



FRAN ODETTE

Woman of Distinction 2008 Access & Equity



Sexy, fun-loving, engaged, nearly omnipresent where women's issues are concerned, **Fran Odette** has dedicated the last 20 years of her time and energy to advocating for the well-being of women with disabilities and deaf women. Currently the Program Manager at Springtide Resources, an agency dedicated to ending violence against women, Fran's passion and drive stem from her experience as a woman with a physical disability, matched with an abiding belief in social equality for all.

Whether it is gently but insistently raising the accessibility issues left off the agenda of able-bodied community organizers, service providers or government agencies, or educating the gay and lesbian community about the intricacies of an attendant caregiver's role in the lovemaking of people living with disabilities, queer or otherwise. Fran Odette appears tireless in her leadership role forging disabled women's access to everyday life and social justice organizing.

Fran graduated with a Masters of Social Work degree from the Carleton University in 1993, and embarked on a life project of creating change. For disabled women themselves, Fran wanted to see empowerment; an end to the alarming abuse rates they face, and a self-image of strength, competence and resourcefulness. For health and social service providers and the larger community, Fran set out to challenge and change stereotypes of sexlessness, helplessness, vulnerability, and marginality that still limit people's perceptions of disabled women. In the face of institutional inertia, people's own unexamined biases or plain old ignorance, Fran exemplifies the admirable quality of being able to channel frustration into a calm and compassionate yet unrelenting way forward.

Though Fran's personal style is engaging and personable, she has strong skills and knowledge that have made her the lead on developing access for disabled women to many parts of our community. A counsellor and group worker for women with disabilities, a researcher and consultant with government, universities and community groups, an educator and trainer in various sectors, and a published presenter at local and international levels, Fran Odette does what it takes and takes it where it needs to go to get positive change to happen. Fran has been part of the advisory councils of Ryerson University and the Anne Johnston Health Station's Barrier Free Health Program, as well as a project coordinator or co-investigator on women and disabilities initiatives for such institutions as the University of Toronto, Centre for Research in Women's Health, The Institute for the Prevention of Child Abuse and The Regional Women's Health Centre. She has been a reviewer for the Lesbian and



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Gay Community Appeal, the Canadian Women's Foundation, The Lesbian Breast Cancer Project, on the board of the Disabled Women's Network (DAWN) and on the Executive of the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Legal Clinic. Her work with Springtide Resources has taken the agency from being in an inaccessible space in the basement of a church to being at the forefront of pioneering disabled and deaf women's services across Ontario.

Fran Odette is a mentor who has a vision of taking disabled women's voices and advice from the margins to the centre of community organizing. She has been instrumental in pushing for women with disabilities to be in the leadership of services addressing violence against women, healthy sexuality, and community engagement. In the face of ongoing barriers to her own participation in social justice work, Fran maintains a frantic pace, a serene demeanor and a wicked sense of humour. Fran Odette has led a range of initiatives that have become milestones in the advancement of women with disabilities and deaf women in Toronto and Ontario -- examples that put her among a small courageous sorority in the world.