

## **Laidlaw Scholarship Research Proposal**

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### **Project Title: Implementing UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Barbados)**

Professor Matthew Saleh will advise the research project entitled, “Implementing the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Barbados.”

Barbados is a small nation in the Eastern Caribbean that ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2013, making the country a late adopter. However, Barbados has yet to implement an overarching legal framework that protects people with disabilities in the workplace, education, and other everyday situations and state services. Although Barbados is a developed country (with a high Human Development Index) globally and regionally, people with disabilities -- who constitute 5.3% of the total population of Barbados (Stephenson et al. 2020, page 91) -- are consistently an underserved demographic in Barbados. While special education occurs in the general setting, special needs units in a general school, or designated special schools, special education policy in Barbados mainly serves youth with physical disabilities when attempting to mainstream education. Youth with intellectual or developmental disabilities are generally segregated from the mainstream education system. The current policy creates educational environments where young people with disabilities have fewer opportunities (i.e., few secondary/postsecondary options) compared to their counterparts without disabilities, stigma and pessimism about the prospects and school-to-work transition of youth with disabilities, and insufficient and improper assessment and evaluation of youth with

disabilities. Unequal opportunity, inaccessibility to support and academic/employment resources, and lack of effort to identify and accommodate young people with disabilities have contributed to the incarceration of people with disabilities at a disproportionately high rate. According to the National Council on Disability, 85% of the juvenile detention population has some type of learning or emotional disability, and only 37% received the assistance they needed in school. Moreover, youth with disabilities are less likely to start school, have lower enrollment and promotion rates, and have lower transition rates to post-secondary education and work (WHO, 2011).

Even though there is a significant direct correlation between having a disability and incarceration and difficult school-to-work transition, little has been done on the governmental level to enforce non-discrimination, provide equal opportunity in education and employment, and protect the rights of people with disabilities.

There is currently no empirical research investigating the employment and training experiences of people with disabilities in Barbados. Additionally, although the 2017 Employment (Prevention of Discrimination) Act prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment, critical components of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) are still not implemented or enforced in Barbados. Such components include Article 31: Statistics & Data Collection (“States Parties undertake to collect appropriate information, including statistical and research data, to enable them to formulate and implement policies”), Article 24: Education (“Effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion”), and Article 27: Work and Employment (“Promote the acquisition by persons with

disabilities of work experience in the open labor market...Promote vocational and professional rehabilitation, job retention and return-to-work programs for persons with disabilities”).

Therefore, we propose to do a qualitative research study using virtual focus groups and interviews with key stakeholders in Barbados. Through exploratory research, we will examine the lived experiences of people with disabilities in seeking and attaining employment and training opportunities (e.g., education, job training, vocational rehabilitation).

After obtaining IRB approval, we will begin conducting outreach and recruitment of participants and will hold virtual focus groups. We will recruit a sample through existing connections with the Barbados Council for the Disabled while also ensuring that individuals with different types of disabilities (e.g., physical, intellectual, developmental) are represented in the target sample size of 30 individuals with disabilities, as well as 30 employers (in supervisory roles across a range of employment sectors).

Our research project aims to inform areas where law and policy in Barbados can meet the employment needs of people with disabilities and address employer attitudes to further implementation efforts of the UN Convention. By doing so, we will aid in improving the living conditions of people with disabilities in Barbados, increasing the resources for the governmental enforcement of non-discrimination and for the assessment and intervention of youth with disabilities to improve the school-to-work transition, enhancing accommodations in schools and workplaces, and overcoming the stigma associated with living and working with a disability.