

# ScreenAccessON: The Employment of People with Disabilities in Ontario's Screen- based Industries

Final Report

September 2016

Presented to:



Presented by:



## Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1.1 Objectives for this report</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1.2 Approach and methodology</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>1.2.1 A note on survey representativeness</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>1.3 People with Disabilities in Ontario</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>1.4 About Lights, Camera, Access!</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>2. People with Disabilities Working in Ontario’s Screen-based Industries</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>2.1 Demographic snapshot</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>2.2 Work activity and role</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>2.3 Compensation</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>2.4 Summary of results</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>3. Identified Issues and Challenges</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>3.1 Breaking in and staying in the screen-based industries</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>3.2 Attitudes, assumptions and awareness</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>3.3 Barriers to developing networks</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>3.4 Missed opportunities for physical/architectural and technological accommodations</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>4. Opportunities for Change</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>4.1 Enable employers to “get organized”</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>4.2 Explore incentives to motivate screen-industry companies to participate in accessibility training</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>4.3 Encourage network development opportunities for people with disabilities</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>4.4 Support more diverse storytellers and encourage positive portrayal</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>4.5 Learn from younger generations</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>5. Conclusions</b>	<b>41</b>

**Table of Figures**

Figure 1: Gender .....	15
Figure 2 Age distribution .....	16
Figure 3: Place of residence .....	16
Figure 4 Highest education level completed .....	17
Figure 5 Nature of disability .....	18
Figure 6 Share of respondents who require an assistive device to complete job task .....	19
Figure 7 Share of respondents who have experienced discrimination in the workplace.....	20
Figure 8 Primary screen-based industry .....	21
Figure 9 Film and TV production job roles .....	21
Figure 10 Nature of work .....	22
Figure 11 Years of experience in the screen-based industries.....	23
Figure 12 Satisfaction with career progression .....	24
Figure 13 Satisfaction with job security .....	24
Figure 14 Annual pre-tax income.....	25
Figure 15 Ontario Disability Support Program recipients.....	26
Figure 16 Barriers to success .....	28
Figure 17 Share of respondents whose employers offer formal support to people with disabilities.....	33
Figure 18 Share of respondents who have a mentor in the industry .....	34



**Generously Supported by:**



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## Executive Summary

### Introduction and Context

Ontario's screen-based industries workforce - that is to say film and television production, broadcast and digital media – contributes significant economic, cultural and social impacts to the Province and helped Ontario become recognized as a global and innovative screen-industries leader. For all that we know about the contributions of this sector, however, our knowledge thins when it comes to the employment of people with disabilities in the screen-based industries workforce. This gap is significant when one considers that Ontario is home to almost two million people with disabilities.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) aims to improve accessibility in areas that impact the daily lives of people with disabilities.<sup>1</sup> AODA consists of five standards that come into effect between 2008 and 2025: customer service, information and communication, employment, transportation and the design of public space. These standards regulate the activities of both public and private sector organizations of all sizes – **including the screen based industries**. As the deadline for an accessible Ontario by 2025 draws nearer, organizations are beginning to assess their level of compliance.

In this context, Lights, Camera, Access! (LCA!) engaged Nordicity to develop a profile of the employment of people with disabilities in Ontario's screen-based industries. LCA! provides services to advance the presence and participation of persons with disabilities in the entertainment, arts and digital media industries. LCA!'s vision is to encourage employment in the entertainment industry of persons with disabilities while engaging decision makers in the sector to use their media to accelerate public awareness and acceptance of persons with disabilities generally and in the development, production and distribution of their product specifically.

### Study Objectives, Approach and Methodology

This study aims to:

1. **Compile a current portrait of employment** of persons with disabilities in the Ontario film and television production, broadcast and digital media industries;
2. **Identify challenges and opportunities** with regard to employment - from the perspective of people with disabilities; and,
3. **Help frame a discussion** around inclusive hiring and inform both employers and individuals in the screen-based industries.

Nordicity, in consultation with LCA!, employed a range of methods in order to collect and analyze data and deliver on the above stated objectives including a **literature scan**, an **online survey** aimed at people with disabilities working in the screen-based industries, a **stakeholder roundtable** and **key stakeholder interviews**. In some instances, findings and observations have been kept necessarily broad because the landscape for people with disabilities in the screen-based industries is complex. Within the "community" of people with disabilities, needs and challenges can exist in direct

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<sup>1</sup> Ontario e-Laws <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/05a11>

opposition to one another. However, alongside that complexity, we found many instances of shared needs and priorities. While this overview is not comprehensive, it should provide a useful discussion starter for screen-based industries stakeholders, including people with disabilities, employers, government representatives, funders, post-secondary institutions and industry associations.

### **Survey Results: At a Glance**

An accessible online survey gave people with disabilities working in the screen-based industries across Ontario an opportunity to share information about their **career trajectories** and identify **challenges** and **opportunities** in the workplace and in society more broadly. Although, the limited survey sample size (between 42 and 60 respondents) prevents extrapolation to the population of people with disabilities in Ontario overall, the results nonetheless provide insight into the **lived experiences** of a group of individuals active in film, television, broadcasting and digital media.

- The age distribution of the results suggests that respondents are younger than the general population of people with disabilities in Canada. Since the survey targeted people who were currently working in film, television, broadcasting and digital media, this demographic difference is not surprising. Just under half of respondents (**47%**) reported working in film and television production, **36%** in digital media and **17%** worked in broadcasting;
- When asked to indicate the nature of their disability, about half (**51%**) of respondents selected a **mobility impairment**. The next most common category of disability chosen was **mental health condition** by **25%** of respondents. Notably, some 22 respondents, or **36%** of the sample, selected more than one category of disability. These figures are consistent with the Canadian Disability Survey, which suggests that **66%** of Canadians who have a mobility impairment also have another disability;<sup>2</sup>
- Nearly half (**43%**) of survey respondents reported that they require an assistive device to work in the screen-based industries. For comparison, The Canadian Survey on Disability found that more than **80%** of persons with disabilities use at least one assistive device;<sup>3</sup>
- Troublingly, some **62%** of survey respondents reported having experienced discrimination in the workplace – a topic explored in more detail throughout this report;
- The survey also suggests that the screen-based industries are characterized by unstable, short-term employment for people with disabilities. The majority (**74%**) of survey respondents reported being employed in temporary freelance or contract work;
- Lack of job security appears to have an impact on career progression. Only **39%** of survey respondents were satisfied with their professional advancement despite an average of **15 years** of work experience. Taken together these results could suggest that although people

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<sup>2</sup>Statistics Canada, “A profile of persons with disabilities among Canadians aged 15 or older.” <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2015001-eng.htm#a2>

<sup>3</sup>Statistics Canada, “A profile of persons with disabilities among Canadians aged 15 or older.” <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2015001-eng.htm>

with disabilities are putting in *time* towards careers in the screen-based industries they are not experiencing corresponding levels professional advancement;

- Finally, at least at a preliminary level, the survey suggests that persons with disabilities earn less than others working in the screen based industries. The average annual income of survey respondents was **\$37,100** for 2015. Of that total figure, on average, about **63%** was a result of employment in the screen-based industries.
- The average annual income of survey respondents was **below** the average annual income of people with disabilities in Ontario (**\$39,300**) and below the average annual income of the population overall (**\$44,100**);<sup>4</sup>
- In contrast, according to the Canadian Media Producers Association’s annual profile, the average annual FTE salary in the Canadian film and television production industry was **\$60,552** in 2015, above both the average income of people with disabilities and of the general population of Ontario.<sup>5</sup>

## Identified Issues and Challenges

Online survey results were bolstered with 1:1 interviews and a roundtable workshop - consultations which explored the barriers that exist for people with disabilities in the screen-based industries. In combination, these multiple lines of research help to overcome gaps in data caused by low survey participation. The challenges identified during the course of interviews, survey responses and in the roundtable can be categorized into four main themes. These themes are:

- **Breaking in and staying in the screen-based industries:** The challenge or hurdle of “breaking in” will be familiar to the vast majority of people seeking work in the screen-based industries, which can often feel like an exclusive club or closed inner circle. The responses from many people with disabilities, however, describe both breaking in and sustaining a career as truly insurmountable. One respondent explained, “the greatest challenge comes from the fact that the opportunities to work on set are so few and far between (sometimes several years) that you tend to feel as though you are still an apprentice;”
- **Attitudes, assumptions and awareness:** Attitudinal barriers to accessibility, that is to say the “behaviours, perceptions, and assumptions” that discriminate against persons with disabilities extend far beyond the screen-based industries environment and into day-to-day life. That being said, the main illustrations of attitudinal barriers resonated profoundly in our consultations with people with disabilities in the screen-based industries – including:
  - *Assuming a person with a disability is inferior:* Many interviewees described a feeling of a “lack of trust” on the part of their colleagues that they could execute a job well;
  - *Assuming that someone with a speech impairment or hearing difficulties cannot understand you:* One respondent described a fear on the part of producers, directors

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<sup>4</sup> The Canada-Ontario Labour Market Agreement 2011-12 Action Plan  
[http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/training/labmark/LMA\\_Plan2011\\_12.html](http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/training/labmark/LMA_Plan2011_12.html)

<sup>5</sup> *Profile 2015: Economic Report on the Screen-based Media Production Industry in Canada*

and other industry stakeholders when it came to working with a deaf person on set as “they do not know what to do;”

- *Forming ideas about a person because of stereotypes or a lack of knowledge:* People with disabilities reported having to act as “ambassadors” and “constantly prove themselves” in professional situations because most people have so little experience working with a person with a disability;
- *Making a person feel as though you are doing them a “special favour” by making accommodations:* One respondent explained that he has been told that people with disabilities are considered a “liability” in the entertainment industries.
- **Barriers to developing networks:** Networking is well-recognized as a vital tool for career advancement, in all industries, but in particular the project-based and connection-driven screen-based industries. Consultations showed that people with disabilities often feel isolated and lacking a network – be it for hiring, support, mentorship or opportunities to collaborate with one another. Networking events in the screen-based industries, while theoretically open to anyone, were described as often indirectly (or directly) inaccessible, for example, because of the time of day, personal well-being, challenges with transport and of course, the accessibility of a given venue.
- **Missed opportunities for physical/architectural and technological accommodations:** Among survey respondents, physical working environments tied for third highest barrier to success, though generally progress seemed to be observed. One respondent reflected on how what appear to be minor inconveniences to others can add up to “big hurdles” for persons with disabilities, “For instance, an event will say they cater to disabled individuals by providing ramps or accessible venues. But you’re still expected to wait in line-ups; or hurry to get to ‘meet and greets’ once there; or be part of an audience where you can’t see who’s speaking because you weren’t able to get a good seat at the front; the list goes on. People don’t want us to feel like we’re an inconvenience. But we still know we are. We need more help.”

## Opportunities for Change

Formulating recommendations was outside the scope of this study, however, opportunities for change emerged through our consultations both directly with people with disabilities working in the screen-based industries and other stakeholders. Two premises which underpin these opportunities is that:

1. The **strongest opportunities for change** must be **identified by people with disabilities, or at least in direct and authentic consultation** with them; and,
2. Little change will happen without far **greater industry support and awareness** regarding the challenges and potential for people with disabilities and a **willingness to invest in change** on the part of screen-based organizations and employers.

These opportunities include:

- **Enable employers to “get organized”:** From dispelling fears around the costs and investing in inclusive hiring (or promoting the benefits), developing accessibility and AODA



compliance material that is tailored to the needs screen-based industry employers, to learning from successes in other sectors, supporting the ability of screen-industry employers to build awareness and take action was highlighted in numerous consultations;

- **Explore incentives to motivate screen-industry companies to participate in accessibility training:** Building on the point above, there was a recognition that simply making such training resources available may not be adequate. Survey respondents and interviewees alike contemplated a future where screen-industry leaders were recognized and rewarded for a) complying with AODA regulations and b) demonstrating or sharing evidence of their efforts to hire inclusively;
- **Encourage network development opportunities for people with disabilities:** Meaningful networking and engagement opportunities and access to mentors and coaches could have a major impact on the experience of people with disabilities working in the screen-based industries. The priority would be to address the issues of accessibility within already established networking events, conferences and meet-ups. The possibility of developing a “hub” for people with disabilities in the screen-based industries – perhaps led by, or in partnership with LCA! – was also raised as an opportunity;
- **Support more diverse storytellers and encourage authentic positive portrayal:** The importance of telling diverse, rich and authentic stories about and by people with disabilities was raised throughout consultations. For some, the focus should be on enabling more people with disabilities to develop as writers, steering their own careers and storytelling. Many recognized the opportunities embedded in new screen-based technologies, often accessible and relatively affordable, in order to help a wider world of storytellers take to the screen;
- **Learn from younger generations:** Where the screen-based industries are described as having a closed inner-circle, in many of our consultations, participants pointed to the openness and awareness of younger generations. Respondents believed that social media has served to increase the visibility of disability issues and as a result, “millennials are huge allies, more open minded and digitally connected.”

## Conclusions

Gathering and interpreting data with regard to people with disabilities in the screen-based industries is complex. The issues facing people with disabilities are multi-faceted, from the decision to self-identify to having to ask for accommodations in a sometimes hostile work environment. The basic premise, however, is that a more diverse workforce and more diversity in storytelling and production is a win-win for Ontario’s screen-based industries. One roundtable attendee mentioned anecdotally that the National Film Board’s experience of funding visible minority artists suggested that stories from outside the mainstream, win popular appreciation and critical acclaim – successes that could potentially be extended to people with disabilities.

At the moment the landscape for people with disabilities in the screen-based workforce is stark. They are earning less and working less than their able-bodied or neuro-typical peers. The industry is difficult for them to access and, once in, careers are difficult to develop and sustain. Discrimination has taken place and continues to occur.



Yet amid this reality, there are signs of positive change. Physical and architectural accommodations are becoming more widespread thanks in part to AODA. The Federal Government appointed a Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, while as of July 2016, Ontario also has a Minister Responsible for Accessibility. Alongside the openness of younger generations and the wave of new technologies with built-in accessibility, there is a sense of growing momentum and potential to seize. One goal for this report is that it can act as a starting point for change by providing a focal point for screen-based industries stakeholders. Next steps will include a communications strategy highlighting the reports key issues to executives within the screen-based industries.

## 1. Introduction

Ontario's screen-based industries - that is to say **film** and **television production, broadcast** and **digital media** – contribute significant economic, cultural and social impacts to the Province. For a sense of magnitude consider that:

- The film and television production sector alone directly generated more than **22,000** full-time-equivalent jobs (FTEs) in Ontario in 2014.<sup>6</sup>;
- In-house production at Ontario's broadcasters is estimated to generate more than **7,300 FTEs** in 2014; and,<sup>7</sup>
- In 2012, Ontario's video game industry is estimated to have generated approximately **1,850 FTEs**.<sup>8</sup>

This workforce has helped Ontario become known as an award-winning, innovative and global-leading province for the screen-based industries.

The contributions of this sector are well-recognized and as a result the health and strength of its workforce (i.e., storytellers, creators, producers, technical talent etc.) are regularly analyzed and tracked. From skills and training needs to addressing challenges with regard to job stability, there is a strong foundation for assessing and understanding the screen-based industries workforce in Ontario as a whole.

This knowledge thins, however, when it comes to an understanding and awareness of the challenges and opportunities for people with disabilities in the screen-based industries workforce. This gap is significant when one considers that Ontario is home to almost two million people with disabilities. In other words, about one in seven Ontarians identifies as living with a disability.<sup>9</sup> In this context, Lights, Camera, Access! (LCA!) engaged Nordicity to develop a profile of people with disabilities in the screen-based industries in Ontario.

### 1.1 Objectives for this report

This study aims to:

1. **Compile a current portrait of employment** of persons with disabilities in the Ontario film and television production, broadcast and digital media industries;
2. **Identify challenges and opportunities** with regard to employment - from the perspective of people with disabilities; and,

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<sup>6</sup> *Profile 2015: Economic Report on the Screen-based Media Production Industry in Canada*

<sup>7</sup> Provincial employment estimate based on Ontario's level of broadcaster in-house production as reported in *Profile 2015: Economic Report on the Screen-based Media Production Industry in Canada*

<sup>8</sup> Entertainment Software Association of Canada, Canada's Videogame Industry in 2013

<sup>9</sup> The Canada-Ontario Labour Market Agreement 2011-12 Action Plan

[http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/training/labmark/LMA\\_Plan2011\\_12.html](http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/training/labmark/LMA_Plan2011_12.html)

3. **Help frame a discussion** around inclusive hiring and inform both employers and individuals in the screen-based industries.

Ultimately this study provides a current snapshot of the challenges and opportunities facing people with disabilities in the screen based industries in Ontario. By identifying opportunities for change, the report authors and funders hope it will be a catalyst for discussion, action and perhaps new partnerships and collaborations within the screen-based industries network in Ontario.

## 1.2 Approach and methodology

Nordicity, in consultation with LCA!, employed a range of methods in order to collect and analyze data and deliver on the above stated objectives including:

- **Literature Scan:** Nordicity reviewed publicly available sources (primary and secondary) to understand the current landscape of people with disabilities in the screen-based industries and the workforce overall. While some of the data presented is at the national level, this study is focused on Ontario. This scan contributed to the development of the survey and the roundtable discussion.
- **Online Survey:** Nordicity developed and deployed an accessible online survey aimed at people with disabilities working in the screen-based industries.<sup>10</sup> The survey was live for approximately eight weeks, launching in early May and closing in June 2016. Despite strong promotion and outreach on the part of LCA!, study funders, community and industry partners (with the hashtag ScreenAccessON) – survey participation was very low (see note at right regarding survey representativeness).
- **Roundtable:** Nordicity and LCA! invited **15** participants to a ScreenAccessON roundtable in May 2016. This event focused mainly on identifying and prioritizing the challenges and opportunities for change for people with disabilities working in the screen based industries.
- **Key Stakeholder Interviews:** Nordicity conducted **eight** Interviews with key stakeholders from the community of people with disabilities in the screen-based industries, as well as leaders in broadcasting, video games and screen-based training.

The barriers to success and opportunities for change described at the end of this study are drawn from all of these data sources.

In some instances, findings and observations have been kept necessarily broad. In other words, they may not and could not fully reflect the true breadth and diversity of all facets of living with a disability. For example, people with hidden disabilities have vastly different experiences from those who have physical disabilities. Some people live with more than one type disability. Within the “community” of people with disabilities, needs and challenges can exist in direct opposition to one another. The landscape for people with disabilities in the screen-based industries is complex. However, alongside that complexity, there were many instances of shared needs and priorities. While

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<sup>10</sup> Nordicity’s survey tool, FluidSurveys, rated the survey as “100% accessible” by its standards. In designing the survey, Nordicity avoided matrix-type questions which are not compatible with assistive technologies. Nordicity also offered survey completion by phone for any respondent not able to complete the questionnaire online.

this overview is not comprehensive, it should provide a useful discussion starter within the screen-based industries stakeholders, including people with disabilities themselves, employers, government, funders, post-secondary institutions and industry associations.

### **1.2.1 A note on survey representativeness**

The limited sample size of between **42 and 60 respondents** means that the survey results alone cannot be extrapolated as representative of all people with disabilities working in the screen-based industries. As a result, throughout the report, survey results are augmented and reinforced (or contrasted) with analysis from the roundtable and interviews. In some respects, the survey pool would need to be far, far larger in order to adequately reflect all types of disabilities.

The analytical focus also remains mainly on the screen-based industries as a whole, rather than developing industry-specific findings for film and television production, broadcasting or digital media.

### **1.3 People with Disabilities in Ontario**

Although almost 2 million people in Ontario live with disabilities, there are significant gaps in the economic participation of people with disabilities compared to the general population. As of 2009, **39%** of persons with disabilities in Ontario were unemployed or not in the labour force, compared to **14%** of people without disabilities.<sup>11</sup>

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) aims to improve accessibility in areas that impact the daily lives of people with disabilities.<sup>12</sup> AODA consists of five standards that come into effect between 2008 and 2025: customer service, information and communication, employment, transportation and the design of public space. These standards regulate the activities of both public and private sector organizations of all sizes – **including the screen based industries**. As the deadline for an accessible Ontario by 2025 draws nearer, organizations are beginning to assess their level of compliance.

Although AODA offers a comprehensive definition of disability, secondary research also highlights the ways in which language creates barriers and perpetuates a medical model of disability that does not account for the social context of inclusion. Although Deaf people are increasingly recognized as a distinct cultural and linguistic community, discussions about ‘person first’ and ‘ability first’ language continue to evolve alongside awareness of neurodiversity and understandings of the relationship between disability and aging.<sup>13</sup> In effect, the choice of whether to identify as a person with a disability or a disabled person remains an intensely personal decision.

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<sup>11</sup>The Canada-Ontario Labour Market Agreement 2011-12 Action Plan  
[http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/training/labmark/LMA\\_Plan2011\\_12.html](http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/training/labmark/LMA_Plan2011_12.html)

<sup>12</sup> Ontario e-Laws <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/05a11>

<sup>13</sup>Cara Lebowitz, “I am Disabled: On Identity-First Versus People-First Language.”  
<http://thebodyisnotanapology.com/magazine/i-am-disabled-on-identity-first-versus-people-first-language/>

For this reason, we asked survey respondents to self-identify using categories that both encompass the AODA’s definition of disability and reflect terms favored by persons with disabilities. The table below summarizes how the survey categories compared to the AODA’s definition of disability.

Nordicity Survey Categories	Definition of “Disability” in AODA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Blind or partially sighted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Blindness or visual impediment</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Deaf or hard of hearing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Deafness or hearing impediment</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Other communication impairment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Muteness or speech impediment</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mobility impairment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination; physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Developmental disability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability; learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mental health condition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mental disorder</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Long-term illness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Diabetes mellitus, epilepsy; injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received</li> </ul>

## 1.4 About Lights, Camera, Access!

LCA! provides services to advance the presence and participation of persons with disabilities in the entertainment, arts and digital media industries. LCA!’s vision is to encourage employment in the entertainment industry of persons with disabilities while engaging decision makers in the sector to use their media to accelerate public awareness and acceptance of persons with disabilities generally and in the development, production and distribution of their product specifically.

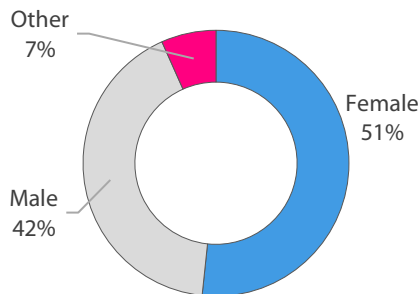
## 2. People with Disabilities Working in Ontario’s Screen-based Industries

An accessible online survey gave people with disabilities working in the screen-based industries across Ontario an opportunity to share information about their **career trajectories** and identify challenges and opportunities in the workplace and in society more broadly. Although, as noted earlier the survey sample size prevents extrapolation to the population of people with disabilities in Ontario overall, the results nonetheless provide insight into the **lived experiences** of a group of individuals active in film, television, broadcasting and digital media.

### 2.1 Demographic snapshot

This section presents some basic demographic data about our survey respondents. The chart below presents share of respondents by the gender with which they identify primarily.

**Figure 1: Gender**



n=60

Source: Nordicity ScreenAccessON Survey 2016

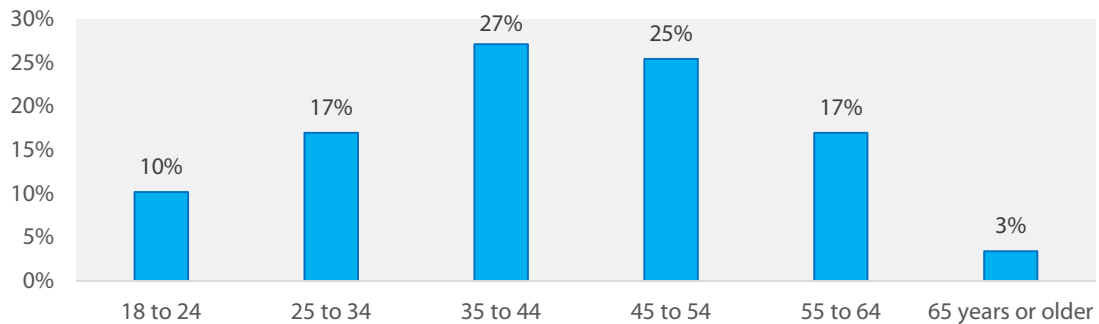
- A slightly greater proportion (**51%**) of our survey respondents identified as female as opposed to male (**42%**). Similarly, the 2012 Canadian Survey on Disability indicates that whereas 15% of women reported disabilities, only 13% of men do;<sup>14</sup>
- “Other” in this case may refer to those respondents who identified as “fluid” or “gender queer” or simply preferred not to specify.

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<sup>14</sup> Statistics Canada, “A profile of persons with disabilities among Canadians aged 15 or older.” <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2015001-eng.htm>

The chart below presents the age distribution of respondents.

**Figure 2 Age distribution**



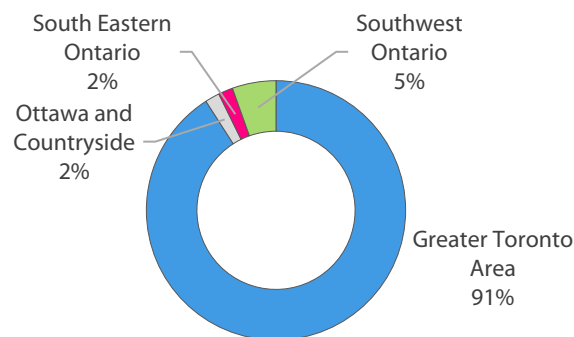
n=59

Source: Nordicity ScreenAccessON Survey 2016

- The majority (**52%**) of survey respondents are **35 to 54 years of age**;
- In contrast, research by Statistics Canada finds that the prevalence of disability increases with age such that whereas nationally 4% of people aged 15 to 24 reported disabilities, this figure rises to 43% for people aged 75 and older;<sup>15</sup>
- The **younger age profile** of respondent in this study of the screen-based industries compared to Statistics Canada data is consistent with the focus on people who are working rather than retired.

The chart below presents survey respondents by where in Ontario they reside.

**Figure 3: Place of residence**



n=55

Source: Nordicity ScreenAccessON Survey 2016

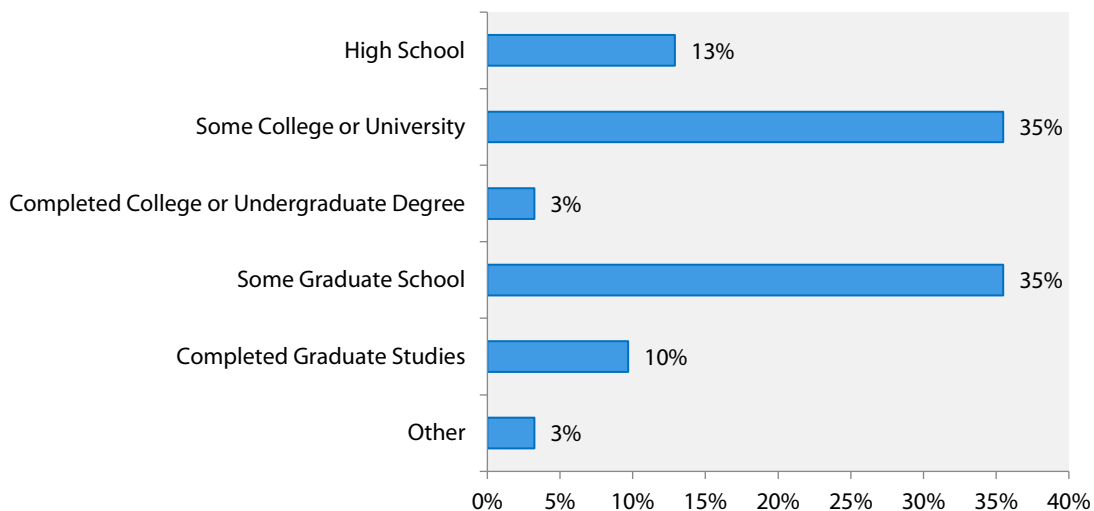
<sup>15</sup>Statistics Canada, "A profile of persons with disabilities among Canadians aged 15 or older." <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2015001-eng.htm>



- The vast majority (**91%**) of survey respondents reported residing in the **Greater Toronto Area (GTA)**. This high proportion is in keeping with our understanding of the GTA as a hub for employment in the screen-based industries and reflects the importance of this region to LCA's membership – a core component of the survey's distribution.

In terms of education, the survey asked respondents to identify the highest level of education they had completed.

**Figure 4 Highest education level completed**



n=59

Source: Nordicity ScreenAccessON Survey 2016

- Taken together, **48%** of survey respondents reported having at **least a college or undergraduate degree**. This figure is much higher than national averages for people with disabilities. Specifically, the Canadian Survey on Disability found that only **16%** of people with a disability have a university diploma, certificate or bachelor's degree;<sup>16</sup>
- These results suggest that survey respondents in the screen-industries are **slightly more educated** than the overall population of persons with disabilities. In Ontario, **18.7%** of persons with disabilities *do not* have a high school diploma.<sup>17</sup> However, just **13%** of people with disabilities who responded to this screen-industry survey listed high school as their

<sup>16</sup> Statistics Canada. "A profile of persons with disabilities among Canadians aged 15 or older." <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2015001-eng.htm>

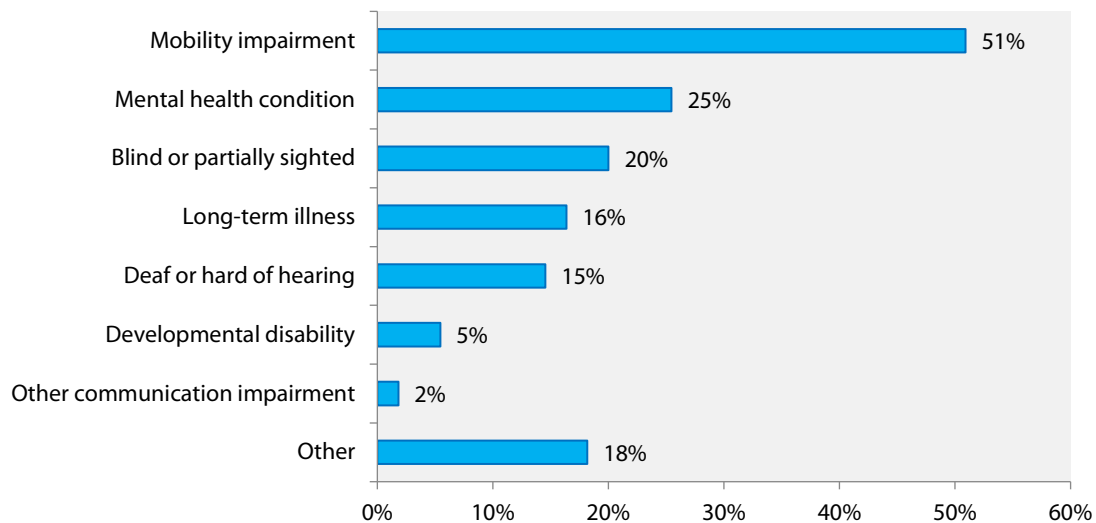
<sup>17</sup> The Canada-Ontario Labour Market Agreement 2011-12 Action Plan [http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/training/labmark/LMA\\_Plan2011\\_12.html](http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/training/labmark/LMA_Plan2011_12.html)

highest level of education achieved. For comparison, **12.5%** of the general population in Ontario do not have a high school diploma;<sup>18</sup>

- Despite positive indicators of educational achievement from this survey, it is likely that survey respondents' formal learning experiences were shaped by their disability. Statistics Canada indicates that **45%** of Canadians aged 25 to 64 with disabilities reported that their disability influenced their **choice of educational programs and careers**.<sup>19</sup>

As described in Section 1.3, the survey asked respondents to indicate the nature of their disability according to categories that corresponded to the AODA definition of disability but also reflected language used by people with disabilities. In identifying the nature of their disability, respondents were given the option of selecting **all categories that applied**. For this reason, the chart below does not tally to 100%.

**Figure 5 Nature of disability**



n=60

Source: Nordicity ScreenAccessON Survey 2016

- 22 respondents, or **36%** of the sample, selected more than one category of disability. These figures are consistent with the Canadian Disability Survey, which suggests that 66% of Canadians who have a mobility impairment also have another disability;<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup>The Canada-Ontario Labour Market Agreement 2011-12 Action Plan  
[http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/training/labmark/LMA\\_Plan2011\\_12.html](http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/training/labmark/LMA_Plan2011_12.html)

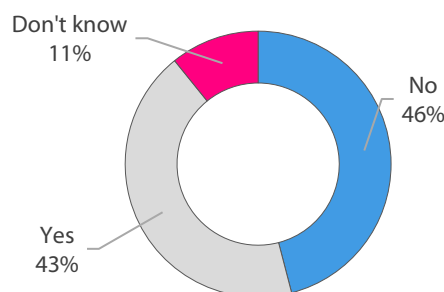
<sup>19</sup> Statistics Canada, "A profile of persons with disabilities among Canadians aged 15 or older."  
<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2015001-eng.htm#a3>

<sup>20</sup> Statistics Canada, "A profile of persons with disabilities among Canadians aged 15 or older."  
<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2015001-eng.htm#a2>

- Slightly more than half (**51%**) of respondents selected a **mobility impairment**. The next most common category of disability chosen is **mental health condition (25%)**. The prevalence of mental health conditions demonstrates that not all disabilities are visible, a challenge discussed further in Section 3;
- For “other,” responses included **ADHD, learning disabilities, and autism**.

As well as indicating the nature of their disability, respondents were asked to provide information about their experiences in the workplace. The chart below presents the share of respondents who require an **assistive device** to complete job tasks. Assistive devices are any specialized aids that help people with disabilities perform routine activities. In the context of the screen industries, assistive devices range from software for people who are blind or have low vision to adapted desks or seating for people who have limited mobility.

**Figure 6 Share of respondents who require an assistive device to complete job task**



n=39

Source: Nordicity ScreenAccessON Survey 2016

- **43%** of survey respondents reported that they require an assistive device to work in the screen-based industries;
- Some **11%** of respondents reported not knowing whether they required an assistive device to complete job-related tasks. These respondents may be indicating that they are not aware of assistive devices which would help them complete job tasks, or do not know whether their needs can be met by assistive devices;
- The Canadian Survey on Disability found that more than **80%** of persons with disabilities use at least one assistive device.<sup>21</sup> The difference between findings for this study and the Canadian Survey on Disability may reflect the **younger age profile** of survey respondents, as discussed in relation to Figure 2 above. The fact that fewer survey respondents required

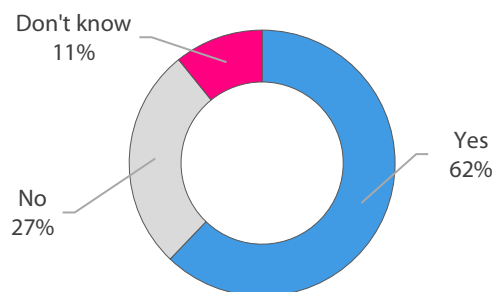
<sup>21</sup> Statistics Canada, “A profile of persons with disabilities among Canadians aged 15 or older.” <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2015001-eng.htm>

assistive devices than the population of people with disabilities overall reinforces the unique needs of people with disabilities who are of working age;

- Other, less tangible forms of accommodation also play an important role in increasing the participation of people with disabilities in the labour force. The Canadian Disability Survey found that **24%** of people with disabilities need a **modified schedule** or reduced work hours while **15%** required **modified duties**. However, as discussed in greater detail in Section 3, flexible working hours proved to be less of an issue among survey respondents working in the screen based industries.

Survey respondents also indicated whether they had experienced discrimination in the workplace as a result of a disability.

**Figure 7 Share of respondents who have experienced discrimination in the workplace**



n=39

Source: Nordicity ScreenAccessON Survey 2016

- Some **62%** of survey respondents reported having experienced discrimination in the workplace, although this question was not bound by a specific timeframe and could thus refer to experiences at any point in a person's career;
- Statistics Canada's analysis of persons with disabilities and employment reinforces the gravity of discrimination in the workplace, revealing that **12%** of Canadians with a disability reported having been **refused a job in the previous 5 years** as a result of their condition.<sup>22</sup>

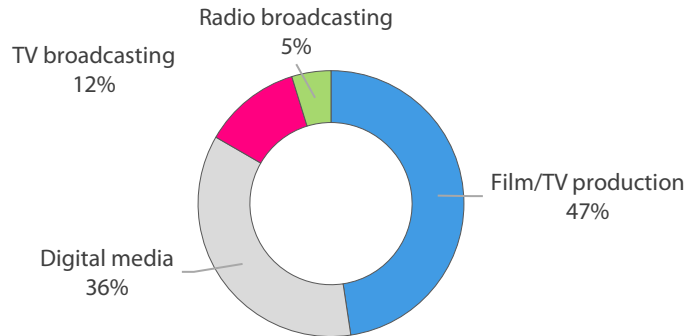
## 2.2 Work activity and role

This section provides an overview of survey respondents' involvement in the screen industries. The chart below shows which segment respondents primarily work in.

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<sup>22</sup> Martin Turcotte, "Persons with disabilities and employment." <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-006-x/2014001/article/14115-eng.htm#a4>

**Figure 8 Primary screen-based industry**



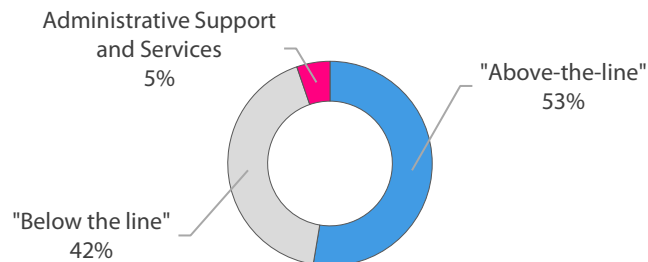
n=42

Source: Nordicity ScreenAccessON Survey 2016

- The chart above demonstrates a range of responses from **across the screen-based industries** with just under half of respondents (**47%**) working in film and television production;
- One may have expected that a greater proportion of people with disabilities would work in broadcasting because it is a **federally regulated industry**. Some **17%** of our survey respondents reported working in broadcasting;
- Approximately **29%** of our survey respondents reported working in a **secondary screen-based industry** in addition to their primary area of work. That almost a third of survey respondents work in two screen-based industries reinforces the precarious nature of freelance and contract work, an issue discussed in greater detail in Section 2.3.

The chart below presents the job descriptions of survey respondents working primarily in film and television production. Small sample sizes prevent graphic analyses of job descriptions in broadcasting and digital media however these segments are discussed in point form below.

**Figure 9 Film and TV production job roles**



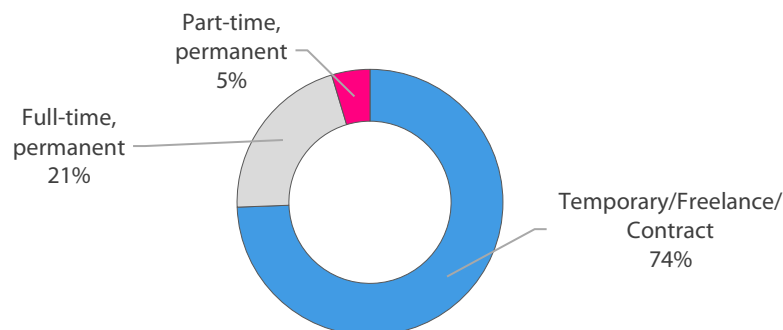
n=19

Source: Nordicity ScreenAccessON Survey 2016

- **Film and television production:** slightly more than half (**53%**) of survey respondents working worked in “**above the line**” positions, which may refer to directors, writers, producers, lead actors, composers or production designers. An additional **42%** of respondents worked in “**below the line**” positions, which could include set designers, camera operators, actors or editing assistants;
- **Film and television broadcasting:** even **split** between survey respondents working in administrative and support services such as HR, marketing and accounting, and on-screen or on-air talent. A minority worked in production, which may refer to producers, engineers, camera operators etc.;
- **Digital media:** survey respondents reported working on **diverse projects** ranging from interactive publishing projects and convergent digital media content to video games and non-game apps.

The survey also asked respondents about the nature of their employment, regardless of which segment of the screen-based industries they worked in. The chart below presents the share of respondents who work on a full-time, part-time and freelance or contract basis.

**Figure 10 Nature of work**



n=43

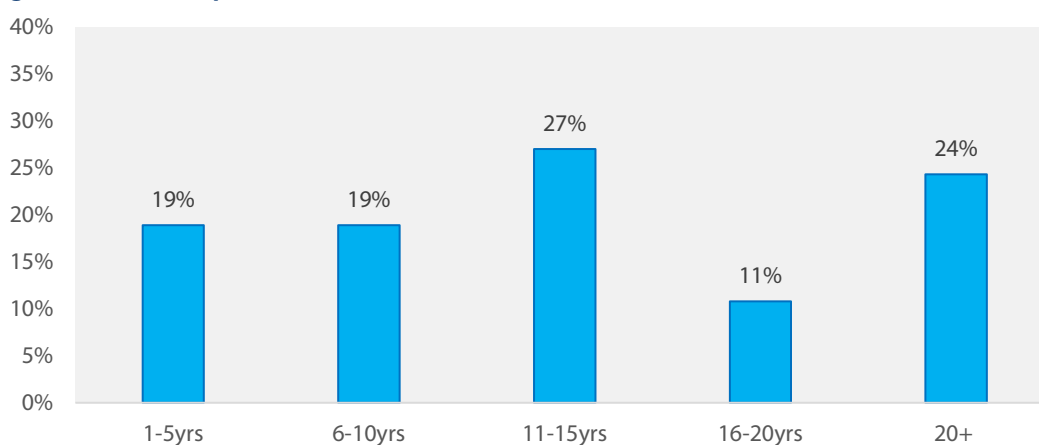
Source: Nordicity ScreenAccessON Survey 2016

- The majority of survey respondents (**74%**) were engaged in **temporary** freelance or contract work. This finding is in keeping with our understanding of the screen-based industries more broadly: apart from core positions at broadcasters and production companies, employment footprints tend to fluctuate – through the hiring of contract workers - from project to project;
- Slightly more than one quarter of survey respondents had **permanent positions**, either full-time (**21%**) or part-time (**5%**);
- On average, survey respondents reported working **14 weeks** in the screen-based industries in 2015. However, approximately **one third** of survey respondents reported **zero weeks** of work in the screen-based industries over the course of 2015;

- As far as contracts, survey respondents reported working on an average of **4 contracts** in 2015. Once again, however, a **full third** of respondents reported working on **zero contracts** during that time;

The chart below presents the years of experience survey respondents reported in the screen-based industries.

**Figure 11 Years of experience in the screen-based industries**



n=37

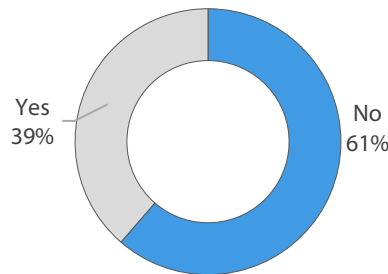
Source: Nordicity ScreenAccessON Survey 2016

- On average, survey respondents had **15 years** of work experience in the screen-based industries. The survey sample was **evenly split** between what one might classify anecdotally as “emerging talent” (1-10 years of experience) – **38%**, more established workers (11-20 years) – **38%**, with about a quarter of respondents reporting almost industry veteran status (20+ years);
- However, some respondents had not worked in the area for several years and noted the difficulty of moving beyond “apprentice-level”;
- The combination of data about weeks of work and number of contracts per year suggests that a significant proportion of people with disabilities who have **interests, skills and experience** in the screen-based industries are not currently working in the area. In some respects, these results are consistent with demand in the film and television production sector overall which is described as “fickle” and “unstable.”<sup>23</sup> However, the results of interviews and the consultation suggest that people with disabilities have greater difficulty securing stable employment in the screen-based industries than others who contend with high levels of contract or project-based work.

<sup>23</sup> Bailey, Ian. “Film or famine” in *The Globe and Mail* (May 15, 2015)  
<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/bc-film/article24462867/>

In this context, the chart below shows survey respondents' satisfaction with career advancement in terms of either screen credits or level of seniority, depending on job role.

**Figure 12 Satisfaction with career progression**



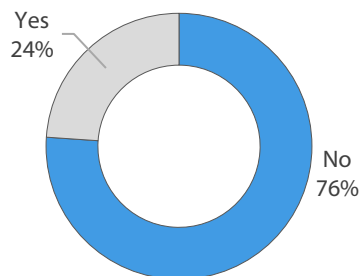
n=44

Source: Nordicity ScreenAccessON Survey 2016

- The majority of survey respondents (**61%**) were **not satisfied** with their level of career advancement;
- Low levels of jobs satisfaction are particularly striking given data on years in experience, which indicates that **62%** of respondents have been working in the screen-based industries for **more than 10 years**, as seen in Figure 11. Taken together these results could suggest that although people with disabilities are putting in *time* towards careers in the screen-based industries they are not experiencing corresponding levels professional *advancement*. The issue of breaking into the industry and career advancement is discussed at greater length in Section 3.

The chart below shows level of satisfaction with job security.

**Figure 13 Satisfaction with job security**



n=46

Source: Nordicity ScreenAccessON Survey 2016

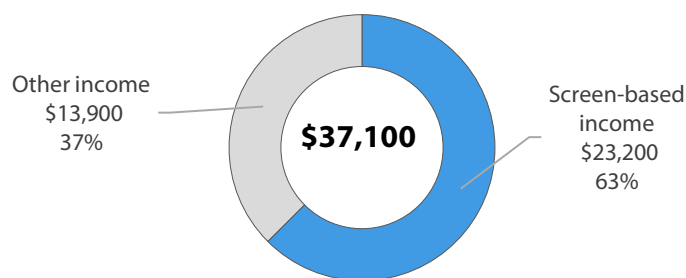


- Only one quarter of survey respondents (**24%**) indicated they were satisfied with their level of job security. This figure corresponds roughly to the number of survey respondents who reported full-time employment, as shown in Figure 10 and highlights the precariousness with which the vast majority (**76%**) of respondents viewed their jobs.

## 2.3 Compensation

The survey also asked respondents about their total pre-tax income for the year 2015 and the percentage of their income from the screen-based industries. The chart below summarizes the average income of survey respondents and shows what share of that income came from working in the screen-based industries.

**Figure 14 Annual pre-tax income**



n=38

Source: Nordicity ScreenAccessON Survey 2016

- The average annual income of survey respondents was **\$37,100** for 2015. Of that total figure, **63%** was a result of employment in the screen-based industries;
- The average annual income of survey respondents was **below** the average annual income of people with disabilities in Ontario (**\$39,300**) and below the average annual income of the population overall (**\$44,100**);<sup>24</sup>
- In contrast, according to the Canadian Media Producers Association's annual profile, the average annual FTE salary in the Canadian film and television production industry was **\$60,552** in 2015, above both the average income of people with disabilities and of the general population of Ontario.<sup>25</sup>
- The **low average earnings** of survey respondents relative to both the screen industries nationally and people with disabilities in Ontario may reflect the impact of precarious employment on the sample, as see in Figure 10;

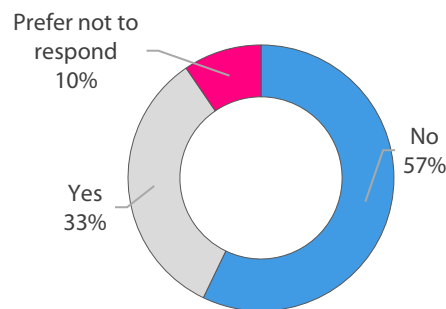
<sup>24</sup> The Canada-Ontario Labour Market Agreement 2011-12 Action Plan  
[http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/training/labmark/LMA\\_Plan2011\\_12.html](http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/training/labmark/LMA_Plan2011_12.html)

<sup>25</sup> Profile 2015: Economic Report on the Screen-based Media Production Industry in Canada

- Even though the sample is small, it would appear to indicate that people with disabilities earn less than others in the screen-based industries in Ontario. Moreover, a significant portion of their income comes from sources *other than* their work in film, television, broadcasting and digital media.

The chart below presents the share of survey respondents who receive social assistance through the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).

**Figure 15 Ontario Disability Support Program recipients**



n=42

Source: Nordicity ScreenAccessON Survey 2016

- **One third** of survey respondents reported receiving ODSP. Since ODSP is adjusted according to earned income, it is likely that access to benefits shapes the employment choices of survey respondents who receive this form of social assistance.<sup>26</sup> Weighing the advantages of paid employment against ODSP is a particularly delicate task for people with disabilities working in the screen-based industries because although many projects and contracts are quite small, even modest changes in income result in reduced provincial support;
- Nationally, Statistics Canada indicates that **31%** of people with disabilities of working age receive all of their income from employment.<sup>27</sup> Since **57%** of survey respondents reported not receiving ODSP, this result suggests that the sample in this study is more economically active than people with disabilities overall.

## 2.4 Summary of results

In effect, the survey provides insight into the demographics, workplace experiences and earnings of a sample of people with disabilities working in Ontario’s screen-based industries. The age distribution of the results suggests that respondents are younger than the general population of people with

<sup>26</sup> John Stapleton discusses the tradeoffs associated with receiving ODSP in greater detail in his report “The ‘Welfarization’ of Disability Incomes in Ontario”: <http://metcalffoundation.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Welfareization-of-Disability-Incomes-in-Ontario.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Statistics Canada, “A profile of persons with disabilities among Canadians aged 15 years or older.” <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2015001-eng.htm>



disabilities in Canada. Since the survey targeted people who are currently working in film, television, broadcasting and digital media, this demographic difference is not surprising.

The survey also suggests that the screen-based industries are characterized by unstable, short-term employment for people with disabilities. The majority (**74%**) of survey respondents reported temporary freelance or contract work. However, lack of job security also appears to have an impact on career progression. Only **39%** of survey respondents were satisfied with their professional advancement despite an average of **15 years** of work experience. Finally, at least at a preliminary level, the survey suggests that persons with disabilities earn less than others working in the screen based industries and that on average **37%** of their income comes from other, non-screen-industry sources.

### 3. Identified Issues and Challenges

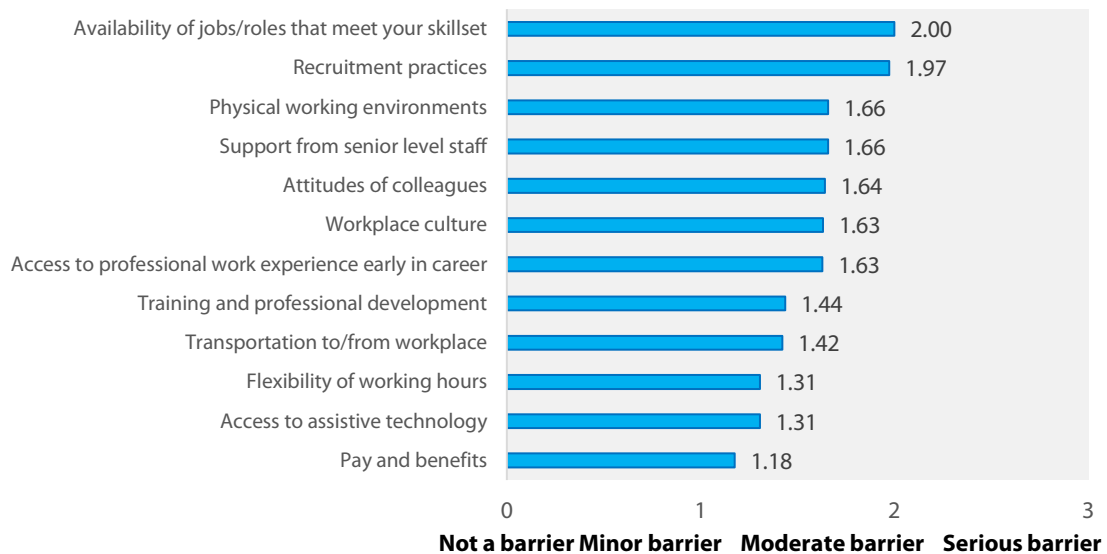
Before the experience of working in the screen-based industries can be improved for, with and by people with disabilities, it is important to identify and review the issues and challenges described as being of the highest priority through this research.

As explained previously, online survey results were bolstered with 1:1 interviews and a roundtable workshop - consultations which explored the barriers that exist for people with disabilities in the screen-based industries. In combination, these multiple lines of research help to overcome gaps in data caused by low survey participation.

#### Barriers to Success: Overall Snapshot

Survey respondents were asked to rank a series of factors based on the degree to which they were barriers to career success in the screen-based industries. The rating scale ranged from zero – “not a barrier” to three – “serious barrier.” The chart below presents the ranking of the factors overall.

**Figure 16 Barriers to success**



n =38

Source: Nordicity ScreenAccessON Survey 2016

- The greatest barrier identified by survey respondents overall was the “**availability of jobs/roles**” that meet candidates’ skillset (**2.00**). This supply issue, coupled with “**recruitment practices**” – identified as the second highest barrier (**1.97**) – points to the challenge of initial entry or access to the screen-industry as a whole;
- At the other end of the spectrum, one notes that “**access to assistive technologies**” ranked lower on the scale of challenges (**1.31**). This may indicate that accessible technologies are

becoming more widespread and available in screen-industry workplaces (or that individuals are able to access them independently);

- **“Flexibility of working hours”** also ranked on the lower end of the spectrum at **1.31** (between a minor and moderate barrier). Anecdotally-speaking, flexible working hours are perceived to be on the rise in many industries with employers increasingly offering telecommuting, flexible working hours and other schedule-based incentives that reflect the reality of 24/7 workplace connectivity;
- It is somewhat surprising that **“pay and benefits”** ranked as only a minor barrier to success (**1.18**), particularly in light of the reported disparity in pay between people with disabilities in the screen-based industries and average salaries. That being said, earlier results showed that 74% of respondents identified as freelance workers and, as such, may not have an expectation of employment benefits.

What is not explored within the scope of this work is the degree to which some screen-industry barriers are *shared* between able-bodied and neuro-typical workers and people with disabilities. The difficulties one faces trying to break in and advance in the screen-based industries (particularly in film and television production), for example, are almost universally recognized as one of their defining characteristics. In other words, this frustration and challenge is not unique to people with disabilities. Our assumption, however, is that even when barriers are shared, the challenge may be greater, or at least less well understood, for people with disabilities.

There may also be similarities between the participation of people with disabilities in the screen-based industries and other groups such as women, Aboriginal peoples and members of visible minorities. Although the employment of these four groups is federally regulated, a full exploration of how these diverse but sometimes intersecting identities shape career trajectories and workplace experiences was not possible within the scope of this report.

The challenges identified during the course of interviews, survey responses and in the roundtable can be categorized into four main themes. These themes are:

1. Breaking in and staying in the screen-based industries;
2. Attitudes, assumptions and awareness;
3. Barriers to developing networks;
4. Missed opportunities for physical/architectural and technological accommodations.

The following subsections address these four challenges.

### **3.1 Breaking in and staying in the screen-based industries**

The challenge or hurdle of “breaking in” will be familiar to the vast majority of people seeking work in the screen-based industries, which can often feel like an exclusive club or closed inner circle. The responses from many people with disabilities, however, describe both breaking in and sustaining a career as truly insurmountable barriers.

One respondent explained, “the greatest challenge comes from the fact that the opportunities to work on set are so few and far between (sometimes several years) that you tend to feel as though you

are still an apprentice.” For instance, an interviewee had volunteered on community television for five years but could still not find stable employment. Taken together, these responses suggest that people with disabilities face greater challenges putting in the time to gain the experience necessary to advance in the screen-based industries.

The difficulty of breaking in is made more complicated by workplace norms. As another interviewee asked, “how can you promote a culture of inclusivity in an industry like film and television where everyone sees themselves as the upper echelon of cool?” Without access to appropriate jobs and roles, it becomes nearly impossible for people with disabilities to build up a portfolio of work or by extension develop the contacts and reputation required to pursue a viable career in the screen-based industries.

Exacerbating the challenge of breaking-in to the screen-industries is the industry’s fundamental instability and turbulence for non-established workers and creatives. The screen-based industries tend to be geared towards contract-based or project-driven work. Depending on one’s network, experience and portfolio, it can be challenging to secure contracts. Survey responses indicated that this precariousness is overwhelmingly true for persons with disabilities. Only **21%** of survey respondents described themselves as employed on a permanent, full-time basis. For some of our survey respondents, years had passed with little or no work in the screen-based industries. Several described the difficulty of finding full-time employment after successful internships or other forms of volunteer work experiences. In many cases this lack of continuity was ascribed, not to a lack of skills, but to employers’ uncertainty about what kind of accommodations people with disabilities required in the workplace as well as discomfort raising these questions.

Others contemplated leaving the industry entirely as a result of unstable working conditions. These sentiments came across most strongly when survey respondents were asked to provide advice to another person with a disability starting out in the industry. Although many responses emphasized the importance of persistence, urging “create your own path” and “keep trying, change will come,” other responses were less optimistic. For example, one respondent wrote: “Think twice. There are other industries that will do more to accommodate your needs and support your strengths.” Others cautioned “don’t quit your day job,” and even “don’t bother.” In effect, consultations suggest that although anyone who enters the screen-based industries today needs to be passionate about their work in order to weather an often unpredictable environment, this is particularly true for people with disabilities.

In some respects, challenges encountered as far as accessing and sustaining a career in the screen-based industries are the symptoms rather than the cause of career instability for persons with disabilities. Some of the possible factors underlying this challenge are described in more detail throughout this section.

### **3.2 Attitudes, assumptions and awareness**

Attitudinal barriers to accessibility, that is to say the “behaviours, perceptions, and assumptions” that discriminate against persons with disabilities extend far beyond the screen-based industries environment and into day-to-day life. That being said, the main illustrations of attitudinal barriers (in

bold below<sup>28</sup>) resonated profoundly in our consultations with people with disabilities in the screen-based industries – including:

- **Assuming a person with a disability is inferior:** Many interviewees described a feeling of a “lack of trust” on the part of their colleagues that they could execute a job well. Others described being berated by teammates on sets for “taking too long to do things, even when I come in so early that it does not affect them.” Respondents have been called “lazy” and treated as though they are “frail.”
- **Assuming that someone with a speech impairment or hearing difficulties cannot understand you:** One respondent described a fear on the part of producers, directors and other industry stakeholders when it came to working with a deaf person on set as “they do not know what to do.” Some were unwilling to text as a means to improve communication.
- **Forming ideas about a person because of stereotypes or a lack of knowledge:** People with disabilities reported having to act as “ambassadors” and “constantly prove themselves” in professional situations because most people have so little experience with disabilities. Stereotypes and stigma were described as extremely significant challenges for screen-industry workers, particularly those with mental illnesses such as bi-polar disorder and autism. The stigma led, in some cases, to toxic working environments and occasionally regret about having disclosed a disability.
- **Making a person feel as though you are doing them a “special favour” by making accommodations:** One respondent explained that he has been told that people with disabilities are considered a “liability” in the entertainment industries. Another, reflected – “In a very surface-focused industry, disability represents ugliness to some people, and disabled people are seen as unattractive and undesirable (or worse, vulnerable, 'helpless' and 'grateful for any attention')." In both cases, people with disabilities are typically expected to express gratitude simply for being “given a chance” in a highly competitive industry.

Troublingly, some **62%** of survey respondents reported having experienced discrimination in the workplace. “Support from senior staff” was ranked as the third highest barrier to success by survey respondents while “workplace culture” scored alongside the top five challenges identified in our survey – as a minor to moderate barrier. In interviews and consultations, the underlying workplace challenge that emerged was the apathy and general lack of awareness on the part of screen-based industry work environments to accommodate people with disabilities. As one survey respondent explained:

“A willingness to actually **alter workplace practices** so that I can do the work that is needed but in a different way. I don't think the changes that are required are very large. A few small changes would allow me to compete but although it is easy to provide me with a computer and software

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<sup>28</sup> University of Ottawa, “Understanding Barriers to Accessibility”  
<http://www.uottawa.ca/respect/sites/www.uottawa.ca/respect/files/accessibility-cou-understanding-barriers-2013-06.pdf>

it takes a bit of imagination to do things differently so that I can participate in the studio as well as at my desk. I have yet to encounter a person in authority prepared to make these changes.”

This comment suggests that increasing the participation of people with disabilities is often a question of devoting time to creative thinking rather than money or new technology. However, problem solving is hindered by a low level of understanding of what accessibility and inclusion look like in the context of the screen based industries. As another survey respondent explained: “There is a general lack of education in the sector about disabilities and accommodation in general—disability is equated with inability, and employers and colleagues frequently try to determine “what can't this person do” instead of asking what they can do and creating an environment where they can do their best.”

Making assumptions about what is in the best interest of people with disabilities is another example of the negative stereotypes discussed above. These attitudinal barriers have tangible impacts on the career prospects of people with disabilities in the screen-based industries. Specifically, lack of leadership and fear of investment on the part of senior staff as described in consultations, limits opportunities for people with disabilities in the screen-based industries. Many explained that providing effective and appropriate accommodations in a sustainable way, requires companies to “get organized” and be intentional about making a change. However, the sense from consultations was that in a deadline-driven, low-margin environment - the motivation to “get organized” for accessibility and inclusion was low. One screen-based industry employer, themselves committed to inclusion but aware of the complexity of the issue commented that,

One of the challenges is the breadth and diversity of disabilities coupled with how many different types of jobs there are in screen industries. All of the jobs are accessible and inaccessible in different ways to different people. It can be daunting to assess... and then even the adaptive technologies can be cumbersome, imperfect and challenging. So many companies are just not organized to think these issues through in advance and it can be difficult to prioritize when sometimes the real number of affected people seems relatively few.

For companies that did attempt to make accommodations whether for people with physical disabilities, these efforts can occasionally seem piecemeal rather than a systematic shift in culture towards accessibility. One TV host described a studio’s willingness to make a men’s washroom accessible for his needs, but puzzlingly leaving the women’s washroom as it was – in other words inaccessible to many of the guests on his show.

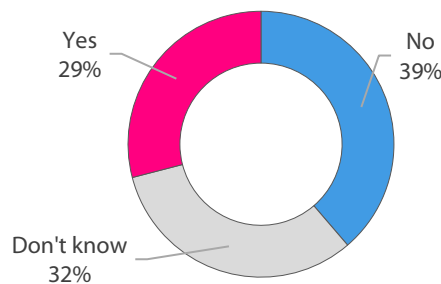
Adapting to invisible disabilities such as mental health conditions, chronic pain or learning disabilities raises a different set of issues. Many employers lack awareness of invisible disabilities and are thus unable to make the distinction between technical skills required for a specific job and social norms expected by the industry. One respondent described an employer’s inability to “look at my performance separate from my social ticks.” Respondents with invisible disabilities also face other challenges, in some cases struggling to find acceptance in the workplace while in other cases attempting to hide their disabilities. One respondent discussed the difficulty of “getting people to accept or understand my disability and that I am not ‘faking’ or lying.” Another respondent admitted, “I work very hard to make my disability not noticeable.” Compensating for a disability and deciding who to trust adds another layer of responsibility to the daily routine of people with disabilities working in the screen-based industries.



The competitive working environments and unpredictable hours of film, television and digital media may also exacerbate some mental health conditions. Several survey respondents mentioned the need to balance personal wellbeing with professional opportunities and noted the negative impact of stress on health as well as performance. In some extreme cases described in survey responses and other consultations, self-identifying is believed to have increased stigma and a sense of instability as employers threatened to disclose an employee’s disability. Although this behavior of course runs contrary to standard human rights practices, it remains a real threat for people with hidden disabilities who are already struggling to find work and build a reputation in a competitive industry.

Employee resource groups for people with disabilities were described as one possible means of effective support for people with a range of disabilities. The chart below shows the share of respondents with employers offering formal supports to people with disabilities, such as employee resource groups.

**Figure 17 Share of respondents whose employers offer formal support to people with disabilities**



n=39

Source: Nordicity ScreenAccessON Survey 2016

- Approximately one-third (**29%**) of respondents reported having access to formal supports in the workplace. Formal supports may be more likely available at larger employers (e.g., production companies and broadcasters) than at smaller and micro-sized companies;
- Respondents’ lack of awareness of workplace resources for people with disabilities may also be related to hesitation to self-identify as a person with a disability or seek support in the workplace.<sup>29</sup> Reluctance to self-identify also came across in open-ended survey questions for the study.

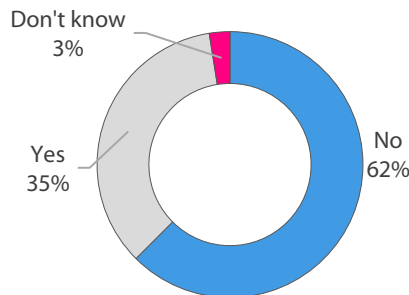
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<sup>29</sup> According to the Canadian Disability Survey, 27% of workers reported that their employer was not aware of their disability. The same study found that 44% of people with disabilities felt that their current employer would consider them less capable because of a disability.

### 3.3 Barriers to developing networks

Networking is well-recognized as a vital tool for career advancement, in all industries, but in particular the project-based and connection-driven screen-based industries. Consultations showed that people with disabilities often feel isolated and lacking a network – be it for hiring, support, mentorship or opportunities to collaborate with one another. Interviewees and survey respondents described the challenge of finding agents, mentors and/or sponsors - often pivotal connections required to advance one’s career to the next level. Approximately one-third of our survey respondents reported having a mentor, leaving the remaining **65%** without a mentor at this time.

**Figure 18 Share of respondents who have a mentor in the industry**



n=40

Source: Nordicity ScreenAccessON Survey 2016

Networking events in the screen-based industries, while theoretically open to anyone, were described as often indirectly (or directly) inaccessible, for example, because of the time of day, personal well-being, challenges with transport and of course, the accessibility of a given venue. One interviewee pointed out that a monthly meet-up she attends is unlikely to be accessible to participants with physical disabilities.

Conferences and conventions can be very important for professional development in the screen-based industries. Networking at these events, however, can be fraught and intense for people with “neuroatypicalities” (i.e., having a different way of processing sensory, linguistic, and social information). One Ontario-based firm, Every1Games, works to ensure that there are low-anxiety environments/areas at networking events – a seemingly straightforward accommodation that is often overlooked.

A few industry stakeholders similarly described the lack of a hub or association *representing* the community of people with disabilities in the screen-based industries as a challenge. LCA! is of course a vital organization in the ecosystem but one with limited resources. Awareness and/or interest in the experience of people with disabilities in the screen-based industries on the part of the established industry associations varies greatly.

### **3.4 Missed opportunities for physical/architectural and technological accommodations**

Among our survey respondents, physical working environments tied for third highest barrier to success. That said, physical accessibility was one area where progress seemed to be observed, perhaps connected to growing awareness of and compliance with AODA. One respondent remarked that at her organization, people with disabilities were consulted more frequently than in the past with regard to building changes and decision-making. As one respondent observed, however, so much of screen-based industry work takes place outside of the office, “buildings are much more accessible. This is good. There's still work to be done. A meeting will take place at a restaurant and we discover the restaurant is not as accessible as they say it is.”

As far as production studios, respondents were split as to the degree of accessibility in the screen based eco-system. One remarked that casting offices are frequently inaccessible, while another respondent asked, “How can you get the gig if you can't get in the door?” Many explained that on-set and behind the scenes there were always obstacles to be navigated from cables to stairs.

Earlier we saw that 43% of survey respondents used adaptive technologies or assistive devices in the workplace. Many devices from tablets to smartphones now come armed with adaptive technologies which can help to reduce some barriers. As mentioned, however, other, less tangible forms of accommodation from modified schedules to modified duties can still present challenges. Some accommodations require advanced planning – such as coordinating ASL interpreters for networking events or on-set activities – a frustration for a number of respondents.

One respondent reflected on the challenge or lack of “lived experience” when it comes to accommodating people with disabilities. She explained,

“People generally make allowances and accommodations for people with disabilities. However, there are myriad other minor challenges we face that people don't know about because they don't live with the disease or condition. Those minor inconveniences add up to big hurdles. For instance, an event will say they cater to disabled individuals by providing ramps or accessible venues. But you're still expected to wait in line-ups; or hurry to get to 'meet and greets' once there; or be part of an audience where you can't see who's speaking because you weren't able to get a good seat at the front; the list goes on. People don't want us to feel like we're an inconvenience. But we still know we are. We need more help.”

Comments like these demonstrate that improvements to physical accessibility, whether widening doors or adjusting lighting, must go hand in hand with changes in behavior that recognize individuals as experts in their own abilities as well as skilled contributors to different aspects of the screen-based industries. Nonetheless, addressing the built environment is a crucial component of ensuring that people with disabilities can participate in both the professional activities and informal networking opportunities that allow people to advance in film, television, broadcasting and digital media.

## 4. Opportunities for Change

The obstacles facing people with disabilities working in the screen-based industries may at times seem insurmountable. Many interviewees described change as happening far too slowly and envied the progress made in other sectors and industries.

Formulating recommendations was outside the scope of this study, however, opportunities for change emerged through our consultations both directly with people with disabilities working in the screen-based industries and other stakeholders. Two premises which underpin these opportunities is that:

5. The **strongest opportunities for change** must be **identified by people with disabilities, or at least in direct and authentic consultation** with them; and,
6. Little change will happen without far **greater industry support and awareness** regarding the challenges and potential for people with disabilities and a **willingness to invest in change** on the part of screen-based organizations and employers.

The opportunities, described in greater detail below, include:

- Enable employers to “get organized”;
- Explore incentives to motivate screen-industry companies to participate in accessibility training;
- Encourage network development opportunities for people with disabilities;
- Support more diverse storytellers and encourage authentic positive portrayal;
- Learn from younger generations.

### 4.1 Enable employers to “get organized”

In the previous section we learned that in order for screen-based organizations to hire inclusively and successfully nurture the career development of workers with disabilities, they must first “get organized.” The consensus was that such organizational change could not be superficial or a reactive but must instead address some of the deeply embedded attitudinal and architectural barriers within screen-based industry organizations. Roundtable attendees pointed to a few key areas that could have an impact on increasing awareness and compelling action on the part of employers and potential employers in the screen-based industries:

- Dispel fears with regard to return on investment of hiring people with disabilities. Research from the United States shows that, on average, the investment required to accommodate a worker with a disability amounts to \$500 and the return on investment includes greater rates of retention;<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Beth Loy, PhD “Accommodation and Compliance Series Workplace Accommodations: Low Cost, High Impact” <http://askjan.org/media/lowcosthighimpact.html>

- Recognize that, particularly when hidden and undisclosed disabilities are factored in, your workforce may *already* include people with disabilities who you value greatly and who could benefit from accommodations;
- Develop AODA awareness, training and education materials that are tailored specifically to the screen-based industries – include tips for implementation, frequently asked questions and support options which relate direction to working in film and television production, broadcasting and digital media. Similarly, share best practices for the development of diversity plans and accessibility policies so that companies can understand the level of investment required, how best to implement necessary adjustments and track success;
- Learn from other sectors including Information, Communications, Technology (ICT) and/or publishing – there is a sense that the screen-based industries may lag other sectors when it comes to inclusion of people with disabilities. One advantage is that they may be able to learn from approaches adopted by other sectors. The Canadian organization, Ready, Willing and Able reported success building relationship engaging employers in IT fields to hire inclusively.<sup>31</sup> While in publishing, Penguin Random House UK, has launched a nationwide campaign to “find, mentor and publish new writers from communities under-represented on the UK’s bookshelves” through its WriteNow scheme.<sup>32</sup>

Roundtable attendees recognized that many employers avoid asking questions about a worker’s disability and/or need for accommodations. They suspected that this avoidance was more rooted in fear and discomfort than anything else i.e., “we don’t know and we’re afraid to ask.” This lack of dialogue was cited as a major barrier to positive change. One roundtable attendee with experience in broadcasting and production described a sort of “warming up period” whereby it would take at least two months in a new setting for colleagues to “get to know him” and get over the embarrassment of asking questions. For this worker, “the best way to deal with uncomfortable questions about accommodations from employers is to be very open and recognize that it’s an ongoing process, not a one-off conversation.” What was especially frustrating to this individual was that again owing to the instability of contract work, it could take an entire contract to feel that progress had been made and a comfort level was attained, after which he needed to start again from scratch.

One reason why asking questions is so important, and which was underlined during the roundtable, is that occasionally employers find out that accommodation is not actually that difficult. One broadcaster explained that when a newsroom was criticized for its inaccessibility, there were fears about the costs and hassle involved in rendering it fully accessible. Upon investigation, however, the work that was required was far less than anticipated.

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<sup>31</sup> Ready, Willing and Able - <http://readywillingable.ca>.

<sup>32</sup> “PRH hunts for writers from ‘under-represented’ communities” *The Bookseller* (July 26, 2016) <http://www.thebookseller.com/news/prh-launches-writenow-publish-new-writers-underrepresented-bookshelves-369101>.

#### **4.2 Explore incentives to motivate screen-industry companies to participate in accessibility training**

Building on the previous point raised with regard to developing accessibility training and AODA compliance modules specifically geared to the screen-based industries, there was a consensus during consultations that simply making such training resources available may not be adequate, particularly when it comes to participation from company leaders. Roundtable attendees, survey respondents and interviewees alike contemplated a future where screen-industry leaders were recognized and rewarded for a) complying with AODA regulations and b) demonstrating or sharing evidence of their efforts to hire inclusively.

One roundtable attendee suggested that in order to truly motivate industry change, one had to capture the attention of senior company executives – be they film producers, broadcasters, video game company CEOs or others. This approach is, in a sense, being experimented with as far as ensuring that certain funds, such as BravoFACT fund, are distributed in an equitable fashion between men and women.<sup>33</sup>

#### **4.3 Encourage network development opportunities for people with disabilities**

The lack of network and the overall challenge of networking in the screen-based industries was identified as a major challenge for people with disabilities. Meaningful networking and engagement opportunities and access to mentors and coaches could have a major impact on the experience of people with disabilities working in the screen-based industries. Some interviewees felt that developing a “separate” network for people with disabilities may actually be somewhat isolating. Their preference would be to address the issues of accessibility *within* already established networking events, conferences and meet-ups.

Nonetheless, enabling people with disabilities to connect with one another in the screen-based industries was also cited as a need both in terms of acting as a peer-support group, but also to inspire potential creative collaborations. Alongside these prongs, there seems to be an opportunity to develop a “hub” for people with disabilities in the screen-based industries – perhaps led by, or in partnership with LCA!.

One interviewee suggested that a major awareness-building and networking conference was required in Ontario order to explore the issues raised in this study in more detail. In May 2016, Policy UK held a conference called: **Diversity in Television: On Screen, Off Screen and Leadership** geared towards providing:

[...] an opportunity for delegates to examine the challenges and next steps practical solutions to improve the representation of minorities within the television sector. Considering race, religion, sexuality, **disability** as well as well as class the morning will bring together representatives from

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<sup>33</sup> 50% of allocated BravoFACT funds awarded to female-led projects – September 2015.

across the sector and consider the barriers facing on-screen and off-screen talent as well as the way forward for greater diversity within senior management.<sup>34</sup>

If developed with their direct participation and influence, a conference or symposium may provide the beginnings of a “hub” for people with disabilities in the Ontario screen-based industries.

#### **4.4 Support more diverse storytellers and encourage positive portrayal**

The importance of telling diverse, rich and authentic stories about and by people with disabilities was raised throughout consultations. For some, the focus should be on enabling more people with disabilities to develop as writers, steering their own careers. One survey respondent encouraged peers in the industry with these words, “Learn your craft, practice it often. Get critical acclaim for your work. Do your own work. Do not wait for permission to express your creativity.” In this respect, one area of opportunity comes in the form of new screen-based technologies, often accessible *and* affordable, that are helping a wider world of storytellers take to the screen. Social media, while no panacea, similarly provides a venue for people with disabilities to connect and promote their work once online. As one respondent urged her peers, “Try to find a way to create your own projects even if they’re not perfect. Use a webcam to create a 5, 10, 20-minute story. Put it on YouTube.”

Positive portrayal, while somewhat beyond the scope of this study, was also a frequent topic of discussion and a potential catalyst for raising awareness. People with disabilities were often frustrated at on-screen depictions of their lives and experiences. While this study was in the field, for example, the #MeBeforeYouAbleism controversy<sup>35</sup> regarding the casting of able-bodied actors as characters with disabilities erupted. Many of our consultations described frustrations with superficially positive portrayals or not understanding that a person’s disability is not the only reason to cast them as a certain character. Some of these frustrations are quoted below:

- “The fact that people with disabilities cannot play regular roles. Roles are written to reflect real life. People with disabilities fall in love, fight off inner demons, and go through many problems.”
- “Having a disability is not the most interesting part of any person or story, it should not always be the focus of coverage because people with disabilities can contribute to a range of topics.”
- “14% of Toronto’s population has a disability of some kind. Why don’t we see it on our screens, how can we improve that percentage? Lots of work still needs to be done.”

There is a sense that positive portrayal and diverse storytelling are elements of improving the experience and acceptance of people with disabilities in the screen-based industries. As one respondent observed, “People have become more accepting. Not completely but there has been a

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<sup>34</sup> [http://policy-uk.com/event/2070/Diversity\\_in\\_Television\\_\\_On\\_Screen\\_\\_Off\\_Screen\\_\\_Behind\\_the\\_Scenes](http://policy-uk.com/event/2070/Diversity_in_Television__On_Screen__Off_Screen__Behind_the_Scenes)

<sup>35</sup> Kim Sauder “Why are you complaining? Some people actually feel that way: a critique of ‘Me Before You’ “ [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kim-sauder/why-excitement-me-before-you-is-deeply-troubling\\_b\\_10108260.html?section=women](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kim-sauder/why-excitement-me-before-you-is-deeply-troubling_b_10108260.html?section=women)

shift. The public seems to welcome seeing people with disabilities in stories, pictures, etc. They understand, sometimes more than studios, that we are part of the fabric of society.”

Hot Docs’ Corus Diverse Voices is one example of a program used within the screen-based industries to foster inclusivity. Each year, six to eight fellows from diverse backgrounds are selected by an industry jury to take part in an intensive training module, seminar series, workshops and networking events as part of the Hot Docs conference week. The program focuses on skills development in factual television production and documentary series and provides fellows with the opportunity to interact with and learn from industry experts first hand.<sup>36</sup>

#### **4.5 Learn from younger generations**

Where the screen-based industries are described as having a closed inner-circle, in many of our consultations, participants pointed to the openness and awareness of younger generations. Respondents believed that social media has served to increase the visibility of disability issues and as a result, “millennials are huge allies, more open minded and digitally connected.”

One component of this success was identified as the strides made by post-secondary institutions, including in screen-based industry training programs, as far as inclusive enrollment and accommodating the needs of a wide variety of students – including those with disabilities. “I think younger professionals have been socialized to be more tolerant of differences. Those 28+ are more rigid in their standards and expectations. I’m hopeful this will lead to a shift in attitude in our industry as a whole.”

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<sup>36</sup> Hot Docs, “Chorus Diverse Voices Program.” <http://www.hotdocs.ca/i/corus-diverse-voices-program>



## 5. Conclusions

Gathering and interpreting data with regard to people with disabilities in the screen-based industries is incredibly complex. The issues facing people with disabilities are multi-faceted, from the decision to self-identify to having to ask for accommodations in a sometimes hostile work environment. The basic premise, however, is that a more diverse workforce and more diversity in storytelling and production is a win-win for Ontario's screen-based industries. One roundtable attendee mentioned anecdotally that the National Film Board's experience of funding visible minority artists suggested that stories from outside the mainstream, win popular appreciation and critical acclaim – successes that could potentially be extended to people with disabilities.

At the moment the landscape for people with disabilities in the screen-based workforce is stark. They are earning less and working less than their able-bodied or neuro-typical peers. The industry is difficult for them to access and, once in, careers are difficult to develop and sustain. Discrimination has taken place and continues to occur. By some accounts, the industry appears almost sluggish to embrace inclusive hiring and/or make the accommodations required for people with disabilities to thrive in their creative work.

Yet amid this reality, there are signs of positive change. Physical and architectural accommodations are becoming more widespread thanks in part to AODA. The Federal Government appointed a Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, while as of July 2016, Ontario has a Minister Responsible for Accessibility. Alongside the openness of younger generations and the wave of new technologies with built-in accessibility, there is a sense of growing momentum and potential to seize.

One goal for this report is that it can act as a starting point for change by providing a focal point for screen-based industries stakeholders. Next steps will include a communications strategy highlighting the reports key issues to executives within the screen-based industries. Other possibilities include the formation of a council of sorts, perhaps with LCA! at its core but also major industry organizations and industry associations. This council would tackle the immediate need for accessibility best practices tailored to the screen-based industries and linked to AODA requirements. In that case, next steps could include:

- Identifying and forming the ScreenAccessON advisory council;
- Developing best practices for accessibility in the screen-based industries – including the necessary tools and training – based on successes such as BravoFact, Hot Docs, international conferences (e.g., the U.K.'s Diversity in Television: On Screen, Off Screen and Leadership) and others;
- Sharing the necessary tools and training and motivating or rewarding industry engagement;
- Supporting and monitoring progress through 2025.

As to the need for a hub for people with disabilities, LCA! could also form a strategic partnership with broadcasters and industry associations to access all relevant components of the screen-based industries in Ontario. One potential model is the Québec action plan around diversity in the screen business which includes partnerships with unions, guilds, associations and others. Looking to the successes on the part of post-secondary institutions (and to partner) would also complement the goals of building awareness and affecting meaningful change.