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NOVA SCOTIA TEACHERS UNION

December 3, 2008 marks the United Nations' first annual International Day of Persons with Disabilities. The theme of this year's convention is "dignity and justice for us all." Also, 2008 marks the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the UN continually strives to create a universal equality amongst all humans. Until recently, however, there has not been any legal obligation to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities. According to the United Nations, Human Rights indicate that "each person has the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."

The UN indicates that approximately 10 per cent of the world's population lives with a disability. We all have limitations and deal with disabilities, personally, professionally or in our communities on a daily basis. You have probably noticed an

increase in accessibility for persons with disabilities in your community, such as automatic doors, accessible parking, Braille on elevator buttons, wheelchair ramps, and bird chirps at crosswalks. Universal design is a paradigm that seeks to improve access to the environment through less stigmatized solutions that are accepted amongst the general population. There is, however, still a great deal of work to be done to make our communities, our homes, and our workplaces acceptably accessible to persons with disabilities.

Inclusion in schools is something we are all familiar with and have incorporated into our values and daily routines. Inclusion began as a policy to ensure that all students, regardless of ability, are integrated into classrooms and school communities. Inclusion works towards promoting a sense of belonging, feelings of respect, and value for those who may otherwise be excluded because of their differing abilities. Although inclusion is often focused

on children and students, it is equally important for adults to implement this way of thinking into their daily routine with other adults at work, at home, or in communities.

Adults have that same need to feel valued

and supported so they can do their best work and optimize their potential.

The NSTU works with members and their employers to ensure contractual and legal rights are upheld at the workplace and members are often accommodated when this becomes necessary. Sometimes, however, a simple acknowledgement, a slight change in policy, procedure or environment, or an offer of support or assistance can provide as much inclusion as a legal or contractual accommodation. Being supportive of your fellow human beings and allowing them the opportunity to reach their potential, regardless of health or disability, is something we can all do to improve the dignity and justice within our

communities and social networks.

Attitudes, social supports, access to information and physical structures are all important pieces of the puzzle.

Every human being has his or her own unique needs, strengths and potential. As the International Day of Persons with Disabilities approaches, take the time to recognize that persons with disabilities—whether they are physical, emotional, cognitive, or social—have equal right to full enjoyment of their human rights.

For more information about Human Rights, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities or supporting your workplace with universal design and inclusion of persons with disabilities, refer to [www.un.org](http://www.un.org), [www.chrc-ccdp.ca](http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca), [www.hrea.org](http://www.hrea.org), or contact the Early Intervention Program at the NSTU.



## did you **KNOW?**

The Early Intervention Program (EIP) invites NSTU members to sign up for our Wellness email list at [Be\\_Well@nstu.ca](mailto:Be_Well@nstu.ca).

Please contact Erin at [ekeefe@nstu.ca](mailto:ekeefe@nstu.ca) to provide her with your NSTU email address. The [Be\\_Well@nstu.ca](mailto:Be_Well@nstu.ca) list will provide information about the EIP and other wellness topics.

