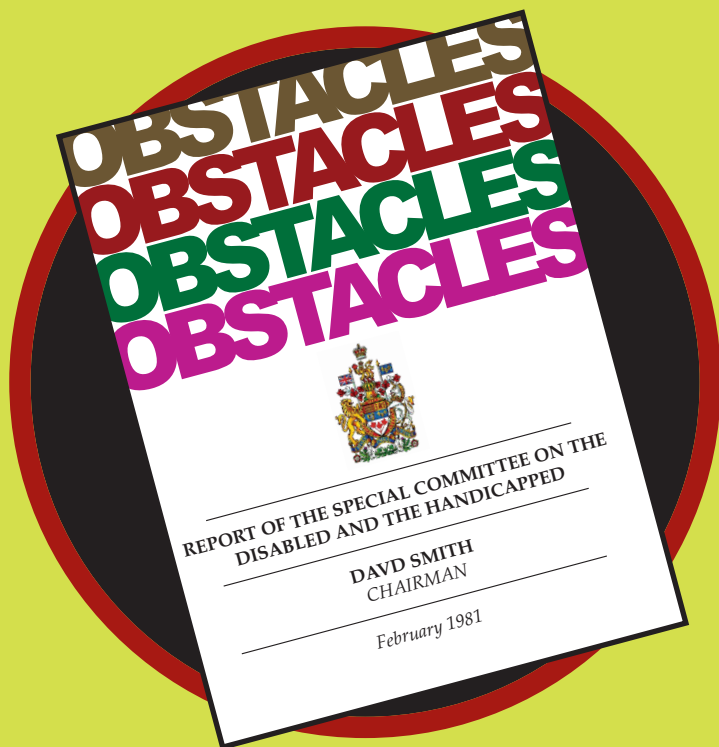


The Advocate

A GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS ADVISORY



Parliament Hill Edition



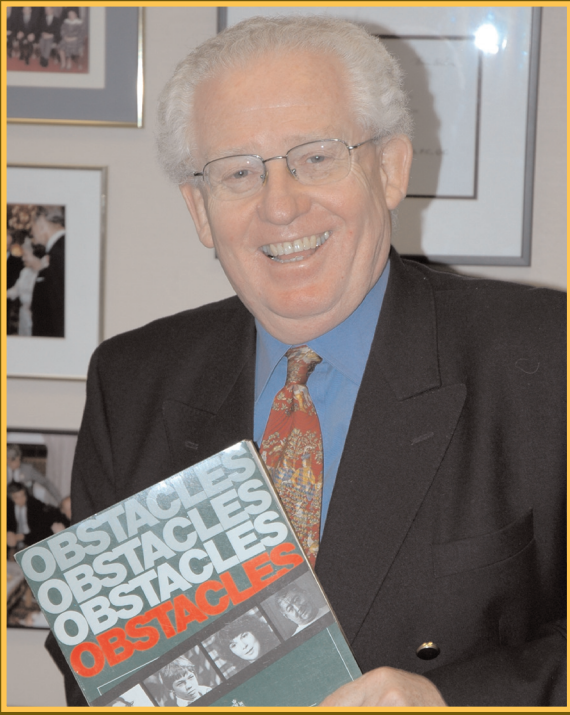
Parliament's Pioneers
The Obstacles
25 Years Ago
Where Are We
Today?

New Hit Video
Engages Citizen
Democracy for Disability
Legislation

Andria Spindel, President and CEO, and Warren himself in March of Dimes' new "Vote Video". Andria undertook the initiative to produce a short web-based video to explain why accessibility is important and how Canadians can participate in advancing the dialogue on national disability legislation. The "Vote Video" and accompanying email blasts that have been coordinated by Andria have generated nearly 35,000 hits to the website since posting it online .



Andria Spindel & Warren at the Video Launch



Senator David P. Smith reflecting on *Obstacles*

Our Vision

Andria Spindel, President & CEO

The opportunity to celebrate 25 years since the national study on the disabled resulting in *Obstacles* provides a tremendous opportunity to celebrate Canadian developments in social policy, environmental change, independence and integration for persons with disabilities. The report was historic, a landmark multi-party federal study that served as both a charter on the rights of people with disabilities and in part a road map on how to get there.

The champions of *Obstacles* and the eventual removal of real life obstacles, were the authors of this study. They should be proud of the groundwork they laid

25 years ago and the commitment that successive governments have made to improving Canadian society for all of its citizens.

March of Dimes has been a partner in the change throughout the 25 years, bringing services across Ontario for over 55 years and across Canada since 2001 to tens of thousands of Canadians with disabilities and their families and caregivers.

Our vision of a Canadian society inclusive of people with disabilities extends to finding leadership in the nexus between aging and disability in response to changing demographics.

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Warren's World

"I feel that we've accomplished a great goal, which is to raise awareness about accessibility and hopefully to get politicians to support a disability act."

By Kristen Calis

Freezing rain, cloudy skies, a growling stomach and long hours are enough to dampen almost anyone's day.

But Warren Rupnarain is not one of these people.

Bad weather, cerebral palsy and a wheelchair did not stop this young activist from getting his message across.

The 23-year-old Ryerson University student intern at the March of Dimes (The Dimes) had his own vision during the 2006 federal election, a campaign developed by his government relations supervisors.

The mission: to spontaneously visit all 66 Conservative, NDP and Liberal campaign offices in Toronto to see who could accommodate him and who would support a disabilities act. He would rate them with a "thumbs up" or a "thumbs down".

The team travelled to all 22 ridings in 12 days

with a Centennial College camera crew and a photographer from 4NPC.com, a local graphic design

company. With Rupnarain interviewing each candidate or campaign manager, the day's events and daily blog updates on www.warrensworld.ca earned a reported



250,000 hits. Rupnarain's optimism, guided by the Warren's World crew from The Dimes and 4NPC, was a key ingredient.

"I think that it is absolutely essential to always have a positive attitude because if you have a negative attitude, it's...counterproductive," Rupnarain said.

The director of the Ryerson University Student Access Centre says Rupnarain's positive outlook on life keeps the office in high spirits.

"We've seen Warren develop for four years," Suzanne Hutchison said. "He's a beam of positive energy. We look to the marks he will

make on this world." The 12-day campaign caught the attention of media throughout Canada and the United States. New to advocacy, with no television or radio experience, Rupnarain says his exposure on nation-wide television was the least of his worries.

I'm not nervous because I know that in order to deliver my message effectively, I have to do it with confidence," Rupnarain said. "And I have that, so it's not a problem."

What really matters to the young activist is that the message of equality gets out.

"I don't want people to remember me. I want them to remember the purpose," he said.

The team found that 76 percent of campaign offices were accessible. Although no offices in East York made Rupnarain's Top Five list, the team had positive experiences with the MPs they were able to meet.

Maria Minna, Liberal candidate and re-elected MP in Beaches-East York, scrambled for a ramp and enabled Rupnarain's entrance. Impressed with his effort, Minna invited him to take part in the upcoming annual Beaches Easter Parade.

"The disability act is important because every human being has the right to access what they wish to access," Minna said. "I'll put in a private member's bill if the government doesn't do it first."

The team also met NDP leader and re-elected Toronto-Danforth MP Jack Layton during his stop at Centennial College's East York campus. Having visited his office earlier that day, Rupnarain awarded Layton with his seal of approval.

"It is an issue that's very close to my heart and that's very important to us," Layton said. "We're hoping to bring in a national disabilities act." After two weeks of long days, late nights, good experiences and some negative ones, Rupnarain and his crew called the mission a success.

"I feel that we've accomplished a great goal, which is to raise awareness about accessibility and hopefully to get politicians to support a disability act," Rupnarain said.

From his experience, Rupnarain learned that in order to make change, one must take action.

"Talk is cheap," he said. The young activist hopes that his endeavour will spark change and will not be forgotten.

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Celebrating Parliament's Disability Pioneers

**OBSTACLES
OBSTACLES
OBSTACLES
OBSTACLES**



REPORT OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE
DISABLED AND THE HANDICAPPED

DAVD SMITH
CHAIRMAN

February 1981

The year was 1981. Despite only a twenty-five year gap between now and then, it was a vastly different time and Canada was a vastly different place.

Our Constitution (then called the British North America Act, 1867) still resided in the United Kingdom, and Canada did not yet have a Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It would take another year before events would change on both fronts.

But make no mistake: action and advocacy were moving vigorously to promote positive change across the nation.

Declared by the United

Nations as the International Year of Disabled Persons, 1981 also saw the release of a ground-breaking report by a forward-looking all-party group of Parliamentarians.

The Report of the Special Committee on the Disabled and the Handicapped, known as *Obstacles*, identified the key obstacles faced by disabled persons in Canada and outlined practical action to help overcome these obstacles.

The first of its kind in Canada, the Special Committee was chaired by then-MP for Don Valley East, David Smith (now a Member of the Senate of Canada), and

included several distinguished Parliamentarians: the late Walter Dinsdale (PC, Brandon), Thérèse Killens (Lib, Saint-Michel), Bruce Halliday (PC, Oxford), Peter Lang (Lib, Kitchener), Neil Young (NDP, Beaches) and J. Raymond Chénier (Lib, Timmins-Chapleau).

A true testament to the fundamental value of public policy dialogue and the work of all Parliamentarians, *Obstacles* helped paved the way for many innovations in federal disability programs and services.

It is because of the groundbreaking work enshrined in *Obstacles* twenty-five years ago that we have initiatives today like Warren's World.

Let's all look to *Obstacles* as a model of how Parliament can work, to promote inclusion, to advance the debate on Accessibility, and get all Members and Senators from all parties to continue to work collaboratively for all Canadians.

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To the Warren's World Team of the March of Dimes Congratulations!



Bob Burrows and Warren

The incredible success that the Warren's World initiative has become is a statement to the strength and courage of Warren and all of those who are disabled. As a parent of two disabled children I have fought back tears as I intently watched and listened to Warren since the beginning of his Warren's World journey. He reminds me so much of my two boys who also have Cerebral Palsy - the fight, the passion, the desire to be an equal, and so obviously the gentle soul.

Accessibility is an issue so important to all people in our society.

It affects all of us whether we acknowledge it, directly or indirectly. Those of us who have had the privilege of

having people with disabilities in our lives understand the need to make these important changes. Those who have not, must be educated so they can overcome the barriers and ignorance that discrimination has built.

Let's make Warren's Act the first step, for those who cannot, in making accessibility a right for all Canadian's with disabilities.

Once again, congratulations on the success of Warren's World. I ask that you forward this email on to our new Prime Minister in hopes that in these new and changing times that this new voice for equality for those with disabilities will be heard loudly and proudly.

Best Regards

Bob Burrows
Richmond Hill,
Ontario

E-advocacy = E-democracy: Welcome back to the 1990s

By Neil Prime-Coote,
RGD
4NPC.com

It gives people a reason to return, find out what's new, and, most importantly, a way to participate and express themselves.

It's called e-advocacy. And where it's used effectively, it has the effect of building online communities, sometimes very powerful ones.

Online advocacy is a natural extension of the very essence of the Internet. The measures employed take many forms, ranging from opinion polls and blogs, to bulletin boards, online groups and vote mechanisms. And where these features are available, web traffic demonstrates that visitors to a site will use them.

"The behaviour of the traffic generated by incorporating a vote mechanism on Warren's World suddenly became very interesting," says Steven Christianson, Government Relations official at the March of Dimes. "The incoming votes are frequent, but it's fascinating to see several dozen votes enter the system in four or five minutes, and all coming from the same network (whether it's a university or company). That tells us that the old-fashioned word-of-mouth promotional method is working in tandem with our online advocacy efforts, and

all of it has to be used cohesively," explains Christianson.

But while the tools have been available for some time now, e-advocacy is really only beginning to see the light of day.

Most organizations still focus on engag-



Neil Prime-Coote and Warren

ing these mechanisms to generate high-traffic hits to their websites in a piecemeal way. This is all too often to the detriment of cultivating real community and participation at the site. It's much more than merely about how many people enter your doors. The real measure of success in using E-advocacy is determining whether or not visitors return, how often, and the degree to which they participate (both online and offline among themselves, ie. word-of-mouth)—all of which should ultimately feed back into improving your organization's product, service or message.

When 4NPC.com constructed the online world for the March of Dimes' 2006

election advocacy initiative (www.warrensworld.ca), several unique features were integrated to provide as much possible information to the public and promote the message. Digital video fed into the blogs, which directed users to the podcasts, working back to

sponsors' links or updates, and into the voting mechanism (which sent an email "vote" to the Prime Minister's public email address).

Perhaps most interesting is that what originally drew people to the Internet is back on the front-burner with a voraciousness that hasn't been experienced since the late 1990s. Make no mistake: blogs and podcasts are big-ticket items. People create them, and many, many people view them. In big numbers. For example, while online ad agencies have been narrowing the market, with fewer agencies, higher costs and reduced return for the advertising organization, blogs have opened a whole new perspective on promoting a message.

The traffic generated on www.warrensworld.ca during its first phase, over about a 25-day period, totaled nearly 250,000, a respectable number by any measure. However, the hits don't tell the whole story. It's the quality that one should be monitoring.

The blog feature on Warren's World received the lion's share of page views and the longest visits. Visitors scoured these pages, which represented the journalistic entries of the Warren's World experience. Other components of the site were heavily visited and viewed. But the advent of the blog reminds us of the need to be constantly abreast in the design of our online products and services.

Blogs are opening alternative forms of advertising as well. Bloggers are beginning to offer a form of contextual advertising within their blogs. Cross promotion was employed by 4NPC.com in constructing the Warren's World blogs, linking special events or national media features directly into the blogs themselves.

Questions that you should be asking yourself should no longer focus on how to build a beautiful website. How long do people view each page? Do visitors download and read important

information? Where do the hits come from? Are you incorporating new opportunities and technology to your fullest? Are you presenting to people or engaging them?

In the case of www.warrensworld.ca several thousand people were measured downloading *The Advocate* (a March of Dimes online advocacy magazine) or reading policy information about disability issues. Those numbers would have once translated into hard printing, copying and mailing costs for the organization. And when one takes a look at where hits are coming from – in this case, several thousand from university and college networks – there's a high chance that the organization's efforts are engaging the youth demographic, a group many consider a challenge to engage in the democratic system.

The lessons learned? Always remember that the Internet is about looking around the corner, sometimes at the upstarts. This is the Internet. The Internet is both a culmination and extension of all other communications, branding, information and promotional efforts. If all parts of the symphony are played creatively and cohesively, and you're able to think outside the box, there are no limits to the reach and impact of e-advocacy.

Neil Prime-Coote, RGD is the Owner and President of 4NPC.com, Canada's premier studio factory producing integrated multimedia information and promotional systems.

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