

Webinar Transcript:

What Does Disability Inclusion Bring to the Workplace?

Casey:

Hello everyone. Welcome and thank you for joining us today for this special presentation on the topic of disability inclusion in the workplace, which we are hosting in celebration of National AccessAbility Week as well as Red Shirt Day, which is taking place today: Wednesday, June 2nd. For more information about Easter Seals Canada and Red Shirt Day, we invite you to visit our website at www.easterseals.ca or www.redshirtday.ca.

We sincerely regret and apologize that we are unable to offer live ASL interpretation services for today's webinar. However, the webinar is being recorded and will be made available on the Easter Seals Canada website with closed captioning in the next week or two.

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My name is Casey Sabawi and I am the Senior Manager for National Corporate Partnerships at Easter Seals Canada.

Before we proceed further, I would like to say on behalf of myself and my fellow presenters and colleagues at Easter Seals Canada and our provincial member organizations that we are grateful to meet and work on many indigenous homelands across this land that we now know and share as Canada. As settlers on these lands we further acknowledge that our national office in Toronto is located on the traditional territory of many nations such as the Wendat peoples, the Anishinaabeg, the Haudenosaunee and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and is covered by the Williams Treaties and Treaty 13.

We are committed to being active participants and partners in reconciliation and to respect and honor the diversity and contributions of the indigenous peoples who have lived and stewarded these lands, both past and present. I think this is especially important given the sad news that broke this past week of the discovery of the mass grave of the 215 children at the Kamloops Indian Residential School in BC and the month of June also being national indigenous history month.

For those who are unaware of Easter Seals, we are a federation of registered charities across Canada that is dedicated to offering a variety of support programs and services that contribute to enhancing the quality of life and well-being and self-determination of persons living with disabilities. Easter Seals will be celebrating the 100 year anniversary of our founding and service to community next year in 2022.

Next slide, please. **[Slide 3]**

It gives me great pleasure to introduce you to our special guest presenters for today's presentation: Dr. Chloë Atkins and Dr. Andrea Whiteley, as well as Brenna Leslie of the PROUD Project research team at the University of Toronto at Scarborough. Please note that there will be time dedicated at

the end of the presentation for Q & A, or question and answer, so if you have any questions for the presenters you're welcome to enter them into the chat box on your screen.

I will now pass you over to our presenters Chloë and Andrea.

Chloë:

Thanks so much, Casey. Thank you for your kind introduction and thank you Easter Seals for kindly hosting this webinar.

I'm Chloë Atkins. I'm a member of the Political Science Department at Scarborough College at the University of Toronto and I'm heading up the PROUD Project which is a research team at U of T and we study a number of issues surrounding disability, but our primary focus is on disability and employment.

[Slide 4]

Today we're going to be presenting what are the preliminary results from our study, from one of our studies and we've entitled it, "What Works: What does disability inclusion bring to the workplace?" You'll discover, as with all research, we went in with one question and we got some of those answers but we got some others as well and this is about some of those answers.

I'm now going to pass you on to Andrea Whiteley who's the PROUD Project Postdoctoral Fellow who's going to describe our activities in a bit more detail.

Andrea:

Thanks Chloë and thank you Casey and Easter Seals for inviting us to present today. **[Slide 5]**

So you've already met Chloë, our primary investigator. Chloë's also a political and legal theorist and has extensive research and publishing experience in the area of disability studies, bioethics and human rights.

My background is in communications and my passion is around the sharing of knowledge for the public good. I have experience working in the disability studies area having taken graduate level courses and as Chloë hired me previously as a research assistant for another large project. I also have lived experience as a caregiver of a person with chronic and disabling illness.

And Brenna is here today. She is our research assistant who we originally hired to help with a literature review project. She has been invaluable to us in all phases of the project and her French language skills, understanding of technology and amazing work ethic have been a huge asset to our team.

Brenna:

Hi everyone. I'm excited to be here this afternoon.

Andrea:

[Slide 5] So the PROUD acronym stands for phenomenological research of underrepresented disabled adults in the workforce. Phenomenological research – like that is a mouthful [laughs] saying that word – put simply refers to research that studies stakeholders' lived experiences to understand an issue a phenomenon or a problem. And we use the word underrepresented because despite legislation to encourage the hiring of people with disabilities, they consistently have much lower rates of employment than people without disabilities.

So, the focus of our research, then, was to speak to people with physical or sensorial disabilities that have successfully found and maintained employment and to speak to them about their experience in the workplace. What allowed them to be successful? What's their, sort of, secret sauce? As well as, is there best practices for employers to implement or government to legislate, or people with disabilities to be aware of?

At the same time, we are talking to employers who hire people with disabilities to listen to their experiences, and to their lessons learned, and their stories, and their ideas.

What sets our project apart from other studies is that we are also comparing experiences between countries and cultures to understand more deeply how disability and employment is addressed across many different jurisdictions. Allow me to unpack this slide a little bit.

We are interested in what types of environments encourage or allow visibly, physically and sensorily disabled people to enter and remain in the workforce. And so, the word environment includes not only the physical work environment, but also other structures and supports such as transportation, the work culture, the home environment and the economic environment. So, for example, how does a person get to work, the cultural environment addresses whether the employee is accepted and included, and the financial context of the individual is also a factor because compensation of the employee needs to be sufficient to allow them the freedom and security to continue working.

Our research is also informed by the social model of disability which is a 40-year-old theory in the area of disability studies and the focus of inquiry is on the things around the individual that impair them, like the institutions, the structures, the built environment, rather than focusing on the individual that needs to somehow overcome their disability. Our approach starts with this lens, but also takes into account the many different ways to look at disability unemployment.

[Slide 8] This chart shows the various research activities that the team is pursuing and our main research task is to conduct qualitative interviews with employees and employers in five countries.

We've mostly completed the employee interviews in Canada and we're starting our employer interviews now.

During the pandemic, we had a time where we had to restructure because we could no longer conduct face-to-face interviews, so we started this bibliometric analysis the second point here and as a communications researcher, I was interested in doing a literature review to understand the kinds of research taking place in the area of disability and employment and to find out who are the leading researchers or scholars working in the area

So we looked at publication, so that's why it's called the bibliometric analysis, and we're writing two articles from our findings and they're actually kind of surprising to us, because we ended up doing not just sort of a run-of-the-mill literature review, but we actually started to interrogate the research technologies that we used for the analysis, so that was quite interesting for us.

And then the third project on the list here, BroadcastAbility, is a project we're partnering with Easter Seals on and that's how we met Casey. This will be a podcast series where people with disabilities will be invited to speak candidly about their employment experiences.

We're quite excited about this project as we feel that sharing some of the things we've heard in our research will allow some of the people we've talked to to have a direct connection to the community and to Canadians. And from a communications perspective, this is a very innovative way to share research knowledge with the broader public.

So knowledge mobilization of research – the communication of research – is one thing that kind of gets left to the last in scholarly research projects. Typically, funding is running out and energy is dwindling, so we wanted to do it in the middle.

We're also writing in the area of disability ethics and we've been writing about COVID-19 a bit, we have one article published and Chloë's working on another one with a different team, and then finally we're going to be teaching a course on research ethics and methodology about some of the things we've learned.

[Slide 9] So we wanted to just briefly go over some of the demographics of our participants. Right now we have a 50/50 split between male and female which is how it worked out and in terms of age it's quite evenly distributed as well.

Just one thing to note if you can't see the small print, this is kind of small print, we were having issues with making the font larger. The blue section starts at age 25, so the youngest person we interviewed was 25 and that's partly a result of the fact that we're asking people who are successfully employed. So up to that age, people are still working on their careers they might have part-time jobs, so they might not have signed up – those people in the younger age category. Anyways, we have quite a nice equal age distribution between our participants.

[Slide 10] And then some other questions we asked in terms of demographics were where people lived, which province. So again, we've got a third from Ontario, that's the green bar, twenty-ish percent from Quebec, 17 from BC, 17 from Alberta and then 6 percent from Atlantic and we're trying to get coverage across Canada just sort of geographically doing our best and then the level of education was another question we asked our participants and interestingly everybody had post-secondary, some sort of post-secondary education and over 50 of the people we've talked to have had advanced university degrees so that might be something that's potentially significant, we'll keep an eye on.

I will now turn the presentation over to Chloë to discuss our data and our preliminary findings of our Canadian interviews so far.

[Chloë:] Thank you Andrea. Thanks for covering all that.

I just want to say before I begin that I've been really, really fortunate. Once I got on the ground in assembling a team, a research team, I've been really fortunate that the members that I've gathered have been really wonderful to work with and they're bright and capable and energetic and have brought a lot to the process so I'm really grateful for that. Anyway, this is, quickly, on this slide. **[Slide 11]**

What I wanted to talk to you about was that, originally, we were looking at supports around individuals. We were speaking to individuals, but I really was interested, because I want to know what facilitated their success. But in speaking to them, we couldn't ignore some of those themes that emerged about these individuals as well as we spoke to them. Some of these [themes] are on the slide and I'm going to talk to you about them.

One is education, the other is they all have a level of self-awareness and resourcefulness, and they seem to be experienced problem solvers. They demonstrated a lot of flexibility and adaptability, as well as persistence and resilience, and they also required and seem to all have navigated so that they had strong networks, reliable and accessible transportation and housing.

Next slide please. **[Slide 12]**

Now on this slide, what I'm going to do is, just before we move on, so on each slide – I find slides are a little awkward in the new zoom era because I usually have very empty slides, but then I found them to be too empty and zoomed so maybe they're too busy this time. I'm leaving just some quotes up from our study. So, I'm just going to read the one at the bottom there. These are people we spoke to.

"I'm of the opinion if you're disabled, you have to be better than average or you don't stick. I've always really worked hard to make sure that I'm at the top of the game. I've always made sure to learn extra, I've learned extra things."

Now with regard to this, we found that 100 percent of participants had upgraded their educational qualifications and 75 percent of employees had undergraduate degrees and 50 of employees had graduate level training. You've already seen that in the previous slide. Almost all expressed an interest in furthering their qualifications if it would improve their productivity or their employability.

They were on it all the time. As part of this, they all had a level of self-awareness. All participants exhibited a high degree of self-awareness and understanding of their own strength what their weaknesses were.

Several spoke of declining lateral transfers or promotions to jobs which they felt were not a good match with their abilities. They didn't want to take a promotional raise unless they felt they were a good fit for the position. Interviewees seemed to have a good understanding of their impairments and how they would function with different demands in varying environments. As well, they seem to also have a very clear grasp of their own intellectual and professional skills that they brought to the table.

I'll just give you an example: one participant who'd been a successful café owner prior to becoming disabled – I understood that that was just something she couldn't do anymore – she re-qualified and changed her career trajectory utterly and became very successful in that new career path.

Another interviewee, who was a physician, understood very clearly how she needs to modify her role within her group practice. She continued in her specialty, but modified the types of procedures she conducted in her schedule. She also figured out how she could be best used to her professional partners because she remained within her group and she's now been practicing for almost a decade in this manner.

Next slide please. **[Slide 13]**

We also discovered a high degree of resourcefulness in the people we interviewed.

They excelled at problem solving. One hundred percent of our interviewees had already conceived of innovative ways in which to facilitate their own work: they accommodated themselves. I'm going to age myself here by saying that they MacGyvered their way out of situations. Here I'm referring to an ancient television series whose lead character could use arbitrary and ordinary materials to fabricate all sorts of helpful substances and devices.

And so, they were really self-reliant. They demonstrated an ability to think laterally when confronting obstacles. They weren't phased by an obstacle or difficulty. They used the skill not only to facilitate themselves but to address problems and project planning that their organizations confronted as well.

After some reflection, I concluded that that as these disabled individuals constantly need to assess situations and problematize things in order just to navigate the inaccessible world around them or even to address how their impairments interact with the world. As a result, their resourcefulness muscle, if I'm going to call it that, is highly developed.

And here it says: "With disability, there's an underlying innovation and creativity and a sort of can-do problem solving." This is an individual reflecting on what she thought disability sort of brought to her.

Next slide please. **[Slide 14]**

As I said, most of these individuals had already thought of workarounds for their various differences in terms of in the workplace and elsewhere. For example, a number of people we spoke to worked in IT. They spoke of having written code to link their own software, their adaptive software, to company systems so they could be more efficient and they also told us of how they'd use this skill to further their employer's overall productivity and innovation.

I'm going to read a quote from one of our French interviews. I've not used many of our French interviewees in this presentation because when French is translated into English it becomes too wordy to fit on a slide, but I really wanted to use this quote in example.

"I'm seated 90% of the time because I have trouble standing, walking and moving around. Luckily my core strength is rather good so I'm not too hampered when I'm seated. Because of this I've had to tailor all the techniques I learned at university. We were taught at university primarily how to use movements while in a standing position. Given my disability, I needed to change those techniques to be able to use them effectively. The patients who know me realize that I carry out my work while seated. That's not a problem."

This individual had a lower limb impairment, which meant he had difficulty walking or standing for any length of time and he worked in both a mentally and physically demanding career in healthcare. And further, he immigrated from another country, established his own business with multiple sites, and also then became a leading mentor and instructor in his field. He did this by constantly assessing his situation and flexing and adapting, whether it was about his education, his technique, his transportation issues, he was always looking to see how he could do things.

He ended our interview with a beautiful metaphor of the need to dance. And what he talked about was that you needed to have intention and purpose that was paired with flexibility in life and at the end of the interview, he hoped, as a kind wish, that all of us could become dancers in our lives. And I thought that was a really powerful image of an employee with a disability, but also of a quite an evolved and capable human being. Next slide please. **[Slide 15]**

I was motivated to this study by my own experience. I have a disability that waxes and wanes but I discovered that when I was visibly disabled, I could not get a job and that as soon as my function improved and I could pass as normal, I found employment. It should be noted that my CV had not changed between two those two conditions.

This made me very aware of prejudice. It also made me really aware that those who are visibly disabled encounter a significant attitude in a wall, when they seek employment and that those who are employed that have made it into the employment world, they've done so as a result of enormous personal persistence and resilience.

If you've noticed, I've bolded a couple of sentences and one is at the bottom: "I just ended up being persistent" and the other is "You gotta be resilient."

I'm just going to read the bottom one here:

"I remember learning to solder in Grade 6 because I got so miffed of having to ask others [...] and when you're holding your handskit iron, it's like 600 degrees Fahrenheit. And when you have to know how to do it without getting burned and as a blind person I vowed that I could learn to solder and I did get hurt a few times. But I learned how to solder pretty well, but it was quite an effort to learn how."

This image of a blind person repetitively, obviously wounding themselves, but repetitively and teaching themselves and then mastering soldering, I think is a really powerful one.

Next slide. **[Slide 16]**

Now in this slide, I don't want to talk about what these remarkable individuals bring to the workplaces. Here I want to focus on what my original research question was, which is what the context which supports disabled persons to integrate into the workforce. In interviewing these individuals, we discovered that all of our participants had certain elements which seemed to enable them.

In order to launch into and maintain their employment, they all seem to have managed to secure accessible transportation and housing and good, strong social supports and networks at home and at work. With regard to transportation, every participant had resolved their transportation issues. This was key to their employment. They couldn't have done it otherwise.

Some had personal vehicles with disabled parking at work and at home and with proper snow clearing at both sites. That's absolutely critical. Some used globally accessible public transit, which meant that all of the city and county transit buses or trains were accessible. Almost all said that para transit was the least useful form of transit, because it was highly inflexible and unreliable and so it couldn't contribute to them working on a regular basis. They all also had backup systems, and relied on impromptu transportation such as taxis, friends and family from time to time to use as backup.

With regard to housing, every participant had stable, accessible housing. They all had stable residences from which they could launch each morning and also from which they could work. Some lived with family members and multi-generational arrangements or other may have had family living close by. Some lived with friends and shared expenses and personal support workers. Some lived in assisted living accommodations with PSWs, personal support workers, who are part of that building infrastructure. Some live in their own personal homes with personal support workers coming in. They live with and without spouses and with and without children.

With regard to government health and social supports, we found that many were aware of and access government and community programs, though I think we need a more centralized system where people can find that information because the awareness was somewhat uneven. But all of them seem to have strong social networks in the community at work.

And the bottom quote here is one individual who is blind at work and he says, "I usually bug co-workers to show me the area and there's a couple --" (He was talking about a move where the company had moved from one location to another.) "I usually bug workers to show me the area and there's a couple that are really good and I memorize the building, which I can fortunately do really quickly. I have a really good geographical map memory, so when I'm shown I remember, it sticks. Which is handy. And then so I come into work, go to my office, fire up my machine, or log into whatever, and just do my work. And if I have to go find someone, I know where people live in the building, I know where their workers are."

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Here I'm returning now to what we thought we were going to be only doing which is you know what, I talked a little bit about as an introduction, is what in fact do employers need to do, what needs to be in place for people to be in the workplace?

First of all, we discovered that robust IT resources were just ubiquitous everywhere. We need them if we're going to have people in the workplace with disabilities. Much the same way people who, years ago before glasses were invented, there was no way that anybody who needs glasses now could be in the workplace without them. That's a technology: it needs to be ubiquitous and I think we've discovered that IT resources need to be ubiquitous as well.

We also discovered that the relatively low cost of any physical accommodations that were made – and there were very few. There were less than 25% of the individuals we talked to. Absolutely, there needs to be good transportation access to and from work and there needs to be an awareness of the availability of government and community programs and finally, which I'll talk about later, there needs to be leadership from the top.

Next slide please. **[Slide 18]**

Despite the fact that almost 100% of interviewees stressed what an important role that computing and technology played in their success, they also complained that employers often failed to understand this.

Employers often didn't upgrade hardware and software because they saw it as expensive. In an effort to save money, managers often would initially decline requests for upgrades.

The people we spoke to didn't feel this reduced costs, it just drastically reduced their productivity. Numbers said that once they did get their upgrade, their productivity soared.

Others spoke of organizations not ensuring that all documents and email attachments were OCR readable. This requires very little effort. It's built into most of our word processing software and a whole bunch of other software. You just simply have to click "check for accessibility."

But this wasn't done and it slowed things down. So, it wasn't mandated from above. Another issue is that firms sometimes invested in new technology or hardware without considering how to integrate it with existing systems.

Firms do this all the time and then they discover too late that they've got problems, but this has a much deeper impact on employees with disabilities, because they rely on technology. These types of lack of oversight and corporate mindfulness, cost these employees and their companies a lot in terms of productivity.

Next slide, please. **[Slide 19]**

Here I'm talking about accommodation, transportation and physical environment. With regard to transportation, one of our interviewees lucked out in that a donor gave her a van.

Another man spoke about how important it was when all of his city buses became accessible – all of them, not just a few – because prior to that there've been a few, but often they when one came it would be every fourth bus and then maybe the mechanism was broken, and he couldn't get on and

so he would be hours late for work. But when everything became universally designed, then he could just move through the world like everybody else and be at work on time.

As I said before, many spoke of the really limited use of the paratransit system. It was very impoverished.

They also emphasized, those who did use vehicles – many of them did – that employers have to understand that it's not simply an accessible parking space that needs to be there. If they can't do that then they need to, for instance, clear ice and snow not just from their clients' entrance but from their employees' entrance. It just needs to, again, be part of policy in what they do.

Another individual spoke about when she had to go to itinerant transportation, resources such as taxis or uber, that using them, then just canceled out the income she earned for the day which was problematic. So, really universal transport really needed to be a priority.

Here one of the individuals is talking about a physical accommodation that was made.

"So the accommodation was a physical reorientation of my desk. So it was a wall mounted desk, so we had to kind of disengage it from the wall and reposition it with another set of walls. It took about half a day to do but my employer was pretty gracious about it and the byproduct is that it actually created a more warm and open setup."

With regard to making physical environmental accommodations in workplaces, as I said, less than 25% of our interviewees needed anything done.

Further, if I reflect on the research done after the environmental titles of the ADA were adopted in the U.S., research showed that about the average cost for a physical renovation was \$800 U.S. at the time, so it's not very expensive.

So the four things that we saw was, one, moving this desk, one was buying a lower printer stand, the other was having a little wood stool built, and the fourth was making an inaccessible bathroom in a healthcare setting accessible, which, frankly, is the law anyway, so it was a net gain for the employer.

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With regard to government and community programs, I think it's really important that employers are aware of, and also encourage, these types of resources.

In talking with our participants, we became aware that employers need to encourage and be aware of community resources. For example, there are government programs in many provinces which will pay a portion of the salary of someone who leaves a provincial disability pension program in order to work, and one of our participant's salary was actually being paid in this manner. So, the government paid a portion of it for several years.

Also, any programs that facilitate the lives of individuals with disabilities that make them more able to be in the world, like robust home care and funded programs for self-managed care or personal support workers at home, accessible housing and transportation, all contribute to the employment of individuals not just in your specific location.

It seems that universally designed communities beyond the workplace are really in the interest of all employers.

Here, one individual was speaking about some of the problems they have even with the programs that are in place and why we need to encourage better ones. "For me, there's this, in Canada [...] wheelchairs, yeah, there are programs but it's only partially funded. Oxygen, yeah programs, partially funded a lot of, so that disability is seen as a separate entity and it doesn't get as much government support. And those individuals, if they have more access like guaranteed access to care, they might in fact be able, if they're not worrying about that, be able to venture further into the world."

Next slide please. **[Slide 21]**

Our interviews with employees revealed that truly inclusive and well-functioning workplaces have strong leadership and an inclusive culture comes from above and is disseminated throughout the organization. It seems at this point in our research that there needs to be a culture of corporate mindfulness about disability inclusion, but we've only just started to speak to employers and we'd really love to hear more from them.

So, if you want, if you or you know someone who has employed visibly disabled individuals in the workplace, we'd love to learn from their knowledge and what they know from their experience. I'm almost finished here, but I have two illustrative anecdotes about how leadership might work.

We spoke to someone who'd been employed at a national media firm for many years. He had worked at reception for almost a decade and he figured he was a disability, you know he was a minority hire. He was never promoted or integrated into the office and he developed very few office friendships and he was let go when the recession hit back in 2008. His next job was at a national outdoor outfitting company and the experience was completely different. The company fostered him, they moved him into IT, a field he had never worked in, but they trained him and encouraged his professional development and he did very well.

Further, when they had team-building exercises, they ensured that they were universally designed. They consulted with experts to do this. The company had a retreat hike and they hired off-road rickshaws and had an expert in disabled rock climbing accompanying them on these meetings.

And we spoke to another disabled entrepreneur who had opted out, who was highly qualified and done very well in one working environment, but really had opted out of staying in it because it was a highly inaccessible workplace that really didn't fit well for her. And so he started his own company and he advised "don't tip-toe around us, you know just ask us what we need and we'll tell you what we need and then we'll just get on with the work," which I thought was a very nice straightforward way of saying it.

On the left here, this quote is really just about, we wanted to include it because it is about systems as well and I think maybe we're learning that, but it's about everything. This quote on the right is one of the employers we spoke to.

"I would say that one of the big things we do is we make people aware of disability awareness. You know, some of the barriers, and that's in the onboarding process. Accessibility is really something that we take from the ground up. So, with the design of our offices, they are fully accessible. We have a contrast in our walls in terms of color, we've got a different texture pattern on corners, so that somebody who is blind or vision impaired would know, 'Oh, a corner is coming up.' Yeah, we have a QR code for in front of everyone's workstation. And so, for persons who are blind, who need an app, the app will read out whose office they're at or who's worked at the desk you're at."

Next slide please. **[Slide 22]**

I just wanted to address COVID very briefly. Here's a quote. It says, "I think it has helped employers to see what's possible. Up until last March, nobody was allowed to work remotely. It will never work. There's no way. Now everybody is working remotely, but I think it's really allowed all of us to re-examine the way we employ people for better and for worse I would say."

It would seem that the lessons from COVID for disability employment are that, one, we all need to have robust IT capacities and organizations and, two, remote virtual working, while not perfect – we had issues with putting this together virtually as a team – that remote virtual working has actually proved to be highly productive and doable.

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As I've said, I think we need to have mindfulness about disability inclusion which comes from the top and that goes well beyond ramps and wider doors. It's much like being mindful of anything else, such as climate change. One now has to consider any decision through a lens of how it might affect the climate or environment. I realize that it may be unfamiliar to do this at first, looking at all organizational decisions from websites and emails to office parties to physical spaces in terms of disability inclusion, but we've done this type of transformation before.

When women entered the workforce in large numbers in the 1970s and 80s there was a lot of resistance and I remember, unfortunately I remember as a child listening to my father say he was very opposed to the notion that there would be maternity leave and I remember him saying that if it was passed into law, which now is, that he would no longer hire a woman of childbearing age. And I remember being a little stunned. We've come a long way from there, and women have entered the workforce and brought a lot with them. There are still problems, but really workforces have thrived for having women in it.

I think the same will be true if we develop a mindful inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workplace. They're real assets to their employers. Moreover, I think given these statistics on this slide an astute organization or company who actively seeks out disabled individuals is likely – can you bring back that slide? Okay, sorry – is likely going to get the cream of the crop. There is an eager and very capable population wanting to contribute to the workforce and it's waiting to contribute.

At this point, I just want to thank everybody for listening letting me gab on and we want to open it up. I haven't looked at the time ... we're good we're early, so that's good. We're four minutes early. I want to open up to questions, but while people get organized or think about them, Casey very kindly had sent us some questions that people had asked beforehand and I'm just going to answer some of those questions.

The first of those was "How do we create a support network with an organization and consistent inclusive language?" From our research, it would seem that disability inclusion in the workplace needs to undertake, as I said, a mindful approach to disability inclusion and that will include setting up support networks and creating inclusive language, but also goes beyond this. As I said in the presentation, disability inclusion needs to be a lens through which one views everything in the workplace: language to IT software and hardware purchases, to rethinking how teams interact, what tools are used, whether they use electronic whiteboards that can be translated into readable text on someone's laptop – apparently drawings and diagrams still don't translate well – to using more accessible fonts. Actually, Andrea was very proactive and revised the fonts on this presentation so that they were more readable. Also, obviously making physical spaces accessible as well. That's where you're going to need supportive networks, because looking at things in this manner and instituting policies and adopting new software and technology will mean that people will be

unfamiliar and will be learning on the ground, and there is likely going to need to be a way of resourcing everyone and problem solving around all of this and getting things right. And it's going to take time and that's where you're going to need supports. I think we tend to think of supports just for the individual, just isolated and I'm just saying it just needs to be broad-based just like we're now thinking about the environment and climate change.

There was another question here about how to create an inclusive registration form when inviting folks or groups for diverse living experiences. I'm presuming here that this registration is going to use websites, web forms and web portals. Andrea and I could tell you lots about this. We've been trying to really discover the world of accessible internet. If this is the case, you're going to have to build an accessible website with accessible interactive forms. We've found some difficulty finding IT professionals who can do this, but they are out there and they're increasingly out there and they're more of them getting informed because it's now law at least in Ontario. The AODA now requires accessibility in terms of websites. There's a very good international resource it's literally w3.org. You can go there and it has international standards that people are meant to follow when they're building anything on the web.

And finally, the third question we have is how to bring disabled individuals into the beverage and hospitality industry. My answer to this would be to reiterate that we need to have a mindfulness about disability inclusion in just the same way a business, such as one in beverage in hospitality, might not have seen any reason to think about the environment a decade ago, now they are. Because they are looking at things and their decisions through available climate change and plastic pollution, they have a mindfulness about their impact on the planet. In the same way, they could likely host a lot of different types of disabled people who could who could work in their industry and so when organizations start to make hiring retention decisions using a lens of inclusion, a mindfulness about disability inclusion, increasing numbers of employees with disabilities will appear in the workplace. So, don't presume someone can't do a job. I think what you do is you just need to, instead of presuming that someone who's blind can't do the job or someone who doesn't have an arm isn't going to be able to wash dishes – they've probably lost a lot of dishes at home they've probably figured it out– and I think you have to sort of begin to have the lens that you'll just be open to the fact that that you can include them.

Casey:

Right. Thank you so much Andrea and Chloë for that excellent presentation. I certainly am taking away a lot of it, myself, and learning a lot of things, so thank you very much for that. We do have a couple of questions that have come through the chat box, so maybe I will go through those first. A very quick question is, could you state again how many people were interviewed for your research project so far?

Chloë:

So I'm going to take this, because it's going to seem a little odd. We've interviewed 20 people at this point which seems tiny when we're living in an age of, you know, covid, of research where you're doing 40,000 or 100 thousand people in studies, but it's a very different type of work that we do. And I didn't understand it when I first went into it. So, we're not doing data, we're not counting things, although I gave you some data. Our interest is – one of the most powerful things in we know from philosophy, and actually from psychology, is stories. The stories that we're told have lessons in them.

So what we try and do, we're doing qualitative research and what we do is we gather individuals who have similar experiences and we listen to their stories and then we keep listening and we begin to hear veins and themes that run through them and we identify them. And then we stop when we reach what's called saturation, when, after we've done more, we're basically hearing the same things. We're not hearing any more themes come up and then we stop and then we move on.

My last study, actually, was a multi-site study and we actually only had done 15 each site on each category. This time, we've gone a bit more and we may do a bit more as well, but I think we're basically at saturation.

Andrea:

And just one thing to keep in mind, Chloë, if I can just add a little bit to that really great explanation was because we're doing this in five countries, we're going to end up with a huge amount of interviews and data to compare. So it's also about the amount of time and energy we have to actually do such a large comparative study. It's what's doable in the time we've got and the finances the resources we have.

Casey:

Thank you Chloë and Andrea. Another question came in from Jennifer: Many employers including governments are rethinking work structures post pandemic. Lots more working from home, more digital documents. What might be a few suggestions of issues to be considered, solutions you already know that are built in.

Chloë:

Well, I'll say this. I didn't say it on the on the slide, and if Andrea has anything to contribute she can, one of the things that I did notice is a lot of people really – not everyone, it wasn't uniform – liked the fact they could work from home and I think, in large part, it's because they weren't having to leave their relatively acceptable world they'd set up and navigate an inaccessible world to get to work again and then do the same coming back. That took a lot of energy and time and they felt they were being more productive.

Now, there are problems to this virtual workplace as well, but I'm hoping that we can start to do a hybrid version. This has allowed us to be more flexible about conceiving of how people can do their jobs Andrea, do you have any suggestions to that question?

Andrea:

Well just to add to that, in terms of new flexible work structures, a couple of people we talked to and just in terms of research that's been done in the past on telework, there's always the disadvantage of the person who's the remote worker and so if you have some sort of ability to sometimes be at the work site and to socialize, so you're not always the minority. So if we do give people the choice and their work culture ends up being more on-site than off-site, then that person working off-site remotely does become –

Chloë:

But then, Andrea, that's in the current model. If the models become hybrid, there'll be more and more people working –

Andrea:

Yeah, yeah. So that's all I'm saying is it's like a hybrid model, I think would be a great fit because then people have the option of being included. So we don't want the groups that choose to be remote to be even less included put it that way.

Chloë:

We'll also develop methods for inclusion, like this. Right? We would never have even conceived of this before, so we're going to develop means for figuring out how to include people. This is putting new lens on the way we think about things.

Andrea:

Yeah, absolutely.

Casey:

Thank you Chloë and Andrea. We have another question, it's from coming in from Rachel. With the interview results, it seems that there's almost a need for people with disabilities to have to put in a lot more work and energy than their non-disabled co-workers. What do you think workplaces and community resources can do to help shift the extra expectations that are put on people with disabilities or employees with disabilities?

Chloë:

That's a [laughs] that's a great question. It's huge. We're trying to address that here. There are huge barriers to people going into the workplace and they are not just because they're not able – as I said these people are really well educated probably better than other cohorts – so you're absolutely right they work harder and I knew they were going to have to work harder because from my own experience, right?

When I was visibly disabled I didn't get a job. I got invited to an interview. Once they realized I was in a wheelchair, the airplane ticket never came. I mean there were very interesting things that happened. I saw it over and over again, so what can we do?

I think we've got to stop thinking that people who are disabled want to ride the system and that any time that we encourage accessibility, payment for their care, payment for housing, that somehow we're catering to these people who are copping out. If we actually do those things, we are going to facilitate them actually leaning in.

At the moment, there are individuals we spoke to who are in the gray market, who live on less than 600 a month, because they are not allowed to earn on the little pensions they have, God forbid they should earn an extra three hundred dollars. So, we spoke to individuals who have been underutilized all of their lives because our systems presume that God forbid they should try to earn a little extra income that they are somehow double dipping and they are being banned. You know, disabled people are the poorest members of our population, or some of the poorest members.

We have got to stop thinking that to facilitate them is somehow, giving in to weakness. We are actually going to build strength, I think, but I'm probably preaching to the choir with that question, but I really do think, I don't know, what do you think Andrea? I don't know if you have anything to add to that.

Andrea:

Yeah, just that we realized after several interviews and we kept on running into these kind of superstar personalities and we just thought, wow, these people are amazing and had great stories to tell us and part of it is an effect of the research itself. So, we realize there might be some bias in the kinds of people that agree to do a study like this and if they want to tell their story, they may be a little bit more outgoing, for example. So, keeping that in mind, never are we saying that whatever sample we have here is completely representative.

The other thing, because it's a small sample, we can't hope to be representative, so we know that it may be skewed towards those people that, they just have that attitude towards work that would not be universal.

Chloë:

I mean, yeah, we're gonna see extroverts a bit, but the point is you're right. Your observation is, you're right they are innocent superstars. What I'm hoping is, there are a whole lot of superstars who didn't manage to get those stable things around them, that housing that transportation that economic base, even, that they could afford to fail. A lot of people can't afford to fail who are disabled because if they fail, then they've made a try, they're in housing that has PSW's attached to it, and they start working and now they have to move, because that's the condition, but they're not allowed to do that.

So, we've got to stop doing those types of things that disincentivize very capable people from taking part in the world around us.

Andrea:

The other thing I meant to mention in my slides was that our study is a little bit different and it just worked out that way. We didn't set out to interview people that had post-secondary education or anything like that, but, interestingly, a lot of studies done previously on what does the disabled person bring to the workplace found that a lot of their research focused on entry level jobs or minimum wage jobs.

We have a bit of a different perspective because we're talking to people who are in their careers, they have a career that they're building. They've advanced in their careers, some of them, quite a few of them, so it's a different perspective than when you're looking at the research from the point of view of whether an employer is employing people at minimum wage and that's the kind of job that they're looking at.

So, that that's also a difference in terms of our research population.

Casey:

Thank you Chloë and Andrea. The next question is, I guess, more of a question for myself. Is there a place where these interviews can be accessed where I can find these quotes included in these slides? I struggled to read some of them, but they were so great. And that came from Ali, or Ali. I apologize if I mispronounced that.

The presentation and the recording of this webinar will be made available on the Easter Seals Canada website in about a week or two. However, Andrea and Chloë have also kindly provided their contact information on the slides, so if you have any other questions, they'll follow up about the presentation or the research, please, I encourage you to reach out to them as well. Okay.

Andrea:

Casey can I just make one point there too? We can't make the full interviews, the data public. We are being very conservative in terms of privacy and security of our participants, so we are masking their identity. Even in our talk today, we masked their identity just to preserve their privacy. It's a requirement of our ethics agreement with our interviewees.

Chloë:

Just on that note, if you're interested in this type of thing, Andrea and I are heading up something with Casey. We're doing the BroadcastAbility, which we will then be interviewing people who consent, in a sense, to talk about their experiences, publicly, in the workplace. And we'll be doing that in French and English and we might even do it in an Indigenous language if we end up having the funding to do that.

But that's another project that's a slightly different endeavor, but then you'll get to hear some more just discourse about it.

Casey:

We have a little bit of a follow-up question from Jennifer. A lot of energy being devoted to creating new ways of sharing documents. In your perspective, how could attention to disability be built in?

Chloë:

I think Apple has done a relatively good job. What I've been fascinated by, years ago I didn't have much use on my hands and so I was using Dragon Dictate and that was very expensive back then. I think it was four thousand dollars and I went in a government program – that was the early 90s – and now we all talk at our phones and what's interesting is that the innovations that come out of disability often make it into the mainstream.

So, I've noticed that there are features with regard for instance making sure OCR – one of the employers we talked to said, you just simply go up, you go check and say 'check for accessibility,' it checks that things are done. I just think you have to make it a policy. You just say you cannot send documents, you cannot make a document that isn't accessible, but with these adaptations.

But you also have to, again, have a strong IT program that is aware of changes in those programs, new developments, so that they can constantly make sure that your systems are upgraded and keeping up to date.

As I said, I think it's a lens, it has to come from the top, they have to believe that this is something that they want to adopt, that they want to get – and think about it – if up to a quarter of our population is disabled, they are missing out, ultimately on a lot of people, right? And we actually have a labor shortage that we're facing.

Andrea:

A couple of our participants, quite a number actually, not just a couple were participating on committees that were looking at improving accessibility for people with disabilities in different provinces. And so, I mean, that's ideal. You have to, have to, have people with lived experience on your committees that are creating these new technologies and so I think finally that's sinking in.

Chloë:

Please pay them! Sorry, there are a lot of people who have not been paid for the sheer amount of public labor they've done on behalf of the public.

Andrea:

Yeah, it's unheard of that they're experts and they're not being paid. I mean they have lived experience, that's their expertise, but they should be paid.

The other thing we're doing, because as Chloë mentioned, it's not quite in its infancy, this kind of awareness and new technologies, that we need to create more innovation to enable people with disabilities and people working remotely, or elderly, or any kind of impairment, to be able to participate in society more fully.

One thing we're doing is we're pioneering this course with someone out of the University of Manchester, Dr. Alys Young and at University of Manchester, they have made every single one of their university courses 100 accessible so they will have closed captioning, they will have live captioning they will have all of their documents –

Chloë:

BSL [British Sign Language]

Andrea:

Yeah, so it's actually a really amazing endeavor that they've done and hopefully we'll be able to – we're just trying to set it up right now – create a course at U of T that's following this model and we're learning from them as how to be more inclusive in the way we teach.

Chloë:

Our research ethics, it's been accepted as a course next January, so we just have to now get it implemented, get it going, and get it done so it'll be taught, we hope, in a highly accessible manner, but again, it's going to depend on the IT resources we can bring in to get it done.

Casey:

That sounds very very exciting, so keep an eye out for that. I'm just cognizant of the time. We have five minutes left to the scheduled end of the presentation.

There have been a couple of comments that came in about people who are interested in participating in the project, and also what is the timeline you have in mind for the publishing of the results and when do you expect the podcast will launch.

Chloë: Okay, well we literally just got ethics approval last week on the podcast, it's called BroadcastAbility, and I've got the Twitter handle PodcastAbility and I think some other social media.

It will launch, should we say tentatively the end of the summer that we will have podcasts up and running? What do you think Casey, maybe even before then. Yep, fingers crossed. And with regard to, we are writing papers now, sorry it's just up to our physical energy.

As I said, I have a wonderful team working for me and they are just generating material and ideas and so that's great. I'm hoping, actually we may even turn this into a small article, we always let people know it will be on our website We always let participants know. I've let all participants who took part in our study know that this was going on and please if you want to take part our email addresses are here, you can look us up in the internet.

We are at theproudproject.ca there is also a French website that is part of it as well. So, yes please contact us.

Casey:

We probably have a time for maybe one more question, if there's any.

Chloë:

And one of the things I'll just say on that last question is that Andrea is a communications specialist. One of the reasons I brought her, I'd worked with her before, but one of the reasons I brought her aboard was just around this, because she had such interest in sharing research with the public – that was her dissertation.

But the public's access to what we do in the academy, that I was hoping she'd be useful to act as a bridge between what we're doing in research and getting it properly disseminated, because, actually, medical research it takes seven years between when a paper is published and it's actually a practice of uptake. into the medical realm so we'd like to be a bit faster if we could.

Casey:

We have a comment from Alexis. This is important. Please know that language is powerful. Person-first language, person with a disability rather than disabled persons. So, thank you for that. And a question from Catherine: I was just wondering about if you know about companies that are doing this disability inclusion well in the workplace.

Chloë:

In part, I can't start naming people unless I've gotten consent to name them and I can't, but we are looking for them as well. Now, there are some large firms that have inclusion offices, there's no doubt, and we'd like to speak to them. But there are other organizations that truly have already adopted this kind of lens of 'we want to hire people with disabilities,' where they've built it from the ground up.

I think there's some media ones, they tend to be non-profits at this stage. I'd love to see some profitable companies do it because they certainly, they could do it very easily.

Casey:

Right, okay. Just one more final comment from Rachel. There's a debate among the disability community around person-first or identity-first, so it's very much up to each person, and I couldn't agree more.

I guess that with that comment, that takes us up to the top of the hour, so Andrea and Chloë, if you have any final remarks that you'd like to make you're welcome to do so.

Chloë:

Go ahead Andrea, do you have anything to say?

Andrea:

Oh, other than to thank everyone for coming and thank Casey for enabling us to share our preliminary research results with everybody today. It's been really helpful for us to start our data analysis and. and also it just feels really nice to be able to start talking about this and sharing our discoveries and our ideas.

Chloë:

I just want to thank Easter Seals and Casey for putting this on and I really hope anybody who's here who's interested in this will get in touch with us and I really appreciate that you took your hour and spent it with us. It's very helpful. It helps us to have contact with you, but also to sort of think through things. And we appreciate your time, we really do.

Casey:

Indeed. Thank you so much, Andrea, Chloë and Brenna for sharing your knowledge with us today and your research. We really look forward to seeing where it goes and, of course, through the BroadcastAbility podcast, so that would be really interesting. And thank you so much everybody for making time out of your busy schedules to join us for today's presentation. We really appreciate your support and, again, just a reminder that this recording of this webinar will be made available on Easter Seals Canada website in a week or two.

Thank you again for joining us. Have a happy and safe National AccessAbility Week.

Chloë: Take care.

Casey: Goodbye.