



Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario

January 28, 2009

Dwight Duncan  
Minister of Finance and Revenue, and  
Chair of Treasury Board/Management Board of Cabinet  
c/o Budget Secretariat  
Frost Building North, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor  
95 Grosvenor Street  
Toronto, ON M7A 1Z1

Dear Minister Duncan,

Thank you for this opportunity to make submissions on the 2009 budget, which I am doing on behalf of the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario.

The Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) and its 20 community based chapters represent the interests of persons with learning disabilities (LDs) throughout Ontario. In the more than forty years since its formation, LDAO has expanded its activities and services to include youth and adults who have learning disabilities, in postsecondary and employment sectors, in addition to serving parents of children in elementary and secondary schools. Over the years, LDAO has regularly provided consultation and constructive recommendations on all government initiatives that affect persons with learning disabilities in Ontario.

Like the Ontario Government, LDAO is committed to investing in skills and knowledge, infrastructure, innovation and partnerships. As a community we believe that much can be accomplished by ensuring that people receive the right education/training and the right support at various life stages. And, if this basic premise is followed, individuals will be better and more suitably educated, trained, skilled, productive and assets to the economy. They will be less inclined to drop out of school, be underemployed, end up impoverished or in the corrections system and create a burden on the economy.

People with LDs, of all ages, represent the largest disability group in Ontario. In the publically funded school system, students with LDs have made up over 40% of students receiving special education. Learning disabilities influence all areas of a person's life and the effects of LDs impact the mandate of many government ministries, including education, transitions to postsecondary education, sustainable employment, poverty and social assistance, the mental health sector, the justice system and corrections. That said, with early identification and diagnosis, the proper accommodations in education and training, and support for individuals and families, people with learning disabilities can become among the most creative, and productive members of society.

In 2007, the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC) released the results of a groundbreaking applied research study, *Putting a Canadian Face on Learning Disabilities (PACFOLD)*. PACFOLD summarized data for Ontario from the *National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY)*:

- 6.2% of children aged 6 to 15 were reported by parents/guardians to have a learning disability;
- Only 24.5% of parents of children with learning disabilities (LDs) said their child was doing well or very well at school, compared to 76.1% of parents of children without disabilities;
- 14.7% of parents of children with LDs said that their child had been diagnosed with emotional, psychological or nervous difficulties, while parents of children without disabilities reported only 1% of such diagnoses.

PACFOLD also reported that:

- A significant number of youth and adults with LDs had dropped out of the education system altogether, with over one-quarter of Canadians aged 22 to 29 with LDs reporting less than a high school certificate as their highest academic achievement;
- Persons with LDs were more than twice as likely to report high levels of distress, depression, anxiety disorders, suicidal thoughts, visits to a mental health professional and poorer overall mental health compared to persons without disabilities.

The 2006 *Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS)* showed that adults with LDs had an unemployment rate of 11.7 %, higher than the rate for adults of all disability types (10.4%) and the rate for the whole population. Average employment income for adults with LDs was only \$20,215 in 2006, compared to \$26,640 for all disability types.

The 2002 study, *Economic Costs to Individuals, Families and Society* that was prepared by The Roeher Institute for the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada reported research findings of 25% prevalence of learning disabilities among prison populations.

These figures and percentages represent enormous public costs in mental health and health services, unemployment and welfare assistance, and correctional costs. These could be significantly reduced and in many cases avoided. We suggest that the Ontario Government focus investment in:

- early identification of learning disabilities
- access to affordable psychoeducational/psychovocational assessments for children, youth and adults
- awareness of learning disabilities in all sectors
- special education programs and services in elementary and high schools
- the promotion of apprenticeships, including accommodations for individuals with LDs
- supports for postsecondary education, including access to assistive technology for all students with LDs
- pre-employment programs that foster job-readiness, including workplace communication skills

- workplace education for employers so that they understand how to identify employees with LDs, and how to support, and encourage their best performance;
- job retention programs to counteract expenses related to losing or terminating employees or rehiring and training new employees.

In the current economic climate organizations can work together and complement each other's services and maximize outcomes. In order to foster partnerships and to create the most productive and efficient charitable organizations, the Ontario government should encourage and provide funding for such organizations, especially those with complementary mandates and missions, to work together – to share spaces, resources, needs assessments, research, and to plan and develop initiatives that address the needs of their populations but also their organizational strengths. For instance, the Government of Ontario could partner with disability organizations to educate businesses and the communities about accessibility standards.

Learning disabilities affect all aspects of a person's life and that of his/her family. Early identification and adequate supports can make the difference between a successful contributor to society or an expensive failure. We believe that representatives from various ministries would do well to meet with members of LDAO and other organizations working with individuals with LDs (and ADHD which has a high correlation with learning disabilities) to discuss long-term strategies, potential funding and partnerships.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to the 2009 budget process.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maggie Wygant', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Maggie L. Wygant

Executive Director

Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario