

member NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER FOR MANITOBANS WITH DISABILITIES

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Matters of Mobility

SMD Wheelchair Services keeps people participating in their communities

Nine thousand.

That is the number of men, women and children who currently rely on SMD Wheelchair Services for their regular or motorized wheelchairs for their mobility needs.

Mobility encompasses far more than the ability to move from point A to point B. It represents greater independence, self-reliance and the ability to participate more fully in the community. Consider how wheelchairs enable people to move about their homes and offices, gain an earlier discharge from a hospital or play sports such as basketball or hockey. Mobility is the difference between just being someplace and being involved.

A History of Mobility

SMD has a long history of addressing mobility needs. In fact, SMD's very roots are tied to mobility.

Long before there was an SMD, there were two groups. In 1946, the Cerebral Palsy Parents Council (with

assistance from the Winnipeg Kinsman Club) had opened a treatment centre at Winnipeg Children's Hospital. Then in 1949, the Business Girls' Auxiliary formed a new "club" called the Wheel Chair Center. This new club was specifically dedicated to providing a variety of services to post-polio and paraplegic girls confined to wheelchairs or requiring prosthetic appliances for mobility.

It was in 1950 that the two groups – with support from the Provincial Government and Winnipeg Welfare Council – led others in forming the Society for Crippled Children. The new organization was open to all children under the age of 21 whose movement was restricted due to disease, illness or from birth. At the same time as this was happening, the Federal Government decided to provide funding for the Provincial Government to use to provide wheelchairs to people. The funds and responsibility for coordinating a province-wide program went to the newly formed Society.

Years went by and the Society began adapting to meet the needs of more Manitobans. By 1953, the organization was renamed the Society for Crippled Children & Adults, providing a growing number

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of vocational and recreational services for people with all types of disabilities. Branch offices began opening to reach people in all parts of the province. The Society began to form partnerships with other community-based organizations.

Even with all the growth and changes, mobility issues remained a foremost priority for the Society. When the Society for Crippled Children and Adults changed its name to the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities, the commitment to meeting Manitobans' mobility needs remained – and the commitment remained strong.

The Model for Mobility

Today, SMD Wheelchair Services provides both regular and motorized wheelchairs on a long-term loan basis. This unique model is what makes the SMD Wheelchair Services program so valuable to so many Manitobans.

Manitobans who require wheelchairs for long-term use are able to get a wheelchair that best suits their mobility needs without the expense of buying their own. Routine inspections are performed annually, with SMD technicians “touring” Manitoba during the summer, conducting inspections and making repairs on-site whenever possible. Appointments can be made at the Wheelchair Services Depot and emergency services are available after hours, on weekends and on holidays – all at no cost to the individual.

The loan model and the fact that SMD keeps its wheelchairs in top shape allow SMD to keep its wheelchairs in circulation longer – and keep program costs down. As people age and grow, their needs change. Rather than purchasing a variety of new wheelchairs, SMD is able to use an existing chair to meet an individual's new needs. This leaves more money for travel and maintenance, which in turn, makes the program available to more rural Manitobans. That's what it's all about: meeting the mobility needs of all Manitobans, regardless of their age or where they live.

Moving Mobility Funding Forward

A large part of the credit for SMD Wheelchair Services' ability to provide such a high level of service for free goes to provincial organizations such as the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA). The WRHA and other community-oriented health organizations recognize the role mobility plays in enriching the lives of Manitobans with disabilities. Their financial support enables SMD Wheelchair Services to operate on such a large scale at no cost to the people who rely on the program. But there is an opportunity to broaden that scale even further.

SMD has long been an advocate of government support for programs such as the SMD Wheelchair Services program. Today, as the number of people with mobility issues continues to

rise, the ongoing financial support that can only come from government is more important than ever. Higher demands for service require higher demands on funds. While SMD Wheelchair Services is managed in the most fiscally responsible manner possible, the program is already working at capacity – and additional growth cannot take place without the additional funding in place to support it.

For Manitobans with disabilities who require a wheelchair, mobility isn't just an “issue,” it's a requirement that enables them to live life to its fullest. To keep mobility moving forward, we have to keep that in mind – particularly when considering funding. Because of all the obstacles to mobility, money shouldn't be one of them. Other community-oriented health organizations recognize the role mobility plays in enriching the lives of Manitobans with disabilities. That is why organizations such as the WRHA provide the financial support that enables SMD Wheelchair Services to meet the mobility needs of Manitobans living with disabilities anywhere in the province – and without adding financial pressure to their lives. That level of support will continue to be vital to SMD Wheelchair Services and to all those who require wheelchairs in the future.

Driving Away Parking Offenders



Parking Permit Program Awareness Campaign Shifts Into Gear

Most drivers have experienced the frustration of being unable to find a parking space.

Now imagine how frustrating it would be to have a parking space specifically for you – a space you need – that's taken by someone else who doesn't need it.

That problem has plagued the Parking Permit Program since day one...and it's why the SMD Wheelchair Services Division hired a marketing communications company to develop an awareness campaign about the abuse of the program.

The Parking Permit Program is a provincially-regulated program administered by SMD. The purpose of the program is to ensure that people who have difficulty walking more than 50 metres have access to parking close to the entrances of stores, providing them with the ability to actively participate in their community. Any Manitoban requiring full-time assistance of a wheelchair, walker, cane or crutches is eligible for the program (temporary permits are also available).

People who abuse the program generally fit into three categories:

1. People who park with the intention of "only being a minute." For these people, the abuse is a matter of personal convenience and poor judgment.

2. People who use another person's permit are also committing a "crime of convenience." However, these people are much more blatant in their abuse of the Program as they are actively choosing to use a permit in a fraudulent manner.

3. People who deliberately park knowing that the odds of their being caught or suffering any consequences are virtually non-existent.

Regardless of the reason behind the decision to park, SMD Wheelchair Services' response remained the same...and became the message of the awareness campaign; "No Permit. No Parking."

With the message in place, the next step was determining how to deliver the message to Manitoba's drivers. Because the majority of parking is outdoors, the use of billboard made the most sense. The decision was also made to roll out the campaign in Winnipeg and Brandon (the areas with the most offences cited) to test the response before adding additional billboards in rural areas.

On Saturday, May 7th, the campaign was officially launched with a special guest speaker: Conservative MP Steven Fletcher. Fletcher is widely recognized for breaking down disability barriers and becoming the first quadriplegic to be elected to the House of Commons.

"This issue has been a personal pet peeve of mine for many years," said Fletcher, who has held a parking permit for the past 9 years. "Before my accident... I did not give people with disabilities fair consideration. Today, I am definitely more compassionate and acutely aware of the issues that people with disabilities face."

The message is out there. Will people listen? Only time will tell...but at least someone is trying to steer them in a better direction.

Working Through Hard Times



How SMD Helped One Consumer Connect with a New Career

Life is a journey filled with unexpected turns. Just ask Zeljko Jefic.

Originally from the former Yugoslavia, Zeljko graduated from university in Sarajevo as an electrical engineer with additional education in ESL and computer programming. He came to Canada in 1996 and soon found a home for his skills at a Winnipeg computer company where he worked on making programs Y2K compliant. He had been working there for nearly three years when his life took a sudden and unexpected turn.

In 2000, Zeljko was diagnosed with brain cancer.

Zeljko underwent emergency surgery and the cancerous tumor was successfully removed. However, the operation left Zeljko unable to work for nearly two years as he slowly recovered his health. After being away from the work force for nearly two years, he soon found that his health was not the only thing he now had to recover.

His previous employer could not hold his job for the two-year recovery period, leaving Zeljko without a job to return to. Changes in technology and job requirements demanded additional education... education he did not have the money for. To make matters even more difficult, Zeljko still suffered from chronic headaches and fatigue that left him unable to work for extended periods.

With no officially recognized credentials, a lack of recent work experience and continuing health concerns, Zeljko turned to his insurance provider for help in returning to work. His insurance company's contracted IT counselor tried placing Zeljko with the City of Winnipeg's Library Services to see if he was able to work. He was also promised that he would be paid for re-training if he were able to work.


"I worked for three months using two different medications, suffering severe headaches just to get training," says Zeljko, remembering how he tried to make the transition back into the workforce.

But because Zeljko was able to work for five hours a day, his insurance company told him he no longer qualified for training. In fact, Zeljko was told he no longer qualified for their benefits program.

"They just said, 'oh, you are now able to work.' And it wasn't that I wasn't able to work, but I was unprepared. I was out of work for two and a half years and didn't improve any of my skills. I even lost some skills because I wasn't able to work."

"So I tried my best to start moving because I didn't want to be on disability. All my life, I've always wanted to work. So when they told me they wouldn't pay for any education, I was pretty disappointed."

However, the contracted IT counselor Zeljko had worked with stepped in and put Zeljko in touch with SMD...which put his life on a whole new track.



Zeljko went to SMD's Adult Program Services where he became connected with Vocational Rehabilitation Counsellor Joe Romanson.

"He helped me out with the Workplace Inclusion Program, and got money for my education," recalls Zeljko.

SMD also helped Zeljko with an employment assessment that guided him toward a slightly different career focus; software development.

"I finished the diploma course for Software Development at the University of Winnipeg, and then I was able to get a job at Manitoba Hydro," says Zeljko.

Zeljko's first three months at Manitoba Hydro enabled him to get some valuable work experience under his belt. It also got his foot in the door and gave him the opportunity to show what he could do. Based on his performance, SMD and Manitoba Hydro were able to arrange a work term position for Zeljko, with half of his salary paid for by a work inclusion program.

"Now, Hydro extended my work term for another year and they will pay my whole wage," says Zeljko.

"I work on existing computer programs," explains Zeljko when asked to describe his work at Manitoba Hydro. "It's a big company and they have many technical and engineering needs. They have many computer programs, so I work on some of the programs to enhance them."

Even more importantly, Manitoba Hydro demonstrated their respect for Zeljko's electrical engineering degree and his desire to work by discussing future possibilities with him.

"I supplied them with my old degree, my old courses and my marks so that they could decide what I would need to get an official designation."

Zeljko has come a long way from where he started more than two years ago, and he appreciates the help and support Joe – and SMD – provided as he made his way down a new career path.

"He is a great person," says Zeljko of Joe. "He was very helpful, even after the SMD involvement ended, he would keep in touch. I am very, very thankful that I met him because he helped a lot."

"Before, I felt...helpless. I lost my confidence. I got sick. Because I got sick, I lost my job. I was still on two different kinds of medication, and I had lots of headaches."

"Since I've started working, it's been much better. I don't have headaches as often...it helps to relax, to work, to be doing something to forget about my problems."

"My experiences with SMD were very good," says Zeljko. "They helped me when I didn't have any other help or support. I am very thankful to SMD that they helped me get here."

Better Together?



(6)

Should Seniors Policies and Disability Policies Be Integrated?

Here's a thought-provoking fact: by the year 2026, more than two-thirds of all Manitobans with a disability (68%) will be seniors.

Even today, there is already a significant overlap between the population of seniors and people with disabilities, with seniors comprising 56% of Manitobans living with a disability.

Why does this matter? Currently, the provision of services to seniors and people with a disability is delivered through two distinct systems. Government departments, policies, and funding targets the groups separately. Yet, as the population ages, the need for services for seniors will increase...and this aging population will include a growing number of people with disabilities.

Common Issues – Converging Solutions

Although seniors and people with disabilities are not homogeneous, they share many issues affecting their daily lives. These common issues may provide an opportunity to governments and those serving seniors and people with disabilities to converge some policies and service deliveries.

In a review of government and voluntary sector policy documents (provincially and nationally), SMD has found there are a number of key issues common to both groups.

These include:

- Social isolation
- Home care
- Technology supports
- Income supports
- Case management
- Pharmaceutical compliance
- Transportation
- Affordable housing
- Accessible primary health care
- Access to government
- Abuse, neglect, and discrimination

In most cases, policies and programs around these issues are based on the specific needs and context of either the seniors group or that of people with a disability, or the 'lens' of the group. Not only do policy-makers and program deliverers tend to use this perspective, those in the groups themselves generally view issues from their own specific 'lens.'

Focusing on shared issues with a 'double lens' may be difficult at first, being outside the normal practice for many of us. Yet there may be benefits to everyone involved. Most significantly, if governments are going to be challenged to find the resources to meet the growing needs of both groups, a pooling or converging may ensure continued services to both.

Convergence in Canada

There are some examples of such convergence from across the country. Here in Manitoba, an accessible housing project has been constructed in Brandon for seniors and people with disabilities.

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In Saskatchewan, a Disability Action Plan published in 2001 identified a number of areas where a joint focus could be applied, for example, in home modification programs and paratransit services.

Further west, the Alberta Ministry of Transportation has three initiatives targeting seniors and people with disabilities: the Driver's Guide for Seniors & People with Disabilities; a guide to provide rural transportation for these two groups; and a parking permit policy incorporating both seniors and people with disabilities.

In New Brunswick, the Ministry of Family and Community Services has combined some of its policy and service delivery areas. Its Long Term Care Services for Adults and Seniors, for example, is one program for all adults, focusing on functionality.

If governments and other groups involved in delivering services to seniors and people with disabilities are to look seriously at the potential of convergence, they also need to recognize possible barriers to the concept. In particular, seniors as a group and people with disabilities as a group may not be willing or able to see their issues from a 'double lens' or perspective. Common issues will tend to be viewed from their specific context and needs.

Considerations Beyond Cost

Additionally, in considering whether to converge some policies and services or not, governments and service providers need to evaluate not just cost effectiveness but the

practical and appropriateness of such convergence. It is one thing to create a single program for two populations and another to make sure the needs of each group continue to be met.

Without dismissing these potential barriers to convergence, SMD encourages further review and consideration of the concept. It recommends the following as initial steps in the process:

1. Development of a draft seniors/disabilities double lens planning tool.
2. Further collaborative planning involving the Disabilities Issues Office and the Seniors Directorate.
3. Community consultations or a double lens planning conference or workshop.
4. Review of federal/provincial funding mechanisms to explore opportunities to maximize federal cost sharing.

As our population continues to age and, simultaneously, experience an increase in people with disabilities, we need to face the challenge with creativity. It is hoped the concept of convergence can play a role in this creative approach to meeting the needs of our citizens.

For the complete position paper Aging and Disability in Manitoba: Converging Opportunities, see www.smd.mb.ca, go to Disability Resources and Links, and click on Position Papers.