



UNION OF
BRITISH
COLUMBIA
MUNICIPALITIES

March 19th, 2009

Dear Mayors and Councils, Chairs and Regional Boards;

Re: Access Awareness Day – Saturday, June 6, 2009

The partnership between the Union of BC Municipalities and SPARC BC is one that continues to evolve, setting new standards in collaboration, planning, accessibility, and community development. This year, we would like to ask for your continued support of Access Awareness Day, which will take place on Saturday, June 6, 2009. Access Awareness Day highlights the important roles we all play in creating inclusive and accessible communities for people of all abilities.

Employing people with disabilities within the tourism industry:

The theme for the 2009 Access Awareness Day campaign focuses on the employment of people with disabilities within the tourism sector and the crucial role that businesses will play in creating employment opportunities within society. SPARC BC chose to work with the tourism sector because BC will be the focal point on the world stage in 2010.

Access Awareness Day will be promoted in the following ways:

- The SPARC BC website will provide additional accessibility resources for businesses, especially within the tourism sector, and specialized employment agencies
- The SPARC BC membership of over 13,000 throughout BC will receive promotional materials
- The ongoing partnership with TransLink will produce a province wide public information promotional campaign to the general public throughout BC
- Hospitals, schools, universities, various ethnic media, government representatives and community organizations will be encouraged to join the campaign by displaying new promotional materials.

In addition to the Access Awareness Day campaign SPARC BC has a variety of other accessibility programs developed through its continuous engagement with the community of people with disabilities from around the province.

“Are You a Mythbuster?”: This year’s Access Awareness Day campaign is a follow up to last year’s campaign where SPARC BC

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worked with businesses to make sure that they were accessible and welcoming for people with disabilities. Further to this SPARC BC now encourages businesses to be inclusive and welcoming by creating employment opportunities specifically for people with disabilities. We all benefit personally, socially and economically from participating in the work world. The employment rate of persons with disabilities was significantly lower than those without disabilities in 2006, 59.1% versus 74.3% respectively.¹ As a result, BC is making considerable effort to increase employment with the 10 x 10 Challenge where it promotes businesses or organizations to increase their employment of people with disabilities by 10% by 2010, gearing up for the 2010 Olympics and Paralympics.

For people with disabilities to be fully included and able to participate in society, it is necessary to create opportunities to contribute to their community. These include schools, training programs, post secondary education institutes, health care, workplaces, recreation facilities, cultural programs, transportation, parks and other forms of public space. Citizenship refers to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of society.² People with disabilities have the skills, abilities, and the experience to contribute to society in important ways, primarily through paid work. As well, employment increases self-worth, self-esteem, and self-confidence for people of all abilities.

This year's 'Employing people with disabilities within the tourism industry' campaign will promote awareness of this growing population and will provide the tourism sector and employment agencies with some ideas about how they can ensure that people with disabilities achieve employment.

We would like to invite BC local governments to look internally and assess how accessible and welcoming their spaces are, how welcoming they are to people with disabilities and to consider ways in which they can engage and support their community on the issue of accessibility.

Accessibility By-law Project: SPARC BC is in the process of developing a model of accessibility by-laws and policies that can be used by local governments throughout BC. This past year, SPARC BC has explored existing accessibility policies and by-laws in BC communities and other cities to identify best practices, and has developed guidelines and examples of exemplary practices. An advisory committee has been created to review this set of proposed by-laws in the hopes of achieving approvals by UBCM and the communities.

Parking Permit Program for People with Disabilities: SPARC BC continues to work hard in assisting people who require designated accessible parking spaces throughout BC and to provide leadership in the promotion, advocacy and public education concerning accessible communities. SPARC BC is able to provide this province wide

¹ BC Statistics (2009)., Labour Market Participation of Persons with Disabilities. Earnings and Employment Trends.

permit issuing service at low cost by being the issuing agency to the majority of local governments in BC. SPARC BC also diligently promotes the importance of keeping designated accessible parking spaces available to permit holders through the media, public announcements, and a wide distribution of information materials. Due to the expanded multi ethnic population of the province, the information brochure has been translated into the most commonly spoken languages (Punjabi, Chinese, Tagalog, and Spanish) and has been well received by the community.

Since 1984, SPARC BC has been providing the parking permit program to people with disabilities in BC, allowing over 100,000 people to remain connected to their communities and arrive safely to their destinations. SPARC BC has been actively advocating for accessibility issues since the early 70's. Through the combined efforts of the Union of BC Municipalities, the Premier's Council on Disability Issues, the BC Coalition of People with Disabilities and SPARC BC, the Motor Vehicle Act of BC now includes regulations on designation of parking spaces and enforcement.

Thank you again for your support of SPARC BC's 2009 Access Awareness Day. Your commitment will make an important difference in the quality of life of people with disabilities.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Hobson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "H".

Robert Hobson
President, UBCM

- Through bus advertisements placed on public transportation vehicles throughout the province
- To the SPARC BC membership of over 13,000 people and organizations throughout BC
- Through a province-wide media campaign
- To hospitals, schools, universities, various ethnic media, government representatives and community organizations who will be encouraged to join the campaign by displaying the new promotional materials and promoting accessibility in their communities.

We are enthusiastic about this campaign; there is always a need for information and people want to know what they can do! You can help put knowledge into people's hands and encourage people to think about how employing people with disabilities will promote inclusion within communities.

Accessible and inclusive communities support the independence, comfort, self-esteem and security of all their citizens, especially people with disabilities. Our mission at SPARC BC is to work with communities in building a just and healthy society for all. We know that this means ensuring people with disabilities have support to be active and involved citizens.

Accessibility By-Laws Project

SPARC BC is in the process of developing a set of model accessibility policies and by-laws that can be used by municipalities throughout BC. This past year, SPARC BC has been working with an advisory committee that is representative of the province in reviewing the proposed set of draft by-laws. The committee was established out from the collaboration with the BC CAN (the BC Community Accessibility Network) to obtain feedback on the draft materials, develop a final version, and create a promotional strategy for the model accessibility policies and by-laws.

Parking Permit Program

Accessibility and social inclusion have been SPARC BC priorities throughout our 42 year history. We're pleased to serve most of the municipalities in the province with the Parking Permit Program for People with Disabilities, which helps over 100,000 people across BC remain connected to their communities and arrive safely at their destination. Our service:

- provides fast and efficient services on permit applications and renewals at a low cost;
- promotes the availability of permits for those in need through public service announcements in the media, and wide distribution of information pamphlets, including multilingual information brochures;

- offers information regarding permits and the application process on our model fully accessible website and office;
- works with the medical profession to educate on the availability and proper use of permits;
- works with municipal bylaw departments, police and private parking agencies throughout BC to diligently promote the importance of keeping designated parking spaces available to permit holders.

We have been able to achieve and maintain our services, promotion, and advocacy work for accessible communities because the majority of municipalities support SPARC BC as their issuing agency. Supported by the UBCM Executive, we ask that municipalities maintain their support for SPARC BC as their permit-issuing agency. Fragmentation of permit issuing will weaken the strong central support we've been able to maintain for an efficient and cost-effective parking permit program, and may jeopardize the consistency of the program.

Please recognize the 12th Annual BC Access Awareness Day, June 6, 2009

Public education is a key component to creating communities that are accessible for all. We hope that your municipality or regional district will take part in Access Awareness Day this year. Please let us know if you are proud to support Access Awareness Day, we are always happy to celebrate the growth of this campaign. Thank you for your assistance in making BC communities more accessible.

Sincerely,

SPARC BC



Nancy Henderson
Executive Director

Enclosed Documents:

- Access Awareness Day Banner
- Are You a Mythbuster booklet
- Sample Proclamation

ACCESS AWARENESS DAY SAMPLE PROCLAMATION

Whereas: All community members should have equity in opportunities, and full participation in community life, and

Whereas: It is instrumental to educate and inform all our citizens of our community of the important part they play in making it accessible and inclusive to all, and

Whereas: It is about removing the structural barriers to participation both in physical accessibility (largely, but not entirely in the built environment) and in inclusion, where individuals are recognized for their contributions, and

Whereas: Providing designated parking spaces are essential to the economic, social, and physical well-being of all British Columbians (both with and without disabilities) in order to contribute and remain active in their community, and

Whereas: The citizens of _____ recognize people with disabilities as equal members where they can contribute and participate in employment, transportation, community activities, or recreation and leisure.

Be it resolved that:

I, _____, Mayor/Chairperson of _____, do hereby proclaim Access Awareness Day - Saturday, June 6, 2009 in _____, a day of individual and group action to provide equitable opportunities and an accessible communities for all of our citizens.

In witness whereof I hereunto set my hand this _____ day of _____ 2009.

Mayor/Chairperson of _____

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