

# DISABILITY CONCERNS CANADA

everybody belongs ■ everybody serves



## Youth Enabling Accessibility

(Federal Government program)

By Miriam Spies

**A**t the end of May, the Federal Government put out a call for young Canadians to build an accessible Canada as part of the Enabling Accessibility Fund (EAF).

Those between 15 and 30 years are encouraged to apply to volunteer time in demonstrating leadership and commitment to their community. This is an opportunity for youth to have a direct impact in the lives of people with disabilities by addressing accessibility barriers in public spaces or workplaces within their community or surrounding communities. Through this work, youth create greater awareness about accessibility needs and encourage organizations to apply for EAF funding to address existing accessibility barriers and build a more inclusive and accessible Canada.

As a designated EAF Youth Accessibility Leader, you will be part of a growing community of youths from across the country that have:

- Identified accessibility barriers in workplaces or public spaces
- Approached organizations and made them aware of existing accessibility barriers
- Encouraged organizations to apply for funding to address such barriers
- Assisted an organization in developing and submitting a project proposal
- Supported the management of an accessibility project valued at up to \$10,000
- Informed program improvements by providing their valued feedback
- Participated in media and ministerial events; and
- Made a difference in the lives of people with disabilities



The application period to submit your interest in becoming a Youth Accessibility Leader is from May 29 to October 31, 2019 at 2:00 p.m. Eastern time. For more information or to apply to be a leader, go to: <https://tinyurl.com/yxja7ojq> Note, the following organizations are eligible to apply for EAF Youth Innovation Component funding:

- Not-for-profit organizations (including social enterprises)
- Businesses (maximum 99 full-time equivalent employees)
- Indigenous organizations (including band councils, tribal councils and self-government entities)
- Municipal governments; and
- Territorial governments

For more general information about the Enabling Accessibility Funding, including grants that are available, go to: <https://tinyurl.com/y6noqonj>

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# A Model for Ministry in the Third Space

By Terry DeYoung and Mark Stephenson

**E**xcept for our spouses, we've shared bedrooms with each other more than anyone else during the past 10 years. We have a good idea what the other will pack, what the other's night-time and early morning rituals are, and when and how frequently the other will call home. Most recently, we have traveled together on overnight trips to Wheaton College and to Virginia Beach for our work.

We see so much of each other that one night recently Mark had a dream that he and Terry were traveling somewhere together. In the dream, we were accompanied by another person, a 10-month-old boy. The child was neither Terry's nor Mark's, but we needed to care well for him. Though we've never traveled with a child, we are on a journey together caring for the Disability Concerns ministry of our two denominations—the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) and the Reformed Church in America (RCA). The ministry belongs to neither Terry nor Mark, nor even to our two denominations, but to God, and we presently have the privilege of stewarding that ministry of fostering communities in the body of Christ where everybody belongs and everybody serves.



(left) Terry serves as Coordinator for Disability Concerns for the RCA. (right) Mark is Director of Disability Concerns for the CRC.

Although we still do some projects independently, we do most of our work on behalf of both denominations. When combined, the full- and part-time staff of RCA and CRC Disability Concerns total three full time-equivalent (FTE) staff—three FTEs that serve the 2,000 or so churches of our two denominations and the hundreds of volunteers from both denominations.

The shared journey began in 2007 when Mark was asked whether he might like to partner with the RCA in

the work. At that time the RCA was actively exploring how the denomination could better minister with people with disabilities. A bi-denominational team was formed which created “A Working Agreement Between the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church in North America in a Ministry For, With, and By Persons with Disabilities.” That agreement was endorsed by CRC and RCA governing bodies and remains in effect today.

This year Terry and Mark find themselves on an informal “10th anniversary tour” of our combined work. We presented a review of our work this past spring at Calvin Seminary. We co-wrote a journal article and presented it at a faith and disability symposium at Wheaton College, and have solicited feedback from a half-dozen regional groups of volunteers and advisors. At Inspire, Terry and Mark will lead a workshop about our shared work, “Disability Ministry in the Third Space.”

What does it look like for our churches to fully welcome and engage people living with disabilities? How do mutuality and interdependence create space in the body of Christ where everybody belongs and everybody serves? In our workshop, a brief overview of that decade of work will provide a platform to explore how mutuality and interdependence are essential in creating more hospitable and welcoming churches. In addition, these complementary concepts offer one model for moving into the proposed “third space” between our two denominations.

We hope you'll join us at our workshop at Inspire to learn how our churches and denominations benefit when we share some spaces, and when we create places where everybody belongs and everybody serves.

## DCC Newsletter: New Videos!

By Miriam Spies

**A**t our Disability Concerns' Leadership Training Conference last fall, seven of our advocates appeared on camera to say why they felt called to become a disability advocate and what the ministry has meant for them, including four Canadians! One of these videos has been posted each week on The Network (<https://network.crcna.org/disability-concerns>) as well as Disability Concerns CRC & RCA new YouTube Channel (<http://bit.ly/DisabilityConcernsYouTube>). We hope these will be useful for increasing awareness of disability concerns, introducing people to different advocates, and inviting people to consider using their gifts as disability advocates themselves! Please watch, share, and talk with your community about why you serve as a disability advocate.

# Thoughts on Reimagining Disability and Mental Health

By Caroline Short

This past May I had the opportunity to audit a course at Regent College taught by Dr. John Swinton titled “Reimagining Disability and Mental Health.” I was familiar with Dr. Swinton’s work through attending the Summer Institute on Theology and Disability as well as his excellent book on the practical theology of dementia. Attending this course for five days was like drinking from the fire hydrant as we covered a lot of ground. We considered who God is and how this affects the way we see normalcy. The work of Vanier and the importance of gentleness and unhurried relationships gave us an example in affirming the value of each individual in our communities. We considered the experience of mental health challenges like schizophrenia, depression and bipolar disorder and what the church can bring to that experience and how the spiritual lives of people living with these challenges can bring to the life of the church. And finally, we tackled the experience of dementia and how the church and individual Christians are called to maintain friendships and value each person.

There are many things I learned in this course, but one idea that left a strong impression on me. When I do this, I am taking away their role as someone whose ideas and experiences are legitimate and therefore I am acting unjustly toward them. The experience of having one’s ideas and observations not received as valid is disrespectful at best and dehumanizing at worst.

Epistemic injustice happens in different ways to different people, but it certainly affects children, people who have mental health challenges, people on the autism spectrum, and people with dementia. People who communicate differently or with difficulty also may experience epistemic injustice: people who have a hearing impairment, aphasia, who use assistance

communication devices, or those who are silent may be wrongly perceived as having nothing to communicate. The challenge for each of us is to receive each person with an unhurried love and to give everyone the benefit of the doubt because our prejudices and stigmatizations will not only dehumanize people beloved of God but rob us of the opportunity to learn something or get to know someone we did not expect.

Interested in learning more? I suggest...

- *Dementia: Living in the Memories of God* by John Swinton (2012, Eerdmans)

- Summer Institute for Theology and Disability <https://faithand-disability.org/projects/summer-institute/>
- *Epistemic Injustice* by Miranda Fricker (2007, Oxford University Press)
- A Video link to John Swinton’s public lecture (“Hearing Voices Human and Divine”) at Regent College on May 13 can be found on the Regent website <https://tinyurl.com/y6lzwbj>



## Inspire Will Offer Track on Disability and Ministry

By Mark Stephenson

From August 1 through 3 in Windsor ON, Inspire 2019 is an event designed specifically for ministry volunteers and leaders from Christian Reformed and Reformed churches across North America.

This year disability ministry leaders will offer workshops during all five workshop slots. Cara Milne, founder of M-Powered Planning and CRC Regional Advocate for Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan, will offer two workshops: Creating an Atmosphere of Belonging and Cara’s Top Ideas for Community Building. Tom Vanwingerden, executive director of Friendship Ministries, and Barbara Newman, author, speaker, and special education teacher, will introduce and demonstrate Friendship’s exciting new curriculum called Together. Barb Newman will also offer a workshop on Universal Design for Ministry. Mark Stephenson, Director of CRC Disability Concerns, and Terry DeYoung, Coordinator for RCA Disability Concerns, will speak on their 10-year partnership in denominational disability ministry.

In addition, Inspire will offer meaningful worship and insightful keynote speakers. For more information or to register see [crcna.org/inspire](http://crcna.org/inspire).



# Looking at the Heart

By Jenna C Hoff



**T**he other day I was visiting my grandmother at her specialized care home for elderly people with conditions such as dementia. One of the staff members there took one look at my power wheelchair and my augmentative communication board and assumed I was a new resident in the home.

Even though I have around three more decades until I meet the minimum age requirements of the younger residents in the home, the staff member wasn't being mean. I've discovered in my journey living with physical disabilities that some people just look at a person using a wheelchair or other disability-

related equipment and see only see the disability.

I experience this all the time, from the people who rubberneck at my wheelchair but never really look at me as they walk on past me in the community to the cashier at the local pita restaurant last week who, upon finding out my husband and are married, told my husband she "saluted him."

If I could say just one thing to people of typical ability, I would say "please just see me. See Jenna. Not my disability. Not my chair. Not my differences. Just see me. I'm a human being just like you."

This desire, I'm sure, applies to all people of all differences. From refugees and newcomers to Canada, to people with facial or limb differences, to people of

differing ages, to people of varying ethnicities or socioeconomic statuses, to people with any of the number of disabilities and medical challenges under the sun—we all just want to be seen for our humanity. We all want to be treated with dignity. We all want to be loved. We all want to be seen for who we are and not the barriers that tend to divide us.

In 1 Samuel 16:7b we're told the Lord looks not at the outward appearance of a person but at the heart. May we strive to do the same.

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Reformed Church in America  
Christian Reformed Church

**Disability  
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