can only do limited hours, if they're on disability, and things like that. So for example, when we post jobs for staff internally, we always try to ensure that it's part time to begin with so that those who are on disability do have the opportunity to apply. So we're always constantly trying to find employment for the community but because we focus on the arts, it tends to be artists that we're looking to employ.

Regie Reyes: Thank you for that.

Kenny Huynh: Let me just check if there are more questions here. Feel free if anyone has any questions. We have a little bit of time left with the wonderful panellists so don't be shy. I know there's some comments in the chat here, loving everything you've said. Thank you. Great work says Chris. There's deserved praise for our panellists here today so really appreciate those comments. In the meantime, if anyone has any questions, please put them in the Q&A. I will do a bit of a wrap-up before I let everyone go. So again, I really appreciate the panellists being here. I heard, you know, these messages of community, of attitudinal barriers, of not assuming that accessibility is expensive or too difficult and not achievable, and I think the three of you here, and the many other projects that recipients have taken on, are a testament to that. These projects can be small budget, large budget, creative budgets, which we've seen a lot of, and, yeah, to really reduce barriers for Manitobans and I can't begin to say how appreciative of the fierce advocacy that the three of you also do, right. This is your day-in, day-out , working with people with lived experiences, including them in all the decisions that you make. That certainly fuels the work that we do in this office with AMA standards. Certainly the Accessibility for Manitobans Act is not perfect by any means, and we do continue to update and seek feedback on a scheduled basis so for those out there listening, there's always an opportunity to submit your feedback and be heard and then advocate for the changes that you want to see and advocate for the inclusivity that we need in this province. I'm also happy to announce, and I don't want to bury the lead here, that the

next intake for MAF is opening in January and Regie can confirm this, but it will open on January 12th and run to February 14th, for six weeks. So you've heard it here first. We haven't announced that anywhere else. Those who stayed till the very end of the webinar got that scoop. So on January 5th, regie, again, I'm assigning him a lot of work here, you'll be hosting an informational webinar that will go through the application process for the Manitoba Accessibility Fund. On January 6th, we're potentially scheduled for a French language presentation as well, so if you have French-speaking individuals, register for that one. We'll get the information up on the website as soon as possible. Like I said, we just got confirmation in the last couple of hours that we can open up that intake. Very excited for that. Like I said, we've had the wonderful opportunity to engage with many projects, you know, many recipients and really see the work that's being done at the grass roots level. I know you all mention grass roots, you all mention sort of like, you know, nothing the phrase we use, you know, nothing about us without us, that sort of motto. So I see it, you know. I'm in a very privileged position to see that work is being done in the community through all these projects and, yeah, so again, my sincere gratitude to you all. We also have our wonderful Compliance Secretariat who will be doing a presentation later in January so check out our website for that, sign up for our newsletter Accessibility News. I've shared some of the links to CoHabit, to Arts AccessAbility network and their database, and Abilities Manitoba and their chat so scroll through there and check out their wonderful work. I'm sure I speak for the panellists when you have questions, feel free to reach out, reach out to our office, reach out to them, auditing, insights, cheat codes for the grant application process by all means. Come contact us, contact myself, Regie or anyone on this call today, I'm sure we'll be glad to help in any way we can. So I feel like I've talked enough. If there's any last-minute questions or comments by any of the panellists, feel free to hop in at any point. I'll give it a couple of minutes just to see if anybody has any comments, yourselves or Regie. Oh, I see one hand up. Let me see if I can, Dana, I see your hand up. I'm going to allow you to talk, and we'll see if this works. Let's see. Dana, you're on mute right now. I'm not sure if that was intentional. There you go.

I see it's on mute already. So I can't hear you, Dana, so if you do have a question, feel free to use the chat or the Q&A function. Sorry about that.

But yeah, so with that, I think I will let everyone go. Again, January 5th is the next MAF webinar. January 12th, applications open. Thank you again for coming to celebrate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Thank you to Frances for delivering wonderful remarks. Thank you to our ASL interpreters and our captioners, you know, it goes without saying, you might be vendors on this call, but you are also the folks that are on the ground, doing the work, reducing barriers for everyone as well, and we're very happy to be able to work with all of you today. So with that, I hope everyone has a wonderful, warm and safe holiday season. Enjoy some time with hopefully your families and friends. And thank you again for attending. Recording will be up as soon as possible, and I hope everyone has a wonderful day and, of course, thank you to Regie

for doing a wonderful job as well. But yeah, so with that, hope everyone has a wonderful day.

Thank you, everyone. Have a great week.