



LEARNING DISABILITIES ASSOCIATION OF CANADA
TROUBLES D'APPRENTISSAGE - ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE

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Organizing Learning Disabilities (LD) Awareness Month Activities
October is LD Awareness Month

Raising public awareness and promoting greater knowledge and understanding is critical and LD Awareness Month is a great opportunity to concentrate activities across Canada. Here are some suggestions on how to get started organizing an event, while suggestions for actual activities can be found in the next section.

How to Plan an Event? Who should be involved?

The first step is to decide who should be involved in the organization of the activity. Will you be organizing it on your own or with an outside partner?

If you are considering a "team approach," one strategy is to include a cross section of agencies or experts from various relevant backgrounds. Involving psychologists, literacy agencies, school boards, postsecondary institutions and others will help build partnerships that demonstrate the inter-relatedness of learning disabilities in your community. It will also encourage broader grassroots support for your initiative from many different sources.

Another option is to team up with partners. Consider approaching your local library to host a talk on library accessibility on print disabilities, or providing training to adult education practitioners on learning disabilities and the adult non reader. The local radio morning show may be interested in an interview/discussion on special education services at the local school district level. A high school class may organize a day trip to a university laboratory for senior students interested in psychological brain research. A business or government department/ministry might be interested in organizing a brown bag lunch for employees on learning disabilities in the workplace.

A partner may make many of the arrangements for you (i.e., find a space, circulate advertising, supply coffee) and provide an audience. Partners also become part of a broader network in the future.

You may also consider having a sponsor. Commercial sponsors may provide equipment, money, refreshments etc. In addition, a college or university or corporation, for example, might lend its name to the event, thereby generating greater interest and a larger audience.

What are you trying to achieve and for whom?

Once you have decided who will organize the event, you must determine your objectives and identify the target audience.

Objectives might include, for example, highlighting the work of your local chapter/agency, introducing a specific issue concerning learning disabilities to the general public, or identifying a key LD related issue in your community to bring to the attention of the media, politicians, or both.

Target audiences can include the general public, colleagues in other professions, teachers, school district administrators, parents, adults with learning disabilities, the media, political figures, referring agencies, and so on.

Make time for a “reality check.”

At this stage, you should consider discussing your ideas with others. Do they think the activity will meet your objectives? Will your idea work and draw sufficient interest? At this point, you should also consider the human, financial and logistical resources needed to put on your event, and whether they are available.

Form an implementation committee

By now you have determined who is going to be involved in organizing the event, as well as the objectives, and viability of the event. If working with a group of colleagues, a committee, or partners, you need to form a core group of people who will make the decisions and do the work to make your event a success. Be sure to include people who have the time, skills, interest, and administrative responsibility to successfully fulfill their roles.

Determine tasks and timelines

A work plan with defined tasks, assigned responsibilities, required resources and timelines is essential. To develop a work plan, it is first necessary to determine such basics as: the type of event (open house, talk with questions and answers and refreshments, a fundraising event, poster session, etc.), the date and location, target audience, publicity, materials and equipment (how to obtain them and transport them to the event). You should also determine if there are other local events that may be complimentary to yours (and consider a joint venture) or whether there are other events that are competing for the same audience. Once these fundamental issues have been determined, it is time to establish timelines, create a budget and assign specific tasks.

Ongoing communication

When working with colleagues, a committee or partners, it is important that everyone understands their respective responsibilities. Effective communications is essential to planning and delivering a successful event. It is important to provide all members with regular updates concerning progress to date, problem areas, and delays in meeting timelines. Regularly scheduled face-to-face meetings or teleconferences are ideal means of communication, as is regular e-mail contact. Committee members should also provide regular updates on their work, seek assistance/advice when problems arise, and lend support to other committee members when necessary. Regular contact helps to identify any potential problems early in the planning process and to take remedial action or make alternative plans.

Get the word out early.

Don't wait until the event is fully planned before getting the word out. Once the date, time and location are set, it's time to start publicizing it. See “Publicizing Your Event” for specific ideas.

Think about getting and giving feedback for your event.

While holding an event is important in and of itself you cannot judge the success of an event without feedback. Consider providing participants with an evaluation survey, or providing an e-mail address if they wish to comment. Ask what worked well, what could have been better, and what they would like to see at future events. Ask the same of colleagues, committee members or partners.

Saying thank you is very important. Don't forget to thank everyone who participated in the event, including speakers, volunteers, media, sponsors, etc. This can be done by means of personal letters or more publicly through a notice in the appropriate newsletters or newspapers.

Sources:

Adapted from the following documents:

Publicity Primer, published by LDAC, 1993

Mental Illness Awareness Week Guidebook published in 2004 available on line at www.miaaw.ca.

'Psychology Month Toolkit' published in 2004. Available on line at <http://www.cpa.ca/PsychologyMonth/Tools.htm>