



Monitoring Human Rights

Looking in the Small Places, Close to Home

WHERE, AFTER ALL, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighbourhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.

With these words, Eleanor Roosevelt, one of the founders of the UN's first Human Rights Commission, beautifully describes what Human Rights Advocates the world over know deeply: Human rights are all about our personal stories, in the small places close to home where we live each and every day.

Since those long-ago days when Mrs. Roosevelt spoke these truths, an elaborate system has evolved: the so-called "UN Human Rights Architecture." It sounds big, it sounds imposing and it sound very far from the small places close to the heart.

But this is not the case!

Indeed, it is our stories, the times when we feel left out or excluded, the times when we cannot do something because of our impairments and how they challenge us in an inaccessible world, that are at the centre of all the discussion about Human Rights.

It is our stories that are at the centre of the work DRPI-Canada is doing on individual monitoring. This work is part of a five-year SSHRC research project that looks, in part, at the individual experience of Canadians with disabilities; seeking to find out about, as Mrs. Roosevelt put it, "the small places, close to home."

Thus it was that a dedicated group of activists gathered for a week of intensive



caption

training in St. John's, Newfoundland, in late August 2009. These 11 wonderful people with disabilities took part in a seminar designed to help make then Human Rights Monitors. The projects unfolding in St. John's marks the beginning of a partnership between the local Independent Living Resource Centre and DRPI Canada. The partnership will train 11 Monitors to interview other persons with disabilities to gather information about their lives and experiences that will become part of an international study on the human rights experience of people with disabilities.

Things got started with a fascinating one-day workshop on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The workshop, funded by Heritage Canada, was attended by over 60 people from St John's. Featuring sessions from both local and national human rights advocates and researchers, the day was intended to give participants the opportunity to share and build their knowledge around economic, social and cultural rights. In speaking with people afterwards, all agreed the day was a huge success!

From this base, the group of 11 Monitors started on the second day, a period of intensive training on conducting the

interviews. We began with some of our own personal stories; sharing how we had battled for our own human rights. Everyone had stories and one person spoke of how she had experienced denial of her rights when asked to leave a treatment centre, which in turn resulted in homelessness for a period of time. This sharing by the Monitors increased everyone's understanding about human rights.

Over the course of the week, the Monitors gained technical interview skills through training and practice. By the end of the week, everyone was comfortable with the idea of doing the interviews and ready to go out and meet people in the community to learn their stories and to hear about life in their "small places."

This was the final round of Training for individual Human Rights Monitors in the DRPI project. The results will be combined with results from other parts of Canada into a report, which will help us turn these stories of people's experiences into a comprehensive report on the Human Rights of Canadians with disabilities.

For more information about DRPI Canada, please visit www.yorku.ca/drpi/Canada.html.