Persons with Disabilities and Technology

December 3rd is the United Nations International Day of Disabled Persons. The theme of this year's celebration, **E-Accessibility**, recognizes the importance of technology in the lives of persons with disabilities, as well as the need to improve access to information technology for persons with disabilities. To highlight the importance of this day, as well as its chosen theme, the Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres (CAILC) is releasing a series of four themed fact sheets in the lead-up to this day.

Technology can both open and shut doors to persons with disabilities. As technology continues to change, new doors to access will open and some of the earlier access strategies will become obsolete.

~ John R. Moore

Technology and Access for People with Disabilities. Available Online.

Fact:

❖ **Persons with disabilities** are **less likely** than their non-disabled peers **to access the internet**. [1]

❖ In 2000, **57.8% of persons with disabilities did not have a computer in their home**. [2]

❖ Having the internet at home greatly improves a person's chances of using this technology; however, in 2000 **only 28.6% of persons with disabilities lived in a household with an internet connection**, compared to **46.1% for persons without disabilities**. [1]

❖ The **internet has a very positive impact on adults with disabilities** who are online. [3]

❖ **48%** of adults with disabilities report the internet has **significantly improved their lives**, compared to **27%** for their non-disabled peers. [3]

❖ **52%** of adults with disabilities report the internet has helped them be **better informed about the world**, **44% feel more connected** to the world, and **42%** report the internet helps them to **reach out to people with similar interest and experiences**. [3]

❖ Research shows persons with disabilities see the internet as an **invaluable way to develop and maintain friendships**, as well as a way to **visit disability-related sites** and **connect with people who understand**. [4]

❖ The "**Digital Divide**" has been defined as the gap between those who can effectively use new information and communication tools and those who cannot. [5]

❖ Research suggests that **persons with disabilities** are more likely to be on the **"wrong side of the digital divide."** [6]

❖ **Poor website design**, **barriers accessing adaptive hardware and software,** and **cost** continue **exclude many** from the benefits of technology.

[1] (2002) Canadian Council on Social Development Disability Fact Sheet No.7.
[2] (2002) Canadian Council on Social Development Disability Fact Sheet No.6.
[3] 2000 How the Internet is Improving the Lives of Americans with Disabilities. June 7th #30.
[4] (2004) Seymour, w. & Lupton, D. *Holding the line online: exploring wired relationships for people with disabilities.* Disability & Society. June. 19(4): 291-305.
[5] Kearns, T. Using Partnerships to Bridge the Digital Divide within the Disability Community. Available online.
[6] Disability and the Digital Divide: An Employers' Forum on Disability Briefing for SCR Practitioners. Available online.

Solutions:

✓ Research on persons with disabilities and the internet shows that **disability-related sites are the preferred place for online communication**, as these sites serve as a source of **information** and **support** linking people facing similar issues. [1]

✓ As supports and services increasingly move online, we must work to not only ensure they are **accessible**, but also to ensure persons with disabilities have **opportunities** to access the tools necessary to tap into these (i.e. affordable and reliable computer access).

✓ **CAILC** and its network of **ILRCs provide opportunities** for persons to **access** and use **new technology.**

✓ Many **ILRCs offer computer** and **internet access** to the communities they serve.

[1] (2004) Seymour, w. & Lupton, D. *Holding the line online: exploring wired relationships for people with disabilities.* Disability & Society. June. 19(4): 291-305.