

INTRODUCTION

The International Decade of Disabled Persons, enthusiastically promoted by Canada at its inception, will draw to a close in 1992. Its results in Canadian society at large can be readily capsulized. During the past decade we have seen new levels of awareness and sincere, if sometimes patronizing, goodwill. While there have been some noteworthy achievements, progress has on the whole been modest.

Within the community of disabled persons, the decade has seen many positive developments, particularly a new emphasis on independence and a new self confidence. Above all, however, it has seen the rise of new expectations and, given persisting realities, new levels of bitterness and frustration.

What is plainly needed now is action. Canadians, both individually and in the commitments of their governments, have already recognized the need for change. Persons with disabilities, in every available forum including this Committee and its predecessors, have told us with increasing precision what changes are needed, and why. What is left is the task of making it happen.

A. Economic Integration: A Theme For Change

This report, and the series of studies which it initiates, is our attempt to contribute to the process of making change happen. We have selected, as the theme for our present and future work, the economic integration of Canadians with disabilities. The idea of economic integration, as we have come to view it, suggests perspectives which we believe provide indispensable guidance for the task which now faces Canadians: the comprehensive inclusion, within our community, of the 3.3 million of us whom we have come to recognize as people with disabilities.

First of all, the theme of economic integration acknowledges that in a society which revolves around the activities of production and consumption, those who are denied participation in the marketplace are fundamentally marginalized. The two central economic activities — production and consumption — in turn identify the central areas which will be addressed in the future work of this Committee. Employment has the same importance to people with disabilities as it does for other Canadians. It is a fundamental form of social participation and source of personal satisfaction. It is also a prerequisite for access to the cornucopia of goods, services, opportunities and experiences that are available in an affluent society, to those who have the money. Like other Canadians, people with disabilities need an adequate standard of living in order to have an acceptable quality of life.

People with disabilities are painfully aware of these realities, and have consistently chosen economic priorities in their representations before this Committee. Their concerns