In our presentation we shall describe what a PlayFair Team is, what a Team may look like, what school administrators and teachers think of PlayFair Teams, and what the Team effect is on its members. Lastly, we shall place PlayFair Teams as one component of an equitable school infrastructure recognizing learners experiencing disabilities as full members of their school community.

The following is an overview of concepts behind PlayFair Teams, how it is structured, and how elementary and secondary students respond having been part of a Team or having attended a Team presentation.

PLAYFAIR TEAMS

Disability – Social Justice – Inclusion

- **A school-based infrastructure strategy to support interaction of students with and without disabilities in an equitable environment.**

- **An opportunity for student leadership in an area of social justice and education for all.**

- **An opportunity for schools to demonstrate their intent to promote positive change.**

- **An opportunity for enlightened impact on schools and communities surrounding schools.**

What Is a PlayFair Team?

A PlayFair Team is a leadership opportunity for schools. In our experience, it is rare for a school to set about development of a long-term program aimed at acting on issues surrounding social justice. Yet, this is exactly what schools talk to their students about through the curriculum. Most often there is talk without action. What is missing is giving students opportunities to be involved in social justice, close to home and close to their community. What better way to accomplish this curricular aim than to become activists in the school and in the community around the school?

PlayFair Teams is positive response to the unfortunate fact that people experiencing disabilities are not yet fully accepted members of our society. Many students with disabilities are segregated from their able-bodied peers in school systems. Even when they are placed in regular classroom settings in the company of their typical peers, they tend to be relegated to the fringes of the classroom society. They often remain unknown in their communities, have restricted friendship circles, experience teasing and bullying, and are treated as second-class citizens. Adults with disabilities face high unemployment rates and low wages when employed. Housing is a continuing concern. Even in Canada, a wealthy, progressive nation, people with disabilities are marginalized in society. The larger society, and our local communities, is not aware of the situation of people with disabilities in our midst. One of the hopes for our education system is that it will strengthen our understanding of each other. We need to work at this. It will not be realized otherwise.

PlayFair Teams is aimed at informing communities about the situation of people with disabilities. It is aimed at disability, social justice, and community.

PlayFair Teams is leadership opportunity for students. It may sound trite to say "The students of today are the leaders of tomorrow.", but it is true. If we wish for equitable treatment of Canadians with disabilities in our communities, we must look to the leaders of tomorrow and support them in social justice for all.

Most people do not personally know a person with disability. They may interact with them occasionally at a superficial or instructional level, but that is not getting to know them. This is certainly true in our schools where typical students rarely have opportunity to mix with their peers with disabilities. They know of them. They see them in the hallways of their schools, on the street, or at the mall at times. But they do not know them at a personal level. They do not know how often their fellow citizens with disabilities are ignored, avoided, and marginalized in their communities. When asked, they will say that their fellow students with disabilities have friends, but that those friends are others in their special classroom. The way to change this is to become involved.

Scattered through this brief discussion are the words of students who have become involved.

[1]*PlayFair has been an experience like no other. It was definitely nothing like I had expected. When I was first told about the nature of PlayFair, my initial thought was that as the Grade 12's, we would be leading the special ed students in developing a presentation. As soon as I learned, the true experience was for me. I'd discovered the joy of meeting new people. Despite physical and mental disabilities, the special ed students are like any other teenager. During this experience, we talked, played, laughed, and cried.*

Michelle, Grade 12

[1] Please note that when the student voice is used, no attempt was made to alter grammar or spelling.

There is an old saying with a great deal of truth in it.

Show me and I will forget.
Tell me and I may remember.
Involve me and I will understand.

PlayFair Teams involves both typical students and students experiencing disabilities. Together, our students are a powerful tool, one which can change the lives of many Canadians with disabilities. We teachers can help them to realize the power they have to create change.

- Our students know what is fair and what is not fair.
- Our students, with strong adult example and guidance, have the potential to sensitize their communities with regard to disability and social justice. They know what playing fair means.
- **PlayFair Teams** is a community education strategy to mobilize the youth of Canada in advancing disability, social justice, and inclusion.
- **PlayFair Teams** is social justice, playing fair, in action.
- **PlayFair Teams** is schools looking outward and contributing to their communities.
- **PlayFair Teams** is students, now and in the future, becoming leaders for social justice.
- **PlayFair Teams** is the Canadian character of accepting all with equity, generosity, and personal responsibility in action.

Playfair gave me the opportunity to meet and get to know 12 different, amazing people, all of who taught me something. The things I've learned about the process of a presentation and about myself are lessons that'll stay with me for life.

Florence, Grade 11

What Does a PlayFair Team Look Like?

A **PlayFair Team** looks like any group of elementary or secondary students. It is a group, which varies in size from school to school. Here are a number of points about what a **PlayFair Team** looks like and does.

A PlayFair Team is:

- A group of volunteer students of any age or grade. The number of volunteers determines the group size.
- A blended group with and without disabilities.
- A group with two advisors - a Teacher Advisor from the school and a Community Mentor for Disability from the community to connect the **PlayFair Team** to the community
- An extra-curricular activity like any other extra-curricular activity. It is not a one-time activity, but a continuing part of the school program.
- An opportunity for personal leadership.
- People working together to achieve a positive goal.
- An opportunity for contribution to the community around a school.
- An opportunity to understand and practice social justice and equity.

The numbers do not matter. Even one student is enough to tell stories, sing songs, recite poems, or do a one-person skit about social justice. The need is to form a **Team** and to be active. Participation on a PlayFair Team is not a requirement. No-one should be told to join a Team because someone else thinks it would be good for them. If we tell our students they should join a PlayFair Team, their participation will not be voluntary. Such an action is not one that will lead to equity.

To never ever make fun of people that go to special ed because they are just as important as the rest of us.

Shalini, Grade 3

We evaluated what students think of PlayFair Teams and its message. Below are responses from grade 3 and 4 students who were part of an audience that watched an elementary school PlayFair Team presentation. These are followed by reflections from secondary school students who were members of PlayFair Teams.

Elementary School:

- After watching the skits, what do you think a PlayFair Team means?

S 1, Grade 3, age 9: I think it means you should play fair without cheating.

S 2, Grade 3, age 8: It means people play together and to be friends.

S 3, Grade 4, age 9: I think the play fair team means not to bully others and to treat

everyone fairly.

S 4, Grade 4, age 9: I think it means people have to play fair.

- What do you think one main message of the skits would be?

S 1, Grade 3, age 9: Treat everybody the same way like you treat other people.

S 2, Grade 3, age 8: They should respect the children.

S 3, Grade 4, age 9: To play fair.

S 4, Grade 4, age 9: Help someone if they are hurt.

- What is one thing that you have learned from watching the skits?

S 1, Grade 3, age 9: There are many different people in the world that should be treated good.

S 2, Grade 3, age 8: I have learned from the skits that you have to help people when they are hurt.

S 3, Grade 4, age 9: I have learned to treat everyone fairly.

S 4. Grade 4, age 9: go and play fair and don't make fun of others if they go to special ed

Secondary School:

Crystal (student experiencing disability)

During the eight months of PlayFair I had a lot of fun with my peers writing our own scripts as well as developing new friendships. We learned to work together as a group but more importantly, I think that each of us learned to get to know each other as individuals rather than just judging the first thing we see. As a group, we not only saw each other's strengths and weaknesses but we also learned how to incorporate everybody's talents into one skit. We realized that we needed to accommodate and help each other and everything that we accomplished was not only the work of one person but the work of everybody in the group.

Megan (student experiencing disability)

While during play fair, I learned a lot. I learned how to be more open with people; after all, people are always more than willing to talk as long as you give them the opportunity too. The most important and perhaps the hardest thing I learned was self confidence. I have to believe I can do something and know that I may have physical

challenges but it doesn't mean that I'm incapable of doing things, I can do anything I set my mind to.

All my life, I was judged, put down and left out of things just because I am physically disabled, but for once I'm not. I guess it's true. People really have no clue how powerful they really are. So, I would like to thank the helpers in play fair for everything they have done for us and for becoming the best friends, which is way more than any one of us could every ask for. Their kindness, compassion, understanding, and the fact that they are always there for me and treat us like a normal person means the world to me and all the other kids in play fair. They respect us and care about us and don't put us down in any way. That's a really great thing to have.

Sonia (typical student)

When I first joined PlayFair the ideas the committee put forth to we they were great. It showed a lot about the human condition here at Johnson, because everyone had this ideal that high school students especially in a locale such as Rexdale have a total disregard for others, for matters of importance. But here was this group of people who thought they could make a difference by creating awareness – it was refreshing. Somewhat idealistic I thought to myself, but refreshing none the less. As a child I was exposed to everything in life, every type of person, a vast variety of differences and for this I have always been so grateful. In life, I think, one can only truly be comfortable in their own skin at all times when we realize the only thing that separates us from the others, is ourselves, our fears. And it is illogical to think that by dong so somehow we will ever get anywhere I this society. When I was in grade school the disabled children were never segregated from us. Some of us took to this much better than others unfortunately. I remember two people in particular, Christina and Victor.

Christina was a year older than me, she could not walk, she has been born with a mental disorder, but she could however communicate well. At lunch time everyday the teacher would elect someone to take her around school and I must admit volunteers were scarce. Somehow I was lucky enough to have done some "required" volunteering for most of my grade seven year, even if I didn't appreciate it at the time. The greatest feeling in the world is getting to know someone, and seeing them better their lives. At the beginning of the grade eight year, I got to see Christina take her very first steps. She had had corrective surgery over summer. While it might not have been perfect, far from it even, but I don't think I've ever been happier for anyone in my whole life. Things that I have seen or have happened in my life made me believe in the playfair cause. I thought it would be amazing if we could break down all these barriers, make people approach things with open arms, but is that possible? To me the answer to that question seemed grim but when we arrived at Mary Ward and saw all those students just as we are, working together, it changed my whole point of view. Because now I truly believe that with presentations as powerful and inspiring as the one I was blessed with being able to witness that day, anyone could become enlightened, and would understand the importance. As I do now.

Daniel (typical student)

I joined the PlayFair Team one year ago because I wanted to see what this group was all about and what I can do for them. At the time when I joined I wasn't thinking that this group would change me or give me any new experiences, or perspective. I thought only that I would join and do stuff and not receive anything in return – but I did. When I saw and heard stories dealing with the acceptance of people labeled with challenging needs, it made me realize that I could relate to them so much, because of things I had gone through in my own life. When we arrived at Mary Ward for the PlayFair meeting, I realized again how much this group means to me because we all support each other. No one person has to feel alone, neither me nor them. Now that I am a part of this team, which means so much to me, I am going to spread the message of acceptance to the best of my abilities because we are who we are, and everyone should be accepted regardless of any differences. We shouldn't have to disguise our true selves for anyone.

PlayFair Teams Have a Role in Bullying Prevention

Though PlayFair Teams have the overall objective in realizing social justice for learners experiencing disabilities, some schools have noted that it impacts on bullying in schools. A PlayFair Team brings together typical students and students experiencing disabilities in a setting where equity of status and contribution exists. Often this is the first time typical students have associated with peers experiencing disabilities in a setting that is not based on some version of the charity model. The impact on both groups of students is obvious in the student comments above. The impact is not only on the students involved in the PlayFair Team. Other students in the school are less liable to engage in inappropriate behaviour directed toward those with disability. In fact, the typical students on the PlayFair Team begin to note and react to inappropriate behaviour. Their sensitivity has been increased, and that begins an effect, which spreads throughout the entire school.

PlayFair Teams was accepted by the Ontario, Canada, Ministry of Education as a bullying prevention program and all schools were made aware of its potential. Ontario is where PlayFair Teams originated. The Ministry evaluation of PlayFair Teams follows. Essentially, the Ministry review found PlayFair Teams to hold significant potential to reduce bullying in schools. A number of the student evaluations made this point as well.

ONTARIO	**Registry of Bullying Prevention Programs – Classification Checklist**

PlayFair Teams – Disability, Social Justice, Inclusion

KEY ELEMENTS OF A SCHOOL BULLYING PREVENTION PROGRAM	Present in Submitted Program	Absent in Submitted Program	Comments
The program defines bullying	*X*		*Clearly defined*
The program identifies different forms of bullying	X		
The program addresses specific issues identified in schools	*X*		The program focuses on social justice for people with disabilities, younger or older
The program focuses on healthy relationships, and explains the bullying dynamic	*X*		The bullying dynamic is explained & strategies on overcoming bullying the disabled are included
The program includes training materials & guides for educators, students, parents, & school staff on the issue of bullying & on bullying prevention strategies	*X*		There is a handout booklet & a CD ROM for both PC & MAC that includes black line masters & interactive resource kit for students to complete & problem solve.
The program takes a multi-faceted approach: school-wide education (targets the whole school community & is embedded in the curriculum); routine interventions (specifies strategies for students involved in bullying & victims of bullying): & intensive interventions (identifies supports for students involved in repeated bullying & victimization with possible recourse to community & social service resources)	X		The program is multi-faceted. The program positions volunteer students, working collaboratively, as leaders in creating conceptual & behavioural social change in understanding & respecting groups that are a focus of bullying
Intervention strategies address peer processes that can promote prevention & stop bullying	X		The main focus of the program is that students can help create positive change in their schools and communities
The program is systemic (it involves parents, peers, classes, staff, & the wider community and is ongoing (it is integrated in reading, art, & other curriculum elements	X		The program is systemic. Students give a voice to their experiences by dramatizing forms of bullying, singing of new possibilities, creating murals of diversity, growing peace gardens, & acting as conflict negotiators
The program involves interventions & support for students who are bullied & those they bully	X		Interventions are included for all students that are a part of the bullying dynamic
The program helps in developing protocols for safe reporting of bullying incidents	X		
The program has an evaluation component	X		An evaluation form is completed by students that are a part of the bullying dynamic
The program has safe intervention programs for bystanders	X		
The school promotes a healthy social school environment	X		A positive healthy social environment is promoted
The program promotes development &/or improvement of students' social behaviour	X		The program promotes awareness of issues that relate to disabilities

EQUITABLE SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE

Our experience in schools has led us to a new way of thinking about the presence of learners experiencing disabilities in regular community schools. It is a thought that applies to schools where all learners experiencing disabilities are placed in regular classrooms, where some are so placed, and where others might be in segregated special classes. In other words, in any school where learners experiencing disabilities and their typical peers are placed in the same building, if not in the same classrooms.

We reflected earlier on PlayFair Teams and its effects on Team members. Our reflection led us to consider the fact that the message of PlayFair Teams was clear, as well, to their audiences. Our evaluations indicated this from early elementary grades through secondary. We wondered about the change in how students related when they became members of a PlayFair Team, and about the fact that a number of firm and lasting friendships resulted from the PlayFair Team experience. Was there something about disability and schools that we were missing, but that PlayFair Teams brought out?

. It came to us that PlayFair Teams gave status to its members in school, just as involvement in other school co-curricular activities give status to those participating in them. The difference in this case was that the learners experiencing disabilities gained status along with their typical peers. In our experience, and that of the students involved, they previously existed on the fringes of school society. They often did not learn with their typical student peers. They were not instructed by the same teachers. They did not become members of school teams or clubs. They were in the same school, but not a real part of the school community. They had minimal status. Now they interacted with some of the typical students, ate lunch with them, chatted in the hallways with them – and they were known to more students than just those on the Team. Teachers and administrators told us that bullying of students experiencing disabilities was down, and that some typical students known for bullying seemed to have changed in their understanding of difference. This gave status to PlayFair Teams in the eyes of administrators and teachers, as well as the student body.

This slowly forming thought led us to ponder on why other groups, whether defined by race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and so on, already had status in the schools. True, there might be individual members of these other groups who might not be full members of the student society, but the group as a whole received recognition. The group did not exist on the fringes of school society as did those experiencing disabilities. For this particular group, it was rare for any member to be recognized as a full member of the student society. Was there something about school itself that fed into lack of recognition as members of the overall student society? Something other than simply "disability"? Was there something about school that gave status to typical students, but not to others?

We began to think of the formal and informal infrastructure of schools. In our minds, the formal infrastructure is that created and run by administrators and teachers. All students are covered by this infrastructure, which deals with the primary focus of

school, academic learning. The informal infrastructure deals with optional activities available to students. Its elements may be accessed by students, if they are interested in an optional school-based activity. Through interaction with the formal and informal infrastructures of school members of all groups gain implicit recognition and status as part of the school community. Assessment of interaction with the formal and informal school infrastructures by members of all other student groups, compared to interaction by learners experiencing disabilities, provides a picture of recognition and status, their level of citizenship in school.

For example: (The first paragraph applies to typical students, the second to students experiencing disabilities)

- School curricula are based on the contributions to knowledge by members of the various groups making up the school community. Widening of the number of groups (moving away from Euro centric curricula), has been a primary focus of schools in recent years. When students study the curricula, they can recognize themselves in those who have contributed to knowledge. In this subliminal way typical students and their teachers accept that they have a place in the school

  It is rare that members of the group comprised of those experiencing disabilities are recognized as contributors to knowledge. In this way they have less implicit status than do their typical peers.

- School clubs and teams are made up by a wide-cross section of students. Students participating in these activities gain recognition and status by others interested in the same activities and by administrators and teachers, who see them as involved in school affairs..

  Students experiencing disabilities commonly are not represented, as a group, on most school clubs and teams.

- Most students can be flexible with regard to time of arrival and departure from school. This opens up many opportunities to participate in all sorts of school activities.

  Students experiencing disabilities commonly are restricted in their arrival and departure times, thus not becoming a part of the informal infrastructure of their school.

- Most student groups can recognize themselves among the administrators, teachers, and other staff of the school. Members of their group are represented and there is a connection.

  Learners experiencing disabilities are rarely able to recognize themselves among those adults working in the school.

- Most students visiting the school library will be able to recognize themselves in numerous library print and visual holdings.

  Students experiencing disabilities will not be able to recognize themselves at a commensurate level in library holdings.

We are not suggesting that a single activity, such as PlayFair Team, can alleviate all or any of the above situations. However, it strikes us that PlayFair Teams is one equity strategy that increases the status and recognition of learners experiencing disabilities in the school community. It is one example of what can be done by perceptive and creative school staff. Are there other ways to achieve similar results?

We know from working with PlayFair Teams that students who previously had low status and who were not known personally to many typical students, found their level of recognition and status changed in various ways. This change did not occur only in terms of the Team's activities. There was interaction in other aspects of school life between Team members. Additionally, typical students beyond the Team's members began to interact more with students experiencing disabilities. Lastly, administrators and teachers noticed a degree of change in the behaviour of some typical students who had been of concern with regard to bullying. The comments of some of the secondary PlayFair Team members bear this out.

We feel comfortable in suggesting that it would be worthwhile for schools to consider their formal and informal infrastructures in terms of how they effect status and recognition of learners experiencing disabilities. It is especially important to reflect on structures that act to mark out certain students, to separate them without intending to from the mainstream of community life. If inclusion is to be realized, students experiencing disabilities must be part of the equitable mix.