

Disabilities Issues Office

**Annual Report
2005 - 2006**



The Honourable John Harvard
Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba
Room 235, Legislative Building
Winnipeg MB R3C 0V8

May It Please Your Honour:

I am pleased to present the first ever Annual Report of the Disabilities Issues Office of Manitoba for the year ended March 31, 2006.

Respectfully submitted,

Gord Mackintosh
Minister

Disabilities

ISSUES

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Honourable Gord Mackintosh
Minister of Family Services and Housing
and Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities
357 Legislative Building
Winnipeg MB R3C 0V8

Dear Minister:

I am pleased to present the first annual report for the Disabilities Issues Office of Manitoba (DIO). The 2005/06 year has been one of development and growth for this new policy co-ordination centre within the provincial government.

Created in 2002, the DIO has four staff – an executive director, two policy analysts and an office manager. The office is also supported by a seconded employee from the Manitoba Housing Authority and term employees who work for government during the summer.

The DIO's primary mandate is to help co-ordinate government policy that affects the lives of Manitobans with disabilities. This is done in many ways, the most important being the Assistant Deputy Ministers Committee on Disability Issues. This committee chaired by the Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities, serves as a clearing house across government on policies and programs affecting people with disabilities. It has an Assistant Deputy Minister from every department and meets every three months.

The DIO monitors the priorities of the community of people with disabilities. We meet community representatives, attend community events and listen to citizens with disabilities and their supporters. The DIO also hosts important forums – Round Tables on Disability Issues - which give the community an opportunity to inform government about its ideas, concerns or suggestions about people with disabilities. The aim is to have the community help design effective policies that are responsive to expressed needs.

Providing advice and support to the Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities is also a key DIO role. The Minister continues to meet with the DIO and other government departments on a wide range of issues including those concerning First Nations Manitobans with disabilities and provincial plans to support people with disabilities in emergency situations. The DIO has been active in presenting a disability perspective on many issues to the Minister and government as a whole.

As a relatively new office, the DIO is still working to raise its profile inside the government and with the general public. Printed material from the office is being distributed, a DIO website has been launched and this annual report is aimed at increasing awareness about the office and the work we do. The higher the DIO's profile is, the more effective our work will be.

The DIO recognizes that an accountable government must develop realistic objectives which can be used to measure its success in serving citizens. This is a priority for the province and the DIO will be working with all departments over the coming years to find effective ways to measure our success in promoting full citizenship for all members of society, including those who have disabilities.

Respectfully,

Dave Martin
Executive Director

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Introduction

The Annual Report of the Disabilities Issues Office is organized to present developments under our primary mission. It includes information about improvements to government services, community consultations, community networking and emerging issues that affect people with disabilities. The report also contains information about the DIO's organization and expenditures.

Mission and Role

In 2000, the premier appointed a Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities to:

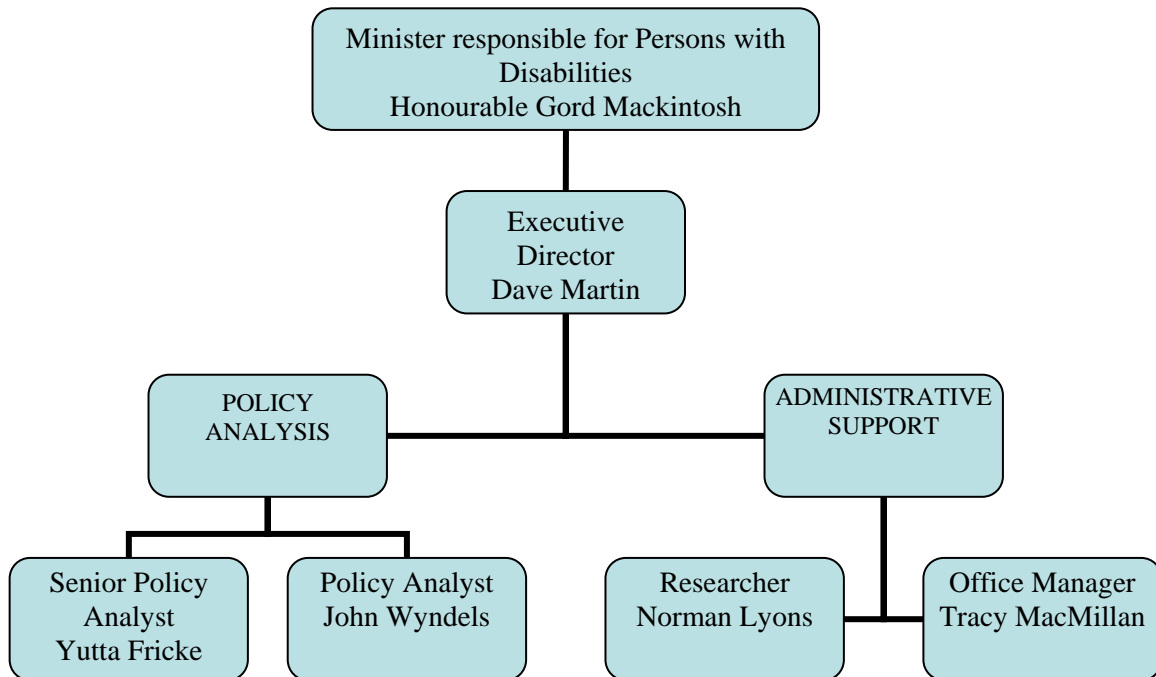
- identify issues affecting persons with disabilities
- co-ordinate policy development to improve access to public services
- promote positive attitudes and raise awareness about disability
- represent the needs of Manitobans with disabilities to other levels of government

In 2002, the provincial government established the Disabilities Issues Office to serve and report to the Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities. The DIO supports the Minister by:

- communicating directly with members of the community
- organizing an annual round table forum to consult with organizations and citizens concerned about new policy directions
- co-ordinating work among government departments, disability groups, corporate and community organizations
- making Manitoba a more inclusive society for persons with disabilities

Disabilities Issues Office Organization Chart

(as at March 31, 2006)



Changing Government to Provide Better Service to Manitobans with Disabilities

Full Citizenship: A Manitoba Provincial Strategy on Disability

In 2001, the Manitoba Government released *Full Citizenship: A Manitoba Provincial Strategy on Disability (Full Citizenship)*. It presented a philosophy for responding to the needs of people with disabilities and outlined a number of priority issues for government. The five main priorities were: income supports; employment; disability supports; access to government; and issues concerning Aboriginal Manitobans with disabilities.

Within the pages of *Full Citizenship*, government committed itself to a series of actions to address issues affecting Manitobans with disabilities. A total of 36 commitments were made on such issues as removing disincentives to employment, providing disability supports during training programs and improving government consultation with the community of people with disabilities.

Highlights among the accomplishments to date are:

- A Rapid Re-enrollment Policy has been created within the Employment and Income Assistance Program to ensure financial assistance is available promptly when a person with a disability unsuccessfully attempts employment and needs to resume benefits.
- The work incentive option within the Employment and Income Assistance Program has been increased to 30 per cent for people with disabilities in recognition of the higher costs incurred by persons with disabilities in being employed.
- A new policy has been introduced to allow certain lump sum payments of up to \$100,000 to be made to Employment and Income Assistance recipients with disabilities without reduction in benefit levels, provided that the funds are used for disability related costs.
- The Manitoba government has adopted the Universal Design Institute's *ACCESS: A Guide to Accessible Design for Designers, Builders, Facility Owners and Managers* as the guideline for buildings where the provincial government has design control through ownership, specific capital funding or leaseholder arrangements.
- Manitoba's Community Connections Program has funded adaptive technology for Internet sites throughout the province.
- The provincial government has implemented a policy on website accessibility to meet the needs of disabled citizens.
- The Civil Service Commission has established a Career Assistance Program for Persons with Disabilities to provide employment opportunities with government.
- Consultation with people with disabilities has been improved with the creation of a DIO and the hosting of four round tables on issues of concern to the community.

- The Assistant Deputy Ministers' Committee on Disability Issues has been formed to review, and take action on, input from the community.

The DIO has been actively involved in working with all government departments to implement the commitments made in *Full Citizenship*.

Access to Government

One priority *Full Citizenship* identifies as needing government leadership is access – not only fair and equal access to government buildings, but the removal of barriers to government services, information and public meetings. To help address these needs, the DIO is working with an Inter-departmental Access Committee. It is a cross-departmental committee, with provincial representatives from health, justice, education, transportation and government services.

The committee's job is to review and update two provincial government documents on accommodating disability access issues: *Interim Accommodation Procedures* and *Manitoba's Guidelines on Access to Government*. Both documents are more than 13 years old and the committee must ensure they properly reflect the Manitoba government's continuing commitment to persons with disabilities.

The *Interim Accommodation Procedures* document was written in the 1990s to provide direction to government staff on accommodating persons with various disabilities when service is required in an inaccessible facility. The province currently owns or leases more than 300 buildings. Despite steady progress to make them all accessible, many still contain design features which act as barriers for persons with mobility and perceptual impairments. The updated *Interim Accommodation Procedures* document is being revised according to principles in the Universal Design Institute's *ACCESS: A Guide to Accessible Design for Designers, Builders, Facility Owners and Managers*.

The document *Manitoba's Guidelines on Access to Government* was introduced in 1989 to improve access for people with disabilities to government services, publications and public meetings and hearings. While universal access to government continues to be a priority, the original guidelines are now inadequate and need to be updated to include new forms of electronic communication such as the Internet.

The Inter-departmental Access Committee is preparing proposals for consideration which will update and strengthen the *Interim Accommodation Procedures* and *Manitoba's Guidelines on Access to Government*.

Task Force on Facility Access

Manitoba's Task Force on Facility Access was formed about 20 years ago. It has served as an inter-departmental mechanism to improve access to provincial facilities for people with disabilities. It has representatives from education, family services and housing, health, transportation and government services, and the Disabilities Issues Office.

During the past year, the task force met, with co-ordination from the DIO, to monitor the implementation of the Policy for Universal Access Building Design announced in 2002. Member departments reviewed information from accessibility audits done on five facilities which were built or renovated following the policy announcement. The audits revealed that progress has been made, although ongoing work needs to be done to ensure that the policy's objectives are achieved. They also showed that budget constraints will be the biggest challenge to the successful implementation of universal access throughout government facilities.

The Municipal Councils and School Boards Elections Act

As a result of a community complaint about inaccessible election procedures, the DIO co-ordinated government and community efforts to:

- review the new *Municipal Councils and School Boards Election Act* ensuring accessibility to all voters
- discuss strategies to make the voting process and locations more accessible for persons with disabilities
- advise on the development of election training manuals and training sessions

The elections procedures manual was revised to offer specific suggestions for parking, snow clearing, lighting and clearance of voting booths. In addition, the manual recommends that, for the benefit of persons with visual impairments, the voting template be colour-contrasted from the ballot and that the list of candidates be prepared in 18-point typeface or larger.

Trainees who will be managing future municipal and school board elections were also given a contact list of Manitoba disability organizations for follow-up with community groups.

Cory Moar Inquest Response

Cory Moar died in December 1998 at 29. He was living in the home of his older brother. The autopsy showed his family had slowly beaten him to death over a period of at least a year.

While Manitoba law demands that doctors, social workers and other professionals report suspected abuse of children and persons defined as vulnerable, Cory Moar did not meet the criteria of either group. The judge leading the review into the death recommended other ways to prevent similar tragedies among other mentally competent adults with disabilities.

Over the past three years, ending in 2006, the DIO joined Manitoba Family Services and Housing (FSH), Manitoba Health and Manitoba Justice in an inter-departmental effort to respond to the judge's 13 recommendations, including:

- training of current and new staff in FSH and the regional health authorities (RHAs) to recognize and respond to suspected abuse
- the need for crisis accommodations for adults with disabilities similar to those provided to women in abusive relationships
- government support of an abuse awareness initiative developed by Community Living Manitoba
- research into ways to share information about suspected abuse without going against an adult's right to privacy

Manitoba First Nations with Disabilities Multi-Sectoral Working Group

Full Citizenship outlines the province's commitment to the equal participation of Manitobans with disabilities. But citizenship and the related rights and responsibilities do not mean the same thing to all Manitobans because we are citizens of both a province and a country. Depending on whether or not we are Aboriginal, one of these identities is more significant to us than the other. If you are an Aboriginal person with a disability, your status will be of primary importance to the level of government (federal or provincial) responsible for the delivery of disability supports and services.

The province is concerned about the gaps in disability services for Aboriginal Manitobans, including First Nations Manitobans living on reserve. To move toward more equitable services, the province helped create the Manitoba First Nations with Disabilities Multi-Sectoral Working Group in April, 2004. Among the participating government and non-government bodies were:

- the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC)
- federal government
- the DIO with several provincial government departments, including family services and housing, health, Aboriginal and northern affairs and education
- community representatives from the First Nations disABILITY Association Inc. (FNDA)

As part of this work, the AMC developed a report and a proposed disability service delivery model for Manitobans living on reserves. In the spring of 2006, it was presented to the federal government in Ottawa and Manitoba's Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities.

The province concluded that follow up to the AMC proposals for disability services for First Nations would require the involvement of the Inter-governmental Committee for First Nations Health (ICFNH). This body has strong participation from the federal government, which currently co-ordinates and funds programs on health and social services on reserves.

Mobility Steering Committee

In March 2005, the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA) established the Wheeled Mobility Steering Committee. It is made up of stakeholders with an expertise in wheeled mobility equipment such as manual wheelchairs, power wheelchairs and scooters. It also focuses on the special seating systems and modifications to other components, such as backrests and cushions, to make the equipment functional. The committee's goal is to improve the way the system operates and seek input on potential changes.

The committee set up several working groups to research remedies to existing inefficiencies. Among the issues reviewed are procurement of special seating systems, the exclusion of funding for wheelchairs for residents of personal care homes and wheelchair maintenance issues. One working group report has been sent to the WHRA; others will be sent when they are completed.

Manitoba Floodway Authority

After the Flood of the Century in 1997, the federal and provincial governments committed to expanding the Red River Floodway. The Manitoba Floodway Authority (MFA) was established and floodway expansion has started and is expected to be completed in 2010.

The floodway expansion will create employment, training and recreation benefits. The DIO met officials from MFA to offer input and ensure that persons with disabilities are active participants in the construction process. The DIO is also advising that plans to develop the floodway as a place for recreation, such as walking trails and toboggan hills, holds great potential for persons with disabilities. The DIO will help ensure that the Policy on Universal Access Building Design and other commitments to accessibility will be applied during the design of these recreation facilities.

Public consultation on the floodway expansion began in the spring with numerous disability organizations and individuals providing feedback. Final results from the consultation will be completed later this year. The DIO will continue to meet with the MFA as the project continues.

Community Consultations

Town Hall Meetings

One of the DIO's priorities for 2005/06 was to increase the level of participation in the community consultations leading to a round table event. To meet this goal, two town hall meetings were organized, one for Winnipeg residents and one for persons living outside Winnipeg. In addition, a Sharing Circle on Disability Supports was organized for Aboriginal and First Nations Manitobans to discuss their unique concerns.

All these meetings were publicly advertised to encourage ordinary citizens with disabilities and their supporters to raise their voices about issues that affect them. Almost 200 Manitobans participated. Reports from these events were used to determine the focus areas of a Round Table on Disability Supports.

Round Table on Disability Supports

The most significant community consultation organized by the DIO is the Round Table. On March 24, 2006, 63 delegates from across Manitoba attended the DIO's Round Table on Disability Supports.

The plenary session was divided into three workshops areas:

- personal supports
- equipment supports
- transitions through life

The DIO prepared background papers on the three topic areas to inform participants of existing policies and programs. Each workshop discussed progress made in these areas, as well as continued barriers and challenges to receiving services. A series of recommendations was developed to guide the province in how to improve the quality and delivery of disability supports.

At the closing plenary, the following priorities were presented to the Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities.

Personal Supports

- Centralize disability support services under one roof – for instance, in fully accessible community access centres.
- Move away from program-centred disability support services toward flexible, individual services.
- Support a national disability supports program and/or *Act*.

Equipment Supports

- Establish a comprehensive, portable package of equipment supports tailored to the user's needs at each stage of life.
- Create a technical aids program with an eligibility criteria based on functional assessment of individual needs.
- Design a technical aids program allowing for consumer control, with personal choice in buying and the flexibility to choose from among a wide variety of approved assistive devices offered by profit, non-profit and public sector vendors.

Transitions

- Ensure there is continuity, equal standards and seamless delivery among services provided by different departments throughout the province.
- Create an advocacy body for families with children with disabilities modeled on the Children's Advocate, or ensure that disability organizations are funded to take on this role.
- Develop made-for-Manitoba disability legislation, if not a *Canadians with Disabilities Act*, which outlines some basic rights and services for Manitobans with disabilities.

While the focus of the round table was on disability supports, special consideration was given to the service gaps faced by Aboriginal Manitobans with disabilities. The delegates at the round table called on the province to continue working with First Nations and Aboriginal people to improve services.

The complete *Round Table on Disability Supports Report* is available from the DIO.

Community Networking

City of Winnipeg Access Advisory Committee

The DIO represents the province on the Access Advisory Committee (AAC) of the City of Winnipeg to help fulfill our common interests in creating a more accessible city. The AAC was created by City Council in 1989 to “enhance accessibility for persons with disabilities to the benefit of all citizens.” The AAC is a 12 person committee most of whom are citizens with disabilities.

Some examples of our collaboration:

- Along with the University of Manitoba’s Faculty of Architecture, the province and ACC hosted a forum on visitable design. The forum introduced Manitoba’s design community, the housing industry and the public to the basic design features that change an inaccessible house to one for all family and neighbours, including those with disabilities.
- We reviewed the city’s audible traffic signals (ATS) to improve their usefulness to persons with visible disabilities in crossing the streets. Recommendations included:
 1. reduce the variety of signals (ATs are found in over 200 cross-walks)
 2. increase the amount of time allocated to safely cross the street
 3. consider relocating the signals closer to ground level for better audibility

Inter-provincial Networking

Some of the best advice about effective disability policies and programs comes from practical testing. That is why networking between the DIO and similar provincial offices across the country is so important.

Most of the research and networking carried out by the DIO is through the Internet. However in October 2004, two DIO staff members were able to meet their peers from across Canada at the Inter-provincial Disability Working Group in Edmonton.

Many of the topics discussed elsewhere in this annual report and at the round tables were also on the agenda in Edmonton. One of the results of the meeting was a new focus by the DIO on emergency preparedness issues for people with disabilities.

International Networking

The DIO’s network extends well beyond Canada to our American neighbours and to Europe. Information exchanged includes our philosophical approach to disability and how this is transferred to policies and programs.

Over the past year, we have joined an inter-departmental initiative on co-operation between the Province of Manitoba and the Département du Bas-Rhin (France). This project, which began with the Saint Boniface business community, allows information sharing on social service programs targeting key populations, like youth and persons with disabilities.

Like the governmental officials from France, visiting policy makers and consumer advocates from Russia visiting the DIO, were also particularly interested in Manitoba's efforts to integrate community consultation into policy development.

Other Networking

The DIO has regularly been invited to talk to community members about the office and progress on *Full Citizenship*. With the integration of Disability Studies into academic curriculum, both the universities of Winnipeg and of Manitoba have requested guest lecturers. From the perspective of the DIO, a well-informed student body bodes well for Manitoba's future.

The DIO collaborated twice with the Human Rights Commission to educate Manitobans in Brandon and Thompson about *The Human Rights Code*. DIO staff focused on human rights issues concerning disability and introduced the philosophy and action plan of *Full Citizenship*.

The most common request for presentations, however, was from disability consumer and service organizations. Some of the invitations received in the past year include the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies, Canadian Council of the Blind and the Interlake peer support group of the Canadian National Institute of the Blind (CNIB).

The DIO attends community meetings not just to inform people about the DIO, but also to be informed about the priorities and concerns shared by specific disability groups, cross-disability advocacy organizations and others. Staff of the DIO attended annual general meetings and other functions of organizations such as: Canadian Council of the Blind, Canadian Centre on Disability Studies, Council of Canadians with Disabilities, Canadian Paraplegic Association, Community Living Manitoba, First Nations disAbility Association, Independent Living Resource Centre, Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities, Reaching E – Quality Employment Service and Ten-Ten Sinclair Housing.

Similarly, the DIO benefited from research and conferences organized by community organizations such as:

- Community Living Manitoba's forum on de-institutionalization
- Independent Living Resource Centre's symposium on visitable housing
- CNIB's NEEDS study on the links between poverty and lack of education and employment opportunities
- Society for Manitobans with Disabilities' research on aging and disability in Manitoba

DIO staff also attended academic presentations of new research:

- Children with Disabilities Receiving Services from Child Welfare Agencies in Manitoba, School of Social Work, University of Manitoba
- research on disability equality in terms of sameness and difference, presented by Eithne McLaughlin for the Disability Studies program at the University of Manitoba

Emerging Issues

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

In December 2001, the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) established an ad hoc committee to consider proposals for an international convention to protect and promote the rights and dignity of people with disabilities. The aim is to ensure that the rights set out in existing human rights treaties and other instruments, such as the *Declaration on Human Rights*, are extended to persons with disabilities in a meaningful way.

Over the past five years, Canada has been very involved in the development of the new convention. We are represented on both the ad hoc committee and a working group created to help write the draft document.

Known as the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, the draft convention has 33 articles dealing with a wide range of issues facing persons with disabilities, including access to education, health services and political participation.

When the draft text is completed (August 2006), it will be submitted to the UN General Assembly for formal adoption. The next stage of implementation will begin, as member governments are invited to ratify the document. Ratification by Canada will require Manitoba to review existing laws and practices to compare them with the obligations set out by the convention. Ratification may require changes to existing laws or practices. Only when enough countries have ratified the convention does it enter into force.

The DIO has provided input into the draft convention both within government processes and through its non-government network, with co-ordination from the Council of Canadians with Disabilities. In future, the DIO hopes to work with the disability community in a publicity campaign to promote the convention. In this way, Manitoba will participate in a worldwide effort to fulfill the mission of the convention as an instrument to support the dignity and to effectively protect the human rights of people with disabilities.

Visitable Housing

The term “visitable” has a relatively short history. It refers to housing that is easily accessible to persons with disabilities. From a small movement that began in Atlanta, Georgia, support for visitable housing has gained widespread acceptance in the United States, and is making inroads across Canada. The provincial government has taken an active role in promoting visitable housing and the concept is beginning to shape policy in Manitoba.

The key components of visitable houses are a level entry into the home, wider doors and hallways throughout and an accessible washroom on the main floor. These simple changes make it easier for people in wheelchairs to move, but they also benefit families pushing strollers, furniture movers and those with temporary injuries like a broken leg. In essence, visitable housing should not be perceived as a housing design for those who have mobility impairment. Rather, its selected features make life easier for everyone.

To increase the profile of visitable housing, the provincial government, the City of Winnipeg, and the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Architecture hosted a seminar on visitable housing in fall 2005. More than 100 people took in the event, including designers, architects, developers, builders and government representatives. Since that time, the government has hired a consultant to provide design expertise to help make new homes more accessible and visitable.

Emergency Preparedness

After September 11, 2001, and the 2005 hurricane season in the United States, cities and provinces across Canada have placed a new priority on emergency preparedness. Manitoba authorities have already responded to significant crises related to flooding and fires. Unfortunately, the future may also bring us a severe tornado or possibly a flu epidemic.

Manitoba Emergency Measures Organization co-ordinates the province's emergency preparedness through the Inter-departmental Emergency Preparedness Committee (IEPC). Some of the members of the committee are the City of Winnipeg, the Office of the Fire Commissioner, the Mennonite Disaster Service and a number of provincial departments.

In 2005, the DIO joined the IEPC to highlight issues related to disability in times of crisis. In a recent presentation to the IEPC, the DIO led a discussion about its concerns:

- public education directed to persons with disabilities
- accessible public communication and warnings
- measures to ensure the safe evacuation of persons with disabilities and care givers
- supports in emergency relief centres
- assistance during post-crisis recovery

In future, the DIO hopes to build on existing programs and to introduce new strategies to ensure the safety and well-being of Manitobans with disabilities under all circumstances.

Financial Report Summary Information

Disabilities Issues Office (Manitoba Family Services and Housing)

Actual vs. Planned Expenditures
for fiscal year ended March 31, 2006

09-1H Disabilities Issues Office

Expenditures by Sub-Appropriation	Actual 2005/06 \$000	FTE	Estimate 2005/06 \$000	Variance Over/(Under)	Expl. No.
Total Salaries and Employee Benefits	258.1	4.00	263.3	(5.2)	
Total Other Expenditures	86.9		87.1	(0.2)	

Disabilities Issues Office (Manitoba Family Services and Housing)

Actual vs. Actual Expenditures
for years ended March 31, 2005 & March 31, 2006

Estimate 2005/06	Appropriation	Actual 2005/06	Actual 2004/05	Increase/ (Decrease)	Expl. No.
263.3	Salaries and Employee Benefits	258.1	214.6	43.5	1
87.1	Other Expenditures	86.9	86.2	0.7	

1. The variance is primarily due to position vacancies in 2004/05.