

## **Check Against Delivery**

### **Albertans Advocating for Change Together Provincial Summit June 13, 2014, Edmonton Honourable Naresh Bhardwaj, Associate Minister of Services for Persons with Disabilities, Human Services**

Good evening everyone.

It's really great to be here at this year's Self-Advocacy Summit.

This year's theme: "Who Am I?" is a good one.

It's a question we all ask ourselves.

And the answer changes throughout our lives as we learn and experience new things.

The summit gives you the chance to increase your knowledge on a wide range of topics.

It gives you an opportunity to learn from each other.

And inspire one another.

It's a place to speak up and share ideas on how we can improve the lives of Albertans with developmental disabilities.

As Associate Minister of Services for Persons with Disabilities, it's important to me that your voice is heard when we discuss improvements and best practices.

The Alberta government is moving toward a new, streamlined disability supports system.

One that helps Albertans with disabilities and their families be actively involved in and supported by one disability program throughout their lives.

One that achieves positive outcomes.

Many of you are employed, live your own lives, and have accessed a range of supports that help you to be successful.

As a self-advocate, you are in a unique position to use your experiences in a way that can be helpful for other people.

When you share what you have learned about services for yourself, others in similar situations and those who support them can learn as well.

Our government wants every Albertan to have the opportunity to live a good life, to be a part of their community and to be a contributor to our success as a province.

This is why we created the Employment First Innovation Fund.

This fund will help create more opportunities for inclusion and enrichment through employment.

A number of agencies will be trying out new strategies for connecting employers with people who have the skills they need, but who also happen to have a disability.

The fund is about supporting inclusion through employment, and promoting independence.

In September, we'll launch the Employment First Internship Program for Persons with Disabilities.

It will give 20 recent graduates from high school or post-secondary the opportunity to gain valuable government work experience.

You all have a wide range of skill sets and abilities to contribute to the workforce.

I have seen for myself that enabling people to be employed is one of the best ways to improve people's lives and be engaged in the community.

To build on the good work being done, we need to hear from you.

Sharing your thoughts and ideas makes a difference.

Your commitment to speaking out and engaging with others in your communities ensures that better outcomes are achieved.

I know the ideas that will come out of the summit will help us build a better, more inclusive Alberta.

Thanks to all the people who have put so much time and effort into this year's event.

And all of you here today who have come to share your experiences and to learn from each other.

You make a real difference in people's lives.

Thank you.