



September 17, 2015

Board Chair Report **2015 Annual General Meeting**

Welcome members, friends and supporters to the 2015 Annual General Meeting of the NWT Disabilities Council. I appreciate you taking the time to be here with us tonight. For those of you who don't know me, I am Cornelius Van Dyke, the current chair of the Board of Directors of the NWT Disabilities Council. I would like to give a brief outline of the Council's activities over the past year. You will hear more details throughout the evening from board or staff members.

Last year, in my report, I mentioned that we were waiting to move into our new office space in the Scotia Centre. Our move was successful and we are now serving our clients from this wonderful downtown location. It is good to not have to worry about thermostats that don't work and dripping ceilings that keep us on the move! Our downtown location is more visible to the public, more accessible to our clients and more convenient for networking and services.

After a difficult and sometimes rocky start, our partnership with the City of Yellowknife and Yellowknife Health & Social Services in the Safe Harbour Day Centre has become a reality. Necessary building renovations were completed, staff trained, and the doors officially opened in October 2014. The day centre provides a warm, clean, friendly shelter for up to 50 people per day, depending on time of year and outdoor temperature.

In 2006, a survey by the Government of the Northwest Territories indicated that approximately 14% of people living in the Northwest Territories identified themselves as having some form of disability, either visible or invisible. In 2008 the GNWT published its Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities. Since its publication the public has heard little about this action plan. This past spring, as an independent follow-up to its publication, the Council initiated a public evaluation of the Action Plan. Our intent was to start the conversation about what was done right, what needed improvement and what needed to be changed. After much hard work by our staff, our Disability Survey has now been completed. We look forward to sitting with all levels of government to discuss our findings and to move ahead toward full inclusion and participation for all people living in the NWT.

The Council depends on the generous financial and in-kind support of many private businesses and government departments for the income it needs to provide its many services to the people of the Northwest Territories. We supplement this income with fundraising in order to cover general administrative costs. Our major fundraising effort is the Benefit Auction which is held in November of each year to kick off the Christmas shopping season. Last November we held a very successful Benefit Auctions at the Yellowknife Inn, raising almost \$36,000.00. Planning is well underway for this year's auction on November 20th, once again at the



Yellowknife Inn. Our winters are long, dark and cold. I urge everyone to break the cycle and come to the Yellowknife Inn for an evening of fun, excitement and good times.

Our premier public awareness event, the Yellowknife Grand Prix, was held on a mostly sunny, warm Sunday in June. This event features home-built soap-box type racers and is open to children from 7 to 12 years of age. A brief shower before the first race did not dampen anyone's enthusiasm and soon 48 excited children were vying for the top spot in a series of preliminary heats, run-offs and finals. All attendees enjoyed the live music, a barbeque, good times and prizes. Congratulations to all the participants, thank you to all the sponsors - we hope to see you all again in June 2016.

The NWT Disabilities Council is focused on supporting, advocating and educating the public on behalf of people throughout the Northwest Territories who are either living with a disability or supporting someone who has a disability. This is not an easy task. We depend on the generous support of concerned individuals and many government agencies for the funds we need to provide our services to those people who come to us for help. Individuals generally understand the value of what we do and contribute as they can. However, in an era of increased funding cutbacks by governments in the pursuit of balanced budgets we need to be a 'constant itch' to our politicians to remind them of that value. Long term, stable funding so that we can grow our services to include anyone in need is our goal. We have met several times over the past year with Minister Glen Abernethy, the current Minister Responsible for Persons with Disabilities, and will strive to continue our dialogue with the forthcoming new government to this end. In addition, we continue to explore non-government funding sources and wish to say thank you to those community minded organizations who support our efforts.

Any organization is ultimately dependent on its employees and staff for not just the services it provides but also for the public persona of the organization. To both, our Executive Director, Denise McKee, and our staff I want to say thank you for a job well done. The NWT Disabilities Council continues to be the premier organization in the north dedicated to supporting, advocating and education on behalf of people with disabilities across the Northwest Territories and, through our membership on national organizations, on behalf of people with disabilities across Canada.

The Board of Directors of the NWT Disabilities Council generally operates in the background, out of all the limelight and public attention. The Board's work however is important in providing direction and support to the staff. To current and outgoing Directors of the Board, please accept my sincerest thank you for all that you have done for the Council and for your support of people across the NWT who live with a disability or who support a person with a disability.

Thank you.