

L'intégration

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- Parliamentary commission on Bill 56
- Alternative-format books
An interview with Line Beauchamp

Fair compensation

The OPHQ leads the debate

When, on May 30, 2001, Norbert Rodrigue, chairperson of the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec, mandated a team of researchers from Université Laval to examine the issue of fair compensation, he took a great stride forward in the process begun by the OPHQ with previous research and the preparation of a symposium on fair compensation entitled *Après 20 ans, assurer l'avenir: vers une compensation équitable des besoins des personnes handicapées*, which took place in March 1999.

The mandate in question was to study the discrepancies in the assistance measures for persons with disabilities, continue identifying possible solutions to make these measures fairer, assess the costs, benefits, and feasibility of the solutions already proposed, identify the most appropriate solutions in terms of meeting needs and viable costs, and propose a strategy for implementing the changes envisaged.

To clearly understand the importance the OPHQ attaches to this issue, it should be recalled that fair compensation was part of its strategic plan for 2001-2004, and also figures prominently in its 2004-2007 strategy. Furthermore, Bill 56, the *Act to amend the Act to secure the handicapped in the exercise of their rights and other legislative provisions*, proposes, among other things, various measures intended to clarify the OPHQ's mission and functions, one of which is to promote the identification of solutions to reduce disparities in programs and services for persons with disabilities.

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L'intégration welcomes your comments, suggestions or opinions on various topics concerning the integration of persons with disabilities. We may decide to share your viewpoint with our readers. Don't hesitate to contact us!

Message from the Chairperson

Amendment of the Act

The *Act to secure the handicapped in the exercise of their rights* was adopted unanimously by the National Assembly of Québec in 1978, thereby creating the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec. In June, the Minister responsible for the application of the Act, Philippe Couillard, tabled Bill 56, the *Act to amend the Act to secure the handicapped in the exercise of their rights and other legislative provisions*. The tabling of this bill and the recent parliamentary committee give me the opportunity to recall and underline certain historical facts.

The work of the Castonguay-Nepveu Commission on the reform of health-care services in the early 1970s sounded the wake-up call as concerns the situation of persons with disabilities and led to the drafting, in 1976, of a preliminary bill providing for the protection of disabled persons. This bill met with a rather cool reception, so the Department of Social Affairs went back to the drawing board and returned in 1977 with a draft policy that resulted in the adoption of the *Act to secure the handicapped in the exercise of their rights*. In this regard, it should be recalled that, in accordance with their wishes, this Act was intended essentially to enable persons with disabilities to integrate fully into society. As for the OPHQ, it was set up not as a government department for persons with disabilities, but rather as a support entity. Bill 56 is perfectly in line with the initial spirit of the Act. It proposes new legal mechanisms and a reinforcement of the OPHQ's roles to adapt them to current realities and help further inclusion.

But exactly what progress has been made since 1978? First, it should be pointed out that there are currently over 325 active measures designed to meet the needs of persons with disabilities and their families, close to 200 of them specific in nature. And how did the creation of the OPHQ contribute to this progress? In 1980, it began devising innovative programs for the purpose of directly addressing the needs of persons with disabilities. How have these programs evolved? Adapted work centres first made their appearance in 1979 and there were a dozen of them in existence by the end of that year. Today, there are 44 all told, providing employment for 2 872 persons with disabilities, up from 657 in 1979. In 1980-1981, 71 vocational integration contracts were signed, whereas 4 512 contracts were in effect when the program was transferred to Emploi-Québec in 2000-2001. In 1980-1981, approximately one hundred advocacy organizations received a grant from the OPHQ, for a total of \$957 000; this amount had swelled to \$5 100 000 by 2001-2002, shared among 300 organizations.

The OPHQ also played an important role in developing policies and programs for persons with disabilities, especially in the areas of family support, residential adaptation and parking permits, to mention just a few. On several occasions, the OPHQ has taken a stand in public forums or during parliamentary hearings, and its representations, often forceful and hard-hitting, have certainly contributed to the progress made, as has the impact of the policy *On Equal Terms*, developed in collaboration with various partners, including community groups.

Reports produced in recent years by the OPHQ confirm that the objective of full-fledged integration into society of persons with disabilities is still far from being met. The remaining obstacles are well-known and the challenges have been clearly identified. This is why we find it timely that a bill amending the *Act to secure the handicapped in the exercise of their rights* is being tabled now. The OPHQ strongly endorses Bill 56 because its adoption would mean a significant step forward for persons with disabilities and their families, thanks, among other things, to the updating of the definition of “handicapped person” and the provisions aimed specifically at various government authorities which are active in the various sectors relating to persons with disabilities. Under this new legislation, the OPHQ would be entrusted with additional responsibilities enabling it to play a veritable transversal role of coordination and surveillance, with the attendant rights and powers. The OPHQ has been awaiting the amendment of the *Act to secure the handicapped in the exercise of their rights* for the very purpose of expanding the limits of inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Despite its support for the new bill, the OPHQ felt it was important to submit a number of recommendations to the parliamentary committee. One of them concerns the proposed deadline for the updating of the *On Equal Terms* policy, which it would like to see extended by a year, given the scope of the work involved. Another concerns the section of the Act respecting the action plans to be produced by government departments, public agencies and municipalities, the content of which should be more in keeping with the spirit of the Act. The OPHQ would also like municipalities with a population of at least 15 000 rather than 20 000 to be subject to the production of action plans, with a view to ensuring greater fairness among regions. From a more contextual viewpoint, in the area of paratransit services, the OPHQ is in favour of the development and implementation of a reference framework for the creation of liaison points between existing service areas. The final recommendation concerns an increase in the funding allocated to the OPHQ to enable it to carry out its new mission.

In another vein, I would like to address the issue of fair compensation, because, along with the bill, it is a topic to which we are devoting much of our energy at present. Further to the publication of the report on fair compensation, written by the researchers we mandated, the assimilation phase is well under way. I am pleased to see that this issue has sparked considerable interest among our partners to date. The far-reaching consultation and joint action that will follow will have a decisive impact on the living conditions of persons with disabilities and their families, which is why the OPHQ intends to see this pivotal debate through.

In closing, allow me to commend the agreement reached between the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, the Institut Nazareth et Louis-Braille and La Magnétothèque concerning alternative-format books. This agreement will undoubtedly be beneficial for persons with visual impairments, and may pave the way to services for persons with other disabilities being offered by the BNQ.

Norbert Rodrigue
Chairman

Fair compensation

The OPHQ leads the debate

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The phases

The researchers' findings, in the form of a report, were submitted to the OPHQ in late January 2004. The next stage was for the OPHQ to assimilate the findings. An initial work plan was developed with a view to identifying the priorities of the assimilation process, first for the OPHQ governing board and staff, and then for government departments, public agencies and associations for persons with disabilities.

The report was presented to various parties during meetings that began in March. "Our initial goal was to ensure that all partners concerned by the issue of fair compensation were able, like us, to assimilate the content of the researchers' report, because it is important to realize that the conclusions and recommendations contained therein are those of the researchers and not of the OPHQ," explains Anne Hébert, the OPHQ's assistant director general. For example, the report touches only briefly on certain aspects relating to the funding of services, which is why the OPHQ is more involved in developing cost assessment projects in the short and medium term, analyzing the "basket of services" currently available to persons with disabilities, and seeking potential solutions to the funding problems for these services.

To date, the report has been presented to the OPHQ staff and a few employees of various government departments and agencies, including the Ministère des Finances, the Ministère de l'Emploi, de la Solidarité sociale et de la Famille, and the Régie des rentes du Québec. In addition, two public information sessions, held in Montréal on June 15 and in Québec City on June 18, brought together partners from various sectors (government departments, public agencies, associations for persons with disabilities). The researchers themselves presented the report at these sessions.

"While preparing the work plan, we set out a fairly tight schedule with the assimilation, consultation and joint action phases following one another closely," continues Anne Hébert, "but given the considerable interest sparked by the issue, we decided to extend the duration and scope of the assimilation phase." Considering the OPHQ's determination to offer the government, at the end of the process, recommendations that fulfil compensation requirements as adequately as possible, it wants to take the time it needs before proceeding with the next phase of the process. To meet the demand, the OPHQ will thus be scheduling a number of information sessions in the various regions of Québec.

The consultation phase which is scheduled to follow the current assimilation phase will not begin until all interested partners and individuals have had a chance to assimilate the content of the researchers' report. When questioned about the form the consultation will take, Anne Hébert replies that the final decision has not yet been made, but that the

OPHQ has the firm intention of ensuring that all groups who wish to express their opinion have the opportunity to do so when the time comes.

By Michael Watkins

Fair compensation

A comprehensive approach and more simple compensation procedures

At the request of the OPHQ, the authors of this article examined the matter of payment of the additional costs entailed by disabilities, with a view to suggesting economically viable solutions to setting up a compensation system that is fairer for persons with disabilities. They recently tabled a report containing over 400 pages, an overview of which follows.¹

Since the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec was created in 1978 and 1981 was declared International Year of Disabled Persons, Québec has come a long way in fostering the development and social inclusion of persons with disabilities. Major sums are invested on a recurring basis in hundreds of assistance programs and measures that provide services or equipment, direct funding, and tax benefits. Despite this, the standard of living of persons with disabilities remains below that of the average Quebecer, and the supply of services is insufficient to meet the demand and varies considerably depending on age, place of residence, cause of the disability, etc.

Observation: current measures result in discrepancies

Each day, persons with disabilities and those who work with them are confronted with the fact that the current system creates discrepancies, a situation that is largely due to the fragmentation of programs and the vast array of funding sources. One person may be entitled to home care while another, whose needs are equally pressing, is left to fend for herself because the budget of the CLSC in her neighbourhood has been established based on different priorities. In addition, whereas the motor vehicle adaptation program operates without long waiting lists, persons with disabilities must wait several years to have their homes modified for greater accessibility—as if a car were more important than a roof over one's head!

This is not to say that all the differences in treatment are unjust. It is only logical that a person who has become disabled following a road accident or occupational injury should have more generous coverage, since not everyone's tax dollars fund these compensation schemes, but only those who create specific risks (motorists and employers). The Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec and the Commission de la santé et de la sécurité du travail are public insurance companies that require advance contributions from persons who are eager to avoid civil lawsuits. The higher indemnities and more generous coverage in terms of services and equipment that result cannot be compared to cases where the disability is the result of disease, given that no one can be

sued and the State has no incentive other than social solidarity to offer adequate assistance measures.

On the other hand, how can we justify that crime victims receive more compensation from the State (under the *Crime Victims Compensation Act*) than hospital patients who develop flesh-eating disease? Are not both cases strokes of fate, with the parties being in the wrong place at the wrong time? In civil terms, the State is no more responsible in one case than in the other: the principles of social solidarity underpin the assistance granted to both individuals. So why are they treated differently?

Furthermore, how can we explain that one disabled person who receives social assistance benefits and is recognized as having a severely limited capacity for employment is granted an additional monthly amount of \$250, and that another who earns enough income to have to pay taxes can claim tax credits, while yet another persons with a disability who falls between these two situations is not entitled to any form of direct monetary assistance? A comprehensive approach and the simplification of compensation procedures: these are the cornerstones of our proposals.

Reorganizing monetary allowances

Where the State acts as administrator and sole funding party of a compensation scheme, this scheme must, in our opinion, be integrated and coherent if persons with disabilities are to be compensated fairly. Such a scheme must be based on the concept of the granting of a monetary allowance, the amount of which would be predetermined and, for the most part, irrespective of the recipient's former or future income. The idea here is not to set up a income replacement program, but rather to promote equal opportunity by allowing persons with disabilities to benefit from measures favouring their full-fledged participation in society. An integrated scheme would also result in the elimination of discrepancies created by the existence of a multitude of definitions of the degree or extent of a disability entitling the individual to this or that compensation measure. Lastly, the tax system does not achieve its goal, because it is so complex that many people do not take advantage of the existing measures. In addition, fiscal provisions benefit taxpayers first and foremost, with the result that disabled persons who are too poor to pay taxes are simply not eligible therefor. All of this speaks in favour of a non-taxable allowance.

Our proposal implies the replacement of several existing compensation programs (crime victims, good citizenship or immunization), tax measures (tax credit for mental or physical impairment, a portion of the tax credits for dependants or caregivers) and allowances or benefits for disabled children (Québec and federal programs), and of programs for social assistance recipients with a severely limited capacity for employment. These programs were set up over more than three decades, from the late 1960s until 2003, which partially explains the odd assortment. In our opinion, it is time for a review of all compensation schemes, in which the State invests over half a billion dollars each year, from a global perspective of transfers to persons with disabilities.

Under our proposal, the allowance for persons with disabilities would be in the form of a direct monetary rather than fiscal transfer. This monthly, non-taxable allowance would be paid to persons with disabilities up to the age of 65 (since, as of this age, certain measures, including the federal income supplement and the tax credit for seniors, would partially replace it). The implementation of such a scheme in Québec should be relatively simple, given that a similar program, the allowance for disabled children, which is administered by the Régie des rentes du Québec but funded entirely by State revenues, already exists, and grants the same non-taxable amount to all eligible families. We thus propose that this measure continue to apply until the disabled person reaches the age of 65 and that the amount be standardized. The Régie des rentes du Québec would continue to administer it.

The monthly amount would not be less than \$250, which is the amount currently granted in addition to the basic allowance for disabled persons with a severely limited capacity for employment (social assistance recipients). Several scenarios, which would take too long to explain here, could be envisaged in order to minimize the injection of new sums while ensuring a more equitable distribution of the funds available. This amount may appear modest, but it is a first step along the road to improving the lot of persons with disabilities who are not in the work force (but who are no longer eligible for their supplement when they do find work) and of the poorest workers (who are not eligible for the tax credit in its current form).

A comprehensive approach to service supply

The public, universal measures currently available to persons with disabilities have many strong points in terms of fairness. However, they do have flaws, in particular as concerns the supply of services in the regions, the existence of numerous implicit and explicit waiting lists, and negative competition among certain programs. In a context where the demand for services exceeds the actual supply, the State should ensure in future that certain objectives are achieved as concerns greater fairness. Here are certain proposals aimed at making the collective management of services for persons with disabilities more equitable.

Evaluate needs more accurately by setting up an individualized service plan: any compensation scheme must begin with a thorough evaluation of the individual's needs, so that he or she can then be referred to the appropriate resources, whether they be public, private or community-based. The individualized approach must be used, because it ensures that the focus is squarely on the disabled person while maximizing the effectiveness of the measures adopted.

Better inform persons with disabilities of the services to which they are entitled by constantly updating the services available. The current situation, which generally requires applicants to identify the existing services on their own, causes not only frustration but also considerable discrepancies between citizens. The right to information is a prerequisite for fair treatment.

Ensure constant communication between service providers. It is neither possible nor desirable to set up a superministry responsible for administering all the services for this numerous and diverse clientele. The tendency to entrust the management of specific programs to a specialized agency must be encouraged, insofar as possible. However, this form of work distribution requires increased coordination on the part of an authority that could be mandated to ensure that the requests of the various clienteles are processed rapidly.

More clearly determine socially essential needs: the State and its partners, especially advocacy organizations for persons with disabilities, must work together to ensure a fair supply of services. If this work is not done in advance and subsequently validated, there is a risk that each group will work to improve its own lot, to the detriment of justice for all.

Know how to establish priorities as concerns access to services. Social solidarity compels us to provide for the special needs of persons with disabilities, but there must be limits. The State must ensure that all citizens are treated fairly and take into account its ability to pay as well as the other missions it must carry out.

Conclusion

It is often said that a society's level of advancement can be judged by how it treats its most underprivileged members. Most Quebecers accept the fact that social solidarity justifies the investment of considerable sums to help persons with disabilities. Existing assistance measures, which are aimed at ensuring equal opportunity for all, must nonetheless be reviewed so that the funds allocated thereto are distributed more fairly among the citizens concerned.

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1 This document (in French only) is available in full or as a summary at www.ophq.gouv.qc.ca, as well as in alternative formats.

Bill

Parliamentary committee

Food for thought

Public hearings on Bill 56, the *Act to amend the Act to secure the handicapped in the exercise of their rights and other legislative provisions*, were held from September 22 to 30, and several organizations and groups presented briefs. Below is a summary of their comments and the responses of the Minister, Philippe Couillard.

Coercion and statement of rights

Several organizations pointed out that the bill was insufficiently coercive. The Minister indicated that the bill was purposely drafted in this way, to encourage those involved to assume their responsibilities. This concept is closely linked to that of awareness-raising, which is present in the Act as it was adopted in 1978. Mr Couillard explained, however, that the bill goes much further, by imposing clearly defined obligations for various authorities and giving the OPHQ official intervention methods. He went on to state, "I am convinced that this bill will achieve concrete results that persons with disabilities will be able to observe in their daily lives."

In another vein, the Alliance québécoise des regroupements régionaux pour l'intégration des personnes handicapées (Québec alliance of regional associations for disabled persons) asked the Minister to incorporate a statement of rights into the Act. In his closing remarks, the Minister recalled that the *Act to secure the handicapped in the exercise of their rights* and the *Charter of human rights and freedoms* have aims and objectives that are separate yet complementary. He explained that the Act "implements a series of measures and mechanisms designed to have a positive impact on the social inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities," whereas the Charter "recognizes fundamental rights and freedoms and provides for mechanisms to protect them." The Minister thus deems it essential that a bill be passed to complement the statement of rights set out in the Charter in order to ensure the exercise of disabled persons' rights.

Section 1.3

Several caveats were voiced to the Minister concerning section 1.3, which stipulates that the provisions of the Act apply to government departments and public and private agencies, "taking into account the human, material and financial resources available to them." The Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse pointed out the potentially limiting effects of this provision, and suggested replacing it with the concept of accommodation. The Minister said that he was open to scrutinizing the question and making changes "if possible, provided there are no adverse effects on the rest of our legislative framework, on government actions or on our fundamental duties as responsible administrators."

Terms and definitions

One hotly debated question concerned the terms "integration" versus "inclusion." In the Minister's opinion, the former has a much broader meaning than the latter, but he

believes in any case that the term “integration”, used in the context of the Act, has essentially the same meaning as “inclusion” for those who use it. “And in this regard, it is very interesting to note that the concept of integration is paired, in many places in the Act, with that of social participation, which is at the very heart of the concept of inclusion proposed,” added Mr Couillard.

As concerns the definition of “handicapped person”, the minister pointed out that the bill’s main purpose is to update this definition “based on the evolution of scientific, legal and social thought.” In addition, the International Network on the Disability Creation Process voiced its approval of the proposed definition, which corresponds to the concepts found in the classification for impairments, disabilities and handicapping situations.

The OPHQ

Many parties demanded that the OPHQ no longer come under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Health and Social Services. While admitting that the arguments put forward in this regard were valid, the Minister pointed out that “the Act stipulates that it is the government that tasks a minister with its application, which means that the door is always open to changes.”

The provisions of the bill concerning the OPHQ’s mission, duties and powers appeared to attract consensus. The Minister also recalled that the OPHQ’s role in promoting solutions to the issue of fair compensation for the needs of persons with disabilities “partially responds to the request made by a number of parties to have the bill recognize this right.”

Integration and continued employment

Although the employment strategy set out in the bill was well received, many parties expressed their desire to see a closer association between the various partners concerned, particularly the associations for persons with disabilities, the OPHQ and specialized manpower services. Others demanded that persons with disabilities be considered a target group under the *Act respecting equal access to employment in public bodies*. The Commission des droits de la personne and other groups also emphasized that an equal-opportunity program should be implemented in the Québec public service, especially since the government should be setting an example in this regard.

Transportation

The changes proposed were, for the most, well received, but it was suggested that other authorities, such as supramunicipal organizations or regional transit agencies, be obliged to produce development plans as well. The Minister said that he was willing to consider these suggestions, and underlined the importance of harmonizing transportation programs, while voicing the wish that “the bill gives both the government and Québec citizens the tools needed to accelerate this harmonization. “

Other positive elements

Several aspects of the bill met with favour and, in general, the “impact” clause was warmly received. This clause stipulates that the Minister must also be consulted during the development of measures provided for by law or regulation that could have a significant impact on handicapped persons. Other elements, such as the provisions concerning the consideration of the reality of families, access to public documents and services, and the production of action plans by government departments and agencies and municipalities, were also received favourably. As concerns the action plans, the Minister emphasized the link between “this mechanism and the proposed updating of the *On Equal Terms* policy, in which we’ve been asked to extend this obligation to produce an action plan to more parties.”

In closing, although he readily admits that the bill is not perfect, Mr Couillard does point out its ambition. In his opinion, regardless of the barrier to the integration of persons with disabilities that is identified, its structured, transparent approach makes it possible to call upon concrete methods of ensuring that these people can participate fully in our society. “This is a framework law that, while achieving a fair balance – the challenge of all political actions –, will reinstate Québec as one of the world’s most enviable places to live,” concluded the Minister.

By Micheline Thibault

Interview

Alternative-format books

Interview with the Minister of Culture and Communications

In Québec, the concept of alternative-format books was developed thanks to the initiative of organizations specializing in visual impairment, but the actual number of such books available to the general public is limited. Alternative-format books generally refer to documents normally available in libraries in Braille, on cassette, in large print, etc.

On June 21, 2004, a landmark agreement was reached between the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec (BNQ), the Institut Nazareth et Louis-Braille and the Magnétothèque, to have the latter two transfer their respective collections of alternative-format books to the BNQ.

Since 1997, the interministerial committee on alternative-format books, chaired by the OPHQ with representatives from the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, the Ministère de l'Éducation, the Agence de développement de réseaux locaux de services de santé et de services sociaux de la Montérégie, and the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications, has been studying the issue, and its efforts have helped facilitate this transfer.

The Minister of Culture and Communications, Ms Line Beauchamp, whose department is very involved in the project, agreed to share her comments with us.

L'intégration: The issue of alternative-format books is of key importance to persons with visual impairments. Could you tell us a bit about your department's actions in this area?

Ms Beauchamp: I can understand that this an important matter for organizations representing persons with visual impairments, more commonly called "users" in the area of alternative-format books. It's an important issue for us as well and we've devoted a great deal of time and energy to it.

We're working to put in place the new structure of the government corporation known as the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, and it was extremely important that, from the outset, we be able to affirm that we pay special attention to accommodating the needs of special clientele. We realized that we had to do everything in our power to ensure that the discussions, which even Lise Bissonnette, CEO of the BNQ, found long, went smoothly. But I'm quite proud of the result, because they culminated in a memorandum of understanding on the dissemination of alternative-format books by the BNQ which, in my opinion, is an ideal solution for this clientele. We're thus enhancing the supply by providing access to more alternative-format books in a barrier-free building with brand-new, state-of-the-art reading material. There is also specially trained staff on hand and longer opening hours. The quality of the services provided at the Magnétothèque and

the Institut Nazareth et Louis-Braille was common knowledge, and the negotiations were somewhat arduous because people feared having to sacrifice this quality, a viewpoint I understood perfectly. With this agreement, users don't lose out; on the contrary, they gain in terms of service quality.

Also, my colleague Philippe Couillard, Minister of Health and Social Services and Minister responsible for the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec, encourages government corporations to adapt their service supply and, in this regard, Ms Bissonnette was proud to be able to point out that the BNQ was among those that had already done so.

So the BNQ's mandate is very broad and encompasses less traditional clientele...

Absolutely. The statute establishing the BNQ clearly stipulates that this government corporation must provide services adapted to persons with disabilities. This imperative is at the very heart of the BNQ's mission, and is complied with by the memorandum of understanding on alternative-format books.

Will people from outside the greater Montréal area have access to this collection?

Yes, the toll-free phone number currently in operation at the Québec alternative-format books service will be under the jurisdiction of the BNQ. There will also be a detailed Web site adapted for use by persons with visual impairments. A mail-order service will also be available.

Could alternative-format books one day be disseminated outside Québec?

We'll eventually be able to meet the needs of French speakers in other provinces. And this is where a one-stop service outlet becomes particularly important. Under the responsibility of a major government institution, we will be able to establish partnerships with other provinces. Discussions concerning the availability of books in both English and French are ongoing, with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, among others.

Has a consultation mechanism for users been set up so that they can take part in choosing the books that will be published in alternative formats?

Yes, and this is very important. This is the factor that will show that we're progressing in the right direction and that we'll be able to remain attuned to the needs of persons with disabilities. Three other mechanisms have been set up by the BNQ: a follow-up committee, which will ensure that the agreement on alternative-format books is respected; a coordinating position for the services offered to persons with disabilities; and the creation of an advisory group, called a liaison committee, which will represent user associations to the BNQ. This committee will answer to the board of directors and,

in this capacity, will be able to inform the members appointed by the government of their wishes, needs and expectations.

How will the BNQ play a leadership and guidance role with regard to libraries throughout Québec?

This is a formidable challenge for the BNQ. The bill establishing the Bibliothèque nationale was passed unanimously by the National Assembly, and the MNAs expressed the wish that the dissemination component should support regional efforts.

In fact, on September 27, I met with the members of the Table de concertation des bibliothèques (provincial library roundtable), which is chaired by Lise Bissonnette. This roundtable is made up of Québec public libraries and regional service centres that act in the libraries' stead to serve municipalities with fewer than 3 000 residents. Representatives of school library networks, CEGEPs and universities, the Corporation des bibliothécaires and municipal associations also sit on this roundtable. This means that if a book is available at a university library, someone could obtain it through his or her local public library. I sense a healthy recognition of each person's role and strong solidarity in the services made available to Quebecers.

Have you allocated certain sums for the upgrading of the equipment used to publish books in alternative formats?

This year, I granted an additional \$263,400 to the Magnétothèque so that it could make the transition from analogue to digital. Thus, each copy costs less than in analogue format, which means that the demand can be met even more effectively.

What do you think of culture as a means of social integration?

It's important. Culture not only serves to express a society's identity, but also to develop the economy. It's also a medium of dialogue that allows us to be open to other communities and the rest of the world.

Recently, I signed two agreements in the regions to support the integration of persons with disabilities through the arts. One of them, the company Productions Des pieds et des mains, received \$10 000 to participate in Premières rencontres internationales du créativité et handicap mental in Liège, Belgium. This event is an international theatre and dance festival for companies working with persons with intellectual impairments. My department also has some deliberating to do on the matter, because a balance must be struck between high standards in terms of the arts as they are practised professionally and amateur or recreational arts and culture.

Interview conducted by Michel-André Roy

As of April 2005, the BNQ will take over the Service québécois du livre adapté (SQLA). Until then, the SQLA, a one-stop service outlet for the dissemination of alternative-format books, will continue to provide this service.

The BNQ's goal is not only to enlarge its collections for persons with visual impairments, but also, when its budget permits, to serve other clientele, such as persons with hearing impairments, persons with motor impairments that prevent them from holding or handling books, and persons with comprehension problems.

Point of interest

Personal support

In March of this year, the OPHQ announced a major restructuring of all of its activities. These changes affected the reception, referral, support/guidance and assistance services. To better understand how these services will be delivered from now on and what stage the OPHQ is at in setting up the new teams who will be providing them, L'intégration met with Mr Gilles Bélanger, team leader of personal support in the new Direction du partenariat et de l'intervention individuelle, the branch responsible for partnership and individual intervention.

L'intégration: First, Mr Bélanger, could you explain the term “personal support” to us?

Gilles Bélanger: The first stage in personal support is reception-referral, which consists in analyzing the needs of the individual who comes to us for help. Depending on the needs expressed, he or she may receive an answer immediately or be referred to the appropriate resource. Questions may be asked by people, organizations, associations or the population at large on all sorts of topics, for example, wheelchair repair, mainstreaming schoolchildren, parking permits for disabled persons or respite services.

If the person or his/her family has a more complex problem, we go on to the next step, where a professional in individual intervention who provides support/guidance or assistance takes charge of the person. Various activities can be carried out with partners such as the CLSC, the school board or a physical impairment rehabilitation centre in order to meet the person's needs.

Could you explain exactly what changes have been made to these activities following the restructuring begun by the OPHQ?

These activities used to be carried out through our 16 regional offices. Now, as part of the restructuring, reception-referral is done in only one place, the head office in Drummondville, where four employees take calls from throughout the province. We've paid specific attention to the transfer of expertise so that these employees can help people no matter where they are from.

As concerns support-guidance and assistance, the team is made up of nine professionals working out of three offices, located in Montréal, Drummondville and Québec City. The flexibility of this structure will enable these professionals not only to increase their knowledge of the regions around their workplace, but also to develop specific expertise in various sectors, such as home support, employment, educational services, etc. This means that Québec is covered—in every way possible!

What stage are you at in the structuring of the new team?

The team's been complete since September 27. It consists of an operator-receptionist for the toll-free line, two people responsible for updating the databanks containing information on partners and contacts, the databank devoted to programs and measures, and the file management system, four people assigned to reception-referral and nine professionals tasked with meeting support-guidance and assistance needs.

How are persons with disabilities and their families and support network currently served?

As I mentioned earlier, the new team is complete and operational at the present time. However, we're currently in transition between the old region-based structure and the new one. Despite this overlapping, people who contact us can be sure of receiving quality services.

Will persons with disabilities be served just as quickly despite the distances?

As concerns fast service, that won't be any change: a person who calls receives an answer. The process described earlier, analysis of the person's needs, is begun immediately, and either an answer is given immediately or, if the problem is more complex, the person is referred to a professional.

But will the professionals assigned to individual intervention be able to act as rapidly as before, given that they're no longer on site?

Our work method remains the same. If a meeting is necessary, the professionals schedule an appointment and travel to meet the person, just like they did when they were posted to the regions. So there's no major change in the way services are rendered.

How can the personnel be as efficient, given their more limited knowledge of the territory and the local resource people?

Most of the individual intervention professionals are already familiar with at least one of the regions to which they are assigned, simply because they used to work there. Various measures have been provided for, including training sessions on the different programs and services for persons with disabilities and their families and on how to use the databank of partners and contacts.

We're also using the buddy system to allow the new personnel to develop or increase their knowledge of the territory. Employees in the old structure were initially twinned with those in the new structure to ensure knowledge transfer. In the longer term, the buddy system will consist in maintaining close ties with people who have in-depth knowledge of the region in question and exchanging information, whether for group or individual intervention.

Co-development activities are also offered. Based on specific themes, representatives of various organizations are invited to present their services and answer our staff's questions. The first activity, on educational services, was held in early October.

Special emphasis must be placed on contacts with partners, and we'll have to work to develop this sector. Our branch and the branches responsible for group intervention in the regions will have to work closely together in order to maintain and enhance our respective contact networks and ensure that we're present in all areas and sectors of activity.

Will resource people who used to call your regional offices for information be able to continue doing so?

During the transition period, they'll continue calling the regional offices. Then, gradually, once the restructuring is complete, they'll all use the toll-free number. Whether the request comes from a group or an individual, it will automatically be directed to the appropriate staff members. Gradually, the resource people will get to know their correspondents at the OPHQ and will be able to contact them directly.

How do you intend to inform persons with disabilities and their families and resource people about this new method of operation?

In conjunction with the Direction des communications, an action plan was drawn up with a view to reaching everyone concerned by the new operational structure. In fact, this article is one of the means of disseminating the information! Several other communication activities are being prepared and should be carried out during the fall and winter.

In closing, fears have been expressed concerning the quality of the services that will be offered as part of this new structure. Do you think you're capable of allaying these fears and delivering quality services, regardless of your clientele's place of residence?

Despite the scope of this restructuring, our objective is to maintain the quality of the services we offer. As is the case with any change, a period of adaptation is required. Obviously, the challenge is a major one and we must take it seriously, but we're confident that we'll succeed. Before, depending on the region, the personnel assigned to individual intervention could also deal with groups. The specialization of our teams and the exchange of expertise among the members thereof, in addition to all the steps we've taken to train and equip them as highly as possible, are factors that lead us to believe that that we'll be able to continue offering quality support to persons with disabilities and their families.

We'll continue to be attuned to our clients' needs in order to make any necessary adjustment to our service delivery methods and the human resources assigned to thereto.

By Micheline Thibault

***For information or personal support,
call
1 800 567-1465 or
1 800 567-1477 (teletype)***

Overview

Job search

Specially designed for postsecondary students with disabilities, a job-search site has been created by the National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS). Called NOWS (NEADS Online Work System), this site enables students to submit their resumés and applications and employers to post employment and internship opportunities. For more information, log on to www.nows.ca or call Mr Chris Gaulin, toll free, at 1 877 670-1256.

Severe behavioural disorders

Montréal's multidisciplinary program targeting severe behavioural disorders (PREM-TGC) offers a wide range of training and professional development activities for 2004-2005 (advanced workshops, seminars, lectures, co-development group, videoconferences). The PREM-TGC is headed by the Centre Myriam, an intellectual impairment rehabilitation centre that works to support the maintenance and development of professional expertise in Québec. The training sessions offered are thus intended for professionals and resource persons, but also for parents and relations of persons with severe behavioural disorders such as intellectual impairments, pervasive developmental disorders, traumatic brain injuries, etc.). To register or find out more, visit the PREM-TGC Web site at www.premtgc.org or dial (514) 345-0601, extension 180.

Accessible tourism

In June, the Canadian Tourism Commission (CCT), in collaboration with Kéroul, announced the dissemination of a report entitled *Best Practices in Tourism Accessibility for Travellers with Restricted Physical Ability*. This reports presents 19 case studies conducted in 11 countries and looks at innovative ways of making tourism accessible to persons with reduced mobility or sensory impairments. For more information, contact Ms Isabelle Des Chênes at the CCT by dialling (613) 946-2122. Copies of the report on CD-ROM are also available by contacting Ms Michèle Côté at Kéroul at info@keroul.qc.ca.

New publications

Most of the publications featured in this column can be borrowed from our Documentation Centre (1 888 264-2362).

In early September, the OPHQ published its yearly review of government action in the area of persons with disabilities, entitled *Revue de l'année 2003-2004 - Action gouvernementale et personnes handicapées*, the third such publication. Although this document contains information specific to various sectors, it is also an overview that enables readers to assess the coherence of government action as a whole. The document is available (in French only) on the OPHQ Web site at www.ophq.gouv.qc.ca. It can also be ordered by calling 1 800 567-1465 (teletype 1 800 567-1477).

The Institut Nazareth et Louis-Braille (INLB) recently published two documents for and about persons with visual impairments. The first, entitled *Critères d'accessibilité répondant aux besoins des personnes ayant une déficience visuelle*, identifies architectural barriers that jeopardize the safety and autonomy of the visually impaired. Presented in the form of fact sheets, the document is intended for authorities involved in building, renovating, refurbishing or managing buildings or public spaces. The second document, entitled *Questionnaire de dépistage des incapacités visuelles*, is a screening questionnaire to help people working in the fields of gerontology and geriatrics to determine whether elderly persons with visual impairments require a more in-depth clinical evaluation or rehabilitation services. Both of these documents may be obtained by contacting Ms Francine Baril of the INLB at (450) 463-1710, extension 242, or by e-mail at fbaril@inlb.qc.ca. They can also be consulted on the INLB Web site at www.inlb.qc.ca.

If you are organizing an event, publishing a document, or have information on a new organization that is active in the field of social inclusion, and would like our readers to know about it, contact us by telephone at 1 800 567-1465 (-1477 by teletype), or by e-mail at integration@ophq.gouv.qc.ca.

Literature overview

Legislation and fair compensation

BLAIS, François; GARDNER, Daniel; LAREAU, André. *Un système de compensation plus équitable pour les personnes handicapées: rapport final du groupe d'experts mandaté par l'Office des personnes handicapées du Québec*. Drummondville, QC: Office des personnes handicapées du Québec, 2004. 432 p. (M6642)

This report presents the various compensation schemes existing in Québec and the government measures associated with “disabled” status. It advocates the implementation of a universal income and special-needs compensation scheme and the creation of an allowance to be paid directly to persons with disabilities. These recommendations are aimed at achieving fairer compensation for persons with disabilities. A summary of the report (in French only) is also available.

Council of Europe. *Committee on the Rehabilitation and Integration of People with Disabilities. Policy and Legislation in the Field of Rehabilitation and Integration of People With Disabilities*. 7th edition. Strasbourg, FRA: Council of Europe, 2003. 410 p. (M6652)

This compendium of legislative texts presents the policies concerning the integration of persons with disabilities in force in 16 European states. It provides a panorama of the realities inherent to each country and highlights the strong points and inadequacies of each national policy in respect of persons with disabilities.

Social Development Canada. Office for Disability Issues. *Defining Disability: A Complex Issue*. Ottawa, ON: Social Development Canada, 2003. 92 p. (M6659)

This is a report about the various definitions of the term “disability” used in different Government of Canada programs, the key issues related to defining disability, and program eligibility criteria. It then provides an inventory of key Government of Canada laws, programs, tax measures and benefits that target persons with disabilities.

France. Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité. Direction générale de l'action sociale. *La politique française en direction des personnes handicapées*. Paris, FRA: Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité, 2000. 62 p. (M6072)

This document presents France’s main laws and policies in respect of persons with disabilities, designed to foster their social and professional integration and enable them to fully exercise their rights.

MELENNEC, Louis. *L'indemnisation du handicap: pour l'instauration d'un régime unique de l'invalidité et de la dépendance*. Paris, FRA: Desclée de Brouwer, 1998. 258 p. (M5050)

The author points out the discrepancies in France's social security system and recommends an equal-opportunity disability compensation system, regardless of the cause of disability.

MARTIN, Lawrence L. «Les personnes handicapées aux États-Unis: contexte, modèles et théories.» In: *Les cahiers de l'Actif*, no 294-295 (novembre-décembre 2000), pp. 51-59 (A8531)

This article describes the main models and theories governing social policy in respect of persons with disabilities in the United States, and presents the legislation and programs designed to foster their integration.

To borrow any of the above, or for more information, feel free to contact the Documentation Centre team at (514) 873-3574 or 1-888-264-2362 toll-free, or by e-mail at documentation@ophq.gouv.qc.ca.

Innovation

L'Abécédaire

*Because growing together...
Is learning to live together!*

In early 2004, a document entitled *L'Abécédaire* was published by the Lanaudière regional committee for the mainstreaming of special-needs into child-care services. This guide was written to help special-needs children aged 4 and under participate fully in regular day-care services.

"This guide is intended for the staff of child-care centres, the partners in the health and social services network and early childhood centres, and the parents of special-needs children," explains Jacqueline Thibeault of the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec, who sits on the regional committee. The guide is divided into five sections: *Agir* (Act), which sets out the terms of use and defines the concept of inclusion; *Bâtir* (Build), which discusses, among other things, financial resources and factors facilitating integration; *Comment faire?* (How to Proceed), which touches on topics such as attitudes, adapting activities and the intervention plan; *Dépistage* (Screening), which deals with the steps in the screening process and parents' reactions; and *Environnement* (Environment), which provides information on professionals, partner organizations and appropriate resources.

The production of this guide is the logical culmination of the activities of the regional committee, which was created in 1996. Two other documents were published prior to this, namely, the *Répertoire de ressources régionales pour l'intégration des enfants ayant des besoins particuliers dans les services de garde*, a directory of regional child-care resources for special-needs children, in 1998, and an information kit entitled *Le réseau de soutien pour l'intégration des enfants handicapés dans les services de garde de Lanaudière* (Support network for children with disabilities in child-care services in the Lanaudière region), in 2002.

At the book launch, Ms Véronique Robert de Massy, of the roundtable of associations for persons with disabilities of the Lanaudière region, stated that the publication of this document represents "the grand finale of a process that celebrates the strength of partnership". And indeed, it is the result of the collaboration and joint action of numerous partners.

By Micheline Thibault

For more information on this document or to order a copy, please contact Ms Véronique Robert de Massy by telephone at (450) 755-1488, by fax at (450) 759-8749, or by e-mail at tcrapl@pandore.qc.ca

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L'intégration is a quarterly newsletter aimed at providing an overview of topics relating to the educational, vocational and social integration of persons with disabilities in Québec and its various regions. Its goal is to promote integration and inform public and private stakeholders about the major issues concerning persons with disabilities by publishing pertinent, well-researched articles.

L'intégration is available in alternative formats upon request.

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