

Human Rights • Disability Rights Promotion International Canada
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Becoming a Human Rights Monitor

People With Disabilities Gather for Disability Rights Training

NORMAN BOUCHER said, “I went to the voting place, but I couldn’t go in. They offered to carry my wheelchair up the stairs and I said no. I wanted to exercise my right to vote – and the location should have been accessible.” His story captures one experience of someone with a disability who could not exercise fully his/her human rights. Boucher is one of the co-leaders of the Disability Rights Promotion International Canada (DRPI Canada) project. He was at the BC Coalition of People with Disabilities (BCCPD) with Rita Samson, coordinator of the international DRPI project, and Marcia Rioux, DRPI Canada project director, to launch the DRPI Canada project and partnership with the BCCPD.

DRPI Canada is a community-university alliance funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). It is working to establish a holistic and sustainable system to monitor disability rights in Canada. DRPI Canada is working in partnership with local disability organizations, which are taking the lead in coordinating the monitoring sites and supervising the data collection. At the Vancouver monitoring site, DRPI Canada benefits from the strong support and expertise of its local partner, the BCCPD.

To get us started, DRPI Canada initiated a six-day training session in May 2009 in Vancouver to train a team of people, all of whom have a disability, to be human rights monitors. The training began with an overview of local human rights issues by Frances Kelly from the Community Legal Assistance Society, followed by a workshop on economic, social and cultural rights funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage. Throughout the next days, through experiential learning



Vancouver training of human rights monitors

and much practising, the monitors were equipped with knowledge and skills to interview their peers about their stories of human rights violations; to obtain free and informed consent; and to protect the confidentiality of information collected.

There were many conversations about the differences between advocacy work and human rights monitoring. As “monitors,” the participants said they are prepared to be neutral and bear witness to unfairness, injustice and discrimination in our communities. As disability “advocates,” the monitors shared stories about how it is hard to take off the “advocate” hat when an interviewee shares his or her problems. To bridge the gap between a monitor role and an advocate role, the group decided to promote self-help and leave a list of community resources with interviewees.

At the end of the training and after many opportunities to practise their skills, the monitors received certificates as a

symbolic recognition for their valuable participation and personal commitment to engage in such challenging work. They all proclaimed that they are ready for the challenges that lie ahead; they know their important work will bring unheard stories to light.

Disability Rights Promotion International Canada is a community-university alliance headed by Dr. Marcia Rioux at York University in Toronto. It brings together community members, people with disabilities, researchers, lawyers, media experts, statisticians, policy experts and students to create a holistic, sustainable system to monitor disability rights in Canada. DRPI Canada is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

For more information, please visit www.yorku.ca/dрпи/Canada.html.