

Intersecting Identities:
**Understanding
Intersectionality and Disability**

FACILITATOR TOOLKIT

**Youth
Success
Strategy**



**Stratégie
de réussite
des jeunes**



Acknowledgement

Funded by the Canadian Association of Supported Employment (CASE) Innovation Lab through the Government of Canada's Sectoral Initiative Program.

Disclaimer

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

For more information, please contact ODEN at info@odenetwork.com

Introduction

The Canadian Youth Success Strategy (C-YSS) was established by the Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN) in 2021. ODEN conducted research that considered the barriers and opportunities that youth who have developmental disabilities experience as they prepare for a future that includes employment.

The research had several key findings, but the two most impactful were:

- a) the expectations of parents, caregivers and educators' matter and
- b) if youth are encouraged and supported towards a future that includes work, it is more likely to happen.

The research also found a lack of employment preparation experiences (co-operative education and volunteer), programs, supports, and resource that were specifically tailored to eliminate the intersectional barriers that youth who have a developmental disability experience before they enter the workforce. Compared to their peers without disabilities, when they finish high school, youth who have a disability, do not have the same foundational skills (technical, soft skills, and literacy) that employers are looking for in job candidates.

ODEN developed a series of workshops to share the knowledge acquired through this research with parents, caregivers, and educators. The positive evaluations of these family workshops led ODEN to further develop this project, advancing this work with grants from the [Canadian Association of Supported Employment Innovation Lab](#), creating the [Canadian Youth Success Project](#).

In the first year of this expanded project (2022-2023), ODEN trained six organizations across Canada to deliver the family workshop "[Employment-The GOLD Standard for Inclusion](#)" locally. These same organizations were trained to use the [JobPath© Employment Discovery Tool](#) in their employment service supports, for those who offered them. And to support capacity to hire inclusively for local employers, ODEN provided access for 100 businesses to [ODEN's Disability Awareness and Confidence Training \(DACT\)](#).

During the second year of the project (2023-2024), ODEN worked in partnership with the [YMCA of Greater Toronto Area](#) to train six (6) regional offices to deliver the family workshop. ODEN worked with [DistinctAbility](#) in Nova Scotia to develop resources to support the objectives of the C-YSS.

In doing this work, and while preparing resources to advance the employment paths for youth who have developmental disabilities, ODEN recognized the need for materials to be informed through an *intersectional lens*. We acknowledge that disability is just one aspect of an individual's identity and that one cannot consider this in isolation. An individual's path is also impacted by their gender, sexuality, socio-economic status, spirituality, religion, race, ethnicity, geography and more. This is called **intersectionality**.

This resource will unpack what is meant by intersectionality. We aimed to provide guidance on how to facilitate a workshop or employment support activity, so that facilitators working with youth who have disabilities can create and execute activities in ways that create a safe and equitable space for all.

Objectives

1. To understand the importance of creating safe spaces when conducting training and workshops.
2. To understand the relationship between human rights and disability.
3. To consider the impact of ableism as well as conscious and unconscious bias on your work.
4. To understand intersectionality and how it impacts individuals, groups, and communities.
5. To understand reflexivity and how to apply it in how you facilitate a workshop/training.

Creating open, safe, and brave spaces

When you facilitate a workshop with an audience such as parents, caregivers, educators, service providers, businesses, and people who have a disability, it is important that you create an atmosphere that is safe. A safe atmosphere or safe space is one where the facilitator shows respect for, and gives space to, the different experiences in the room. One that appreciates that everyone in the room or meeting will have a different and unique story informed by their identities and experiences.

This resource will consider the importance of:

- Showing respect for each other and each other's unique story
- Having an open mind, be open to active communication, and positive interactions with participants
- Respect each other's privacy
- Show empathy towards others.

By establishing these guidelines and fostering a respectful, empathetic, and open-minded environment, you can facilitate a workshop that is both safe and productive for all participants.

To do this, it is important to first understand concepts such as intersectionality, reflexivity, cultural humility, social location, and conscious and unconscious biases.

But first, let's discuss human rights and the social model of disability.



Human rights

The [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (UNCRPD) is guided by a belief in the inherent dignity of all human beings. This resource was created from a human rights-based lens and considers the strengths all people who have a developmental and or disability and maintains that the challenges experienced by people who have a disability lie outside the person and in society.

The UNCRPD exists to:

“Promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity. Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”.

The medical model of disability versus the social model of disability

Disability is often viewed from a medical lens. In other words, it may be described by a person’s diagnosis. For example, referring to a workshop participant as the Autistic person.

Interventions guided solely by a medical model often focus on fixing the person rather than considering what structures around the person may be causing challenges to them. For example, a person who has Autism may be overstimulated by noise and the way the physical environment is set up. They may need time to adjust to a new setting and could require more than one visit to a particular classroom/meeting room before feeling comfortable to fully participate in your workshop.

A social model of disability would encourage you to move beyond the diagnosis and think critically about the set up for your workshop (physical, social, environmental, etc.) and how it impacts this person; you are creating spaces and opportunities so they can fully access all of the experiences in your workshop and in turn experience full inclusion in their communities.

In all of our work, ODEN operates from the **social model of disability**. While we recognise the importance of understanding a person’s diagnosis and what it may mean for them, we recognize that a diagnosis does not define the person. The following chart provides a comparison between the medical model and social model of disability.

Article 1 - Purpose | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD). (n.d.).
<https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/article-1-purpose>

Medical Model of Disability

- Informed by pathology which sees disability as a diagnosis located within the individual.
- A diagnosis is considered something that could be either treated or fixed.
- People who have disabilities may be referred to as “sick”, “frail”, “vulnerable” and “dependent”.

Social Model of Disability

- Disability is seen as one aspect of a person’s identity, such as race/ethnicity, gender, etc.
- Disability is believed to result from a mismatch between the person who has a disability and the environment (both physical and social).
- A person’s environment creates the barriers, not the disability.
- The way to address disability is to change the environment and society, rather than people who have disabilities.
- Negative stereotypes, discrimination and oppression serve as barriers to environmental change and full inclusion.

MOMENT OF REFLECTION

Consider the following and reflect:

1. What model of disability is informing your thinking?
2. What experiences have influenced you?
3. What model of disability informs your work and how?
4. Can you think how both models of disability can co-exist in your work?



Disability and Ableism

Ableism is a set of negative attitudes, beliefs, and actions that consider disability as not 'normal' and as being 'less valuable' in society. Ableism is informed by, and reinforced by, negative stereotypes that see people who have disabilities as "less than". An example of ableism is feeling sorry for a person who has a disability. Or the assumption that a person cannot do a certain job because they have a disability is ableist. Ableist attitudes can be informed by conscious and unconscious beliefs held by you and others. Ableist attitudes view disability as negative and abnormal versus seeing disability as universal and a natural part of the human diversity.

It is important to recognize that disability is one aspect of a person's identity. Someone in your workshop may also experience oppression, discrimination or indeed privilege, because of other aspects of their identity. You need to consider the impact of intersectionality.

What do we mean by intersectionality?

The term intersectionality was coined in 1989 by American critical race scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw ([Syracuse University Guide: Intersectional Self](#)). Intersectionality promotes the understanding of human beings as shaped by the interaction of different social locations (e.g. race/ethnicity, Indigeneity, gender, class, sexuality, geography, age, disability/ability, migration status, religion). These interactions occur within a context of connected systems and structures of power (e.g., laws, policies, state governments, and other political and economic unions, religious institutions, media).

Why it's important to talk about intersectionality when working with youth who have developmental disabilities?

A young person's disability is only one part of their story, one part of their identity. Their life experiences are also impacted by where they live, what their family's socio-economic status is, what color their skin is, what gender they identify with, what culture they identify with and more.

The interaction of these identities can bring both privilege and oppression (or unique challenges) — at the same time.

We call this intersectionality.

Human experiences cannot be explained by considering only one category — such as gender, race, disability or socio-economic status. People's lives are complex and multi-dimensional and are shaped by different factors and social dynamics operating at the same time. People can experience privilege and oppression at the same time.

For more information on this visit:

[Equity-based Co-Creation, Chapter 3 - Equity Deserving Communities](#)

ACTIVITY — WHO AM I

How have these aspects of your social location affected your life?

- Race
- Disability
- Culture and ethnicity
- Sexuality/gender
- Age
- Faith
- Citizenship
- Place of origin/Ancestry

Take a moment to consider all of these as they relate to you and how they have impacted your life experiences. For example, have you ever experienced racism and what impact did this have on you and your work as a facilitator?

Reflexivity — what is it and why is it important here?

Reflexivity is about understanding and thinking critically about your social location (position), role and power, and how these are impacting what you are saying and how you are reacting to what other people are saying.

Reflexivity is the process of examining your own feelings, reactions, and motives (reason for acting, or asking a question). It is the ability to look inwards and critically reflect on what is influencing your actions or words.

Why do we want to introduce the concept of reflexivity in this guide?

Your preconceptions of disability, gender or race (or other aspects of a person's identity) can impact how you might approach working with a family and their youth who has a developmental disability.



CASE STUDY

You are working as an employment/job coach with a youth who has a developmental disability. You knew this youth as Davina and as a girl. Davina has told you of their plan to transition to identifying as a male and would like you to call them Devon from now on. You have always held the personal belief that the gender you are born with is the one you stay with for life. Furthermore, you recognize that they may now face greater challenges as both a transgender person and a person who has a developmental disability. You are worried about how your personal feelings will get in the way of you being able to support them.

1. Place yourself as the employment/job coach in this case study and consider why it is important to consider preconceptions, what is informing them and how they might impact one's work in a professional setting.
2. How can this be mediated?

NOTE: You may not personally hold the views expressed in this fictional case study, but you may hold other views that could impact your work – take a moment to consider these and how they might impact your work with youth who have developmental disabilities.

Culturally informed practice

Culture is a set of shared ideas, customs, traditions, beliefs, and practices shared by a group of people. Each of us experience culture and may identify strongly with one or more aspects of our culture. For example, we may describe ourselves as Canadian because we live in Canada, but we might also say our cultural heritage is African. One's culture can inform how they view and experience disability. If you are working with a family who have different culture to your own, you should consider how this will impact their life experiences and perspectives. We call this culturally informed practice (Mullaly and West 2017).

To be culturally informed in your work, listen to what others are saying, hear their experiences and acknowledge how they may differ from your own. How you view and understand disability may be different to others. For example, some cultures view disability as something to keep hidden from others while others see it as something to be celebrated.

Take a minute to consider the “Who Am I” activity discussed earlier and consider the following:

CASE STUDY

Condelisa, a parent who was in the audience of your family workshop — Employment: the Gold Standard for Inclusion—approaches you (the facilitator) after the workshop. She is a black, middle-aged woman. She tells you she is from Ghana, Africa, and has been in Canada for the past four years. She has a son who has Autism who currently communicates with pictures and with few words. She tells you how in her culture, children who have disabilities are more often kept at home, she cannot imagine him ever working, and she has enough challenges trying to have him attend school. She feels that a lot of what you said in your presentation Employment: the Gold Standard for Inclusion, does not apply to her son.

1. How do you respond in a way that reflects empathy and understanding
2. Reflect on what is informing your response?

Social location

Social location is defined as the social position or power/influence an individual holds in society and is based on social characteristics deemed to be important by any given society (this can differ in different cultures). Each of us hold different social characteristics at the same time, for example we may identify as female, a person with a temporary disability and who is also middle class — these impact how we experience day-to-day life. The illustration on the next page, the Wheel of Privilege and Power, helps to describe how different locations hold privilege and challenge, based on the categories around the outside — the further away from the center, the more oppression a person may face.

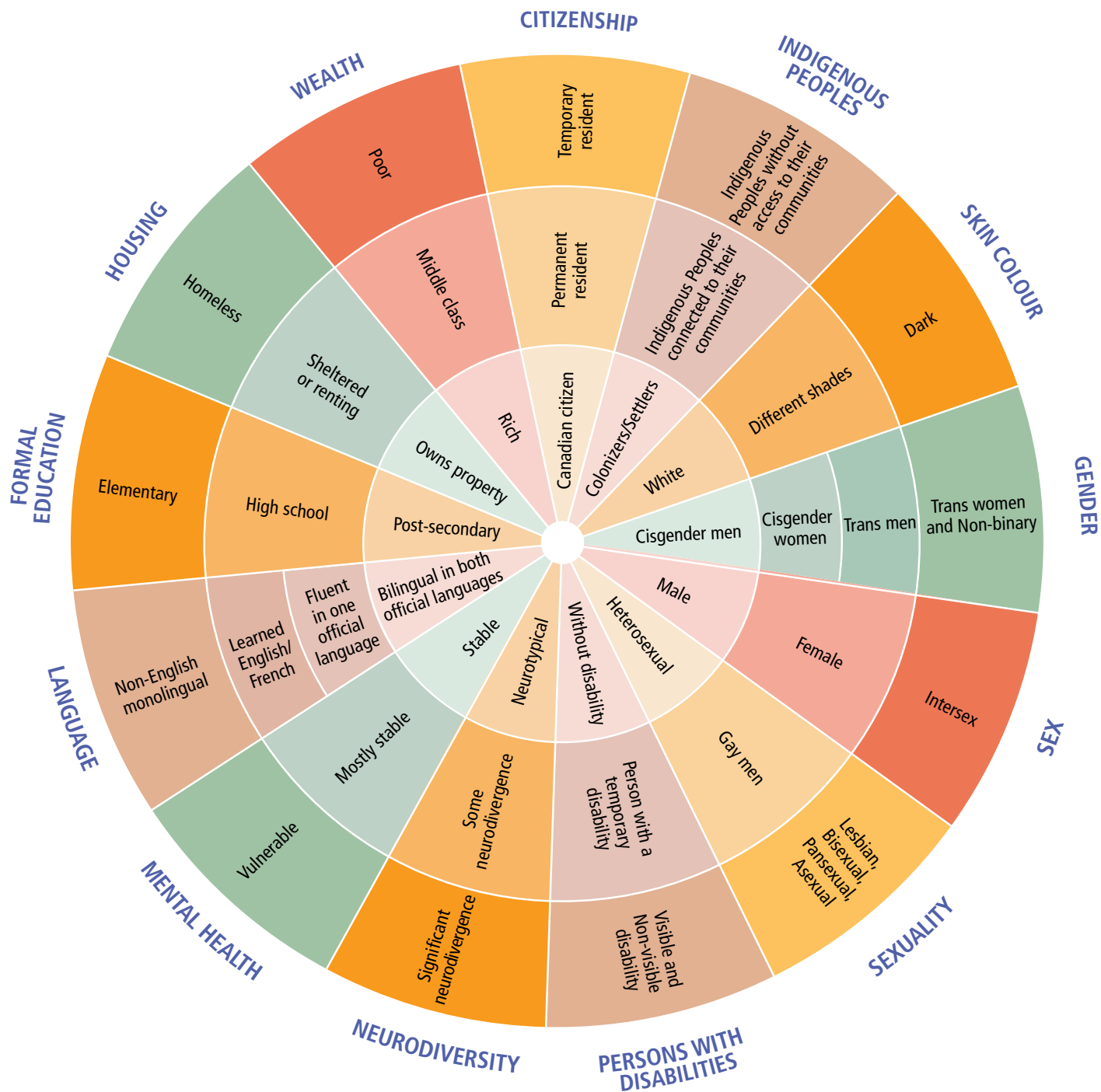
ACTIVITY

Consider the Wheel of Power shown on the next page.

1. Where do you position yourself?
2. What does this mean for you and your views and how you experience privilege or oppression (or both at the same)?
3. What implications does this have for your work with job seekers and/or families (caregivers)?

Wheel of Privilege and Power

(the closer you are to the centre, the more privilege you have)



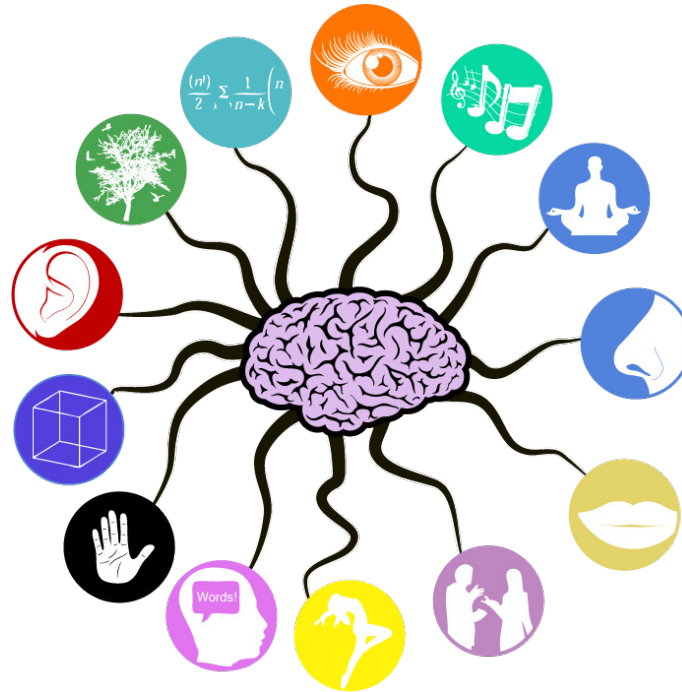
Note: the categories within this wheel are only examples in the Canadian context, and we should not limit ourselves to them. Intersectionality is a broad concept, and this tool is only a beginning point.

Wheel of Privilege and Power government of Canada (IRCC) <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/documents/pdf/english/corporate/anti-racism/wheel-privilege-power.pdf>

Conscious and unconscious bias

A bias is a prejudice in favour or against one thing, a person, or a group or a way of thinking; it can be held by an individual, group, community, or institutions such as governments. Biases can have both negative and positive consequences for others. Biases are influenced by how we gather and process information from external sources through our senses (what we see, hear, smell, touch, etc.).

The graphic below provides a visual of these interconnected inputs.



[Sensory Perception – How our senses can influence our perception](#)

Unconscious bias

An unconscious bias is social stereotypes about certain groups that can become “truth” to those outside that group. Often, we are not aware how they influence our thinking nor are we always intentionally trying to cause harm – but we make assumptions based on long held beliefs about a group of people, which are often false and informed by negativity. This can cause harm. For example, one might think that *people with Down syndrome are happy all the time* – if we believe that *people with Down syndrome are happy all the time*, we may not recognise a person with Down syndrome as having depression and they may not get the support they need and deserve.

ACTIVITY

Take a moment to think about unconscious biases that you may hold. Think about the potential negative impact this could have in how you support a person who holds many different identities, including a disability.

How might this impact your work with them?

Conscious bias

A conscious bias is sometimes called an explicit bias, in other words it is something you are aware of. It is an action you are taking or something you are saying with intention — something that is informed by your beliefs, attitudes, and experiences. A conscious bias can be harmful when it is informed by stereotypes and personal prejudices. An example of a conscious bias is when someone in a workshop you are delivering tells you that people who have developmental disabilities are not smart enough to work.

Activity

Think about a time when a decision you made or something you said was informed by a bias you hold. We have all done this. It is not something to be ashamed of, it something to think about and consider how it may negatively impact our work with others.

Think about what you can do to challenge biases you may hold — for example, if you believe that people with developmental disabilities are not smart enough to work, ask yourself why?

Look for and consider the evidence that shows us how well people with developmental disabilities can perform at work when their functional needs are considered.

Share this evidence with others to change and challenge stereotypes.

Conclusion

We hope that this guide has provided you with tools to understand intersectionality and how it may impact your work in supporting families, caregivers, and youth who have developmental disabilities.

We have touched on other areas as well that influence intersectionality, for example social location, explaining the need for understanding and considering our own social location and how that might impact our work with others. We covered what are conscious and unconscious biases and how harmful these can be, despite good intentions. Understanding all of the areas covered in this resource and critically reflecting on how they impact our work will ultimately allow us to provide brave and safe spaces in our work with families, caregivers and youth who have developmental disabilities.

We encourage you to use this resource as a supportive reminder and guide of the continuous work we all need to do to challenge barriers and the role we all have to play in creating a more equitable society.

REFERENCES

- Al-Faham, Hajer & Davis, Angelique & Ernst, Rose. (2019). Intersectionality: From Theory to Practice. *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*. 15. 247-265. 10.1146/annurev-lawsocsci-101518-042942.
- Chatzitheochari, S., & Butler-Rees, A. (2023). Disability, Social Class and Stigma: An Intersectional Analysis of Disabled Young People's School Experiences. *Sociology*, 57(5), 1156-1174. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385221133710>
- Goethals, T., De Schauwer ,E., & Van Hove, G. (2015). Weaving Intersectionality into Disability Studies Research: Inclusion, Reflexivity and Anti-Essentialism. *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, 2(1-2), 75-94. <https://doi.org/10.11116/jdivegendstud.2.1-2.0075>
- Gopaldas, A. (2013). Intersectionality 101. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 32, 90-94. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43305317>
- Moodley, J., & Graham, L. (2015). The importance of intersectionality in disability and gender studies. *Agenda*. 29. 10.1080/10130950.2015.1041802.
- National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS). (2018, June 22). Kimberlé Crenshaw: What is Intersectionality? [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ViDtnfQ9FHc>
- Wickenden M. Disability and other identities?-how do they intersect? *Front Rehabil Sci*. 2023 Aug 10;4:1200386. doi: 10.3389/fresc.2023.1200386. PMID: 37637932; PMCID: PMC10449449.
- WHEEL OF PRIVILEGE AND POWER. (n.d.). <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/documents/pdf/english/corporate/anti-racism/wheel-privilege-power.pdf>



Ontario Disability Employment Network
Box 4047, RPO Thickson
4081 Thickson Road North
Whitby, ON L1R 2X0

info@odenetwork.com
1-866-280-ODEN (6336)

odenetwork.com

ISBN: ????