



## **DRN HISTORICAL ROOTS**



The International Year of Disabled Persons, 1981, was a key year in the history of the Disability Resource Network, formerly known as the Adult Special Education Association (ASEA). In 1980 the Ministry of Education issued a policy statement on education of disabled adults as part of an international push to promote disability related initiatives. The Ministry policy offered the following framework on education for adults with disabilities:

1. The education of adults with disabilities is an integral part of public education.
2. Public educational institutions will be encouraged to provide reasonable access to services and programs to adults with disabilities
3. The Ministry, subject to funding approval by the Legislature, will develop guidelines, coordinate programs, and ensure development of curriculum resources.
4. The Ministry recognizes that programs and services for disabled adults require a different level of financial support that other programs.
5. The Ministry will provide administrative and financial support to ensure that educational institutions have the capability to fulfill the responsibility to provide access to adults with disabilities.

In order to launch their initiative, the Ministry established a position of Coordinator of Adult Special Education and seconded the late Frank Cassidy from North West Community College to this position. A small grant was provided to Camosun College to hire an Adult Special Education Coordinator as a trial run to see if this was a viable activity. Brian Russell was hired in this position, and provided the Ministry with a report on his experience. Based on report, the Ministry sought funding to implement their plan.

Once funding was established for their initiative, the Ministry of Education announced the availability of new grant aimed at establishing services and resources for adults with disabilities in provincial colleges and institutes. The main focus was on creating services to ensure that disabled adults could enrol and participate in regular programs in higher education. At that time, some colleges had designated programs in place for adults with developmental disabilities, but lacked the resources to assist students enrolled in regular coursework.



Camosun College



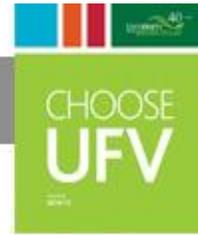
## PIONEERS

In the spring of 1981, a meeting was held with the first group of coordinators hired through the grant under the direction and guidance of the Frank Cassidy. This group included:

Camosun College	Late Brian Russell
Capilano College	Late Paul Jones
Cariboo College	Rod Dolmage
College of New Caledonia	Randi Duke
Douglas College	Gladys Loewen
Fraser Valley College (FVC)	Don Tunstall
Malaspina College	Late Laurie Ramsey
Selkirk College	Jan Lindsay
VCC	Donald Oakes
VCC King Edward	Late Joyce Lydiard, Late Wayne Bottlinger; Greta Nelson
VCC Langara	Maida Long



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By the fall of 1982, 14 of the 15 provincial colleges had hired or assigned one or more persons with the responsibility of coordinating services and providing access. New employees included Garnet Brown (FVC), Paula Keirstead (Kwantlen College), Linda Love (Duncan campus of Malaspina College), Elizabeth Snyder (North West Community College), Mel Felker (Cariboo College), Jolene Bordewich (Capilano College), Gillian Summers (North Island College), Val Best, and Marilyn Raymond (Okanagan College) joined the group. Several school districts also established services and programs for disabled adults; Delta School District staff participated and in fact hosted some of our meetings.

In the early years, through on-going financial support from the Ministry, we pioneers meet twice a year to focus on the development of programs and services. The focus was on sharing ideas, resources, and experiences, and establishing a network of support. These connections and meetings were vital in maintaining a collaborative network as we broke new ground trying to establish resources for disabled adults enrolled in higher education.

### **LAUNCHING THE ASEA**

In 1984, at a professional development day followed by a conference hosted at Douglas College, the group of 20 - 25 post-secondary service and program representatives voted to establish a formal association called the Adult Special Education Association of BC (ASEA). The primary purpose of this group was to provide a formal network for support and identity. Donald Oakes (VCC, City Centre) was nominated as President and Joyce Lydiard (VCC King Edward Campus) as Secretary Treasurer of the ASEA. The goals of the new association included:

1. To promote meaningful responses to issues and concerns affecting the educational resources and independence of disabled students.
2. To promote professionalism and expertise among individuals who are interested and involved in providing services to post-secondary students with special needs.
3. To Develop and strengthen the communication network for those persons professionally involved in providing services and programs for disabled adults.
4. To provide standards and to encourage accountability of persons providing special services.
5. To promote delivery of services at post-secondary level to allow full participation of individuals with disabilities.

Until 1985, the Ministry assisted in the planning and hosting of a fall professional development day plus as well as an annual spring conference which included post-secondary disability service providers as well as community members worked with disabled adults. This funding ended in 1985, so the ASEA took over the responsibilities for coordinating the conference. As a result the annual conference became a cost-recovery activity and the fall professional development activity was cancelled due to lack of institutional funding.

The professional development days were important to this small group as we were forging new ground, designing policies and procedures, and establishing standards. ASEA members brought sample documents, policies, and issues to these meetings so that we could learn from each other's experience, maximize the resources, and support each other. Occasionally we had speakers, but most of the time was spent sharing resources and exploring solutions and strategies. Basically we were a working group in action.

## **EARLY INITIATIVES**

As an association, we raised key issues with the ASE Coordinator at the Ministry and worked to identify directions on these issues. 1984 was a big year for projects and resolving concerns and pressure points. For example the term "learning disability" was starting to surface, so Linda Love (Malaspina) received a small grant from the Ministry to research adult learning disabilities. Linda, Paula Keirstead (Kwantlen), and I drove to Portland Community College to spend a day with staff from their disability service office gathering information. Linda and I also attended the AHEAD (Association on Higher Education and Disability) conference in Kansas City to continue the research. That same year, Douglas College received a grant to produce a provincial guide on integrating disabled students in higher education. Rod Dolmage and Paula Keirstead, hired by Douglas College, wrote *Adapting to Abilities*, which was circulated around the province through the Ministry.

From 1982 to 1984, the Ministry provided a small grant to the Provincial Centre for the Visually Impaired (PRCVI) to produce alternate format materials for post-secondary students. This process proved to be problematic due to the increasing number of requests for alternate format materials. Since their mandate was providing resources to public school students, the requests for adults were processed after the requests for children had been completed, often resulting in late production of post-secondary materials. Letters were sent to the Ministry expressing concern that the current model of support was not working. As a solution, the Ministry explored the idea of providing funding to the newly created Open Learning Agency (OLA) to create all their materials in alternate format, making this institute fully accessible for students who required materials in alternate format. The community, including ASEA members, protested that this approach amounted to segregation, forcing all students who required alternate format to attend the OLA. After an all day planning meeting at Douglas College with representatives from many post-secondary institutions, including Librarians and the Ministry, it was decided that VCC Langara Campus would be given a contract to establish the College and Institute Library Services (CILS). This proved to be a solution that was workable for all colleges and institutions.

## **EFFECT OF CHANGES**

In mid 1985, the Ministry cancelled the position of ASE Coordinator and ended Frank Cassidy's secondment. A public outcry ensued by disabled students, advocates, community workers and ASEA members as everyone was concerned that the Ministry was diminishing its interest and support of ensuring access to higher educational opportunities for disabled adults. In the end, the Ministry assigned responsibility for adult special education to an existing Coordinator position to show their on-going commitment. In reality, this Coordinator also had responsibility for Adult Basic Education and Literacy, leaving limited time to support the field in the manner that the field had become accustomed.

The Ministry also changed the funding process in 1985 and “rolled” the grant funding into the base budgets of the institutions. This was a tumultuous time as most of the colleges reduced the budgets for disability supports since the funding was no longer protected. As a result, any full time positions were downgraded to part-time.

In 1986 the Ministry announced another grant to facilitate the transition of disabled students from high school into higher education. This grant added additional resources and positions, though many of them were part-time due to the limited amount of funding. The Ministry hoped for regional coordination and in fact asked the lower mainland colleges (Capilano, Douglas, Kwantlen, and VCC) to see if they could coordinate transition services as a group. After a planning meeting, the colleges submitted separate funding proposals, but agreed to coordinate activities for panel presentations to high schools and community groups. The staff hired under this grant were commonly known as Transition Planners. Since this funding was protected, some of the former fulltime positions were reinstated adding transition planning to the job description of the person in the job.

The ASEA continued to meet annually with a group coordinating the annual conference. Barbara Clague (VCC City Centre) was hired as the conference coordinator and managed the organizational details through the conference committee. I chaired the ASEA conference committee from 1983 – 1993. As our annual conference was the major event in the lower mainland related to disability at that time, the numbers of the public network grew. One year, we had 350 people register for the conference as we attracted Vocational Rehabilitation Consultants, community workers, adult educators, parents, and adults with disabilities. The conference committee scrambled that year to ensure sufficient space and resources were available at the hotel.

An Association like the DRN (ASEA) survives through dedication of its members in achieving its goals and working together to support each other. This requires members to volunteer their time and energy as well as sharing expertise and experience with members to maintain a strong network. The association is only as strong as its member’s actions. It is exciting to see that the DRN is still a vital organization in working towards the goal of ensuring that adults with disabilities are able to fully participate in higher education in B.C.

Gladys Loewen  
Founding member of ASEA