

ORGANIZATION NAME:

Disability Services at Conestoga College

ITEMS AUDITED:

- Conestoga College's Disability Services Website
- Information letter for Students with Disabilities
- Information letter about Proctor's
- Information letter about booking a test with Disability Services
- List of all Student Services
- Fact Sheet for Disability Services
- Statistics about students with disabilities at Conestoga

FACTS:

Number of Employees:

- 5.5 counsellors
- 4 support staff
- 1 disability employee advisor
- 1 disability resource coordinator

Number of Locations:

One

History:

The service started out being called Special Needs Services. Due to negative connotations being associated with "special needs" the name was changed to Disability Services. This name is now beginning to be viewed as negative and has created a cause to find a new name to replace "disability" with to create a positive image with the community, prospective students, current/past students and staff.

Challenges:

Disability Services has been receiving calls from local high schools concerned about the negative association with the word disability. High school counsellors are finding that telling prospective students with learning disabilities that their resource is Disability Services is bringing up a lot of depressing and pessimistic outlooks.

Disability Services also notes that trying to keep up with new programs being added to Conestoga's repertoire is challenging to accommodate new students with disabilities. It is a lot of work for a counsellor to create a plan of action for students to use in the new programs. It is a learning experience for both the counsellor and student as to what works and what does not work for different kinds of disabilities within different programs.

New illnesses are also a challenge for Disability Services. They have to keep in mind the Health and Safety regulations of many different programs and what makes the students eligible or ineligible to be accepted into the program.

Strengths:

Disability Services is a hardworking and busy office. Each employee tries to help all their students to the best of their ability, going above and beyond the call of duty to make a program work for a student. They are strengthened by the students as they watch them throughout their college career, helping them make their dreams come true.

Another strength is that each counsellor follows the same students from the start to the end of their Conestoga College career. The students are not being passed around from counsellor to counsellor unless the student requests it.

KEY MESSAGES:

"Conestoga College is committed to providing a safe and accessible environment for students with disabilities. Accommodating disabilities at the College is a shared responsibility between students, faculty and administration. The supports and services provided by Disability Services are intended to allow students to pursue their College education in a way which respects their dignity, encourages independence in their academic pursuits and promotes full participation in the college community."

This mission statement, containing their key messages was found on the Disability Services Fact Sheet. It is also found on Conestoga College's Disability Services website on the Welcome to Disability Services page.

WELL EXECUTED:

Disability Services has a very strong mission statement and it is very easy to understand what their key messages are. They also have a very clean and organized website filled with excellent resources and important information about the service. Their information sheets are incredibly informative and offer many definitions of all the different disabilities that they accommodate and work with.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

Their mission statement is very wordy and long. While the paragraph could remain the mission statement, we believe that taking key words and messages from the paragraph and using them in information sheets and other writing designed for students would make them more appealing to students. We believe they would be read and understood as opposed to the likelihood that the message is being overlooked.

Their information sheets are informative, but they are also very forgettable. They are on plain paper and get lost among the magazines they are on the shelf with. To improve the positivity Disability Service is hoping for, we think their writing needs to exude positivity. The sheets have lots of information and are very helpful, but unless someone is being given one, we don't see them being used at all. When something is colourful or bright and bold and interesting is more likely to be picked up by a student or any one walking by and therefore, more likely to be read and used.

One of their messages is accommodating all students with disabilities, however, their section of the website can only be viewed if you have your eyesight. Having limited or no eyesight at all is a type of disability and without having audio imbedded there is no other way for a visually impaired student to benefit from the website and its resources.

Their website is clear and organized, but it is also very technical. Making a section for students that is more colourful and friendly may make the website more effective for students who want to use it for the resources that are available on it. Placing student success stories on the front page may also improve the overall feeling of the website. Interactive is also a great way to get users/students involved more.

All of their communications are very text heavy and unappealing. Improvements using colours, photos, entertainment aspects and editing could easily improve the view the college community and prospective students might have regarding Disability Services at Conestoga College. It may also allow students who may need the service but feel that admitting to use the service is degrading, feel comfortable and at home with using a service that shows openness and understanding through their change in the communication outreach.

It goes without saying but changing the name of the service and making it more student friendly will also increase the positive outreach that the service provides.