

FOCUS disABILITY Services Newsletter

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Focus on Technology: Are Students Using It?
- Focus on Individuals: Kerry Harris
- Focus on Disability: Depression
- Learning Disabilities and Intellectual Disabilities: Some Radical Changes Are Coming!
- Roles within Disability Services

Focus on Technology: Are Students Using It?

Assistive technology (AT) allows students to work independently and requires fewer resources to provide requested accommodations such as readers and scribes. The following is a summary of the uptake in AT use across the province as of October 2014:

• Kurzweil (Text-to-Speech Reader Software):	130 users
• Dragon NaturallySpeaking (Speech Recognition Software):	42 users
• Other AT:	17 users
• Alternate Format Texts:	29 users

There is an upward trend in AT use at the college. The more we encourage and expect students to use AT, the more independent and skilled at self-advocacy they become!

If you would like to learn more about AT and how you can use it to assist your students, speak to the CDS or RF at your campus.

Focus on Individuals: Kerry Harris (Resource Facilitator)

Kerry Harris is the Resource Facilitator (RF) for Gander campus. He has a diverse educational background having completed the Hairstylist program in Gander, the Cook program in Stephenville, and a Floral Design program at Nova Scotia Agricultural College. This diversity extends to his work experience as well: Kerry owned a fabric and craft shop at age 19; he worked as a parental supervisor with the Department of Social Services; and was employed as a support person for various students with disabilities enrolled in programs at the Gander campus. It was this experience that led him to his current RF position with the college in Gander where he also owns and runs the Hair Station.

Kerry has been a tremendous support to students with disabilities throughout the central region. Having grown up in a family who fostered many children with disabilities, and who adopted the last four taken into care, he has been living his life immersed in disability. It is this life experience that has fostered a committed, caring, and inclusive individual who is able to have a positive impact on the lives of people with disabilities both at work and in the community at large.

Although Kerry works primarily at the Gander campus, he has trained both students and faculty to use assistive technology at the Grand Falls-Windsor and Baie Verte campuses as well. In promoting inclusion, he has assisted the Gander campus with student council, peer tutoring, helped the Student Development Officer with various student-centred activities, advocated for students, worked to place a piano in the cafeteria, and is a familiar face on the registration line. In addition, Kerry has provided job placements at his hair salon for students with disabilities and often goes above and beyond the call of duty to assist students transitioning to work.

This year, Kerry has been provided with a large, dedicated space for disability services at the Gander campus. This space serves as his office, an alternate setting for exams, the assistive technology (AT) centre, and as a general student drop-in centre. Kerry uses it to provide AT training, to invigilate exams, to assist students with the scanning of documents into alternate format, and other duties, as required. As one would expect from him, it doesn't stop there. Students with and without disabilities use the space to chat, study, and relax (Kerry has provided a guitar for the musically inclined and he also set up a coffee area). It is an inclusive space that serves the needs of students with disabilities, but because it is open and inviting to all students, there is no attached stigma. Students who have not initially identified a disability tend to feel better about doing so once they have gotten to know Kerry and have gotten comfortable in the centre.

Kerry promotes an inclusive environment for students with disabilities and his attitude, assistance, and genuine caring nature leave a positive impact on the students who work with him. Many continue to stay in touch with him after leaving college and, as a sign of their appreciation and respect, he has even been invited, by parents, to dinner. Now, that's having an impact!

Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.

- Albert Einstein

Learning Disabilities and Intellectual Disabilities: Some Radical Changes Are Coming!

For years, the term learning disability (LD) applied to individuals who had average or above average intellectual ability (I.Q.), but had deficits in one or more specific areas—typically, reading, writing, or math. This meant that students with LD were capable of learning college-level information and skills as long as accommodations such as reading software were provided to compensate for the area of disability.

In contrast, students with intellectual disabilities (ID) have overall low intellectual ability in all subject areas. These students have difficulty understanding content and, consequently, accommodations such as reading software will not be sufficient (although they may help). These students need more one-to-one assistance, repetition, and simplification than students with learning disabilities.

Previously, a lot of students “got lost in the gap” between ID and LD diagnoses. These students had “low cognitive ability”—however, neither low enough to receive a diagnosis of ID nor high enough to receive a diagnosis of LD. Unfortunately, without a diagnosed disability, these students did not qualify for most supports and services at the post-secondary level.

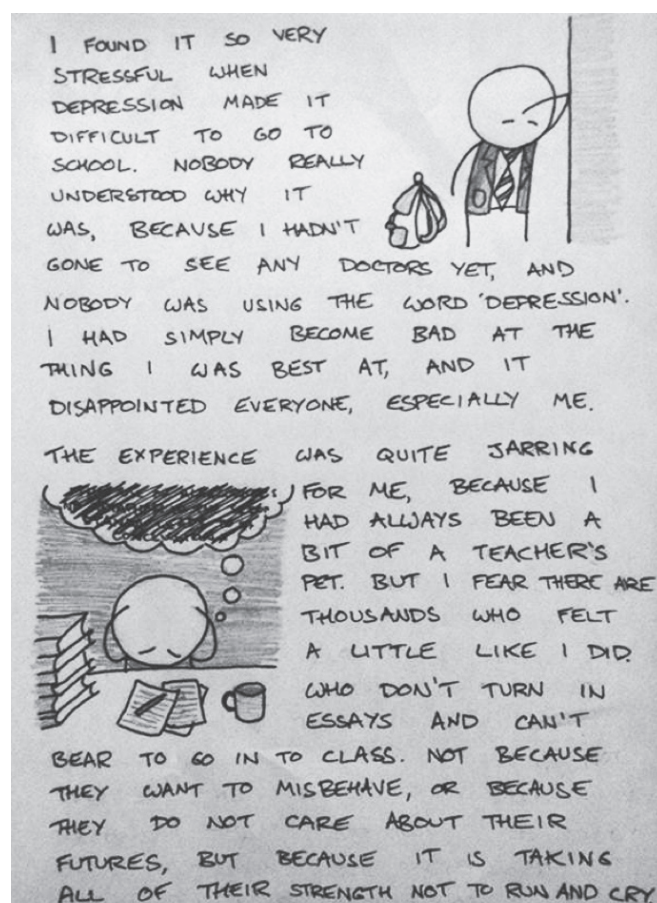
These disability definitions and the process of diagnosing them are in the process of changing, however, with huge implications for the college. For example, the newest version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5)—the book which mental health professionals use to diagnose mental disorders—uses the term Specific Learning Disorder (SLD) rather than LD. To be diagnosed with a SLD, it is NOT necessary that the individual have average or above average intelligence. Instead, a SLD will be diagnosed if the individual’s academic skills are below their age level and their difficulties are not better explained by an ID diagnosis. The implication of this is two-fold: First, there will likely be an increase in the number of students identified as having a disability and, hence, receiving accommodations in the coming years. Second, some students with SLD could have superior intelligence while others could struggle with all aspects of the curriculum. It will, therefore, be more difficult to anticipate which strategies will be suitable for which students. More trial-and-error and creative solutions may be required and working closely as an instructor/DS team will be necessary to ensure that the educational needs of all CNA students are met to the best of everyone’s ability.

Roles within Disability Services

The Coordinator of Disability Services (CDS) is responsible for the coordination of accommodations, supports, and services for those students who identify a disability and request accommodations. The Coordinator is responsible for meeting with students to discuss their accommodation needs, gathering other pertinent information that will help their transition to college, and communicating the approved accommodations to the instructors and others, as appropriate. The Coordinator may work closely with college counsellors and Resource Facilitators who, together, support instructors and provide or coordinate supports and services through the Student Services Division of CNA. Coordinators are based at one campus in a region, but are responsible for other campuses within that region.

At CNA, we have positions at some of our campuses called Resource Facilitators (RFs). The RF may be responsible for assisting the CDS in communicating the approved accommodations to instructors, training students to use assistive technology programs, supporting students with alternate format materials, assisting instructors with invigilation of exams when technologies are required, and other duties, as required. **Resource Facilitators** are not instructors or Instructional Assistants and will not provide any one-to-one academic support to students nor are they personal care attendants. Resource Facilitators support the CDS, instructors, and students with disabilities and are an integral part of the Student Services team at CNA.

Focus on Disability: Depression



Analysis of Paralysis. (June 20, 2014). Retrieved February 24, 2015, from <http://paralanalysis.tumblr.com/post/25526414896>.

Know me by my name, strengths, abilities, hopes and dreams, not my diagnosis.
www.disabilityisnatural.com