

## Francine Arsenault

To mark International Day of Persons with Disabilities, Independent Living Centre Kingston and the Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee of the City of Kingston celebrates the empowerment of persons with disabilities and their communities by recognizing a local leader in the disability movement, Francine Arsenault.

When Francine Arsenault joined the disability rights movement in 1981, she was rapidly catapulted into national and international politics, a world far removed from her log cabin home in the woods of rural Ontario.

"When there is a principle to be fought, Francine will be there doing battle. You can always count on Fran," states Cathy McPherson, former Provincial Coordinator of Persons United for Self-Help in Ontario (PUSH Ontario), an organization of which Arsenault held the presidency for six years. She was then elected as Chairperson of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities.

"Francine epitomizes the strength of the self-help movement with her combination of the personal and the political. These are things which fuel social and political change," states McPherson. "Francine's strength is that she recognizes the importance of both the issues and the emotional aspects of the work. She recognizes the emotional reasons that bring people to the movement and keep them there."

One of the principal concerns attracting many people to the disability movement is transportation. Francine has challenged the transportation industry both nationally and provincially. She has co-chaired Ontario's Transaction Coalition, which forged an alliance of seniors, people with disabilities and others who want to make Ontario's transportation system accessible.

"To be effective on complex social policy questions like transportation or poverty, we have to work together. My particular leadership style is to assist people and groups to work collectively on the socio-economic concerns affecting them," states Francine.

Having had polio at eight months of age, which led to many stays in hospital, Arsenault is dedicated to ensuring that consumers with disabilities have enough information about self-help to prevent the establishment of repressive institutions, which segregate people with disabilities from the community.

Many vestiges of institutionalization remain in Canada despite over 20 years of struggle to make full participation and equality a reality for people with disabilities. "People across the country have told us that accessible transportation, employment and training, attendant services, housing and recreation are vitally important to them," states Francine. Francine's unique blend of local, national and international involvements enable her to assist the Canadian self-help movement of people with disabilities meet the challenges of a country that is becoming more of a player in the global economy through initiatives such as the north American Free Trade Agreement.

Francine's involvement in international matter was demonstrated during her time as head of the International Centre for the Advancement of Community Based Rehabilitation (ICACBR) at Queen's University.

Francine was a leader in the development of disability resources in Kingston and area as a founding member of Independent Living Centre Kingston and held a leadership role for more than 10 years.