

National Educational Association of Disabled Students

Annual Report

2024-2025



National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS)

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## Introduction

Founded in 1986, the National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) is a by-and-for, cross-disability charitable organization that supports full access to education and employment for disabled and neurodivergent post-secondary students and graduates in Canada. NEADS collaborates with post-secondary institutions, employers, community organizations, and funders on research, consultation, and knowledge mobilization initiatives.

We have spent the 2024-2025 working diligently to support disabled post-secondary students and new graduates in both programming and advocacy work. We wrapped up our four-year Virtual Access for All project this past March and continued to expand eligibility to our Building Employment Pathways job coaching program in order to holistically support all self-identified post-secondary students and new graduates with disabilities.

## Note from Our Chair of the Board: Stephanie Evans

“My adventure as chair kicked off in January 2025, and it’s been a whirlwind of excitement! This year, I've had the opportunity to collaborate with some fantastic organizations like Wavemakers, McGill University, Wilfrid Laurier University, and Carleton University. I've also ventured into the podcast world, discussing the struggles students face and the fantastic things NEADS offers on an episode with CMS Web Solutions Inc. And I had a blast on Traipsin’ Global On Wheels, sharing insights about being a social worker with a disability. The variety of experiences has been truly engaging and interesting.

I also jet-setted to the Global Disability Summit in Berlin, where I got to shine a light on disability issues from around the globe. And as if that wasn’t enough fun, I was invited to join a panel discussion on youth mental health in PEI. What a fantastic opportunity! To top it all off, I was deeply honored to receive a nomination for the 2025 D-30 Disability Impact List, a recognition of the impact of our collective efforts in the field of disability advocacy.

It’s been a busy and thrilling year so far, and I'm filled with anticipation for what’s next on this incredible journey! I can't wait to continue making strides in disability advocacy and sharing my experiences with you all.”

## Note from Our National Coordinator: Frank Smith

“The 2024/2025 fiscal year was extremely impactful for our community. The National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) has supported post-secondary students with disabilities by delivering financial aid, provided vital resources across our websites and social media so students and graduates have the tools they need for success in school and the labour market.”

A total of $1,130,000 in financial assistance was provided to hundreds of disabled students across Canada through the Accessibility Resilience Program, the NEADS Student Awards Program and the NEADS Student Assistance Program since 2021 during the Virtual Access for All project. Students were pursuing college and university education, across fields of study, in diploma, undergraduate and graduate studies.

I am excited that NEADS is now offering a free Job Coaching service. We've built significant partnerships with by and for disability and student groups. We've met with students and graduates with disabilities and service providers in communities across Canada, virtually and in person through our events. We've continued to provide expert advice to federal and provincial governments to ensure students and graduates with disabilities are best supported by government funding and social programs.”

## Meet the NEADS Team

* Frank Smith: National Coordinator
  + Alt text: A man in a suit and tie smiles warmly at the camera, exuding confidence and professionalism.
* Katja Newman: Director, Student Financial Assistance Program
  + Alt text: No image displayed.
* Aliyah Petzak-Grant: Director Website Content and Digital Engagement
  + Alt text: A woman wearing glasses, with dark curly hair and a black and white knit sweater stands in front of a textured wall, looking confidently at the camera.
* Chloée C. Godin-Jacques: Educational Programming Director & Research Manager
  + Alt text: A black and white photo of a woman sitting on the ground in a grassy field, surrounded by nature.
* Isabella Fiore: Director, Partnerships and Communications
  + Alt text: A woman wearing glasses with short and dark curly hair seated at an outdoor patio table, smiling, with a vase of flowers in front of her.
* Alan Bridgeman: Technology Consultant
  + Alt text: A man dressed in a suit and tie stands confidently for a photo against a blue background.
* Jason Thompson: Director, Web Platforms and Infrastructure
  + Alt text: No image displayed.
* Eniola Akisanmi: NEADS Student Awards Program Officer
  + Alt text: A black woman with glasses and curly hair and glasses smiling wearing a red long sleeve shirt.
* Lauren Gravis: Advisor, NEADS Student Awards Programs
  + Alt text: A woman with auburn hair smiles warmly and black blouse at the camera.
* Mohamed Behi: Advisor
  + Alt text: A brown man wearing glasses and a blue jacket smiling confidently at the camera.
* Jérôme Archambault: Advisor
  + Alt text: A man in a tie purple striped tie and blue button down shirt and glasses is sitting in a wheelchair, presenting a professional demeanor.

## Meet the NEADS Team: Board of Directors

* Stephanie Evans: Chairperson, Newfoundland and Labrador Director
  + Alt text: A woman with vibrant red hair dressed in a black shirt, smiling softly against a neutral background.
* Elizabeth Doherty: Vice Chair, New Brunswick Director
  + Alt text: A smiling woman with auburn hair in a navy polka dot shirt sits on a couch, with a zebra print painting behind her.
* Selali Tettevi: Treasurer, Saskatchewan Director
  + Alt text: A smiling woman with long black hair, displaying a cheerful smile against a netural background
* Avesta Alani: Ontario Director
  + Alt text: A woman with blonde hair dressed in a black turtleneck, smiling softly while standing against a plain background.
* Adam David: Past Chair, Alberta Director
  + Alt text: A man with curly hair in a black shirt, smiling softly while standing against a plain background.
* Antonia Francis: Director-at-Large
  + Alt text: A smiling woman wearing a blue dress with long blonde hair stands in a blurred conference room, smiling directly at camera .
* Monique Sangha: British Columbia Director
  + Alt text: No image displayed.
* Paige Cox: Nova Scotia Director
  + Alt text: A woman wearing glasses, brown/blonde hair in a red blazer, smiling confidently at the camera
* Vanessa Aase: Director-at-Large
  + Alt text: A women with long blond hair, wearing a green sweater with a T shirt with a watercolour painted octopus on it stands next to a tree, surrounded by nature.

## Building Employment Pathways

NEADS’ Building Employment Pathways provides free virtual job coaching to post-secondary students and new graduates with disabilities in across Canada!

Coaching is delivered through the Sustainable Livelihoods model. This is a holistic, strengths-based approach exploring six key areas supporting a variety of employment journeys with individualized strategies. Participants shared goals such as:

* Get a job as soon as possible
* Build new skills to make me work-ready
* Career change or progression
* Transition from school to work
* Removing barriers at work

We’ve partnered with Sustainable Livelihoods Canada, Council of Canadians with Disabilities, the Quebec Association for Equity and Inclusion in Post-Secondary Education, and the Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities in this project.

We thank Employment and Social Development Canada for their generous support via the Workplace Opportunities: Removing Barriers to Equity program.

## Building Employment Pathways

Building Employment Pathways experienced lots of growth in the last year!

The program expanded in August 2024 to include participants interested in any sector to be more responsive to a wider range of employment pathways. We served 46 community members throughout the year!

Program stats:

* First infographic has a graphic of a small clock. Text reads “Time. 7589 total minutes spent coaching. 64 mins: average length of session.”
* Second infographic has a graphic of a map of Canada with black location pins across all provinces except for Prince Edward Island. Text reads “Location. Participants are from nine different provinces. Ontario has the most participants, with 17.”
* Third infographic has a bar graph representing the highest level of education participants have. 4 participants attended received a CEGEP diploma; 3 participants received certificates; 9 participants received bachelor's degrees; 8 participants received master's degrees; 0 participants received professional degrees; 1 participant received a PhD degree; 4 participants did not share information; 0 participants only received a secondary school degree.

Want to try a free coaching session? Scan this code to register for a session today! QR code links to this website: <https://breakingitdown.neads.ca/building-employment-pathways-project-students/>

We thank Employment and Social Development Canada for their generous support via the Workplace Opportunities: Removing Barriers to Equity program.

## Financial Assistance Program

Between April 2024 and March 2025, NEADS provided $378,000 to 186 students across Canada!

Pie chart with following labels:

* Tuition Fees (30.6%)
* Rent Support (18.8%)
* Food Security (8.6%)
* Mental Health and Wellness (18.3%)
* Learning Supports (3.8%)
* Medical Supplies (5.9%)
* Computers & Tablets (5.4%)

We offered grants valued at $2,000 in a variety of areas, including:

In March 2025, NEADS surveyed 68 students who received our financial assistance to assess the program’s impact on their academic and personal lives & here’s what they reported:

* 90% said it helped reduce their financial stress!
* 76% said the assistance helped them stay enrolled!
* 85% reported improvements in mental health and well-being!

We thank Employment and Social Development Canada for their generous support via the Supports for Student Learning Program.

## Virtual Access for All: State of the Schools Tour

NEADS‘ State of the Schools Tour travelled across Canada from 2021-2025 and hostedparticipants at 12 different campuses!

Map of Canada with logos of schools NEADS stopped at:

* University of Victoria
* University of British Columbia
* University of Manitoba
* Carleton University
* University of Western Ontario
* Université du Québec à Montréal
* University of New Brunswick
* Memorial University
* St. Francis Xavier University
* Dalhousie University
* University of Toronto
* McMaster University

NEADS collaborated with our community at each stop to co-host a hybrid event with discussions, presentations & panels on subjects relevant to disabled post-secondary students & new grads. Check out recordings of the stops on YouTube!

We thank Employment and Social Development Canada for their generous support via the Supports for Student Learning Program.

## Virtual Access for All: Webinar Series

NEADS hosted 41 webinars between September 2021 and March 2025 with ASL interpretation & captioning.

Our webinars provided information to empower and support disabled students navigating post-secondary education while creating spaces to engage in mutual care and collaboration! You can find recorded videos of these webinars on our YouTube channel.

Popular Virtual Access for All Webinars:

Screenshots of the following webinar YouTube thumbnails:

* [You Belong in Law School: Imagining Futures for Students with Disabilities](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZh43yxr3WE)
* [Navigating Grad School with a Disability](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWErSkdopmw)
* [Through Entrepreneurship: How Disabled and Neurodivergent Students and Graduates are Paving the Path to Accessible and Inclusive Employment Opportunities](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BgYyGkbEqKY&pp=0gcJCa0JAYcqIYzv)
* [Ableism, Transphobia and Heterosexism: Compounding Effects in Higher Education](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HnEIiD1VWwc&t=9s)
* [State of the Schools Tour: Year in Review](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HrcUHCectUQ)
* [Navigating the Transition to Post-Secondary Education & Financial Assistance Program Information Session](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_6vUxhAwRU)

We thank Employment and Social Development Canada for their generous support via the Supports for Student Learning Program.

## NEADS Websites

[NEADS.ca:](https://www.neads.ca/en/) Your one-stop shop to everything you need to know about NEADS!

Our main website saw a 20% increase in traffic and users spent 25% more time on our site than in 2023-2024. Over half of our traffic comes from organic searches!

[DisabilityAwards.ca:](https://disabilityawards.ca) The hub for financial assistance for students with disabilities in Canada! Our site views increased by 19% from last year, and users spent 35% more time searching for scholarships!

[BreakingItDown.ca:](https://breakingitdown.neads.ca) Bridging the employment gap with resources for employers and job-seekers! This website had a break out year - visitor traffic was up 18% from 2023-2024! Visitors are interested in accessible workplaces & job search tips.

[DisabilityRightsOnline.ca:](https://disabilityrightsonline.ca) Providing advocacy and awareness resources for people with disabilities! Last year, we saw stable year-over-year traffic, showing consistent interest in rights-based content despite no changes to the website!

## Social Media

[Instagram:](https://www.instagram.com/myneads/)

* 126.7% increase in profile visits
* 16,290 unique visits to our profile
* 301 new followers, up 27% from 23-24

[Facebook:](https://www.facebook.com/myNEADS)

* 87.1% increase in reach
* 192 new followers
* 5,259 unique visits to our profile
* 1,382 times our content was interacted with

[LinkedIn:](http://linkedin.com/company/my-neads)

* 10,740 unique content views
* 204 new followers, up 33% from 23-24

[YouTube:](https://www.youtube.com/@MyNEADS)

* 4991 video views
* 14 new videos posted
* 33% increase in followers from 23-24

## Partnerships

NEADS started 2025 by re-engaging with our community and developing organic partnerships to strengthen our networks throughout Canada! We hope to continue to build organic connections to increase access to post-secondary education and employment for people with disabilities.

Our #MyNEADSNetwork represents partners from coast to coast!

Map of Canada with blue dots in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Nunavut, Quebec, and Prince Edward Island.

24 community partnerships established in 24-25. Partners include service providers, disabled persons organizations, student unions, on-campus disabled student groups & allies!

Want to join the #MyNEADSNetwork?

Send an email to [isabella.fiore@neads.ca](mailto:isabella.fiore@neads.ca) to connect & chat about ways we can collaborate!

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