

government bureaucracies, together with the harsh realities of poverty, unemployment, social and geographical isolation and inadequate living conditions, continue to contribute to the high incidence of disability amongst Aboriginal people. As well, these same factors make organizing and obtaining adequate services and programs more difficult.

The work of main-line federal departments to deal with these problems seems quite impressive when it is viewed in isolation and assessed at face value. In appearances before the Committee, officials from the Departments of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, National Health and Welfare and the Secretary of State carefully outlined both specific initiatives for Aboriginal people with disabilities and the benefits from normal departmental programs. These witnesses left us with the immediate impression that the federal government is actively devoted to solving problems related to disability amongst Aboriginal people.

Closer scrutiny, however, revealed major gaps because the issues faced by this group of people can be appreciated only by listening to their voices. Witnesses from across this country demonstrated the most significant change that has taken place since 1981: the voice of Aboriginal people with disabilities has grown much louder and much stronger. Indeed, those from across Canada and from the United States that Members of the Committee listened to at Akwesasne in November 1991 were extremely well-informed about the nature of their battle for change. They were also articulate in proposing solutions for resolving their struggle. Over and over again, Aboriginal people with disabilities