

# Disability Concerns Canada

*Everybody belongs. Everybody serves.*

The Christian Reformed Church in North America

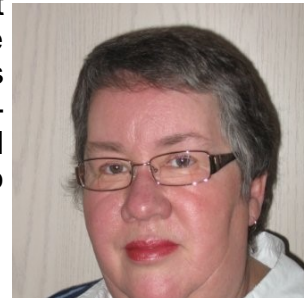
October 2015 Issue 58

## Editorial

Elly VanAlten

I had the privilege of watching the opening exercises of the Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles on July 25. A young man named Tim who opened a restaurant that serves food and hugs had this to say about what a hug means: he said it means “unity and love”. I found this to be very profound and powerful. Unity implies that we accept one another for who we are; love implies that we care for each other and want the best for each other and are willing to help each other achieve that.

Since my first involvement with Rehoboth Christian Ministries (a ministry with persons with developmental disabilities), I’ve experienced many of those spontaneous hugs, and thinking now about what they meant, they are even more special to me. It is very poignant that the people that many in the world tend to look down on because they are disabled, are the most effective at showing us what Jesus would do—accept and love each other. I’ve also experienced that in the Disabilities Concerns community, and I hope this never stops. With Tim in mind, I have vowed to give out many more hugs!



Published by  
Disability  
Concerns -  
Canada, a  
Committee of the  
Disability  
Concerns  
Ministry of the  
Christian  
Reformed Church.  
Elly VanAlten  
Heather DeBoer  
Editors



## SAVE THE DATE: 10/28-30, 2016

For Christians interested in disability, ministry, justice, and faith including :

- individuals and families living with disabilities
- pastors, children and youth ministry leaders, care coordinators
- disability advocates
- care givers
- anyone wishing to deepen their engagement with people who have disabilities

### Life to the Full Conference

October 28 - 30, 2016  
Niagara Falls, Ontario

More details to come at  
[www.disabilityconference.org!](http://www.disabilityconference.org!)

### 2016 Disability Conference

# Life to the Full

Ability. Belonging. Community.

# 2015 Disability Concerns Leadership Conference

By Elly VanAlten

The annual 2015 Disability Concerns Leadership Conference was again a can't-miss event. One of my favourite activities occurs at the beginning of the conference, when each person is asked to introduce themselves by saying where they are from, and more importantly, what motivated them to get involved in DC. The reasons are both noble and wide-ranging, and form the basis for excellent discussions when networking during break and meal times. I've discovered over the years of attending these conferences that the people involved in DC are some of the most passionate and caring persons ever – it's a real privilege to know them and work with them.



Friday afternoon featured 2 sessions that were promoted to and open to persons in the surrounding communities.

Jay Groningen spoke on the “Principles and Practices of Asset-Based Community Development”(ABCD). This involves developing ministries that the people around them say they need. Listening is the most important function, not only to what people say they need, but also to what people care enough to act on. This requires finding passionate people with the skills and knowledge to plan, organize and maintain a ministry that is needed in the community. These ministries may be with/for both persons with disabilities and those without. Jay comes with excellent experience in his past and present positions as a ‘coach/trainer for neighbourhood transformation’. He is the author of “Changing Times, New Approaches: A Handbook for Deacons” (available from Faith Alive Resources).

Gary Mulder is associated with Interfaith Disability Advocacy Coalition ([www.aapd.com/what-we-do/interfaith/](http://www.aapd.com/what-we-do/interfaith/)) of the AAPD. This is an organization unique to the United States; the work that they do – expanding employment opportunities for persons with disabilities - is funded in Canada and therefore foreign to Canadians. The Coalition specifically targets faith communities who are prepared to mentor, prepare and help persons with disabilities to find meaningful employment. Three areas are targeted: 1) “Communicate to members and visitors in the congregation the need to support an initiative to hire more people with disabilities”; 2) “Encourage employers who are members of the congregation and within the community to hire qualified people with disabilities”; 3) “Encourage local organizations that have job assistance programs to include a component that will assist persons with disabilities to find employment”. The Coalition is there to educate congregations on how to go about starting such a ministry, and offers ongoing support to congregations who take up the challenge to do so.



## Finances

Don't forget that there are number of initiatives that people living with disabilities can take advantage of. RDSP, Disability Tax Credit and provincial funding. Remember to especially encourage seniors living with a disability to take advantage of these resources.



# Conference Workshop for Regional Advocates (RA)

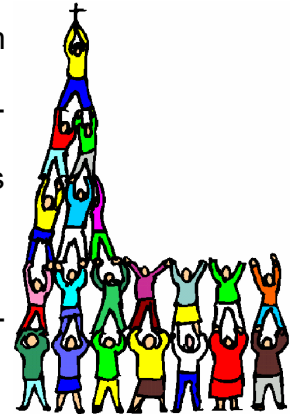
By Len Bakelaar

This workshop was facilitated by Elly VanAlten. Six RAs spoke of some of their experiences regarding what has worked for them and also some of the trials they have had.

Mike spoke of some of the struggles he encountered trying to get a ramp in place in his church, but by persistence and remaining faithful to the task there does come success. Sometimes it just takes a long time. In other words, if you feel convinced you are following God's leading, don't give up. Pat lamented that many churches in her classis still don't have a CA and some that do seem isolated and perhaps inactive. But there are also a few who are seeking and asking for resources. They are working to create more awareness concerning people with disabilities.

Len spoke on preparing for a "CA Gathering" (bringing together 3-6 CAs from a smaller geographical area). The agenda would include:

- Looking at the church policies that the CAs have brought from their churches
- Looking at the CA Mandate and how it could be modified especially if this would be a team effort rather than a single CA
- Attending a deacons meeting with a good presentation
- Communicating with Pastoral Elders and other leaders in the church
- Use the "5 Stages" document to discover their church's attitude to including persons with disabilities.



Roger spoke of the importance that RAs report to their classis. Even if you are not able to report it is still worthwhile to attend if only for the networking. Just by attending church leaders will recognize you as their RA and from time to time may engage you in a conversation regarding the ministry that you do.



Bob talked about a new opportunity, a ministry for veterans who have difficulty getting back into the mainstream of society. A good number of them suffer from PTSD and other issues. Reaching out to them can be difficult. Bob suggests that one way that has some success is to start a "Vet to Vet" ministry, a ministry in which they will likely feel more comfortable to share with each other than with non vets. This area may require some homework for the RA, but opens up much needed new opportunities.

Elly spoke on the value of Canadian RAs working with their diaconal consultant to recruit CAs. She also suggested that CAs could have a huge impact on making their building more accessible by offering to be on the building committee when renovations/additions are planned by their church.

These RAs shared of their struggles, their successes, some new information and the issues that are familiar to all of us. But all of it together encourages us to move forward serving our Lord in this ministry.

"Compassion, acceptance and LOVE is the cure to MOST of the issues that plague this world."  
Yvonne Pierre, *The Day My Soul Cried: A Memior*

"My disability has opened my eyes to see my true abilities." *Robert M. Hensel*

# Support Groups 101: a summary of a workshop from the DC Leadership Training August 14 and 15, 2015

By Mark Stephenson

In this workshop, four presenters described some of the basics of developing and sustaining a healthy support group (Vinnie Adams, Roze Meyer Bruins, Ivan Mulder, Beverly Sullivan). Support groups help those who attend to know that they are not alone in their struggles. In addition, groups can connect people with resources, provide an opportunity for sharing, and be a forum for learning. To begin a group, first and most important, pray; bring the group and its members and leaders before God. Then determine the purpose of your group. Is it primarily for communicating information or for sharing? If sharing is the main purpose, establish some rules for confidentiality and for sharing. Groups can become a powerful way to lament before God what is difficult in life, but be careful that the group does not become a dumping ground for people's complaints. (For a helpful list of group rules, search the Internet for "Celebrate Recovery Five Small Group Guidelines".) As you prepare to

start a group, think about the nuts and bolt of including when and where it will meet, how often, who will facilitate, what topics will be addressed, and how it will be publicized. Don't try to run a group alone, but form a team who will be responsible for the group. Be sure to get feedback from group members regularly about the hopes and desires for the group and how they believe the group is going. Read about one group's successes and failures at <http://network.crcna.org/disability-concerns/support-group-successes-and-failures>.



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If there is a vacancy in your classis and you need assistance, or you are interested in filling the position please call Heather DeBoer in the Burlington, ON office at 800-730-3490 or email at [hdeboer@crcna.org](mailto:hdeboer@crcna.org)