

International Day for Persons with Disabilities: Inclusion Means Everyone

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Ask Me Anything

International Day for
Persons with Disabilities -
Inclusion Means Everyone

Wednesday, December 11, 2024

1:00 PM - 2:30 PM ET

More information:



Panelists



Michel Marcelin
Health Canada



Debbie Patterson
Department of National
Defence



Jeffrey Stark
Shared Services Canada

Co-Hosts



Sarah Francescutti
Department of National
Defence



Samantha Moonsammy
Department of National
Defence

Featuring: Michel Marcelin, Debbie Patterson, and Jeffrey Stark

Co-hosted by Sarah Francescutti and Samantha Moonsammy

Date and time: Wednesday, December 11, from 1:00 to 2:30 PM EST

Audience: Open to all Government of Canada employees

Link to join: Join the event (https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting_YTljYzdkYTktNmRiYSooZjkoLTg3NWetMzA3YTYzZGNjMDcy%40threa d.v2/o?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%22325b4494-1587-40d5-bb31-8b660b7f1038%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%22905de883-ee9c-42a6-bfee-cc866f97f03e%22%7d)

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#AMACHallenge

Thank you to our contributors

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Event description

Join us for an engaging Ask Me Anything session in celebration of International Day for Persons with Disabilities! This event is a unique opportunity to explore and discuss topics related to accessibility, inclusion, and advocacy for people with disabilities. Hear from advocates and individuals with lived experiences who will answer your questions, share insights, and discuss ways to create a more inclusive world. Whether you're looking to learn more about disability rights, inclusive design, or personal stories, this interactive session is open to everyone and encourages all to participate. Don't miss out on this chance to connect, learn, and champion accessibility for all!

Join us as our speakers share their sincere stories and candid reflections on the Ask Me Anything stage!

Meet our panellists

Michel Marcelin, Accessibility Advisor, Health Canada

My name is Michel Marcelin, and I work for Health Canada as an accessibility Advisor. I am a first-generation Canadian of German and Mauritian descent. I am a person with multiple disabilities, both mild physically and learning oriented. Over my life, having a disability was always part of my identity. Still, I never really fully embraced what this truly means and the value that it holds to myself personally until fairly recently, when I realized that it is really my "superpower."



You see, I always believed that we are MORE THAN just the sum of our parts! And this resiliency is literally what has saved my life many times over!! My life has been a lot about beating the odds! In fact, since the very beginning, I have been doing this. When I was born, after a few months, I became unresponsive to my parents with blank looks into nothingness often and like any loving parents, they were worried. They brought me to the emergency where, as a baby of 6 months, they did some tests and concluded that I had fluid in my brain.

And they decided to do emergency surgery to install a plastic tube that drains that fluid from my brain to my abdomen. This was done to keep my brain from expanding, for in the 1800s, this technology did not exist, and many babies died as their brains would implode.

So, I had this tube for 14 years until, in a high school exam, I had similar symptoms of headache and dizziness combined with vomiting. Which essentially called for an ER visit and emergency surgery to have said tube replaced.

Ironically enough, something similar recently happened a few weeks ago in October. And I spent days in hospital recovering from the same surgery.

I tell you this story to express to you the importance of resilience and perseverance when facing challenges of many kinds. It is this resilience that I have developed over my life (even educationally and professionally) that has carried me through hard times. As a student with a learning disability, recognizing not my weakness but my strength and allowing this strength to propel me forward has really been my superpower!

Debbie Patterson, Strategic Manager, National Defence

About Lily: I am a brown Portuguese wavy coat waterdog who trained for more than two and a half years to be a Service Dog. My full-time job is to support and work for my handler. By law, I can go anywhere my handler goes. I have signed a non-disclosure clause. I am not a circus dog, and I don't do tricks, although I do know some. I have webbed toes that help water dogs become better swimmers. I am barrel-chested, so I have a larger lung capacity. I love to work! This is because Portuguese water dogs were bred to be working dogs and were initially used by Portuguese fishers to pull heavy nets between fishing boats and dive into deep water to retrieve items. I do not shed hair, so I don't leave a mess wherever I go. I have no dander, so people with allergies are comfortable around me. Different cultures attach meaning to black dogs, so my brown colour means that persons from different cultures do not need to fear me or be superstitious about me, and I should not cause them discomfort. Some people recognize me as the "Obama dog" as the former US president had a dog named 'Beau' exactly like me, while others



think I am some sort of doodle, which I am not. I am not an emotional support animal nor a companion animal; however, when I am not working and doing my job, I am very good around people, and children love me. Some people find it amusing that the acronym for Portuguese Water dog is PWD, and so is the acronym for 'Persons' with Disabilities' which is also PWD.

About Debbie: I am blessed to have insight from many perspectives as I come from a multi-generational military family; I am a military orphan, an ex-sea cadet, a part-time reservist while I attended university in my youth, a military spouse, a military mother, and enjoyed a long, fulfilling career as a fulltime military member in DND. I have worn approximately seven different military uniforms over the course of my military career, which spans three decades. I am a

woman and a female injured veteran with both visible and invisible disabilities. For approximately fifteen (15) years, I have been a proud civilian federal public servant since my release from the military. I have had the opportunity and privilege to work in most L1s in DND throughout my 45-year career in a diverse number of positions, as both a military member and later a civilian. I am a proud Maritimer, and I have coached sports, volunteered, and worked with youth groups throughout my life. As an advocate for change, I have been labelled a 'troublemaker,' my head is sore from breaking through "glass ceilings." I now advocate for 'cultural change' and proudly participate in the ADM MAT LLMC initiative led by Samantha and her team.

I am most proud of changing and advancing outdated policies and procedures and being an advocate for others, especially those who are not able to advocate for themselves. Initially responsible for personnel administration and logistics in the military, I later became the first compassionate services officer in NDHQ/NCR. For over 10 years, I was an EAP referral agent in DND, a previous co-chair for the Defense Advisory Group (DAG) for persons with disabilities (PWD) - first as the military co-chair at NDHQ and then as a civilian Co-chair in the NCR. I have advocated for the fairness of military widows reservists killed in Afghanistan and equality in the workplace, clothing and equipment from a GBA+ perspective, resulting in asset changes and updating of dress regulations. I was qualified as an assisting officer, contributed towards the development of casualty administration, headquarters transformation, and a wide variety of projects. I belong to the various DND DAGs and WiDs as a member. I continue to volunteer with various organizations including those that involve persons from EE groups, such as blind hockey.

Jeffrey Stark, Principal Advisor for the Accessibility Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology program, Shared Services Canada



Jeffrey Stark is an expert in inclusive and accessible Information & Communication Technology (ICT) and a passionate advocate for disability issues. He frequently speaks on accessibility standards, guidelines, best practices, and the challenges faced by persons with disabilities, aiming to eliminate systemic barriers in Canada and beyond.

Throughout his career, Jeffrey has led research and developed solutions for people with various disabilities (vision, hearing, physical, cognitive, learning, etc.). He has contributed to new approaches and technologies to remove workplace barriers and chairs several digital accessibility working groups. Jeffrey has also trained thousands of professionals, including developers, publishers, and technicians across Canada, on accessible application design, digital/web accessibility, inclusive service design, and adaptive computer technology.

Currently, Jeffrey is the Principal Advisor to the Accessibility, Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology (AAACT) program. This internationally recognized group is a driving force for the digital inclusion of people with disabilities. AAACT has implemented a “hub and spoke” service approach across government departments to build capacity, foster collaboration, and provide services and support.

Meet our co-hosts

Sarah Francescutti, Senior GBA Plus and Culture Evolution Strategy Advisor, National Defence

Sarah Francescutti has dedicated over 21 years to leadership roles within the federal government. Her journey began with six years of service as a full-time Army Reservist, where she honed her leadership skills before transitioning to civilian life due to a military injury. With a decade of experience in disability management, Sarah has supported military personnel facing illness and injury through the Transition Centre, as well as civilian public servants needing medical accommodation through the Office of Disability Management.



Sarah previously served as the National Chair for the Equity Committee with the Commissionaires, a national organization committed to providing employment opportunities for veterans across Canada. Currently, she is the Senior GBA Plus Culture Evolution Strategy Advisor at the Materiel Group within the Department of National Defence, where she focuses on fostering inclusive workplace practices.

Sarah holds an MBA and an executive leadership coach certification. Outside of her professional endeavours, she is also the Vice President for BC Hands & Voices, where she supports families with children who have hearing loss.

Samantha Moonsammy, Section Head Lead Advisor for Diversity and Inclusion, National Defence



Samantha has spent over 20 years in the public service working in numerous communications, outreach and engagement initiatives that focus on the people side of business. But Samantha is much more than that. Her layers include being a woman, mother, partner, daughter, sister, community builder and immigrant.

As an Indo-Caribbean Canadian, she was born in Guyana, South America and immigrated to Canada as a toddler. From a young age, dating back to elementary school to the present, Samantha has been a leader in diversity, inclusion and equity, always helping to amplify the voice of others and create sustainable change in organizations to build deeper respect and understanding for all humans. Samantha lives in the Ottawa area and spent time in Toronto and Barbados during her Master's degree in Communications and Culture. She is a passionate world traveller who has worked and studied in India, China, France and the Caribbean. Her daily mantra: Be the change you wish to see in the world.

About the Ask Me Anything series

This session is part of a series of Ask Me Anything discussions that give us a platform to share stories, listen, ask respectful questions and continue on our journey towards more inclusive organizations.

As an individual, you can't necessarily change where you live. You certainly can't change your past, but you can adjust who influences you—through the authors you read, the music you listen to, the movies you watch, and the interactions with your community. The 'Ask Me Anything' series provides you with an opportunity to increase your perspective — to learn from the lived experiences of individuals who are bravely sharing their stories to help educate and move the public service towards a culture where equity is embedded.

The series also provides an opportunity for you to know that you aren't alone. These experiences, especially the negative ones, are systemic and can happen all too frequently throughout the public service. The objective of shining this light is to continually increase the network of public servants ready to take action and move forward toward a culture of inclusivity and belonging.

Mission: Ask Me Anything series

We recognize that individuals are composed of a multitude of layers that make us who we are. We do not fit easily in one box or another and we can't be neatly counted. We represent the mosaic of Canada.

It is important that we find value in each other's experiences, differences, and unique characteristics. When we build our cultural competencies, we can work better together in our teams and respond to each other with relevance, empathy and compassion. By celebrating and sharing our authentic selves, we gain greater appreciation of each other and the diversity that surrounds us.

We know through diversity, that workplaces and communities are stronger, more successful, and resilient. And most important, it creates spaces of inclusion and fosters a sense of belonging at work where people feel valued.

We encourage others to have courageous conversations with their peers. Use the monthly Ask Me Anything sessions as an opportunity to have brave conversations in your workplaces with your teams.

#AMACHallenge

Here's what you need to do:

- Invite your leaders and colleagues in your organization to an Ask Me Anything watch party, tune in live and watch the session together. Make sure it's on their calendar.
- Before the watch party, book an "After the AMA – Team Session" with your immediate team for the day after the event for 30-60 minutes. Share the resource guide and have these questions for discussion.

After the AMA: Team session discussion questions

1. What was my main takeaway? – Expand and share an amazing quote, story or moment

2. What made me uncomfortable/ what was one of my blind spots?
3. What is an example of systemic discrimination that I am aware of in my life?
4. What am I not going to do anymore?
5. How can I use my voice/influence? – both overtly/covertly
6. Where am I going to dig in and learn more?
7. How will I continue this conversation?

It is important that we find value in the experiences, and in the unique characteristics of each other. When we develop our cultural competence, we can work better together within our teams and respond to each other with relevant empathy and compassion. By celebrating and sharing our authentic selves, we gain a greater appreciation for each other and the diversity that surrounds us.

Thank you to our contributors

Thank you to our contributors from across the Public Service of Canada – National Defence, Health Canada, and Shared Services Canada

MCs: Sarah Francescutti and Samantha Moonsammy

Panellists: Michel Marcelin, Debbie Patterson, and Jeffrey Stark

Production Team: Lyrique Richards, Adele Dacres, Marika Brown

Join the live event (https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting_YTljYzdkYTk tNmRiYSooZjkoLTg3NWEtMzA3YTYzZGNjMDcy%40thread.v2/o?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%22325b4494-1587-40d5-bb31-8b660b7f1038%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%22905de883-ee9c-42a6-bfee-cc866f97f03e%22%7d)

Resource Guide

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