



# **Work Readiness Skills**

## **Focus Group Report**

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December 2005**



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1. Introduction

1.1. Project Background

The Tap into Employability – Work Readiness Skills Project, considered a Community Learning Network Project funded by the Office of Learning Technology is researching the effectiveness of using a Blended Learning Curriculum in teaching and enhancing Employability Skills for Persons with Disabilities. In this situation, blended learning refers to teaching using a combination of methods including on-line technology, facilitator led groups, peer supports, and mentorship.

In 1996 the Canadian federal government established the Office of Learning Technologies (OLT) as a partner in building a culture of lifelong learning.

The OLT works to raise awareness of the opportunities, challenges and benefits of technology-based learning and to act as a catalyst for innovation in the area of technology-enabled learning and skills development.

The Community Learning Networks is an initiative that supports community-based pilot projects, which demonstrate innovative and sustainable uses of existing network technologies to upgrade skills and knowledge of adult learners in Canadian communities.

The Coalition for Persons with Disabilities for Peel-Halton-Dufferin is coordinating this research project.

This project has many objectives that when successfully met, should lead to increased opportunities for persons with disabilities to access accommodating community based computers and employability skills development programs leading towards finding and maintaining employment.

The projects objectives are as follows

1) Complete a map of community resources which persons with various disabilities can use to access employability skills development services and programs that are accommodating their needs;

2) To develop blended learning options that enhance persons with disabilities' successful acquisition of employability skills by modifying employability skills e-learning tools to accommodate a variety of learning styles and disability related accommodation needs;

3) Provide 24 to 75 persons with disabilities with blended learning opportunities for increasing employability skills;

4) Provide 24 to 75 persons with disabilities with access to on-line and other industry mentors to assist them in their acquisition of employability skills and in conducting successful job searches;

5) Provide employment and disability service providers with well researched and documented best practices in providing work readiness learning programs which incorporate on-line learning resources to assist persons with disabilities in increasing employability skills, successfully obtaining and maintaining employability.

The initial phase of the project involved research-based activities, which include a community mapping exercise, along with a series of focus groups.

### Mapping

The aim of the mapping exercise is to create an inventory of what currently exists in terms of programs that enhance learning and development of employability skills, and access to community based computers including the various accommodations for persons with disabilities.

### Focus Groups

Since one of the primary goals of this project is to modify employability skills e-learning tools to accommodate a variety of learning styles and disability related barriers it is essential to identify the learning accommodation needs of persons with disabilities in the regions of Peel, Halton and Dufferin. Information about needs and barriers was gathered through a focus group process. The purpose of these focus groups was to identify and explore the situations, accommodations and adaptive technologies that enhance access and opportunities for achieving learning goals.

## 2. Focus Group Methodology

As stated earlier, the purpose of these groups was to identify and explore the situations, accommodations and adaptive technologies that enhance access and opportunities for achieving learning goals.

Focus groups were arranged and scheduled with the assistance of several community organizations and a total of 9 were scheduled and 8 were conducted. The following organizations participated: CNIB, Learning Disabilities Association of North Peel, Canadian Mental Health Association Peel PAR Clubhouses, Employment Access PAH! Program, Caledon Community Services, Community Living Mississauga, and one was planned with the Ontario March of Dimes, however due to low participation it was cancelled. The organizations were invited to provide support to the focus group by generating a list of potential participants and to provide a location for the groups to take place. Staff were invited to co-facilitate if interested and the moderator indicated she would return to the organizations to share the individual and collective results with staff and clients. This was a minimal time commitment for respective parties and the opportunity to share resources and information is mutually beneficial.

All of the focus groups followed the basic question guidelines, yet was designed so that it could be facilitated in slightly different formats dependent on

the needs of the group. (Appendix 1. Focus Group Question Guide) All participants in the focus groups were persons with disabilities.

The groups were conducted in either a single 3-hour format, (Format A) or alternately two 1.5-hour sessions (Format B). The groups began with brief overview of the project and the explanation of the purpose of the focus group followed by a simple icebreaker intended to put people at ease. Each group consisted of discussion components, priorities voting exercises (Dotmocracy) and a questionnaire pertaining to computer access and use of adaptive technology. (Appendix 2. Survey) Dotmocracy is a facilitation process whereby participants in groups indicate their priorities by applying sticker dots for written identified issues. Results can be easily presented in a visual table graph demonstrating the overall preferences of the group. Many Dotmocracy exercises have been known to use small dot stickers to indicate the voters' preference for priorities. To be more accommodating to possible dexterity issues as a result of physical disability, and the need to have larger markings for voting for persons with visual impairments, bingo dabbers were used. With the exception of one group the lists were made on flip chart paper and posted at a level on the wall so the persons using wheelchairs could access when voting. Assistance was provided when necessary. The number of votes that each person had was directly linked to the total number of ideas generated. If 15 ideas or less were generated, each person could have 4 votes, 16 to 25 ideas resulted in 5 votes each per person. A person could use their votes in a number of ways to indicate their priorities. If they felt particularly strong about an issue they could use all votes on one, or distribute their votes over several priorities.

To be consistent with the overall direction of this project in terms of inclusion through appropriate accommodations, the focus groups themselves needed to meet disability related needs in order to maximize the effectiveness of the participants.

In Format A, a break was taken at approximately 45 minutes into the group, or when the participants appeared to have exhausted their ideas of optimal learning situations. During the break, the moderator finalized a list of ideas identified in discussion. Upon returning from break, voting on the generated ideas took place. Following the voting in Format A, discussion focussed on the ways that disability impacted learning and the barriers that people perceived as having a negative impact on their learning opportunities and again participants voted. In Format B, the first sessions consisted of discussion and the generation of ideas of optimal learning situations and followed by the Dotmocracy exercise and questionnaire. Format B second session discussions were focused on disability and barrier issues and the negative impact on learning. The following outlines the types of accommodations provided in the focus groups.

### 2.1 Accommodations Related to Methodology

A focus group was held at the Canadian National Institute for the Blind Halton Peel District office (CNIB), with staff and volunteer assistance. This office is one that all participants attending the focus had travelled to before. The

familiarity of transportation route and the set-up of the meeting area is an important accommodation. An existing peer support group of persons with various levels of visual impairments were willing to participate in the group, and the peer leader and staff were instrumental in making the group a success. The group was held in the same room as their regular group meetings. The moderator was provided with a list of the needs of participants in terms of alternative print material. A project overview document and invitations to the groups were sent via email, so that participants could read them with their computers via the use of adaptive technology such as screen readers in their own home. Only two of the participants, who were blind, did not have computers and they were contacted by phone and invited personally. Preference would have been to use invitations created in Braille. Transportation assistance, by way of taxi was provided for a participant who was blind and required such assistance in order to participate. This group used Format B, as it was consistent with their regular meeting schedule.

This group had two moderators. Through the use of a laptop computer and projector, notes were taken and displayed in a very large font size so that those with limited vision could read along. Regular summaries of the ideas generated were provided throughout the discussion so that participants, who could not see the notes, could be on track. At the time of the Dotmocracy exercises the list of ideas was printed in both in large print as well as Braille. The questionnaires were also provided in Braille and large print. The services of the CNIB Halton-Peel were relied on for the print material. Some challenges were experienced with the printing of the Braille material as a new Braille machine was being used and staff's expertise with the use was developing with practice.

A focus group was held for persons who are Deaf and communicate in ASL. (American Sign Language) Employment Pah! is a program of Employment Access for persons who are Deaf and communicate in ASL. Previous Pah! participants were invited via email or by TTY. (Teletypewriter) The invitation itself was proofread and edited by a Deaf individual whose primary language is ASL, to assure that there was a reasonable readability factor. ASL is a visual language and there is no associated text. English can often be a second language and the structure is very different than ASL. For this group two interpreters for English-ASL translation were used. As a result of the format of the focus group having a significant text component necessary for Dotmocracy and the Questionnaire, a third interpreter who offered transliteration services was used. She translated the visual language of ASL into a written form of English easier understood by those who communicate in ASL. The location for this group was off-site from the Employment Access facility at a local library. There was sufficient signage to ensure that participants could locate the meeting room on the second floor.

With assistance from the Learning Disability Association of North Peel a focus group was held at their Brampton site. The staff at the LDA NP provided a list of invitees and they were contacted by moderator to attend a focus group information session in advance of the focus group. Since learning disabilities are

a very individualized disorder and can affect a person's ability to interpret information, perhaps taking more time to learn things, it was necessary to ensure people were clear on the purpose, format and process of the focus group in advance. The participants were encouraged to contact the moderator if they had questions about the focus group prior to the scheduled date. The moderator used format A. In also understanding, that some persons with learning disabilities are visual learners and rely on images to enhance their understanding, the moderator printed some images of persons learning at a computer, reading alone, and in a group. This was challenging, as it would be impossible to anticipate the potential responses. Images were used again in the discussions of the adaptive technologies. A handout was distributed that had images (appendix 3) associated with the various descriptors of adaptive technology.

Community Living Mississauga assisted with a focus group and included clients in their services. Community Living Mississauga supports persons with intellectual disabilities to live meaningful lives in the community. An intellectual disability is an impaired ability to learn. A staff person familiar to the participants in the group was a co facilitator and often played a key role in phrasing and rephrasing questions that may not have been asked in the most accessible manner. In addition, she played an instrumental role in the Dotmocracy exercise. Although a number of learning style priorities were identified, the standard approach that was taken in previous Dotmocracy exercises would have proven to be a barrier for many of the participants in this group. The process was modified and similar priorities were grouped together, which made voting a more simplified and accessible process. Participants in this group seemed to increase their understanding of the questions, when able to relate to examples. The questionnaire was completed in a different way to accommodate varying literacy levels. This moderator asked questions and participants responded by show of hands. By error of omission and time restrictions, the moderator did not ask demographic questions pertaining to ages or education as in other groups in written survey. Due to time factors a voting exercise for situations that enhance learning could be completed.

Canadian Mental Health Association Peel PAR Clubhouses, both the North and South sites were involved with focus groups. Clubhouse programs offer a place for socializing, member education, transitional education, competitive supported education, and vocational support for persons with mental health issues. Clubhouses are member oriented, with staff playing a supportive role. To be accommodating to the needs of the participants, an open invitation was extended to all members of the clubhouse and they provided verbal confirmation to attend alleviating pressure and also allowing for personal invitations the day of the event. The moderator arrived early and connected with members to respond to any questions or concerns regarding participation in the group. The PAR South Clubhouse focus was well attended with 15 people. This was originally planned to be facilitated in the 3-hour format, however at break time participants, discovered the opportunity to participate in a paid group

employment opportunity. It was decided that the groups could reconvene the following week and complete the focus group. Some were able to remain to vote on priorities identified through the discussion.

This flexible approach allowed for maximum participation, there was also not pressure for persons who stated that they were not comfortable with the questionnaire component. Confidentiality was assured, however this did not alleviate everyone's concerns.

The PAR North Clubhouse followed Format A, similarly flexibility as an accommodation was provided. In both groups, some participants required more frequent breaks than were scheduled and there was no issue or negative impact on process as people entered and exited as personally required.

Other focus groups held at Caledon Community Services and at Employment Access required that the location, including the entrance, washrooms and meeting rooms be physically accessible for persons using wheelchairs and other persons with physical disabilities. There were other significant accommodations provided.

### 3. Summary of Findings

The following charts outline the ranking of votes as a result of the Dotmocracy exercises that asked persons with disabilities to identify both situations that enhance learning and barriers to learning.

#### 3.1 Focus Group with assistance with the **Learning Disability Association of North Peel**

The focus group had 6 participants attend with the following demographic breakdown:

**Ages:** 25, 28, 45, 34, 51, and 54

**Disability:** 2 identified as having a Learning Disability, 2 with Dyslexia, 1 with Dysgraphia and Aniridia (visual disorder) one did not respond.

**Education:** 1 completed grade 10, 3 completed high school, 1 completed university, and one did not respond.

As highlighted in Table 1 below, The Dotmocracy exercise that followed the group discussion examining the situations that enhance their learning resulted in "**hands on practical learning opportunities**" garnered the highest number of votes. Some participants indicated that the more "*relatable to everyday circumstance*" improved the learning experience. "*Learning a skill and using what you learn, reinforces it*" A participant indicated that there "*is more effort required when not practical*"

The following learning priorities received equally, the second most number of votes in this exercise "**Small group learning with instructor, audio-based material, having learning material in the right format**" The discussion regarding groups involved identifying the benefits and drawbacks of learning in this situation. By virtue of the voting results, the benefit seems to be most

significant. Some of the drawbacks that connect to disability issues included *“the pressure to fit, and to look as if you know the answers”* This is in response to an identified sense of intimidation of the *“know it alls”*. Some participants identified that listening assisted in their learning and that **“audio based material”** enhanced learning. Some comments on this issue included that the benefits of using audio content *“hearing emotions, tone and pitch”* and having the opportunity to *“play it back, stop and rewind as necessary”*. In terms of the priority of **“having material in the right format”** There was not consensus in this regard, in part because the groups comprised of persons with various learning disabilities. The last remaining priorities received the fewest votes, yet a numbers of points arose during the discussion. In terms of **“one on one support”** participants indicated that *“there is no pressure”,* and *“you can learn faster”*. The issues of “time” and the impact on learning was explored both as part of the enhancement and barriers discussion. As an enhancement priority receiving 1 vote was, **“Right amount of time for learning; having realistic time frames.”** Comments regarding this included the benefit of *“picking the time to learn”* and from another angle, *“breaking the learning into smaller chunks”*. The second part of the focus group examined barriers to learning. Some of the barriers that the group identified reflected what was summarized as learning enhancements. **“Negative learning environment, ignorance of learning disability and negative attitudes of class and teacher “** and **“need for longer time not accommodated”,** and **“no practical skill development component”** were equal in receiving the highest number of votes. These results are indicated in Table 2.

**Table 1:** Situations that Enhance Learning – Learning Disability Association North Peel

Dotmocracy Exercise Part 1	Learning Disability Association North Peel
Number of votes	Situations that Enhance Learning
4	Hands on practical learning opportunities
3	Small group learning with instructor
3	Audio based material
3	Having learning materials in the right format for me
2	One on One support
1	Right amount of time for learning; realistic time frame

**Table 2:** Barriers That Impact Learning – Learning Disability Association North Peel

Dotmocracy Exercise Part 2	Learning Disability Association North Peel
Number of votes	Barriers that Impact Learning
4	Negative learning environment; ignorance of learning disability and negative attitudes of class, teachers

4	Need for longer time to learn; not accommodated
4	No practical skill development component
2	Barriers to adaptive technology
2	Learning material not the right format
2	Red tape; referring to detection, ODSP, other bureaucracy
1	No formal detection of having a learning disability
1	One misinterpretation leads to a domino effect of misunderstanding

### 3.2 Focus group with the assistance of **Caledon Community Services**

This group had 5 participants with the following demographics:

**Age:** 40, 44, 52, 55, and 57

**Disability:** 1 with Mental Health- Schizophrenia, 3 with Physical and Mobility related disabilities: Fibromyalgia and back injury, Phocomelia as a result of Thalidomide, Limited Mobility and function 1, with Low Vision.

**Education:** 2 indicated completing high school, 2 completed college and 1 indicated highest level of completed education as Life Skills training.

This is the only focus group that was planned with persons with various disabilities. The result of the voting in this Dotmocracy exercise reflects more individualization of responses in participants more significantly in part 1, where the number of single vote responses is greater than those responses with 2 or more votes.

The learning priority that received the greatest amount of votes with a total of 4 is ***“Flexible hours/time frame set by me to accommodate disability needs”***

Various group members discussed that as a result of their disability, they required extra time with learning and assignments and that this was not always accommodated. With the second most votes, 3 each, ***“problem solving as a method of learning”*** and ***“training until competent and confident in developed the skill”***. 10 additional situations that enhance learning were identified and voters attributes either 1 or 2 votes for each. In Part 2, receiving the greatest number of votes with 6 in total is ***“no transportation system in Caledon”***. Participants in the group discussed the significant limitations on choices as a result of not been able to access transit. The following 3 barriers, second in ranking, received 3 votes each; ***“Intimidation of computers, Lack of therapeutic support, Time frames established for learning programs creates pressure.”*** In reference to the computer comment, 2 of the participants identified on the survey as having limited computer ability. Several of the participants discussed the need for and ***“lack of therapeutic support”*** as a means of coping effectively dealing with personal and emotional issues associated with living with a disability. They spoke specifically about the physical and emotional stress associated with what they described as “trauma” in the “disability system.” Consistent with Dotmocracy Part 1, the issue of time arose, this time as a barrier, as people in the group discussed that there is a negative impact on their learning as a result of pressures with time frame in learning

programs. The group discussed 9 additional barriers and these points each receive 1 or 2 votes.

**Table 3: Situations that Enhance Learning – Caledon Community Services**

<b>Dotmocracy Exercise Part 1</b>	<b>Caledon Community Services</b>
<b>Number of votes</b>	<b>Situation that Enhances Learning</b>
4	Flexible hours/time frame set by me to accommodate disability needs
3	Problems solving as a method of learning
3	Training until competent and confident in developed skill
2	Independent learning and research
2	Opportunities to ask questions
2	Trained and taught by someone knowledgeable and competent
1	One on One support during learning process
1	Show me through demonstrations
1	Practice; further develops skills when retention is low
1	Summarizes in own words and create own system of note taking
1	Start with simple concepts, gradually increasing in complexity
1	Refer to previous knowledge and tangible experiences
1	Learning my own learning style

**Table 4: Barriers to Learning – Caledon Community Services**

<b>Dotmocracy Exercise Part 2</b>	<b>Caledon Community Services</b>
<b>Number of Votes</b>	<b>Barriers to Learning</b>
6	No transportation system in Caledon
3	Intimidation of computers
3	Lack of therapeutic support
3	Time frames established for learning programs creates pressure
2	Sitting down for long periods of time
2	Invisible disabilities lead to assumptions about ability
1	Stress is a negative impact; often caused by trauma in system
1	Environment for learning not physically accessible
1	Personal lack of confidence
1	Learning related barriers. No accommodations offered in program
1	Teachers with preconceived ideas of persons with disabilities and unwillingness for accommodation

1	No accessible transit in Caledon
1	Lack of focus for extended periods

### 3.3 Focus group with assistance with the **Canadian National Institute for the Blind Peel–Halton Branch**

There were 7 participants for the first session and 6 for the second session.

Age: 23, 27, 41, 50, 50, and 56

Disability: 4 identified as having visual impairment, 3 identified as Blind.

Education: 4 identified as completing High School, 2 College, 1 University.

In Dotmocracy Exercise 1, **“Practicing”** and **“Memorization”** received 5 votes each leading the number of votes for situations that enhance learning. Participants indicated, “associations were often used to memorize” In addition participants stated in reference to practice that “persistence” and “guidance – practice –more guidance” positively impacted their learning. **“Hands on learning”** received the second most votes as a situation that enhances learning. Both **“Group learning with people with visual impairments”** and **“Learning location accessible”** receiving 3 votes each received the third most votes. When discussing group learning experiences, in particular, with other persons with visual impairments that “common experiences are shared and it’s helpful” and that there is “comfort with group”. “Group learning, people to provide advice, everyone acts like a teacher”. **“Learning location accessible”** prompted significant discussion with the group. Participants stated that there are “mobility issues for blind people” and that “no stairs” is beneficial. Over half of the participants “need someone to help you get to learning location”. As the table indicates 10 more points were identified as a situation that enhanced learning and ranked with either 1 or 2 votes accordingly. Part 2 of the exercise shows 4 learning barriers with the highest number and equal amount of votes. **“Lack of courses directed at blind and visually impaired people”, “Changes in transportation and location are a barrier”, “Interruptions are very distracting for learning”, “Travel and transportation issues different for visually impaired vs. blind more difficult.”**

**Table 5:** Situations that Enhance Learning – CNIB Peel Halton

<b>Dotmocracy Exercise Part 1</b>	<b>CNIB Peel Halton</b>
<b>Number of Votes</b>	<b>Situations that enhance learning</b>
5	Practicing
5	Memorization
4	Hands on learning
3	Group learning with people with visual impairments
3	Learning location accessible
2	Someone to explain and describe
2	Focus
2	Guidance
1	Motivation

1	One on one learning
1	Create a system for yourself
1	Persistence
1	Knowing learning limits
1	Learning location marker
1	Links to tools outside the classroom

**Table 6:** Barriers that Impact Learning – CNIB Peel Halton

<b>Dotmocracy Exercise Part 2</b>	<b>CNIB Halton- Peel</b>
<b>Numbers of Votes</b>	<b>Barriers Impacting Learning</b>
3	Lack of courses directed at blind and visually impaired people
3	Changes in transportation location are a barrier
3	Interruptions are very distracting for learning
3	Travel and transportation issues different for visually impaired vs. blind more difficult
2	New and resources for blind people difficult to find
2	It is difficult to rely on people for help for example bus drivers
2	People who are born blind have different experiences
2	Learning environment needs to be organized
1	Listening to learn works best for some blind and visually impaired people
1	Learning locations can be inaccessible because of the stairs
1	Lighting needs to be bright

3.4 Focus group with **Employment Access Job Zone Group**. While over 13 people were invited to attend and 8 people confirmed, only 4 people actually attended. All those who were invited had a physical, mobility or agility related disability.

**Age:** 25, 47, 50, and 52

**Disability:** Bone disability, Osteo-arthritis, injured legs, broken wrists.

**Education:** 2 completed high school, 1 college, 1 did not respond.

In Part 1 it appears that there are more individualized responses as reflected in the rankings with a large amount of single votes. Receiving the highest ranking with 4 was “**Learn by hands on practical opportunities**” Discussion surrounding this point included the challenge to find the balance with learning theory as in University, and practical work experiences as often acquired in College. “*Theory is good, you are held back without practical experience.*” Another person stated “*Knowledge is important, experience is what employers are looking for.*”

The point that received the second highest ranking was “**Learn by someone already successful in their job- mentorship formal or informal.**” Discussion included comments that there are benefits “observing successful person in their

field and have the opportunity to ask questions.” With 11 additional points named, with 8 receiving 1 vote this indicates the group more individualized priorities. Part 2 continued to reflect a significant amount of individualized responses. The highest-ranking point with 4 votes was “**Family and personal responsibilities get in the way, not enough time.**” All participants agreed that this was a barrier to learning. Both “**Travelling long distances**” and “**disability affected job goals, changes mean relearning**” were responses that came in second in the ranking both with 3 votes each. Some participants indicated, “Travelling by driving or by transit a long way to go increases their stress and negatively affects their learning.”

The majority of participants in the groups discussed the change in job goal as a result of disability as 3 of 4 of the members acquired a disability later in life, rather than being born with one. The groups discussed and votes for 8 additional barriers that 1 or 2 participants voted for.

**Table 7:** Situations that Enhance Learning – Employment Access Job Zone Group

<b>Dotmocracy Exercise Part 1</b>	<b>Employment Access Job Zone group</b>
<b>Numbers of Votes</b>	<b>Situations that Enhance Learning</b>
4	Learn by hands on practical opportunities
3	Learn by someone already successful in their job (mentorship formal or informal)
2	Learn by studying and reviewing
2	Learn by practice and repetition
2	Learn best when able to concentrate in a quiet space alone
1	Learn by creating own system to learn
1	Learn by reading
1	Learn by taking notes that highlight key points
1	Learn by watching
1	Learn by applying previous knowledge and experience in new setting
1	Learn by trouble shooting and problem solving
1	Learning in small groups
1	Learning by asking questions

**Table 8:** Barriers to Learning Opportunities - Employment Access Job Zone

<b>Dotmocracy Exercise Part 2</b>	<b>Employment Access Job Zone Focus group</b>
<b>Number of votes</b>	<b>Barriers to Learning Opportunities</b>
4	Family and personal responsibilities get in the way, not enough time
3	Travelling long distances
3	Disability affected job goals, changes mean relearning
2	Long recovery of disability related injuries limited learning opportunities

2	Pain effects learning
2	Materials being taught have unclear concepts
1	Learning in groups; distracting
1	Learning in groups; hesitant to ask questions
1	The use of projectors as teaching tool
1	Lack of Canadian work experience
1	Limited mobility

### 3.5 Focus group with assistance from **Employment Access Pah!**

There were 6 participants for this group.

**Age:** 27, 30, 41, 42, 52, and 60.

**Disability:** All participants were Deaf; one has a visual impairment as well.

**Education:** 4 indicated completing grade 12, one person indicated grade 14, one person responded college and one did not respond to the question.

In the Dotmocracy exercise Part 1 the greatest number of votes, with 6 in total, were attributed to ***“Use computers/blackberries/SMS to communicate.”***

Second in ranking with 4 votes is ***“Learn in Deaf Culture”*** During this discussion comments included “Learning with hearing teacher is not bad, but clearer and faster learning in ASL” and that, “ASL is different with Deaf: Deaf instructors go the extra mile” Deaf culture different approach to education”

The following points ranked equally with the third most votes. ***“Good ASL skill with interpreter”, “Watch friends and others” “Have concrete examples to understand more clearly” “Ask other students hearing or Deaf for help”.***

Discussion regarding the impact of the skill level included comments, “learning not consistent, dependent on interpreter.” “Interpreter nervous or not comfortable with content the result is more work for me based on notes behind the 8ball if interpreter not good” On the issues of interpreter use in learning in Deaf learning environment was not an option, stated that you should” match with your interpreter, match your intent, be compatible.”

The other points did not have extensive discussion associated with the comments.

The group 8 additional learning priorities were identified and received 1 or 2 votes for each.

**Table 9:** Situations that Enhance Learning – Employment Access Pah!

<b>Dotmocracy Exercise Part 1</b>	<b>Employment Access Pah! Focus Group</b>
<b>Number of votes</b>	<b>Situations that Enhance Learning</b>
6	Use computers/blackberries/SMS to communicate
4	Learn in Deaf culture
3	Good ASL skill with interpreter
3	Watch friends and others
3	Have concrete examples to understand more clearly
3	Ask other students hearing or Deaf for help
2	Join group (any size)

2	Have teacher use ASL
2	In hearing class when class finished go to teacher to clarify meaning one on one with the teacher
2	Use tutor
1	Join small group, not large group
1	Need same interpreter not change all the time
1	Write down information from other person
1	Write again information yourself, summary

**Table 10: Barriers that Impact Learning – Employment Access Pah!**

<b>Dotmocracy Exercise Part 2</b>	<b>Employment Access Pah! Focus group</b>
<b>Number of votes</b>	<b>Barriers that impact learning</b>
4	Not understand Deaf not willing to help
3	Not equal chance to answer questions Why? Time behind with interpreter
3	Can't take notes and watch interpreter at the same time
3	Too much finger spelling information not enough ASL sign
2	Join hearing group not answer question Why? Embarrassed
2	Teacher write too much English on boards
2	Interpreter not know not understand information
2	Join hearing group more work Why? Check dictionary more, read notes
2	Too much English books
1	Interpreter not same –change change
1	In hearing class feel nervous to answer questions but go ahead and answer but answer not clear <i>but</i> I know answer

### 3.6 Focus group with the assistance of **Par North Clubhouse**

This groups using Format A, had 9 participants.

**Ages** 19, 24, 30, 31, 43, 46, 46, 54, and 61.

**Identified disabilities include:** 2 with mental health disorder, paranoid schizophrenia, schizophrenia, schizoaffective, physical –vision, physical/mental, one person did not reply to the questions on survey.

**Levels of completed education:** one person chose not to reply, grade 8, grade 11, grade 13, 3 persons with college, some university, and 2 completed university.

This group identified 20 situations that enhance their learning and ranked highest and equally with 7 votes, were “**hands on learning**” and “**learning using pictures/visual/videos not just words and text.**”, and “**Learning in small groups**”. With respect to small groups, people identified that this format provides more attention from teacher and more time to ask questions. Three priorities ranked second with three votes each were, “**Practice**”, “**having tools for learning (material/books)**”, and “**Desire and need to learn (example new language in new country)**” Ranking third with 5 votes was “**Learning when I am very interested**” 5 other situations received 4 votes each. They are

**“Learning with a friend”**, this situation was said to provide comfort. **“Learning one on one and individual support”**. The person discussing this point indicated that one on one support is important for having more time to have your individual needs met, that you are the special focus and important for when you are having problems. **“Learning at own pace,”** Some people in the group indicated that there was less pressure, and that ones; mind functions better because of that. **“Money to afford programs/materials”, “Starting with the basics and build with more complex concepts”**.

In Dotmocracy exercise Part 2, which focused on learning barriers **“Lack of concentration”** ranked highest with 7 votes. There is fewer consensuses in this exercise than in Part 1. Ranking second in terms of barriers to learning are **“ODSP red tape”,** and **“Having negative/unsupportive family”**.

**Table 11:** Situations that Enhance Learning – CMHA PAR North

Dotmocracy Exercise Part 1	CMHA PAR North Focus Group
Number of votes	Situations that Enhance Learning
7	Hands on learning
7	Learning using pictures,/visuals/videos not just words and text
7	Learning in small groups
6	Practice
6	Having tools for learning (material/books)
6	Desire and need to learn (example new language in new country)
5	Learn when I am very interested
4	Learning with a friend
4	One on One and individual support
4	Learning at own pace
4	Money to afford programs/material and transportation
4	Starting with the basics and building with more complex concepts
3	Learning with examples
2	Focus and preparation
2	Learning when immersed in situation
1	Trial and error
1	Reading on my own
1	Reviewing until understood
1	Good facilitator
1	Learning from t.v.

**Table 12:** Barriers that Impact Learning: CMHA PAR North

Dotmocracy Exercise Part 2	CMHA PAR North Focus Group
Number of Votes	Barriers that impact Learning
7	Lack of concentration

5	ODSP Red Tape
5	Negative/Unsupportive Family
4	Anxiety and Fear
4	Not enough visuals aids to support visual impairments
4	Negative self image, not believing in yourself
4	Transportation barrier too long trips stressful experience
3	Not doing homework
3	Not enough learning material
3	Other people slowing you down in class
3	Peer pressure in group learning
3	Not doing homework
3	Medication side effects
2	Lack of interest in subject
2	Lack of patience or persistence
2	Negative teacher attitudes
2	Lack of energy
1	Lack of money
1	Physical pain
1	Mixing medication and alcohol
1	Not taking medication

### 3.7 Focus group report with **CMHA PAR South Clubhouse**

As discussed in the Accommodations and Methodology sections, flexibility was a large component of this group and while approximately 13 people participated in the initial discussion and voting exercise only 9 people completed the survey, which these demographics are based on. Some participants stated privacy concerns despite confidentiality being assured, others simply stated they did not want to, while a few left early to attend a work opportunity.

Planned to use Format A, but changed to Format B

**Ages:** 20, 27,42,49,50,51,51,67

**Disability:** Psychosis, mental illness, schizoaffective, Clinical depression, schizophrenia, epilepsy and depression, depression, depression

**Highest level of education:**2 persons- grade 10, 2 persons- grade 12, grade 13, high school, Bachelor of Arts Degree, one person did not indicate response.

The group indicated through the voting process that the number one ranked situation that enhances learning is **“Having positive feedback.”** The groups discussed the difference between the pressures of hearing “you are not learning fast enough” versus the benefits of hearing “you’ll get it”. The 2 situations that ranked second with 6 votes each include **“Asking questions”**, and **“Peer to peer learning”**. The group discussed the difference in learning from peers rather than the more common relationship of instructor and student, “you are on the same level”. Fourth ranked with 4 votes included **“Learning must be challenging”** Comments included” level of learning must be suited to me” and another stated they did “not want to be taught like they were four year olds.” With 3 votes and ranking third was **“Step by step by breaking into small parts”**. The four remaining situation that enhanced learning received 1 or 2 votes. In terms of the second Dotmocracy exercise there was less consensus

regarding barriers that impact their learning. “**Learning without any support**” ranked as the most significant barrier from this group with 5 votes. “**Time limits on learning**” ranked second with 3 votes.

**Table 13:** Situations that Enhance Learning- CMHA PAR South

<b>Dotmocracy Exercise Part 1</b>	<b>CMHA PAR South Clubhouse</b>
<b>Number of Votes</b>	<b>Situations that enhance your learning</b>
9	Having positive feedback
6	Asking questions
6	Peer to peer learning
4	Learning must be challenging
3	Step by step by breaking into small parts
2	Being taught at the right pace
1	Learning in small groups
1	Teaching must be consistent
1	Fun and entertaining

**Table 14:** Barriers to Learning: CMHA PAR South

<b>Dotmocracy Exercise Part 2</b>	<b>CMHA PAR South Clubhouse</b>
<b>Number of Votes</b>	<b>Barriers to learning</b>
5	Learning without any support
3	Time limits on learning
2	Negative teaching environment
2	Negative feedback
1	Stress
1	Not being able to ask questions
1	Too much reading
1	Poor nutrition
1	Illness gets in the way
1	Not being interested

3.8 Focus group with assistance from **Community Living Mississauga**. There were 5 participants who have an Intellectual Disability of varying degrees. As mentioned in earlier in this report, demographic details were not recorded. As well, due to the modification of the Dotmocracy exercise and the grouping of similar priorities, this focus group had three options to vote for. Comments from participants regarding **Learning in a Group**, included “you learn from everyone”, [people are concerned} with “how you are feeling”. In terms of **one on one learning**, some participants agreed “watching first, being watched practicing with help, and asking questions” were aspect of one on one learning that proved to be helpful.

**Table 15: Situations that Enhance Learning- Community Living Mississauga**

<b>Dotmocracy Exercise (Modified)</b>	<b>Community Living Mississauga</b>
<b>Number of Votes</b>	<b>Situations that enhance learning</b>
3	Learning in a group
3	Learning One on One
0	Learning on my own

### **Computer Use Survey Results**

Each participant in the focus groups was asked to complete a survey regarding computer use, most complied with this request with few exceptions. This survey also asked questions pertaining to situations that enhance learning and forms of adaptive technology. (see Appendix 3) the following tables outline the responses from the completed surveys.

Question: <b>How would you describe your ability to use computers?</b>	Not at all	Limited	Average	Competent	Above Average
Number of responses	<b>2</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>5</b>

Question? <b>Do you have a computer in your home?</b>	Yes	No
Number of responses	<b>41</b>	<b>14</b>

If no to above <b>Why not?</b>	Not interested	Too expensive	Not comfortable with computers	Other
Number of responses	<b>1</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b> (broken, limited knowledge)

Question <b>Do you use a community based computer such as a library or community organization?</b>	Yes	No
Number of responses	<b>24</b>	<b>18</b>

If no to above <b>Why not?</b>	Number of responses
Disability related barrier	<b>9</b>
Not familiar with adaptive technology	<b>7</b>
Computers do not have adaptive technology	<b>2</b>
Do not know where to access community computers	<b>2</b>
Transportation problems	<b>7</b>
Building accessibility problems	<b>2</b>
Require support	<b>4</b>
Other:	<b>2</b> use home computer <b>1</b> does not feel safe in community alone

<b>What do you use computers for?</b>	Number of responses
Entertainment (games, media)	<b>30</b>
Job Search Related	<b>27</b>
Personal/social (email, chat, explore interests via internet)	<b>38</b>
Work (previous employment situation)	<b>25</b>
Education Reason (school, classes, research)	<b>27</b>

<b>What kind of assistive devices or adaptive technology do you use that enhances your access to learning opportunities to technology?</b>	Number of responses
Screen readers and Talking Browsers	<b>7</b>
Learning materials in Audio Format	<b>6</b>
Scanners and OCR	<b>5</b>
Screen magnification	<b>4</b>
ZoomTech	<b>4</b>
Speech Recognition Software	<b>3</b>
Word Prediction Software	<b>2</b>
Service Interpreter	<b>1</b>
Interpreter	<b>1</b>
Kurzweil 1000	<b>1</b>
Jaws	<b>1</b>
Phone	<b>1</b>
Computer	<b>1</b>
Height adjustable key board	<b>1</b>
Ergonomic chair with neck rest	<b>1</b>
Book Rest	<b>1</b>
Wrist Rest	<b>1</b>
Adapted mouse	<b>1</b>
Raised line writing paper/graph paper	<b>1</b>
Large screen	<b>1</b>

#### 4. Conclusions

These focus groups, conducted during the Fall of 2005 were intended to learn more about the situations that enhance or create barriers to learning, as well as to explore the accessible technology or assistive devices that support their learning.

There were significant differences in responses based on the disability type, and within each focus group to conclude that supports or accommodations are disability specific. The number of responses that garnered only 1 or 2 votes reflects the impact that individualized learning styles have on learning opportunities.

There were some themes that connected nearly all of the focus groups. Some component of one on one support during the learning process was reflected as a situation that enhanced learning. Groups mentioned directly one on one, through tutors or mentors. There was prevalence of group learning as situation that enhanced learning. The groups indicated preference for small or disability specific groups.

In terms of themes related to barriers, transportation issues were discussed in the majority of these focus groups. Transportation was discussed as problematic as a result of the long distances required to travel by transit, or the lack of available of accessible transit options.

#### 5. Recommendations

Recommendations include creating learning programs that fit and accommodate disability specific needs, such as those outlined in the tables but also consider the impact of individual learning styles. It is also important to recognize the importance of the need for accessible technology and the barriers in accessing such much-required equipment. Location of such learning programs should consider the accessibility of the space and the feasibility of transportation.

## Focus Group Question Guide

### **Purpose:**

Identify and explore the situations, accommodations and adaptive technologies that enhance access and opportunities for achieving learning goals.

### **Format:**

Focus groups could be in one of several formats dependent on group needs.

One session totalling approximately 3 hours

Two sessions of 1.5 hours each

Or designed to meet participants needs.

Each format would have discussion component and questionnaire.

Depending on clients needs, questionnaire could be completed independently or with support.

This guide to the group and questions may not be phrased exactly as prepared in the guide. Timelines are anticipated and may change with the need for the group.

1. Introductions, purpose of exercise, ice breaker. Total approx.15 min  
Introduction question: If you could learn anything what would it be?  
Think big, without limits!  
Sample answer: I would love to learn how to fly a plane! Etc...
2. Think about a time when you had to learn something new (new language, new skills, new concept)  
Facilitator to try to identify a shared learning occasion if possible. (sending an email, baking a cake)

For discussion: What were the situations that made it possible to learn at your best?

Prompting could include such things as calling a friend for support, lots of practice, quiet moments to think about it, listening to teacher, working in groups, reading, being in a discussion, watching someone else etc.

3. How important is it to have individual support when you are learning?  
Discuss, ways support can be provided.
4. Priority exercise: (Dotmocracy) Based on above discussion, list priorities  
And have people vote. Format of voting depends on needs of group.

Approximately 1.5 hours for discussion.

End of session one, have participants offer any additional thoughts and complete questionnaire. Provide assistance with questionnaire for those who require.

Session 2, or second part of full format

5. What ways do you feel your disability impacts your learning?
6. What kinds of support/accommodations/adaptive technology would enhance your opportunities for learning?
7. Priority Exercise (Dotmocracy) Based on above discussion, list priorities and have people vote. Format of voting depends on needs of group.
8. Summarize and ask if there is anything else people want to ask.

**Computer  
Use  
Survey**



**This is a confidential survey; your name is NOT required.**

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Disability: \_\_\_\_\_

Highest completed level of education: \_\_\_\_\_

Region: please circle one PEEL HALTON DUFFERIN

1. How would you describe your ability to use computers

Not at all	Limited	Average	Competent	Above Average
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Do you have a computer in your home?

Yes  no

If no: Why not?

**Not interested**

**Too expensive**

**Not comfortable with computers**

**Other: Specify**

3. Do you use a community-based computer such as in a library or community organization?

Yes

no

If yes: where? Please be as specific as possible

Name of place \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_

If no, why not? (Please check all that apply)

- Disability related barrier
- Not familiar with adaptive technology
- Computers do not have adaptive technology
- Do not know where to access community computers
- Transportation problems
- Building accessibility problems
- Require computer support
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

4. What do you use computers for?

Entertainment (games, multimedia)

Job search related

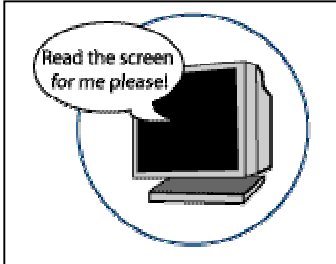
- Personal/social (email, chat, explore interests via internet)
- Work (previous employment situation)
- Educational reasons (school, classes, research)

5. What kind of assistive devices or adaptive technology do you use that enhances your access to learning opportunities or technology?

6. What other kinds of supports would enhance your access to technology and learning opportunities?

## Appendix 3

### Adaptive Technology for People with Learning Disabilities



A Screen Reader is the commonly used name for Voice Output Technology used. Screen readers are used to replace the visual display traditionally viewed on a monitor for those with visual disabilities. Hardware and software produce synthesized voice output for text displayed on the computer screen, as well as for keystrokes entered on the keyboard. Talking browsers use the same technology as screen reading software, but the reading functions are limited to Internet use.



Voice Recognition allows a user to use his/her voice as an input device. Voice recognition may be used to dictate text into the computer or to give commands to the computer (such as opening application programs, pulling down menus, or saving work).

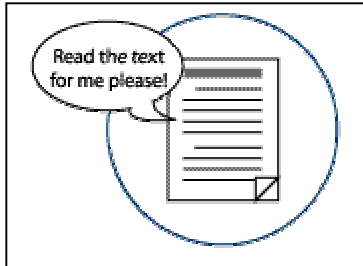


Word prediction technology is used to assist with text entry. These software packages predict the word you are typing and the next word based on word frequency and context. They may also include features such as spell checking as you type, speech synthesis, and hotkey's for frequently used words. Word prediction is particularly useful for slow typists, probe or pen users, and people with minor visual impairments or dyslexia.



Scanning and Optical character recognition (OCR) is the process of converting an image of text, such as a scanned paper document or electronic fax file, into computer-editable text. The text in an image is not editable: the letters are made of tiny dots (pixels) that together form a picture of text. During OCR, the software analyzes an image and converts the pictures of the characters to editable text based on the patterns of the pixels in the image. After OCR,

you can export the converted text and use it with a variety of word-processing, page layout and spreadsheet applications. OCR also enables screen readers and refreshable Braille displays to read the text contained in images.



Text-to-Speech software is used to convert words from a computer document (e.g. word processor document, web page) into audible speech spoken through the computer speaker. This would be helpful to people who need or want aural verification of what they are seeing in print. Text-to-speech technology can be integrated with OCR systems. Text to Speech software is different from Screen Reading technology in that it does not read any system information (such as file structure or alter boxes)

Note that with software that produces a "sound" or voice output, you also need a PC compatible sound card [which usually comes with Pentium based computers]

Source: Technical Glossary  
Adaptive Technology Resource Centre  
University of Toronto [www.utoronto.ca/atrc](http://www.utoronto.ca/atrc)