



THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS

ANNUAL REPORT

THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



2015

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MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER OF SOCIAL SERVICES & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



In August 2014, after unanimous support in both Houses of Parliament, the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act was enacted. The National Commission for Persons with Disabilities was appointed in December of that year to direct the implementation of the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act, 2014, amongst other functions. The Chairman of the Commission, Mr. C. DeCosta Bethel, and the fourteen other Commissioners have been most diligent in the exercise of their mandate to protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities throughout The Bahamas.

The Commission has been busy during its first year, and this inaugural Annual Report is a record of its activities, accomplishments, and goals. During the course of 2015 the Commission actively engaged with key stakeholders such as Government Ministries and Departments and Disability-Related Non-Governmental Organizations. The Commission's public education and awareness efforts were set in motion to provide vital information about the Act, the rights of persons with disabilities, and the responsibility of our Society in helping to protect such rights. As required by the Act, the Commission also began the process of registering persons with disabilities, as well as addressing complaints from the public regarding non-compliance and other matters related to the welfare and development of persons with disabilities under the new law.

On September 24th, 2013, The Bahamas became a signatory to the United Nations Convention for the rights of Persons with Disabilities. On September 28th, 2015, The Bahamas took another giant step forward in ensuring the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities by ratifying the Convention. In so doing, The Bahamas renewed its commitment to include provisions of the Convention in the national legislation. A fundamental function of the Commission is to ensure that The Bahamas is compliant with the provisions of the Convention, where possible.

The Government of The Bahamas is committed to the greater inclusion, access, and empowerment of people of all abilities. Through the Commission, the Government invites the partnership of other stakeholders – businesses, churches, schools, community organizations – in the process of promoting equality and ending the discrimination of persons with disabilities. It is important that each of us understands our responsibility in accepting, respecting and celebrating the wonderful diversity that disability brings to the human family.

I laud the work of the Commission as it marks its first year, and eagerly look forward to its second year being even more productive and effective. I also commend the Secretariat of the Commission for providing the administrative and technical functions necessary for the Commission to fulfill its mandate. The entire Staff of the Ministry of Social Services and Community Development join me in wishing the Commission continued success as it works towards the goal of a disability inclusive development throughout the entire Bahamas.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Griffin', written in a cursive style.

The Honourable Melanie S. Griffin, M.P.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

On 15th December, 2014, the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities was appointed to begin its work of giving oversight to the implementation and monitoring of the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act. Over the past twelve months the Commission has worked tirelessly to begin its task of ensuring that the Act does what it is intended to do - end discrimination against persons with disabilities in The Bahamas.



This first Annual Report records the activities and achievements of the Commission during 2015. Such activities include the implementation of a strategic public education and awareness plan, engagement with key stakeholders including Government Ministries and disability-related NGOs, and the registration of persons with disabilities. The Commission has made much progress, even as we recognize that there is a lot more to be done.

I commend the work of my fellow Commission Members and applaud the efforts of the staff of the Secretariat headed by Mr. Lester Ferguson, the Executive Secretary. I also wish to especially thank the officers and staff of the Ministry of Social Services and Community Development, the Legal Affairs Division in the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs, and the community of persons with disabilities for their overwhelming support of and cooperation with the Commission over the past year.

The Commission's Annual Report also records our 2016 Plan which includes, among other items, continued dialogue with all stakeholders, the establishment of an Inspectorate, and a closer examination of the issue of accessible transportation in The Bahamas - a matter that not only greatly concerns persons with disabilities, but also has widespread implications for their wellbeing and inclusion in community life.

The Commission remains passionate and committed to protecting and promoting the rights of persons with disabilities, ending discrimination and ensuring inclusion. My fellow Commission Members and I hope that you will join us in recognizing that we are all advocates and ambassadors in the cause of ensuring that the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities are respected and upheld. In so doing, I believe we will continue on the path of becoming a truly great Nation.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "De Costa Bethel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mr. C. DeCosta Bethel, Chairman

PURPOSE & MISSION

The National Commission for Persons with Disabilities is a statutory body established by the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act, 2014. The Commission is a public sector agency, and is a unit within the Ministry of Social Services and Community Development.

The purpose of the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act, is to end discrimination against persons with disabilities.

The purpose of the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities is

- to oversee the effective implementation of the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act;
- to provide public education concerning the Act;
 - to ensure compliance with the Act;
- to investigate and take action against violations of the Act; and
- from time to time to review the Act and recommend amendments.

The Mission of the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities is to

- protect the rights,
- promote responsibility,
- ensure accessibility,
- encourage inclusion and
- advance equal opportunities

for persons with disabilities.

THE PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

After at least 20 years of discussions, drafts, consultations, debates, and some setbacks, The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Bill was tabled in the House of Parliament by the Honourable Melanie S. Griffin M.P., and unanimously passed in July 2014 at which time Minister Griffin proudly stated that the passage of the legislation "will rank amongst the noblest of Acts of Parliament and The Commonwealth of The Bahamas." A truer statement could not have been said, for the Act provides the legislative framework for every Bahamian, regardless of condition, to enjoy the rights that are intrinsic to being a member of the human family, and a citizen of The Bahamas. This includes the right to be treated with dignity and respect; the right not to be discriminated against; the right to be viewed equally with others under the Law; and the right to participate fully and equally in the opportunities that citizenship or residency in The Bahamas provides. In passing the Act, The Bahamas took a giant step forward to truly moving forward, upward, onward and together as a Nation. The Legislation came into force on August 13th, 2014.

COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP

The Persons with Disabilities Act established the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities as a Statutory Body, and in accordance with the provisions of the Act, the Minister appointed 15 members to the Commission, with effect from 14 December, 2014. Members were nominated and carefully selected based on the criteria prescribed by the Act, but also on the basis of their experience and the value they would bring to the important work of giving oversight and direction to the implementation of the Act. The membership of the Commission is comprised of five persons with disabilities, three of whom are representatives of disability-related NGOs; three parents of children with disabilities; a representative of the Ministries of Health, Education, Works, Labour and Social Services; and representatives of Employers and Civil Society. The Commission began formal sittings in January 2015.

Commission members, along with the staff of the Secretariat, have worked hard during the Commission's first year of operation. The Act requires the Commission to meet at least nine times a year, but because of the passion and commitment of its members, the Commission held 20 meetings during its first year. Every meeting had a quorum, and the average meeting attendance was 85%. Commission meetings were stimulating and productive, and the Commission looks forward to undertaking and accomplishing even more in 2016.

COMMISSION PRIORITIES

Immediately after the Commission was constituted, it began the work of familiarizing itself with its mandate and functions as outlined in the Act, as well as determining its priority agenda items. Because many of the members were already engaged in disability-related issues before joining the Commission, it did not take long to determine what the Commission's priorities should be. The early sittings of the Commission saw it deciding and focusing on the following priorities:

Built Environment Accessibility. The ability to access buildings and facilities that are open to the public remains a major challenge for the community of persons with disabilities. While The Bahamas Building Code 2003 contains a section on accessibility for persons with disabilities, many of the buildings constructed before 2003 were built without regard to accessibility. Additionally, poorly maintained or improperly built sidewalks in key areas are of particular concern for persons who are mobility challenged. Such sidewalks not only make it impossible for wheelchair users, for example, to independently get from one place to another, but they also pose safety risks. The Commission has begun to engage the Ministry of Works with regards to the regulations for building accessibility and issues relating to sidewalks, and the enforcement of those regulations.

Employment. The Commission is aware that there are qualified persons with disabilities who have not been able to secure employment, an issue that is not unique to persons with disabilities. The Commission also recognizes and is seeking to address barriers which job-seeking persons with disabilities face including transportation; employer discrimination; accessibility of places of employment; negative stereotypes about persons with disabilities; and training/re-training of persons with disabilities.

Accessible Parking. The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act requires all places that the public may access to have accessible parking spaces. The misuse of such parking spaces remains a daily source of aggravation for accessible parking permit holders. As there is no penalty when persons who do not have accessible permits park in such spaces, the Commission has begun to work on proposing legislative amendments that would make, amongst other things, the misuse of accessible parking spaces a punishable offense. The Commission has also engaged with the Department of Road Traffic, which has been working on a comprehensive revision of the Road Traffic Act and Road Traffic Regulations. The Commission has submitted detailed recommendations to the Department of Road Traffic that would help address challenges that road-users with disabilities face.

Registration of Persons with Disabilities. The Act required the Commission to register all persons with disabilities, and a sub-committee of the Commission was tasked with completing a registration form that would also serve as a tool to inform public policy.

The above-mentioned four priorities continue to be major areas of challenge for the community of persons with disabilities. The Commission spent time carefully discussing and researching the issues to better understand the issues and how best to address them. While the Act was clear as to how some of these matters should be viewed, there were connected matters that needed to be addressed which were outside the control of the Commission, or carried implications to other Acts or Regulations that would take some time to be addressed.



Student at the Beacon School for special needs children, Grand Bahama

SECRETARIAT

With the appointment of the Executive Secretary and the Deputy Executive Secretary in accordance with the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act the Commission's Secretariat commenced its work in July 2015. The Secretariat is now comprised of four full-time professional officers who administer the day-to-day affairs of the Commission and assist in effecting its mandates and implementing its decisions. In addition to fulfilling the administrative and technical functions of the Commission, the Secretariat also undertakes the Commission's public education and awareness initiatives (a critical task in the early stages of the Act and Commission's work); receives and addresses public complaints and concerns on behalf of the Commission; and assists the Commission in interfacing with key stakeholders, including other Government Ministries.

It is expected that the work of the Commission will continue to evolve and expand and as it does, additional staff will be added to the Secretariat to address the demands of a growing workload.

ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

➤ PUBLIC EDUCATION AND AWARENESS EFFORTS

At the very onset of its establishment, the Commission recognized that a critical part of its function would have to be an effective public education and awareness campaign. A strategy was developed and by August it was put into operation. The purpose of the efforts is to provide much needed education on The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act, the Commission and its work, the rights and responsibilities of persons with disabilities, and the responsibilities of Society to respect,

protect, and promote the rights of persons with disabilities. The format of the education and awareness efforts included the following:

- **Newspaper Advertisements** in the Nassau Guardian, Tribune, Bahama Journal, and Punch newspapers with the titles,
 - Stop Discrimination;
 - “Did You Know” PSA on concealing persons with disabilities;
 - “Did You Know” PSA on the purpose of the Commission;
 - “Respect the Person; Respect the Sign” PSA on Accessible Parking

Did You Know?

Hiding, concealing or locking away a person with a disability is a criminal offense, since such action denies that person the opportunity to reach his/her full potential?

Section 48 of the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act, 2014, states:

No parent, guardian or next of kin shall conceal any person with a disability in such a manner as to deny such a person the opportunities and services available under this Act.

A person who contravenes subsection (1) is guilty of an offense and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of one thousand dollars or a term of imprisonment of one month or both.

For more information on the rights of persons with disabilities, download a copy of the Persons With Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act, 2014, at www.bahamas.gov.bs/socialservices or call the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities at 397-8603 or email disabilitiescommission@bahamas.gov.bs

This message is brought to you by
The National Commission
For Persons with Disabilities

**Protecting Rights
Promoting Responsibility
Ensuring Accessibility
Advancing Equal Opportunities**

**Respect the person!
Respect the sign!**

When vehicles without an accessible parking permit use an accessible parking space for “just a minute”, that’s 60 seconds too long! Please, don’t do it!

The misuse of accessible parking spaces

- is a daily frustration for persons with disabilities;
- is inconsiderate and insensitive;
- restricts the ability of persons with disabilities to shop, conduct business and actively participate in daily life.

Never park in a space reserved for people with disabilities unless you have a permit to do so. It is the **right** and **respectful** thing to do.

For more information please contact
**The National Commission
for Persons with Disabilities**
by calling 242-397-8603 or
by emailing
disabilitiescommission@bahamas.gov.bs

Did you know that Section 21 of the Persons with Disabilities Act requires all businesses and buildings which are open to the public to have clearly designated disabled parking spaces?

RESPECT the person, the sign, the rights.

**Protecting Rights
Promoting Responsibility
Ensuring Accessibility
Advancing Equal Opportunities**

STOP DISCRIMINATION

Did you know that if you treat, act or speak negatively to or about someone only because that person has a disability, then you are discriminating against that person?

Did you know that if a business denies service to someone only because that person has a disability, then that business has committed an act of discrimination?

The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act, 2014, seeks to end discrimination against persons with disabilities in the areas of **employment, housing, health care, transportation, education and training, sports, recreation, social amenities, voting, and accessibility to buildings, businesses and information/communication technologies.**

For more information please contact the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities at 397-8603 or email disabilitiescommission@bahamas.gov.bs

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For Persons with Disabilities

**Protecting Rights
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- **Appearances on radio and television talk shows** including, Island 102.9 FM Radio; ZNS Radio; ZNS Television; Peace 107.5 FM Radio; Love 97.5 FM Radio; Guardian 96.9 FM Radio;
- **The production of five information brochures** and distribution of those brochures through a variety of outlets. Brochure titles included,
 - Know Your Rights & Responsibilities;
 - What You Should Know About the National Commission;
 - Employers: Protecting and promoting the rights of Persons with Disabilities;
 - Tips for Businesses and other places accessed by the public;
 - Disabilities Etiquette;



The Commission has also produced newspaper and online articles, and it is in the process of completing a condensed and easy-to-read version of the Act. The Commission's public education and awareness efforts are ongoing as it continues to inform and sensitize the public as well as raise awareness of the Act and the many issues related to persons with disabilities.

➤ COMMISSION'S LOGO

In an effort to get the younger demographic thinking and talking about disabilities and related issues, in September 2015 the Commission launched a logo design competition in all secondary and high schools throughout the Nation. The Commission desired to have a logo that would come from the wider community, represent the creativity and talents of youths of all abilities, and reflect the values of inclusion, empowerment and accessibility. The entries were judged by a panel from the community of persons with disabilities and the winning logo became the Commission's official emblem.

The winning logo design concept was submitted by Mr. Nicklaus Saunders, a student at the Eight Mile Rock High School, Grand Bahama. The second and third place winners were also students of the Eight Mile Rock High School - Mr. Myles Martin and Mr. Roland Elidor, respectively.

COMMISSION'S LOGO



- The four major categories of disabilities are captured in the design – **mobility**; **developmental-learning challenges** (represented by a puzzle piece); **deaf and hearing loss** (represented by an ear); **blindness and visual impairment** (represented by a white cane).
- The symbols and map of The Bahamas occupy the same space in the inner circle, symbolizing inclusion and unity.
- Sections of the image of the wheelchair user are outside the boundary of the outer circle, symbolizing breaking barriers, independence and empowerment.



(L-R) Mr. Ken Heslop (Art Teacher); Mr. Ivan Butler, (Principal); Mr. Nicklaus Saunders (First Place Winner); Mr. Derrick Nottage (Commission Vice-Chairman); Mr. Roland Elidor (second runner up); Mr. Myles Martin (third runner up); Mr. Damaso Gray (Art Teacher).

➤ VISITS TO DISABILITY-RELATED ORGANIZATIONS

From August to November 2015, the Commission's Secretariat visited a number of disability-related NGOs. The purpose of the relationship-building visits was twofold: for the Commission's Secretariat to become familiar with and learn more about the role of the various NGOs, as well as to inform the NGO's about the purpose and functions of the Commission. Mutually enriching familiarization visits were made to:

- Erin H Glimour School for Blind and Visually-Impaired Children
- Bahamas National Council for the Disabled
- Disability Affairs Division
- Centre for The Deaf
- Stapledon School
- Abilities Unlimited
- Marjorie Davis Institute for Special Education
- Bahamas Infant Stimulation Programme
- The Training Center for the Disabled
- R.E.A.C.H. Autism Awareness Parent Support Group

➤ REGISTRATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Since an important function of the Commission is to register all persons with disabilities, the Commission completed a draft of the registration form by September 2015. A limited number of the registration forms were pilot-tested in Nassau, Grand Bahama and Abaco, and the Commission is in the process of concluding its evaluation of the results of the pilot test. If necessary, adjustments will be made to the form in preparation for nationwide distribution.

The Commission also held preliminary discussions with the Ministry of Finance's Department of Information Technology for the creation of a database to collect, store and analyze the data the Commission intends to gather. The computer software CPro (short for *Census and Survey Processing System*) was identified, and it is currently being used to design a programme for the collection of the Commission's database.

While the Department of Statistics enumerated 10,138 persons with disabilities in the 2010 census, the actual number of persons with disabilities could be anywhere from 35- to 50,000, based on the World Health Organization's estimation that 15% of the persons in a given population live with a disability. The purpose of the registration of persons with disabilities is to inform public policy as well as help shape national planning and development, particularly in the areas of education, training, employment, health and housing.

➤ ENGAGEMENT WITH CORPORATE COMMUNITY AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

In October 2015, The Commission and its Secretariat met with Bahamas First Insurance Company's newly established Equal Opportunities Committee. After seeing one of the Commission's newspaper public service advertisements, Bahamas First was eager to learn more about the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act and the Commission, as well as what it needed to do to ensure that its building was compliant with the Act's accessibility requirements.

The Commission and its Secretariat also participated in several events held by disability-related NGOs, including:



Commission Members and Community Representatives with Bahamas First's Equal Opportunities Committee

- AKTION Club Annual Meeting
- Department of Health "Health and Wellness Fair"
- Bahamas Alliance for Blind's White Cane Day
- New Providence Association for Deaf "Deaf Awareness Week"
- Eyes Wide Open's Pep Rally
- Bahamas National Council for Disability's Accessibility Conference
- REACH Parent Support Group
- Disability Affairs Division's Public Forum on "Access for All"

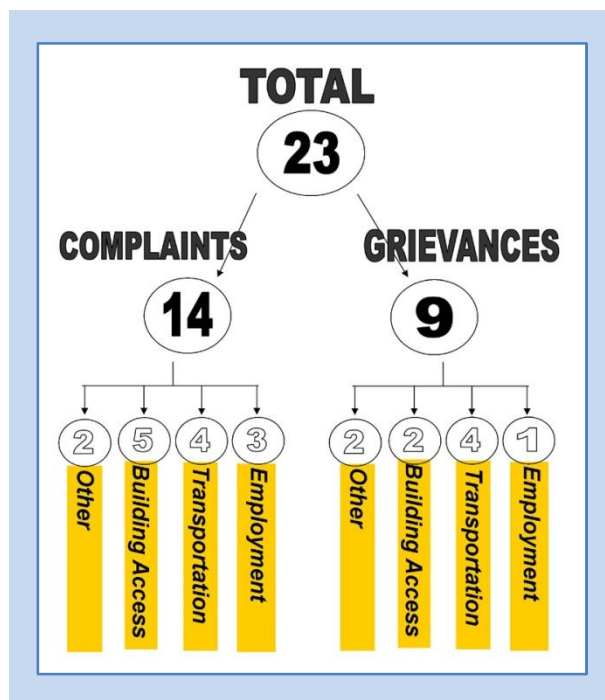
➤ ENGAGEMENT WITH PARTNER GOVERNMENT UNITS

There were also opportunities for the Commission to engage with its partner government units including ongoing dialogue and collaboration with Disability Affairs Division staff. The Commission also participated with Community Affairs Division and the Ministry's Task Force and Workshop on *Violence against Women with Disabilities*. Additionally, the Commission continues engagement with the Consultant and the Project Manager of the proposed Multi-Service Facility for Adults with Developmental Disabilities, a critical government initiative which will address training, habilitation, rehabilitation and other needs of post-school age young adults.

➤ PUBLIC COMPLAINTS AND CONCERNS

The Commission is required to receive public complaints with regards to allegations of discrimination or the possible violation of any provision of the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act. Persons are invited to make a complaint to the Commission by telephoning, visiting, emailing or writing the Commission's Secretariat. The Complainant is interviewed by a senior officer in the Secretariat and pertinent details regarding the complaint or concern are logged. The Secretariat investigates the complaint or concern and gathers any additional information necessary to address the matter. The complaint or concern is then conveyed to the Commission to be formally addressed.

During the period under review, the Commission received 23 formally lodged complaints and concerns from the public. There were 14 complaints of alleged discrimination or other alleged violations of the Act, and nine grievances or concerns registered. Complaints ranged from allegations of discrimination against persons with disabilities by employers to insufficient access to buildings which are open to the public. Accessible public transportation as well as the misuse of accessible parking spaces are major recurring complaints and concerns. The inability of some persons with disabilities to access public transportation means they are usually unable to effectively participate in community life including opportunities for socialization, recreation and employment.



➤ CART (Communication Access Real-time Translation)

The appointment of one Commission member who is deaf and another member who is hard-of-hearing meant that the Commission needed to make its meetings accessible to these members so that they could fully and equally participate in meetings. Because not all persons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing are sign language or lip-reading oriented, the Commission determined that acquiring the CART system was the best means to facilitate effective communication, during meetings, with members who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.

CART, which stands for Communication Access Real-time Translation, is comprised of a stenotype machine, a laptop, and computer software. A stenographer types verbatim everything that

is said in a meeting. The computer software translates the stenography into text, and the text is displayed instantly, or in real-time, for deaf and hard-of-hearing persons to read. The text can be displayed on a large screen via a digital projector, or it can be transmitted wirelessly, and simultaneously, to several laptops to iPad tablets. The process is so fast that there is hardly any lag time between what is said and what the deaf or hard of hearing person is able to read.



In the photograph above, a stenographer or CART writer (first person from left) quickly types into a stenotype machine using stenography shorthand. Computer software translates that shorthand into real-time text or captions. The text is then instantaneously displayed on a laptop which the Commission member who is deaf (second from left) is able to read.

CART will not only be used during Commission meetings but also in public gatherings, conferences, media events, presentations and other public or private forums where it is needed. The Commission's significant investment in acquiring the CART system was made not as a favour to persons who are deaf or hard of hearing, but in agreement to their right to fully and equally participate in meetings. The investment sends a strong message of the Commission's own commitment to the ideals of inclusion, accommodation and accessibility which are all important tenets of the Persons with

Disabilities Act. The use of CART to accommodate communication with persons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing is quickly growing in a number of jurisdictions in developed countries. The Commission is the first entity in The Bahamas to make use of this important assistive technology.

➤ COMMISSION'S STAKEHOLDERS EVENT AND INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES COMMEMORATION

The Commission celebrated International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3rd December with its inaugural Stakeholders' and Media Event. The occasion saw some 65 representatives of disability-related NGOs, Government Ministries and Departments, Media Houses and other organizations gather at the Ministry of Social Service and Community Development's Headquarters to meet with Commission and Ministry officials. The event featured an address on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities by the Minister of Social Services and Community Development, the

Honourable Melanie Griffin, M.P. Also featured at the Stakeholders' Event was a report by Chairman DeCosta Bethel, summarizing the work of the Commission over the year; the announcement of the winners of the Commission's logo design competition; the unveiling of the Commission's logo; and the launch of the Commission's website.



A Commission member unveils the Commission's website address.

The theme for International Day of Persons with Disabilities, which also became the theme for the Stakeholders' Event, was **Inclusion Matters: Access and Empowerment for People of all Abilities**. The Stakeholders Event participants were reminded that as The Bahamas continues to develop as a Nation, no one should be left out or left behind, and that regardless of ability, everyone must be given the opportunities and tools to achieve his or her best as an individual so that The Bahamas can achieve its best as a Nation.

➤ **COMMISSION'S WEBSITE (WWW.DISABILITIESCOMMISSIONBAHAMAS.ORG)**

The Commission's website, launched at its December Stakeholders Event, is intended to serve as an important tool for information and resources for persons with disabilities and their families, as well as the wider community. Documents such as The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act, the Commission's information brochures, and the International Convention for the



Screenshot of the Commission's Website

Right of Persons with Disabilities, can be accessed through the Commission's website. The website will become the portal for other local and international resources. It is also expected that Persons with Disabilities will also be able to register with the Commission via the website, from anywhere in The Bahamas.

The Commission has worked diligently during 2015, though much of its work to date may not have been as obvious or as tangible as the general public would like. Be assured, however, that the Commission is hard at work! 2016 plans include:

- **CONTINUED DIALOGUE WITH STAKEHOLDERS.** With the goal of fulfilling the provisions of the Act, as well as protecting, upholding and advancing the rights of persons with disabilities, the Commission will continue to dialogue with stakeholders including,
 - **Government Ministries and Departments** – continued engagement with Ministries regarding their obligations to those sections of the Act which relate to their respective Ministries.
 - **Disability-Related Government Units** – continued collaboration with Disability Affairs Division, and the Multi-Service Centre for Adults, particularly on issues related to training and rehabilitation for persons with disabilities;
 - **Disability-Related Non-Governmental Organizations** – continued collaboration with NGOs to promote and provide education regarding the Act, as well as encourage NGOs in their roles of advocacy, raising awareness, fostering support and protecting and promoting the rights of persons with disabilities;
 - **Educational Institutions** – continued dialogue with College of The Bahamas and new efforts to begin engagement with other institutions towards the end of ensuring better facility, administrative, and programme accessibility for students with disabilities.
 - **URCA (Utilities Regulation and Competition Authority)** – To begin dialogue with URCA regarding those provisions of the Act that relate to telecommunication accessibility for persons with disabilities.
 - **Industry Associations** – To begin engagement with industry associations such as the Bahamas Contractors Association, The Bahamas Insurance Association and the Hotel Association of The Bahamas to provide further awareness and education on those provisions of the Act relative to their sectors.

- **ONGOING PUBLIC EDUCATION & AWARENESS.** The Commission will continue to inform, educate and raise awareness of the Act and issues regarding persons with disabilities through seminars, educational material, workshops, meetings with industry stakeholders, and greater use of print, electronic and social media. There will be a strong emphasis on involving the faces and voices

of persons with disabilities in communicating the messages relating to promoting rights and ending discrimination.

Town Hall Meetings As an important part of its public education efforts for 2016, the Commission plans to host a series of Town Hall Meetings for Nassau and the Family Islands. Each meeting will have expert presenters focusing on particular issues, and will serve as a platform to better inform and engage the wider community. The Commission intends to video-record the presentations made at the town hall meetings and upload them to its website so that the important information shared can be accessed anytime by anyone on any island.

- **ACCESSIBILITY.** This issue will continue to be an important agenda item for the Commission, and while 2016 will see the Commission continuing to address built-environment accessibility, it will also give attention to accessible transportation. It makes little sense ensuring accessibility to buildings and social amenities when wheelchair-users and other mobility impaired persons have no reasonable means of transportation to get to those buildings and facilities. Dialogue will continue with the Ministry of Transport and Aviation in this regard.
- **INSPECTORATE.** A major agenda item for the Commission in 2016 will be the introduction of an Inspectorate. Section 47 of the Act makes provision for the Commission to appoint Inspectors who will be empowered to investigate and recommend prosecution or any other remedy against any person who violates a provision of the Act. The Commission and its Secretariat will be working assiduously on the specific details to ensure that its Inspectorate becomes a reality in 2016.

CONCLUSION

The Commission will continue its mandate of ensuring that all of the provisions of the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act are implemented in a timely manner and that such provisions are monitored, evaluated and complied with, and any alleged violations addressed. The Commission also has the task of helping to ensure that The Bahamas is compliant with the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other international treaties to which The Bahamas is party, and which have implications for persons with disabilities. The Commission is fully committed to being accountable to the Government and People of The Bahamas in ensuring that the Act and the Convention fulfill their intended purposes.



While the Commission is thoroughly prepared to fulfill its mandate, it is mindful that there is a sense in which accountability is everyone's responsibility. The various disability-related non-

governmental organizations will continue to create awareness and provide needed services and support. Stakeholders will do their part in ensuring compliance. And the Government will continue to steer legislation and public policy, as well as provide disability-related rehabilitative services. But it will take all of the citizens and residents of The Bahamas, by their individual and collective respect for the rights of persons with disabilities and their intolerance of attitudes and actions which discriminate against them, that will make this Nation truly inclusive and accessible, free from discrimination and inequality.

The Commission is grateful to its Stakeholders and the community of persons with disabilities for their support during the past year, including persons with disabilities, parents, caregivers, disability-related NGOs, health and educational practitioners, advocates, activists and Government Ministries and Departments. The Commission looks forward to increased collaboration with Stakeholders in 2016, in the noble cause of making certain that The Bahamas protects the rights, promotes responsibility, ensures accessibility and advances equal opportunities for all persons with disabilities.

THERE
IS NO GREATER DISABILITY
IN SOCIETY
THAN THE INABILITY
TO SEE A PERSON AS
MORE
THAN THEIR DISABILITY.
- ROBERT M. HENSEL

MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION

	
Mr. DeCosta Bethel Chairman	Mr. Derrick Nottage Vice Chairman

			
Mrs. LaSasha Williams-Harry	Mr. Antoine Munroe	Mrs. Vernelle Carey	Mr. Anthony Hamilton
			
Mr. Townsley Roberts	Mr. Stephano Green	Mr. Peter Goudie	Mrs. Maxcine Stubbs
			
Ms. Olly Mae Knowles	Dr. Phillip Swann	Mr. Leonard Cargill	Mr. Craig Delancy

SECRETARIAT STAFF

			
Mr. Lester Ferguson Executive Secretary	Mrs. C. Anna-Maria Côté Deputy Executive Secretary	Ms. Gabrielle Johnson Administrative Assistant	Ms. Iris Adderley Consultant

THE COMMISSION IN ACTION



Commission Member Dr. Swann unveils Commission's website address



Minister of Social Services, Melanie Griffin, and Chairman DeCosta Bethel at a Violence Against Women with Disabilities Workshop



Judges carefully examine the Commission's Logo Design Competition entries



Commission Members listen to a presentation on Multi-Service Centre for Adults with Developmental Disabilities



Vice-Chairman Nottage talks with Permanent Secretary Alan Strachan after Commission meeting



Commission Members participate in Ministry of Health's Wellness Expo



A meeting of the Disabilities Commission



The Secretariat of

The National Commission For Persons With Disabilities

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