



Communiqué

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Persons with Disabilities in Television Programming CAB to Develop Broadcaster Tool Kit

Ottawa, September 16, 2005 -- The Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) today submitted to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) its research report titled *The Presence, Portrayal and Participation of Persons with Disabilities in Television Programming*.

The Report provides extensive detail on the issues and barriers challenging persons with disabilities, in society and in television programming alike. It further provides a series of recommendations for the development of a broadcaster tool kit to move forward on greater inclusion of persons with disabilities within the broadcasting industry; and for addressing issues of presence and portrayal on-screen.

“Recognizing that all media, and particularly television can play a strong role in changing public attitudes on social issues, Canada’s private broadcasters are committed to improving the presence, portrayal and participation of persons with disabilities in television programming. Our comprehensive report demonstrates this commitment but also highlights that our collective success depends on the collaboration and contribution of our industry partners,” said CAB President and CEO Glenn O’Farrell.

A Steering Committee, comprised of CAB members and chaired by Sarah Crawford, Vice-President, Public Affairs, CHUM Limited, was created to oversee the development and implementation of a detailed Action Plan. The Steering Committee recommended a number of tools and initiatives for broadcasters and industry partners based on its research findings from over 50 one-on-one consultations, a stakeholder forum and best practices research. An Outreach Committee comprised of persons with disabilities, many of whom have experience with the broadcasting industry, served as an invaluable advisory group on the implementation of the CAB’s research plan and provided invaluable input on the recommendations and tools.

The Steering Committee concluded that in order for the recommendations to succeed, the initiatives must take place at one of three levels: at the level of the individual station, broadcaster or corporate group; at the level of the broadcasting industry as a whole; or within other designated sectors, such as the independent production sector or the education sector.

Both the Steering and the Outreach Committee members recognized that implementation will take place primarily at the level of individual station, broadcaster or corporate group, as initiatives need to be tailored to their individual business realities.

Canada's private broadcasters are committed to the development and implementation of initiatives that improve and advance diversity in the industry. Last year, the CAB adopted the recommendations advanced by the Task Force for Cultural Diversity on Television. These recommendations were made following a major qualitative and quantitative study on ethnocultural minorities and Aboriginal peoples in Canadian television in 2004.

The 100-page report and research study is the culmination of the work set out in the CAB Action Plan submitted to the CRTC in August 2004. The full report and research study can be found at: <http://www.cab-acr.ca/english/social/diversity/disabilities.shtm>.

The Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) is the national voice of Canada's private broadcasters, representing the vast majority of Canadian programming services, including private radio and television stations, networks, specialty, pay and pay-per-view services.

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Backgrounder

The Presence, Portrayal and Participation of Persons with Disabilities in Television Programming

In January 2004, the CRTC requested that the CAB develop and file an action plan with the Commission, outlining the process proposed to examine and address issues concerning the presence, portrayal and participation of persons with disabilities in television programming (Public Notice 2004-2). The CAB undertook a number of consultations and background research in developing an Action Plan that was submitted to the Commission in August 2004.

THE RESEARCH STUDY:

The CAB retained CONNECTUS Consulting Inc. to undertake the qualitative research study on the presence, portrayal and participation of persons with disabilities in television programming that included:

- 1) *Extensive consultations* through one-on-one interviews with representatives from service and consumer disability non-government organizations (disability NGOs), persons with disabilities within the broadcasting sector, government officials, senior managers in the broadcasting industry and representatives from the Canadian production sector. *A total of 56 people representing 43 organizations from across Canada were interviewed between May 31 and July 31, 2005.*
- 2) *A Stakeholder Forum* held July 15, 2005 in Toronto, which brought together 20 disability NGOs, broadcasters, performers and producers in a facilitated discussion of issues, barriers and tools/initiatives. An additional 16 observers from government and the broadcasting industry attended the event; these included members of the CAB Steering Committee overseeing the research; members of the CAB Outreach Committee, an advisory group to the Study comprised of persons with disabilities; and two officials from the CRTC.
- 3) *Best Practices* research and analysis, focused on broadcasting industry initiatives and industry-related initiatives in the U.K., the U.S. and Canada.

This approach to the research has yielded a comprehensive Report that provides extensive detail on the issues and barriers challenging persons with disabilities, in society and in television programming alike. It further provides a series of considerations for a broadcaster tool kit in moving forward on greater inclusion of persons with disabilities in our industry and for addressing issues of presence and portrayal on-screen.

KEY POINTS OF CONSENSUS:

The Steering and Outreach Committees identified the following **key points of consensus** for the development of a set of initiatives directed at improving the presence, portrayal and participation of persons with disabilities in television programming:

- 1) Canada's private broadcasters are committed to the development and implementation of initiatives that improve and advance diversity in the industry. Television broadcasters report on their progress in advancing diversity within their station(s) in their annual diversity reports to the CRTC that now include initiatives that focus on persons with disabilities.

- 2) Canada's private broadcasters believe that all media, and particularly television can play a strong role in changing public attitudes on social issues, and that greater visibility, more accurate depictions and positive messaging can strongly influence inclusive practices across society.
- 3) Consultations undertaken for this research revealed widespread support for the business case for diversity in broadcasting – this is based on the recognition that (i) more on-screen presence and accurate portrayal will reach and increase audiences not only from Canadians with disabilities, but from their families, friends and caregivers; (ii) broadcasters can gain a competitive edge by tapping into all creative resources available to them, including persons with disabilities; and (iii) all employees in the broadcasting industry can potentially benefit from accommodations that are made for employees with disabilities (e.g. automatic doors, ramps, etc.).
- 4) There is general agreement among those consulted for the study that the presence of persons with disabilities both on-screen and behind the scenes is low, and that negative portrayals still take place but that broadcasters and representatives from the disability community sense a strong basis for positive change at the present time.
- 5) Research findings indicate that Canada's **independent production sector**, including producers, writers, casting directors, directors and other content creators, can play a powerful role in creating more on-screen presence and more accurate portrayals of persons with disabilities.
- 6) The **community channel** plays a very important role in the broadcasting system as a point of access to the airwaves for Canadians. As noted in the Research Report, cable distribution undertakings can make a valued contribution to inclusion by making community channels available and accessible to programming initiatives by persons with disabilities while also providing training facilities for persons with disabilities.
- 7) Canada's **education sector** plays a fundamentally important role in the development of human resources for the industry. With the support of broadcasters and industry partners, educators at all levels can play a very important part in guiding students with disabilities to career paths in broadcasting and/or television production.
- 8) In a world marked by technological development and content convergence, it is important to support the inclusion of persons with disabilities across distribution platforms and across media. As video content becomes available through alternate means, and as linkages continue to develop between various types of content providers and content distributors, opportunities to include persons with disabilities as performers, creators or other roles extend well beyond television.
- 9) Building communication and outreach between broadcasters and the disability community is a key starting point for a broadcaster toolkit.

HIGHLIGHTS OF INITIATIVES AND TOOLS

The CAB will create a **Public Service Announcement (PSA)** directed at influencing a positive shift in public attitudes about persons with disabilities that may be broadcast on our members' stations. The launch of the PSA is expected for the Fall of 2006.

The CAB will review its **Industry Content Codes** by Spring of 2006 to address issues identified in the research relating to the portrayal of persons with disabilities in television programming.

The CAB will develop a **training seminar** for HR and other managers in television broadcasting. Such a training seminar will be developed for implementation in 2006 with input from the disability community and will serve to sensitize the industry to the specific – and often cost-effective – ways in which persons with disabilities can be accommodated in the broadcasting workplace

The CAB will develop an **information package about employment in the broadcasting and production sectors**, for wide distribution to broadcasters, educators, and the disability community. The information package will include a brochure explaining the types of employment available in broadcasting and production and will be posted on the *Diversity in Broadcasting* section of the CAB website.

The CAB, seeking the input of the disability community and the cooperation of the RTNDA, will develop **educational material on inappropriate use of language**. This material is envisioned as an information brochure that would be circulated to CAB and RTNDA members and posted on the CAB's *Diversity in Broadcasting* section of its website and its members' websites. The CAB will undertake this initiative with RTNDA immediately, for completion in 2006.