

Government of the Northwest Territories Employability Working Group

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories is committed to increasing the representation of people with disabilities in the public service.

The Government of the Northwest Territories' Affirmative Action Policy identifies disabled persons as a target group eligible for affirmative action preference. The Standing Committee on Government Operations and Members of this Assembly have also welcomed the Department of Human Resources' plans to increase the participation of disabled persons within the Government of the Northwest Territories' workforce.

With this in mind, The Department of Human Resources wants to improve our ability to recruit and retain individuals with disabilities. In order to achieve this goal, the Department created the Government of the Northwest Territories Employability Working Group in July 2008. There are nine members of this group, composed of Human Resources staff members.

Since its inception, the Working Group has identified short and long term priorities based on consultation with stakeholders and has undertaken a number of initiatives.

The Working Group facilitated the visit of a member from the Yukon's Workplace Diversity Office to Yellowknife in March 2009. The purpose was to explore models from other jurisdictions, so discussions began with the Yukon Territorial Government. Mr. Jon Breen, Manager of the Yukon's diversity employment office met with the Working Group to discuss the Yukon model.

Mr. Breen also delivered sensitivity training workshops to the Department of Human Resources staff and senior management. Disability related issues with recruitment, accommodations and co-worker acceptance were covered in these workshops. As a result, the Working Group is currently exploring the possibility of further sensitivity training for Government of Northwest Territories' staff.

The Working Group has already developed partnerships with various stakeholders and has met with the following groups:

- The Northwest Territories Council of Persons with Disabilities;
- Yellowknife Association for Community Living;
- Canadian Mental Health Association (Northwest Territories' Branch);
- Hard of Hearing Association;
- Tłıchǵ Employment Program, part of the Northwest Territories Council of Persons with Disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, the Working Group also has a designated representative participating on the Disability Steering Committee Partnership.

To move things ahead for the Government of Northwest Territories, the Working Group is examining a number of next steps including setting similar goals to those of the Yukon, and the gathering of baseline data. Sensitivity training and awareness have also been identified as priorities.

Longer term priorities include the development of a recruitment strategy and developing our partnerships further in order to ensure appropriate supports are available for employees with disabilities. Partnerships with non-government organizations will be the key to moving this initiative forward.

The Government of the Northwest Territories' Employability Working Group is also considering the establishment of a new Northwest Territories Advisory

Committee on Disabilities with Territorial representatives to explore avenues aimed at increasing the representation of employees in the public service who have disabilities.

Members of the Committee would be appointed by the Deputy Minister of Human Resources, upon recommendation of the Deputy Minister Human Resources Committee.

The Northwest Territories Advisory Committee on Disabilities would provide advice and make recommendations to the Deputy Minister Human Resources Committee on initiatives that will enhance employment for persons with disabilities within the Government of the Northwest Territories Public Service. It would work to strengthen relationships with government, non- government and unions in the areas of human resources management and employment.

Finally the soon to be released Human Resources document, *20/20: A Brilliant North - the NWT Public Service Strategic Plan for the Northwest Territories* will be recommending the creation of a Diversity Position in DHR which will provide support to the Advisory Committee.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories is an inclusive workplace and it is open for business and I would like to thank the members for their on going support of this initiative.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.