

Youth Inclusion at FINALY!

As the new Youth Inclusion Coordinator with FINALY!, my main goal is to assist any youth with barriers to employment to find and use information related to career development, job search skills, employment prospects and other opportunities that exist for them here in the province.

As the title of my position indicates, the 'inclusion' of youth with disabilities is my objective. It is understandable but not acceptable, that a youth with a disability may feel excluded from the labour market because of their disability. Much of this feeling of exclusion I believe is due to a lack of awareness of the help and support available to them. This is where I come in.

I hope to create awareness amongst the youth of the province that although they may face challenges when it comes to finding meaningful employment, there are many programs and services to aid them in their search.

In addition to these services, I am in the process of compiling online information that will be available on FINALY's website in the near future. The project I am currently working on is a "Youth Breaking Barriers" directory. This directory will provide a wealth of useful information geared towards youth with disabilities and their job search.

Included in this directory will be information pertaining to various occupations, self-assessments, job search resource guides, career assessments/development, networking, resumes/cover letters, interviewing, skill development, etc.

It will also include links to provincial and federal government programs and services that assist and aid youth with disabilities to overcome barriers to employment. There are also numerous disability related organizations across Canada that have very informative websites that are worth checking out and their links will be provided in the directory as well.

Contact information for Newfoundland and Labrador community based organizations and agencies that deal with disability issues and employment will also be included to provide better access for youth living in various areas of the province.

In addition to job-related information, I am also currently considering the work of other non-profit organizations to include in the new directory. The Public Legal Information Association of Newfoundland's Youth Justice Project, for example, provides important information to youth about the criminal justice system in the province and in Canada.

Also, sticking with the inclusive theme of the directory, information related to immigration will be provided to help new Canadians, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians feel more welcome in their new homes and help them adjust to new ways of life in the province. These two issues are relevant to youth inclusion because both can create barriers to employment.

Although much of the information on the directory will be directly related to youth disability and employment, I welcome any new ideas and suggestions from others that could help aid youth in general and make them feel more informed and involved in their community.

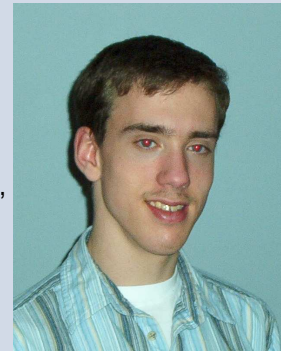
I realize that there are many challenges facing youth with disabilities when trying to find and secure meaningful employment. However, I am optimistic that barriers to employment are breakable and that we are all capable of creating our own futures at home and abroad regardless of the obstacles we may face.

I hope that my time here at FINALY! will give me the opportunity to connect and make a difference to the youth of Newfoundland and Labrador. ■

- **Steve Walsh, Youth Inclusion Coordinator** - steven@finaly.ca

2007 Easter Seals Ambassador Justin Mercer

Easter Seals Newfoundland and Labrador announced on February 26, 2007 that Upper Island Cove native Justin Mercer was selected to serve as their 2007 Easter Seals Ambassador. The Easter Seals Ambassador is a child or youth with a strong spirit of independence, a "can-do" attitude, self-assurance and an intention to complete post secondary studies. Justin represents the incredible potential and amazing abilities of children and youth with physical disabilities.



Justin is a Level III honours student at Ascension Collegiate who has cerebral palsy, yet it is well known among his family, friends, classmates and community as someone with limitless spirit and determination are limitless and without boundaries. Justin will try anything, and he is a great role model for other youth because he always puts his best efforts forward and sets his sights on succeeding regardless of the obstacles that may come his way. He never lets his disability slow him down at all, and this for Justin proves that having a disability does not equal inability.

Justin has a wide array of interests and hobbies. He plays the guitar and piano and enjoys driving, working on computers, meeting new people, snowmobiling, physical exercise, flight simulation and traveling.

In addition to Justin representing youth with physical disabilities in the province, his future plan is to attend university to become an architect. Other goals include pursuing a life-long dream of becoming a pilot, raising a family and living a full and productive life.

The ability to overcome barriers and excel is a true sign of what young people with disabilities can accomplish on a daily basis. Justin gives hope and encouragement to many young people in Newfoundland and Labrador who face similar obstacles in their lives and acts as a true model of what a youth leader should be. ■