



## The face of learning disabilities

Finding the right employer who understands learning disabilities is one of the greatest challenges faced by almost 10 percent of the Canadian population.

A groundbreaking three-year study on learning disabilities (LD) reveals both a troubling and encouraging picture. The study set discovered remarkable resiliency of Canadians, both young and old, who live with the condition every day.

Among its more obvious findings was the difficulty those with a learning disability encounter in obtaining an education. An even greater challenge, however, is persuading prospective employers that they can do the job they might be hired for.

The report, Putting a Canadian Face on Learning Disabilities, was produced by the Learning Disability Association of Canada (LDAC) at a cost of \$302,000.

The study is unique, says Dr. Lex Wilson, its co-principal investigator and director of the Meighen Centre at Mount Allison University. "It represents the first time that any disability organization in Canada has requested access to Statistics Canada data surveys. Our team examined ten different data sets—the most comprehensive look ever at the impact of living with a learning disability in Canada."

It concluded that governments can do more to eliminate barriers for Canadians with learning disabilities who are often prevented from realizing success at school, at work and in everyday activities.

Achievements are often accomplished through factors outside government support:

- Finding a teacher who is trained to work with a student with LD
- Finding the 'right' employer that understands learning disabilities and provides the necessary accommodations
- Having family support that includes financial resources

"A learning disability is a series of neurological conditions that severely affects a person's capacity to perceive, interpret and manage information. There needs to be early identification, interventions and supports to minimize the impact on individuals and the costs to Canadian society," says LDAC Chair Fraser Green. "With this support in place, Canadians with learning disabilities will have equitable opportunities to develop their chosen potential."

Persons with learning disabilities are twice as likely to report that they did not successfully complete high school and are more likely to drop out before graduation.

Nearly a third of parents with children with a learning disability could not afford the learning aids their children need to succeed academically

In addition, Canadians with learning disabilities are less likely to report being employed—51 percent of adults aged 30 to 44, compared to 89 percent of the general population of the same age. They are also two to three times more likely to report high levels of distress, depression, anxiety disorders, suicidal thoughts, visits to mental health professionals, and poor overall mental and physical health.

"Results of this study are impossible to ignore," said Green. "The wait-to-fail approach clearly isn't working. The provincial/territorial governments need to put early screening and interventions for all Canadian school children into place. There also needs to be more equitable access to learning aids and appropriate accommodations and support for people with learning disabilities." **DI**

