

Inclusion is a Choice

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by **Gina Catenazzo, Senior Instructional Designer in the Teaching & Learning Centre**

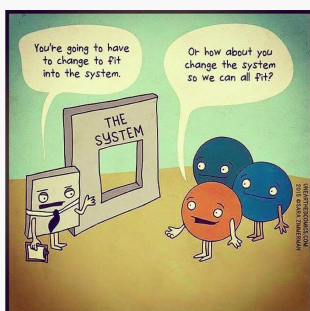
As someone who is passionate about and an advocate of accessibility and inclusion, I have had the privilege and opportunity to attend several conferences over the years dedicated to these topics. Two of these conferences that I have attended include [axe-con by Deque](#) and the [University of Guelph Accessibility Conference](#). I always leave these conferences knowing more than before attending, feeling reflective about how I can contribute to accessibility and inclusion, and inspired to implement new ideas and share information.

What follows are some “nuggets” from conference presenters mixed with some of my own elaborations about disability, accessibility, and inclusion.

“We disable people by creating inaccessible environments.”

– Jamie Knight, Manager, Digital Accessibility at BBC (2022)

There are two types of models of disability: the medical model of disability and the social model of disability. The medical model says “...people are disabled by their impairments or differences” (Disability Nottinghamshire, n.d.). The social model says “...disability is caused by the way society is organized”. Therefore, people are not the problem that needs ‘fixing’; rather, the systems, situations, interactions, and content we create are disabling and need changing.



Unearthed Comics by Sara Zimmerman

Cartoon Description – Disabling Systems

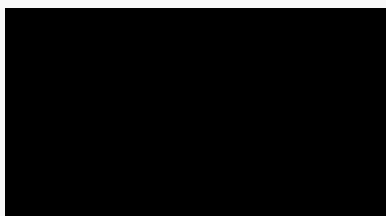
The cartoon shows four characters. One character is a square wearing a tie. The other three characters are circles. Beside the square character is a bigger square with a square hole in the middle. This bigger square says “The System” on the top. The square character says to the circles, “You’re going to have to change to fit into the system.” One of the circles then says, “Or how about you change the system so we can all fit?”

End Description.

“Disability is rarely the problem. The problem is often society creating arbitrary barriers. And we all need to work together to remove those barriers.”

– Haben Girma (CNBC Make It, 2020)

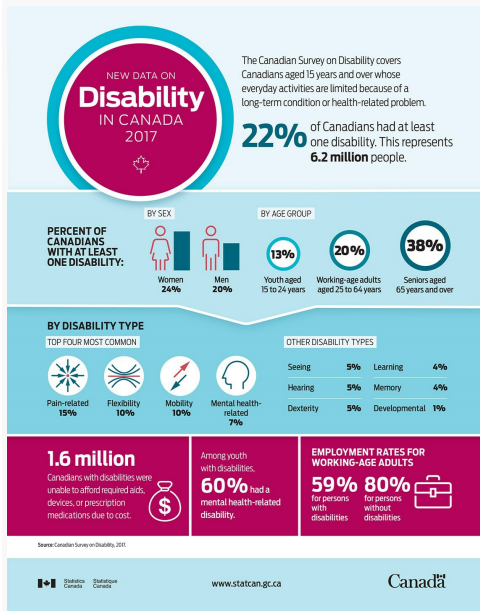
The video that follows is about Haben Girma, the first deaf-blind person to graduate from Harvard Law School, and someone who does not let her disability stop her from experiences that are traditionally only easily accessible to sighted people. She is a disability advocate and identifies as black, a woman, and a child of refugee parents from Eritrea.



"25% of students declare as having a disability while only 6-9% seek accommodation. Why is that?"

– Indira Naidoo-Harris, former Minister of Education of Ontario, University of Guelph Associate Vice-President of Diversity and Human Rights (2023)

Bears repeating; why is that? Fear of ...judgement? ...discrimination? ...negative perception? Arbitrary barriers to getting help? Disabling systems? In fact, in their 2017 survey, Statistics Canada identified that "22% of Canadians had at least one disability. This represents **6.2 million** people" (2018).



Infographic Description – New Data on Disability in Canada 2017

Disability is not the exception, so why do we continue to treat it as such? Why do we continue to choose aesthetics, convenience, and/or tradition over accessibility and inclusion?

Just some things to think about.

If you are interested in knowing more about creating accessible content, sign up for a future offering of my two-week asynchronous course on [Foundations of Creating Accessible Content](#). Also, if you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact the [Teaching & Learning Centre](#).

References

CNBC Make It. (2020, January 4). *How Haben Girma Became Harvard Law School's First Deafblind Grad* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/5xOL3jq2J8E>

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Knight, J. (2022). *BBC Accessibility Definitions & Principles – Revisiting the lenses we use and why we use them*. [Conference Presentation].

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Statistics Canada. (November 28, 2018). *New Data on Disability in Canada 2017*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2018035-eng.htm>

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