



Language / Imagery with Dignity

2008

December 3rd is the United Nations International Day of Persons with Disabilities. This year's international theme is the "Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities: Dignity and Justice for All of Us". "Dignity and Justice for All of Us" is the theme for this day as well as the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Did you Know?

- Use people first language referring to the individual first and the disability second, for example, persons with disabilities, person with an intellectual disability, or a child with autism and avoid expressions such as "differently-abled" or "physically challenged".
- Positive attitudes and accessible environments enable people with disabilities to live with dignity.
- Words and images are powerful tools in shaping positive societal attitudes and perceptions.
- Appropriate terminology can open doors that foster understanding and respect and enable individuals with disabilities to be viewed as contributing members of society.
- Using appropriate words is about communicating effectively not being "politically correct".
- Perpetuating stereotypes does not promote dignity, it reinforces prejudice; i.e., people with disabilities are to be pitied, instead, they are valued members of society.
- Avoid using the term "special" to describe needs, use the terms "disability supports" or "disability accommodations".
- Disability imagery, whether photographs, posters, verbal or written, is composed of multiple viewpoints or gazes, ranging from the "impaired" physical body to the disabling social environment. In some instances, photographic images and accompanying text combine to reinforce the notion that persons with disabilities are helpless and needy people. These types of images not only emphasize prejudices, they also limit perceptions about persons with disabilities.

Solutions:

- Avoid negative words that imply tragedy, such as afflicted with, suffers, victims, prisoner and unfortunate.
- Use objective descriptions when referring to a person with a disability ie: a person who uses a wheelchair or a person who uses a communication device.
- When producing material or creating images about people with disabilities, show them as active participants in society. Portraying people with disabilities in everyday social situations and work environments and reinforces their presence in the community.
- Governments, businesses, organizations, media and all other sectors need to move away from the medical/charity models of disability or images that invoke pity. Negative images and photographs play a critical role in how society views persons with disabilities and unfortunately has an impact on how many persons with disabilities view themselves.
- Get a copy of “A Way with Words and Images” is a Government of Canada handbook on appropriate terminology and images. To find this handbook go to:http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/disability_issues/reports/way_with_words/page06.shtml
- If in doubt, most individuals with disabilities are generally more than willing to help you and sometimes individuals view or speak about their own disability differently.
- Do not hesitate to contact a local Independent Living Centre or Independent Living Canada for more information and guidance. Go to www.ilc-vac.ca to find a Centre near you.

“The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug (fireflies).”

- Mark Twain