

# Expo highlights opportunities beyond high school for people with disabilities

by Patricia Roy

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

The third-annual **Transition Expo** gave parents and students a chance to find out more about disability-related supports for special needs students after they graduate high school. The event was held in November at Westisle Composite High School.

“The Expo was an opportunity for agencies, colleges and universities to provide information on topics such as post-secondary education, employment and training,” says **Jackie Charchuk**, Special Education Consultant with the **Western School Board**. “There was also information provided about college and university funding opportunities for students with learning disabilities.”

Jackie explained that in grade 8, the **PEI Department of Education** begins to help students with special needs and their parents plan for the transition after high school. “It is important for parents to know that schools have a process in place to prepare students for college, university or employment,” says Jackie. “We are trying to get parents to think about the transition from school to post-secondary and career planning in general as early as possible.”

Several gaps in the transition process were identified in a recent review of services for people with disabilities. “There is a need for more community-based services for adults with disabilities: housing, recreation, transportation, and employment,” says Jackie. “Another

gap is the lack of a Cooperative Education program in some schools, especially in the western end of the Island. As well, employers need to become more open to hiring people with disabilities.”

## Exhibitor

**Nancymarie Arsenault** was one of the exhibitors at the Transition Expo. She is Prince County’s Employment Specialist for the **PEI Council of People with Disabilities**. “Students need help finding out about getting a job or going to college, university or on-line learning,” says Nancymarie.

“We offer a pre-employment program called **Work Abilities**, which is available to people from 18 to 65,” says Nancymarie. “It is a series of nine one-day skills development workshops. We help participants prepare for the work place.”

## Workshops

- skills identification
- understanding and responding to unexpected change
- stress and time management, career goal setting, successful job search, communication skills and interview techniques

- résumé creation, job application and interview skills.

“Everyone has marketable skills,” says Nancymarie. “It is just a matter of highlighting these skills and qualifications as opposed to focusing on the disability.”

“The Work Abilities program began in Charlottetown and it has now expanded to Montague and Summerside. We are looking at offering a Work Abilities program specifically for students during the year they graduate.”



**Nancymarie Arsenault is Prince County's Employment Specialist for the PEI Council of People with Disabilities.**

For more information about the **PEI Council of People with Disabilities**, contact the location nearest you:

Charlottetown **892-9149**

Montague **838-5878**

Prince County **888-8035**

For more information about Work Abilities workshops, or visit [www.peicod.pe.ca](http://www.peicod.pe.ca) click **Coming Events**.

The Transition Expo was organized by the Student Service Division of the Western School Board, in cooperation with the Resource/Special Education teachers and Administration of Westisle Composite High School.

# New business offers computer technology and training to people with disabilities

by Patricia Roy

People living with physical, sensory, reading or writing challenges may require help when using a computer or navigating the Internet. With the aid of new assistive technology and training, working on a computer is easier. As a result, people with disabilities or injuries can reach their education and employment goals.

**Catherine Llwyd** operates an Island-wide mobile business called **Working Advantage Virtual Enterprises Training** from O’Leary. She offers the devices and training needed to work with new technology such as:

- switches activated by pressure
- touch screens
- voice-to-text software
- hands-free software.

Because her father was a quadriplegic, she has always been interested in finding ways to help people with disabilities. She has worked in this field for many years. Before moving to PEI from Ontario this past spring, she researched the need for these services in the province and found there is a demand.

## What the business offers

“Basically, my business is a full-service company that helps install computer equipment and assistive devices and provides the training and follow-up support,” says Catherine.



**Catherine Llwyd demonstrates a type of assistive technology which uses head movement to operate a computer.**

“I work directly with clients who require assistive devices and training. I also provide assistive technology software training to corporate leaders, government and social agencies including educators.”

“We work with other community support services such as physiotherapists, psychologists and other professionals to find out what best suits a person’s needs. Training can take place at a client’s convenience in the home, library, workplace, or classroom.”

## New technological tools

Technology is available for people who are unable to use their hands or their voice. “As a person focuses on a letter on an on-screen keyboard, a web camera tracks the user’s head movements, which allow the person to write and even browse the Internet,” Catherine says.

“Speech-to-text technology is also available for people who are facing physical challenges or dyslexia. For example, I can teach someone with carpal tunnel syndrome to use voice detection software to compose an e-mail, write a document, or navigate the Internet.”

## Business support

Catherine took her business idea to **Resources West Inc.** in Alberton. She found out that she was eligible for the **Self Employment** program administered through **Service Canada**. Resources West Inc. is a community-based economic development agency. It provides entrepreneurial development and training, community planning and support, project management, business counselling and support and help with research and development.

**David Gamble** is the Resources West Inc. Small Business Officer. David provides guidance for clients applying for the Self Employment program, which is funded through **Service Canada**. The program provides both financial assistance and entrepreneurial support to eligible participants to help them start their own businesses. The Self Employment program assists individuals in the development and implementation of the business plan through technical and consultative expertise.

For more information about **Working Advantage Virtual Enterprises Training**, call Catherine Llwyd at **438-1770** or visit [www.workingadvantage.ca](http://www.workingadvantage.ca)

For more information about **Resources West Inc.**, call **902-853-4555** or visit [www.resourceswest.pe.ca](http://www.resourceswest.pe.ca)