



The FINESSED Project: Fostering Inclusion and Environments of Support for Students with Episodic Disabilities

In 2018, *Realize* received funding from the Ontario Government in order to undertake the Fostering INclusion and Environments of Support for Students with Episodic Disabilities (FINESSED) project.

FINESSED Summary

The goal of the FINESSED Project is to increase the capacity of both teaching and support staff within Ontario's post-secondary education sector to understand episodic disabilities and appropriately accommodate students living with episodic disabilities who are engaged in academic programs within their institution through participation in an online training program developed in the project. The project also intends to raise awareness of the AODA generally as it applies to students with episodic disabilities.

While the AODA does contain a number of standards relevant to improving access for people with disabilities, there is currently no education standard. Students with invisible and episodic disabilities constitute a large number of the overall student population with disabilities and yet confusion remains regarding their disabilities and the resulting impact on their educational success.

Project Rationale

In 2016, *Realize* undertook research with Dalhousie University and other partners to investigate the experiences of post-secondary students living with episodic disabilities. This work included a think-tank, literature review, surveys for both students with episodic disabilities and post-secondary disability service providers, key informant interviews with teaching staff and the development of a community report. A key finding of this work was that despite large numbers of students experiencing episodic disabilities, including most notably mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression, there is a widespread lack of recognition of episodic disability within the post-secondary sector and little understanding of what accommodation may look like for students with episodic disabilities. The FINESSED Project seeks offer training to faculty and staff on episodic disabilities.

FINESSED Goal and Objectives

The goal of the proposed project is to increase the capacity of both teaching and support staff within Ontario's post-secondary education sector to understand episodic disabilities and appropriately accommodate students living with episodic disabilities who are engaged in academic programs within their institution through participation in an online training program developed in the project. The project also intends to raise awareness of the AODA generally as it applies to students with episodic disabilities.

The objectives of FINESSED project are:

- To raise awareness of episodic disabilities among teaching and support staff within Ontario's post-secondary education sector by at least 70 percent in those who participate in the proposed online training.
- To increase the capacity of teaching and support staff within Ontario's post-secondary education sector to accommodate students living with episodic disabilities by at least 70 percent in those who participate in the proposed online training.

The intended results of this project are to raise awareness of episodic disabilities and to facilitate an increase in the capacity of staff within post-secondary environments in Ontario to recognize and respond appropriately to the needs of students living with episodic disabilities and ultimately to improve educational experiences for students living with episodic disabilities in Ontario.

FINESSED Activities

Project activities are intended to facilitate the development and roll-out of an online training program for teaching and support staff in Ontario universities related to understanding and appropriately accommodating students with episodic disabilities. In order to achieve this, **Realize** will undertake the following activities:

- Convene project advisory committee composed of stakeholders including representatives from post-secondary education institutions, students with lived experience, as well as experts in accommodation of episodic disabilities and human rights
- Undertake a provincial scoping review on episodic disability and post-secondary education
- Develop and implement a survey of post-secondary teaching and support staff on attitudes and issues related to accommodating students with episodic disabilities
- Develop and disseminate a discussion paper that identifies potential topics and priority issues to be addressed in online training
- Convene a provincial summit on episodic disabilities in post-secondary education to include teaching and support staff, students with episodic disabilities, counsellors, policy makers and other key stakeholders to explore the issues relevant to this topic and to identify/-review priorities for an educational program intended to raise awareness of episodic disabilities within the post-secondary education sector

- Conduct a webinar on the provincial summit discussions and outcomes and seek further input for the training
- Draft online training for post-secondary sector on episodic disabilities and appropriate accommodation strategies, as well as the AODA as it relates to people with episodic disabilities
- Implement online training draft in learning management system
- Pilot online training and revise online training according to results of pilot
- Roll out training to staff in at least 6 Ontario universities/colleges
- Evaluate impact of training through surveys and interviews

For More Information

Should you have any questions about the FINESSED Project, please contact Annette Wilkins, Episodic Disabilities Initiatives at awilkins@realizecanada.org or by telephone at 416-513-0440 x222.

Acknowledgments

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