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Employee Networks in the Ontario Public Service (OPS)

The OPS has organized employee networks that are "voluntary, employee- driven associations organized around shared interests, issues and a common bond or background. Under the OPS Diversity Strategy, the activity of an Employee Network must focus on building a strong, inclusive organization, with attention to improving work conditions and removing barriers and discrimination."

D-Net is one such employee group that has received "network" status. Members are OPS employees interested in accessibility issues and supporting the development of a more inclusive workplace for persons with disabilities in the Ontario government.

Canada ratifies the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2006 with a purpose "to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of human rights by all persons with disabilities and to promote respect for their inherent dignity." A full spectrum of civil, political, economical and social rights is recognized in the Convention (i.e. the right to work, the right to participate in public life, etc.). The Convention focuses on straightforward principles, such as inclusion, non-discrimination, equality and also deems access to certain life elements such as justice, independent living, health, information and communication, education and employment as essential. On March 11, 2010 Canada ratified this important international agreement.

An accessible built environment is an important gateway to opportunity and participation and is heralded by people who have become weary of facing discriminatory architecture. Through continued implementation of the ORC's Accessibility Management Framework, we are creating meaningful change and the tangible outcomes include the design and construction of accessible public buildings that will empower and include people of all abilities in Ontario.

HTML Version of the Convention:

<http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=2599>

For an Ontario Public Service perspective on the Convention, please visit:

<http://intra.mgs.gov.on.ca/diversity/reflections.htm>

Friends not Foes: Accessibility and Heritage

On the surface, it may appear that accessibility and heritage are conflicting interests. Or, that there is a hierarchy of interests which ranks one above another. But, in reality, there is no 'trump' card between accessibility and heritage.

To learn more, follow this link
[government diversity networks](#)

Generally what inhibits accessibility projects at heritage buildings is poor (or no) planning; inconsistent approaches (especially at multi-tenanted buildings), a lack of understanding about the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act requirements and an absence of expertise (in accessibility and heritage) on the project team.

True, it can be a challenge to accommodate the goals of accessibility and heritage, but what we require is a co-ordinated approach on projects. In Professional Services, we have found that the accessibility and heritage specialists working together on projects ensures that both goals can be achieved.

On-going work on the development of a Wayfinding Signage Standard for Ontario Government Facilities is a good example of an accessibility initiative that addresses the specific requirements related to heritage buildings. And as we complete more projects, ORC is developing a portfolio of best practices which will influence other accessibility projects. For instance, the barrier-free ramp at the front entrance to Osgoode Hall has set a precedent for other courthouses.

There is no advantage for the heritage community to prevent accessibility projects at heritage buildings. Actually, we want as many people as possible to access them. In the end, the more people that visit, work and live in heritage buildings the better change we have of ensuring their future existence.

What's New?

Accessibility Audit of ORC's Head Office (1 Dundas Street West, Toronto)

ORC has completed an updated accessibility audit of ORC's head office, which consists of the 19th, 20th and 22nd floors of 1 Dundas Street West. The purpose of the audit is to identify further opportunities to enhance the accessibility of ORC's work space. ORC's Pilot Accessibility Design Standard ("ADS") was used as the basis for collecting and assessing audit data,; features such as entrances/doors, lighting, wayfinding signage, office and cubicle corridors and common areas were investigated.

City of Toronto wins Universal Design Award at Canada Blooms

The Canada Blooms "Passions" Festival was held March 17 to 21 and the City of Toronto received the Universal Access Award for it's submission of an accessible gardening system. Proud Toronto Housing residents showcased the raised beds that are useable by



City of Toronto wins Universal Design Award at Canada Blooms

Source: H. Elston (2010)



gardeners in wheelchairs or for those who find it difficult to get down to ground level. Elizabeth Jassem, Architect and Manager of Universal Accessibility with Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), designed the accessible beds and was ecstatic about the award.

Jassem notes that "There was also a very enthusiastic response from a large percentage of the senior visitors; many asked where they could buy the tools and our accessible planter. " The ORC is also investigating opportunities for raised garden beds and sensory gardens in the provincially owned portfolio, as part of its work to mainstream accessibility.

Heather Elston, ORC's Accessibility Planner, and Elizabeth Jassem came together earlier this month to compare notes on accessibility projects. It is strikingly evident that Jassem's 'from the heart' approach has driven the construction of an innovative space and reach assessment centre for TCHC clients. The centre facilitates independent living by custom designing TCHC dwelling units to match the findings of the on-site assessment. Observations made by an Occupational Therapist at the centre ensure each tenant's unique needs are incorporated at the design stage. This is a win-win for the tenant and TCHC; in the past dwelling units may have undergone a number of costly renovations in order to get accommodation matters right.

"Parking Mobility" Application - Improving Accessible Parking

There is a new application for iPhone users called "Parking Mobility". Parking Mobility is an application that allows the user to report when a vehicle is parked in an accessible parking spot without proper identification. Information that is captured by the user through Parking Mobility (such as photos and other data) is forwarded to municipalities for their use. The Parking Mobility application also allows users to:

- Easily locate accessible parking;
- Add accessible parking spots that are not found in Parking Mobility's records; and
- Suggest locations for accessible parking

This application will be available on Blackberry and Android devices in the near future. For more information on Parking Mobility and where you can download the application for free, visit

<http://www.parkingmobility.com/>

We look forward to hearing your questions and comments. Please contact us at:

accessibility@ontariorealty.ca

Sincerely,
Accessibility Team
Ontario Realty Corporation

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