



New Brunswick Human Rights Commission

Gordon Porter

New Brunswick sets an example

Well in terms of effectiveness of the Commission itself, I think New Brunswick has always been seen as a progressive leader across Canada. Every province and territory has a Commission. There are different models, they operate differently, they had different ways to handle complaints from citizens and to deal with them effectively. I think that the New Brunswick Commission was seen as an effective Commission, willing to look at the issues and to make progress in what was happening. The other thing that was really a personal interest to me, was the education situation in New Brunswick, where New Brunswick had passed a law in 1986 making inclusion of people with disabilities or students with disabilities the mandate for the school system. That was never done quite so explicitly in other provinces of Canada, and by the 2000s, New Brunswick was seen as a leader, not only in Canada, but around the world. One of the really interesting things that happened, was that when the United Nations started to gather people together to develop the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, New Brunswick was used as a model to challenge people around the world to say that inclusive education should be the method to educate children with disabilities around the world. There were many, many debates, but Canadian representatives at that convention-building process, particularly from the community—the people from the citizenry—not just the officials, were able to cite the New Brunswick example and it was explicitly part of the discussion that led to article 24 of the convention. And I, actually, as the Chair of the New Brunswick Commission—and I think I was chair of CASHRA, the Canadian Association of Statutory Human Rights Agencies, at the time—and I was at the UN in 2008 when the Convention was formally signed off by Canada and other countries around the world. So that was a real highlight for me personally, and I think one that not many New Brunswickers know about, but they should, and they should be proud of the fact that in a small province like ours, we've been able to set a standard that, certainly here has many challenges, but on the other hand, sets a standard of effort and a target of including people with disabilities that's quite exceptional.