

member NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER FOR MANITOBANS WITH DISABILITIES

Issue 2, Spring 2005



In this Issue

[1]

The Daily Cost of Living

[2]

Fast Facts about SMD

[3]

News & Notes

[4]

Letter from the CEO

[5]

SMD Success Story
"Navigating the Roads to Rural Success"

[7]

ASL Immersion

[8]

Access Denied?
Disabilities and the Internet

[9]

SMD Vision & Values

[1]

The Cost of Daily Living

FACT: The number of Manitobans living with a disability is continuing to grow, in large part due to the aging population developing age-related disabilities.

FACT: Many of these Manitobans will require an assistive device of some type (i.e. hearing or mobility aids) or may require lifestyle changes (i.e. modifications to home, home or personal care services).

FACT: Assistive devices and health care costs money.

Considering how most people already struggle to balance their budgets to cover the essentials (food, shelter, bills, etc.), it shouldn't come as a surprise that adding an expense such as home care or the cost of an assistive device can end up breaking the bank for a person living with a disability.

A recent study released in the United Kingdom found that people living with disabilities already experience higher costs in everyday areas including transport and clothing. The addition of what the study calls "personal assistance" – which includes such things as

home care or personal care services – only adds to the financial stress, especially for those who are living off of some form of benefits program or combination of programs. Ultimately, the study concluded that the added costs were driving people with disabilities further into poverty.

It is reasonable to believe that many Canadians living with disabilities face similar financial challenges, especially when you consider that – according to the Participation Activity and Limitations Survey (PALS) released in February of 2004 – only 43.5 percent of people living with a disability are employed. (Of course, some conditions hamper a person's ability to work which contributes to this number).

[con't on page 2]



SMD Alliance
825 Sherbrook Street
Winnipeg, MB R3A 1M5
e-mail: volunteers@smd.mb.ca



Fast Facts about SMD

- *SMD is building an all-new online presence! The new SMD & Me family of sites will be up and running very soon. Keep watching this newsletter for updates!*
- *SMD has a total of six regional offices to offer services throughout Manitoba.*
- *SMD 's Community Education and Training Department provides workshops to employers and businesses who want to make their workplaces more disability friendly.*

Still, the Canadian government recognizes that there is a cause for concern. One of the problems federal, provincial and territorial governments have had in creating policies to effectively address disability-related costs has been the lack of hard data.

The *Price Survey of Assistive Devices and Supports for Persons with Disabilities by Children, Youth and Social Developments Directorate* (December 2003) was commissioned to help create "a more accurate and comprehensive portrait of the costs borne by individuals with disabilities." The survey examined the costs of items ranging from hearing aids and insulin pens to specialty furniture and lift devices to nursing services and interpreters.

The Government of Canada has also openly said that it is making people with disabilities a priority which is good news for Canadians living with a disability. The *Price Survey of Assistive Devices and Supports for Persons with Disabilities* is a good start as it will provide people and policy-makers with a better sense of just how much items can cost, guiding development and improvement of programs.

But the question remains: ***what can be done about addressing those costs right now?***

Who Can Help?

A good place to begin is your local Yellow Pages. There are numerous provincial and national organizations that offer services

and support for specific types of disabilities either for free or at a reduced cost. The Social Services Section of your Yellow Pages should list the ones in your area.

Another good place to look is online. www.enablelink.org provides a listing of more than 5,000 disability organizations in Canada. The Canadian Health Network (CHN) has a section on Living with Disabilities on its site (www.canadian-health-network.ca). Among the FAQs are answers on how to find services and supports and funding, as well as links to valuable resources.

And of course, SMD provides a wide array of services for adults and children living with various disabilities, as well as for their families. These include:

- Outreach Therapy Program for Children
- Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children
- Recreational and Life Skills Program
- Case Management/Counselling Services
- Vocational Assessment
- Work Experience
- Employment Services
- Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Adults
- Life Skills Programming for Adults
- Computer Training
- Financial Support
- Wheelchair Services

[con't on page 3]

NEWS & NOTES

A United Effort

December third marked the United Nations' annual "International Day of Disabled Persons." The U.N. recognizes this day as a means of promoting a greater understanding of disability issues and to encourage support for ensuring the dignity, rights and well-being of people living with disabilities. For more information, visit www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/disiddp.htm

Electronic Excitement!

An article in the September 23 issue of the Globe & Mail reported how partners Xperiential Learning Solutions Inc. and Toronto-based developer Jesterwerk Inc. are enabling some people with disabilities to experience adventuresome activities via virtual reality technology. A digital camera (similar to the EyeToy for Sony's

[con't on page 4]



The Cost Benefits of Membership

Membership in SMD Alliance is also becoming a means of saving money. SMD Alliance has recently reached an agreement with Dufresne Furniture and Appliances that entitles SMD Alliance Members with a discount on items purchased at all Dufresne stores, Palliser Rooms (in Calgary and Winnipeg) as well as in La-Z-Boy and Sleep Source stores in Winnipeg.

- 15% off the regular store price of furniture, mattresses and accessories
- 7% off the regular store price of appliances and electronics

To qualify, all a person has to do is present their SMD Alliance Membership Card at the time of their purchase.

SMD Alliance is also working on developing other discount deals with other retailers, including those who distribute hearing aids and mobility devices.

Encouraging New Attitudes

Another way to help address the costs of living with a disability is to help create communities where people with disabilities can participate more readily. This is particularly important from an employment perspective.

SMD's Community Education and Training Department specializes in working with businesses to create a greater awareness and understanding of disability issues and potential barriers to employment. By working together with the business community, SMD can help remove those barriers and get more people with disabilities working.

There is no easy answer or quick fix to completely address the increased costs associated with living with a disability. But progress is being made and that keeps one thing that no one can afford to lose intact: hope.

A PDF of the study from the U.K. can be found at <http://www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/eBooks/1859352375.pdf> and a PDF summary can be found at <http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialpolicy/pdf/054.pdf>

The Price Survey of Assistive Devices and Supports for Persons with Disabilities by Children, Youth and Social Developments Directorate (December 2003) can be found at dsp-psd.communication.gc.ca/Collection/RH63-1-585-11-03E.pdf

For more on the many services offered through SMD, visit www.smd.mb.ca ❖

[from page 3]

PlayStation 2) projects a person's image onto a TV screen amid a computer-generated environment, enabling them to do things such as water ski, snowboard and mountain climb using their bodies as controllers.

Easier Access 2 Entertainment

After working with nine national disability organizations, Famous Players and Cineplex Galaxy LP have created a new program for moviegoers with disabilities. Through the new program, theatres will offer free or reduced admission for the support people of persons with disabilities. Applications for the Access 2 Entertainment Card are available at <http://www.access2.ca> or by writing to Access 2 Entertainment c/o Easter Seals / March of Dimes National Council 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 208 Toronto, ON M4P 2Y3

a **letter** *from the* **CEO**

Today, there are all manner of technological tools available to enable people to be more active in their community. The problem, however, is that technology is expensive.

That expense goes beyond the purchase price. There are many additional costs that need to be considered and budgeted for if technological tools are going to be embraced.

A recent article on "Technology Aids for Inclusive Classrooms"¹ provides an example of the promise and the problems associated with incorporating assistive technology into classrooms. The article cites the fact that technology can help children with a wide variety of disability types be included in the classroom with other students. However, it goes on to point out how teachers and staff will need to be trained in the proper use of that technology for it to be effective. Technology is also imperfect. Things break down and when they do, there are maintenance costs involved in getting things up and running again.

In addition, there is the rapid pace of technological change to consider. Technology becomes obsolete as soon the next generation is developed. If people with disabilities are to be equal members of the community, they will have to keep pace with changing times as much as everyone else.

To make the use of technology more feasible, people – particularly members of community organizations who want to be more inclusive in their practices – need to budget for the real costs of technology. That means being able to see beyond the purchase costs and building a budget that takes implementation and maintenance costs into account. Do the research and crunch the numbers carefully. Because when people begin to build more appropriate budgets for their technological tools, they will avoid the pitfalls of unexpected costs that contribute to later financial struggles.

Remember; assistive technology is an investment. But it's not just an investment in a product, it's an investment in people... and the return is a more inclusive community.

For more information on how to plan to incorporate assistive technology more effectively, check out the following articles on the web:

http://www.summitcollaborative.com/NPQ_Cost_Technology.html

<http://www.techsoup.org/articlepage.cfm?ArticleId=197&topicid=11>

<http://realgar.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/river/river13.html>

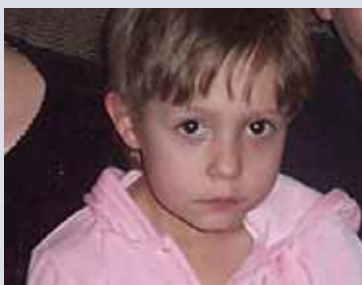
1. Article 4: "TECHNOLOGY AIDS FOR INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS"

Source: Author: Howell, Richard; *THEORY INTO PRACTICE*, Winter 96, Vol.35 Issue 1, p58, 8p. as found at http://www.geocities.com/nycnyc12065/article_4.html

an SMD **Success story**

Navigating the Roads of Rural Services

Parenting holds its share of challenges, but even more so when your child is born with a hearing disability... *and* you live in a rural area where support services aren't readily available.



Mark and Candace Wozniuk live in the town of Minitonas, Manitoba with their two daughters, Tawny (age 7) and Brooklynn (age 4). Neither Mark nor Candace's families had any sort of history of hearing loss. As a result, they were shocked when they found out their children had been born with a hearing loss... and even more shocked at how difficult it was to get an exact diagnosis.

"We didn't initially find out about Tawny's hearing loss and, due to the fact that she's highly skilled at reading lips, we really had to struggle to prove that she had a hearing loss," recalls Candace. "We had many doctors tell us that she was just spoiled and that she would come around. It wasn't until I finally made an audiologist turn their back and test Tawny that they realized that she was picking up on the body language and the lip movement and she wasn't hearing a thing."

Brooklynn was also difficult to diagnose, but for different reasons. Although they had Brooklynn's hearing tested at the same time as

Tawny and found out about her hearing loss, there were other problems. Brooklynn was acting out around the house, hitting people, wrecking things and behaving in unusual ways. Because of her age, her parents couldn't even ask her what was wrong. The stress levels at the Wozniuks were rising and no one was sure what to do.

But perhaps the biggest frustration was that the Wozniuks often felt left out of the decision-making process when it came to their children.

"We didn't get a lot of information," says Candace. We were told, 'Your children have a hearing impairment. We're sending you to Winnipeg.' When the girls got tested there, the doctors said, 'Your children are going to be fitted for hearing aids. We're sending you back to Dauphin.' The lady fitted us, basically gave us the hearing aids and sent us home. And that was kind of the end of the involvement."

Then about two years ago, the Wozniuk family met Diane Maydanyk.

Diane – who works at the SMD Parkland Office in Dauphin, Manitoba – originally began connecting the Wozniuks with speech and language pathologists through the Parkland Regional Outreach Therapy Program. But the relationship quickly grew as Diane became more involved in helping

[*con't on page 6*]



an SMD
success
story cont...

the family connect with different services.

"She got us set up to see an occupational therapist, physiotherapist and speech therapist all out of Winnipeg, out of the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities Communications Centre for Children," says Candace. "We went down there and spent a week having the girls evaluated. And basically, that's where our lives took a turnaround."

SMD helped determine why the girls had a hearing loss and diagnose their specific conditions. In addition, it was determined that Brooklynn was unable to speak and had Sensory Integration Disorder; a disorder causing children to react differently to touch and movement. This fact combined with the frustration of not being able to communicate was the root of the behaviour problems.

Working together with SMD, things began to change for the Wozniuks. The whole family learned sign language, enabling everyone to communicate. When her right ear went completely deaf, SMD petitioned the government to get Tawny a much needed new hearing aid. A Preschool Coordinator from SMD's Brandon office comes to the Wozniuks' home once a month to help Brooklynn with her sensory issues, offering ideas and advice that the Wozniuks can use on a daily basis.

The family is sharing what they're learning with the community as well. When Tawny started school, the Wozniuks worked closely with the staff, working on sign language and remembering to face the class so that tawny could lip-read. Candace – who is also currently taking Business Administration – also manages to find time to work with SMD to organize American Sign Language courses for the entire Minitonas community. As if that wasn't enough, she actively works with Tawny's class to teach sign language.

"Right now I'm in the process of doing two Christmas songs," says Candace. "We do one for my daughter's Christmas Concert in her school, plus we've been invited to the church Christmas Eve to do a song."

Candace says it's vital for parents to ask questions, push for answers and make their voices heard in making the decisions that affect their children. "If you don't advocate for your children, no one will," she says.

In working with SMD, the Wozniuks have found an ally in their advocacy; people who listen to them and keep them both educated and involved every step of the way.

"Diane was the first person that ever said to us, 'Nobody knows your kids better than you know your kids,'" says Candace. "My

[con't on page 7]



an SMD
**Success
story** cont...

husband and I kind of looked at each other and went, 'Finally!'"

"Diane has been there all the way through and backed us on everything that we've ever tried to do or wanted to do with the girls. She's done what she can in her professional capacity to back us.

"I chose Diane to be our case manager because she's right on top of things. She knows what's going on and she's not afraid to dig. If you ask her a question and she hasn't got the answer, she'll find out who has. I just don't know how to explain her."

"Diane has always been there. I can even just pick the phone up and just phone and talk to her. Other than in her professional position she's been a shoulder to cry on at the same time. She basically knows everything that we've gone through in the last two years."

There are still challenges ahead. Babysitters who know sign language are still in short supply in Minnetonka. Brooklynn will be starting school in September '05, and because she has no speech abilities and sensory issues, staff must learn how to work with her in a different way that they did with Tawny. Still, the Wozniuks continue to be optimistic, knowing that they aren't going to be facing those challenges alone. Diane – and SMD – will be there to help in any way they can. ❖

**AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE
IMMERSION 2005**

Now's the time to sign up for American Sign Language Immersion and Fun & Sign programs organized by SMD Services! There are 7 levels of ASL classes from Beginners to very Advanced, where students learn more of the language and culture of Deaf people in a relaxed and fun way.

Where:

The Manitoba School for the Deaf (MSD)

When:

July 11th – 15th, 2005 and
August 15th – 19th, 2005

Session Times:

Monday to Thursday 9am to 4:30pm daily (Friday: 9am – 3:30pm)

Pizza Night

Thursday 4:30 – 7:00 pm (optional)

ASL Immersion Registration Fee:

\$200.00 (adults and youth)

Fun & Sign Registration Fee:

\$90.00

For more information, contact Sandy Lysachok via any of the following numbers:

204 975 3080 V

204 975 3083 TTY

1 866 282 8041 V/Toll free MB

1 800 225 9108 TTY/Toll free MB

SMD will send an information package and a detailed registration form which must be filled out.

**Call
(204) 975-3018
to inquire about how you
can become a member of
SMD Alliance.**

access denied?

Disabilities and the Internet



When people talk about “accessibility,” there is a tendency to think in physical terms. For example, can a person using an assistive device enter a building easily? Is there a ramp or an elevator?

But what about “virtual accessibility” issues?

The Internet represents one of the most powerful resources at our disposal today. Through it, we can find information on virtually any topic, 24 hours a day, seven days a week – all with a couple of clicks of a mouse.

But for people with disabilities, there can be more to accessing the Internet than just having a computer and a good service provider. The electronic and interactive nature of the Internet creates some unique accessibility issues from a disability standpoint.

For example, Internet users who are blind use a type of software called a “screen reader.” A screen reader scans the text on a website and reads it aloud. The problem, however, is that many web designers have a tendency to use a lot of graphics instead of text descriptions. In addition, text that is presented in columns or broken up in a non-traditional manner may make it difficult for screen readers to follow what’s written.

On the other hand, people who are deaf or hard of hearing are more likely to prefer graphic-heavy presentations or detailed descriptions to convey information. However, longer descriptions can potentially pose a problem for those who have lesser coordination

or difficulty moving since they may be required to move the mouse, scroll and click on more items.

A truly accessible website must keep all these factors and more in mind during the development stage. Unfortunately, a look at many existing sites shows there are few developers who seem to consider the needs of web surfers with disabilities.

The good news, however, is that there is a growing movement toward making the Internet more accessible by people of all abilities.

The **World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)** consists of over 350 member organizations from all over the world who are all dedicated to developing ways to help the Web live up to its fullest potential for use by everyone and anyone. As part of this vision, W3C has developed a set of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines that are widely regarded as the standard by which all sites should be measured. Even the well-known Bobby-accessibility tool tests in large part against these guidelines.

While the W3C guidelines themselves are very comprehensive, they are rooted in four key principles:

1. Content must be **perceivable**.
2. Interface elements in the content must be **operable**.
3. Content and controls must be **understandable**.
4. Content must be **robust** enough to work with current and future technologies.*

[con't on page 9]

The soon-to-be unveiled SMD & Me family of websites is applying these same principles during development, going through the various levels of accessibility testing required to receive the Bobby stamp of approval.

Ensuring website accessibility becomes even more important given SMD's goal of providing a comprehensive, one-stop online information resource that provides timely, accurate and relevant information from all over the world. In gathering information from so many different sources, SMD is taking great care to convert and deliver all articles, studies and facts in a way that any visitor to the SMD sites will find accessible.

It's a big undertaking, but one that SMD feels is important. SMD believes that appropriate

technologies can enhance independence and help create environments accessible to all. Having access to information in particular can enable people with disabilities – as well as their friends and families – make better health and life decisions. But having all the information in the world at your fingertips is useless if you can't read it or you're unable to find what you want.

For more information on W3C and its Web Content Guidelines, visit www.w3.org

** Principles were taken from the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 W3C Working Draft 30 July 2004 Document at www.w3.org/TR/2004/WD-WCAG20-20040730/*

the SMD **vision & values**

At SMD, our vision for Manitoba is that of "a community that supports the independence, participation and empowerment of persons of all abilities."

As we work towards achieving this vision, our actions are guided by our core values:

Empowerment... of persons with disabilities

Independence... as a principle of well being

Participation... in all areas of society

Community... for support and growth

Prevention... of disabling conditions

Holism... as a model for service

Dignity... in all matters