

go out to a big urban center like Edmonton or Winnipeg he just does not get service. What is needed are more programs that go into the communities. You have to be practical. The instructors and people who design programs for the disabled have to be willing to change. The blind need to be able to function in their own communities, not in Edmonton. To give you an example, the mobility program that C.N.I.B. puts on teaches a person how to use a white cane in an urban setting like Calgary. But such training is useless to a person who wishes to return to his home community here in the Northwest Territories where there are usually no paved streets, but there are low-hanging branches, deep snow, and big rocks. Here a walking staff is much more useful than a white cane.

When I was young I always wanted to learn to use an axe but I was never allowed to for fear I would cut myself. If a C.N.I.B. instructor had come to my community when I was young, maybe I could have learned how to do that. I know there are blind people that do use an axe but I was never taught. Instead I went away to school where I learned to function and do things important in a white society. The point that I'm trying to make is that it is hard to get services for Native disabled people that they really need where they really need them.

Look at the blind children in the schools here in the N.W.T. They sit in their classrooms day after day with nothing to do because the schools don't have any qualified staff to teach them and their parents refuse to send them out to Winnipeg to go to school. These parents love their children and they don't want to lose them. If they go away to learn how to function as a blind person in Winnipeg they will lose their Native identity and their sense of

belonging to their community. On the other hand, they are not adjusted into the mainstream of Canadian society either. They are like half-people, neither Native nor Canadian.

I'd like to tell you about something else that bothers me. You have asked me if the C.N.I.B. or any other agency has helped me find a job. The answer is no, I never received much help from any of these agencies. They talked good but did little or nothing. The jobs I've had, I found myself or got through friends. When I got out of school I tried very hard to find a job. I looked everywhere but no one seemed to want to give me a chance. Even though I had a degree I couldn't find work, even maintenance work. When I applied I was told I wouldn't see well enough to clean. I had been taking care of a family since I was 12 years old when my mother became ill with cancer. But the boss wouldn't even give me a chance.

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I couldn't even get a job doing dumb things that nobody needs training for and are usually given to Natives without any problems. But because I was blind I wasn't even allowed to do the shitty jobs that are usually given to minority people. Do you know what I ended up doing? I became a bar maid and go-go dancer. I didn't need the qualification of sight for that. In fact, it was just the opposite—I had to be viewed. You know, put on display. At the time I was proud of what I was doing because I had found that job and I did it, and I didn't have to feel inferior about it either. Really, I'm not ashamed of what I did. I was a pretty good dancer and I know that I had my job and kept it because I was a good dancer, and for that reason only. When I took my glasses off to go up on stage it was one time when I felt people were not patronizing me. I would have liked a more respectable job as a cash register lady in the dime store or something else, and God knows that I tried hard enough to get that kind of a job. But when I got hungry enough I took whatever I could get and to hell with what people thought.

When you are blind it is hard to get a chance. Today there are many programs set up to help Native people. Some of these programs I can use because I am a Native, but often-times they don't meet my special needs as a blind Native. There are very few programs designed to meet the needs of handicapped Native people. I would definitely say it is harder being blind that it is being a Native.

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