

2C

Sunday, July 5, 2026

FEATURE



Five decades of advocacy, inclusion and progress



“Fifty years ago, our founders planted the seeds of inclusion. Today, we honour the struggle and ignite the future where no one is left behind. – Patricia Padmore-Blackman, President, BCD.”

Message from BCD President

As we commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Barbados Council for the Disabled (BCD), I am filled with a profound sense of pride, gratitude, and optimism for the future.

Having served on the Board of the Barbados Council for the Disabled for many years before assuming the role of President, I have had the privilege of witnessing firsthand the remarkable transformation of both our organisation and the national landscape for persons with disabilities. The journey has not always been easy, but it has been one marked by resilience, determination, and an unwavering commitment to advancing the rights and opportunities of persons with disabilities in Barbados.

Over the past five decades, the council has evolved from a small advocacy body into a respected national organisation representing a diverse disability community through its network of member organisations. Together, we have worked tirelessly to promote accessibility, inclusion,

education, employment opportunities, and independent living. We have challenged barriers, influenced policy, fostered partnerships, and, most importantly, helped change attitudes towards disability in our society.

The achievements we celebrate today are the result of the vision and dedication of countless individuals who came before us—our founders, past presidents, board members, staff, volunteers, partners, supporters, and persons with disabilities themselves. Their collective efforts have laid a strong foundation upon which we continue to build.

In recent years, we have witnessed significant milestones, including the advancement of the Fully Accessible Barbados Programme, increased awareness of universal design, greater recognition of disability rights, and the enactment of landmark legislation that strengthens protections and opportunities for persons with disabilities. These accomplishments demonstrate what can be achieved when advocacy is matched with action.

Yet, while we celebrate how far we have come, we

recognise that our work is far from complete. True inclusion requires ongoing commitment, collaboration, and innovation. As Barbados continues to develop, we must ensure that accessibility and inclusion remain at the heart of our national agenda, benefiting not only persons with disabilities but all citizens.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I extend sincere thanks to our members, partners, donors, government agencies, corporate supporters and the wider community who have walked alongside us throughout this journey. Your support has been invaluable.

As we honour our past and celebrate our present, let us also embrace the future with renewed purpose and determination. Together, we will continue moving beyond barriers and building a Barbados where every person can participate fully, contribute meaningfully, and live with dignity.

Patricia Padmore-Blackman
President, Barbados Council for the Disabled

MISSION STATEMENT: To strengthen the Barbados Council for the Disabled through strategic change and alliances, nationally and globally, to effect change for and to champion the rights of all persons with disabilities, ensuring their full and effective integration into society.



NTI's Commitment to Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities

A Shared Vision for Inclusive Learning

When NTI speaks about equipping every Bajan with the knowledge, skills and values to thrive in a digital world, we truly mean every Bajan.

Under the leadership of NTI Director Dr. The Hon. Allyson Leacock, that commitment is woven into the fabric of the initiative. From its Change Artists to the partnerships we built and the stories we chose to tell, NTI was designed around the understanding that national transformation must include every Bajan.

One of those Change Artists is Maria Holder-Small, former President of the Barbados Council for the Disabled, who has served as NTI's Change Artist for Persons with Disabilities since 2020. Through her lived experience with Multiple Sclerosis and longstanding advocacy within the disabled community, she has helped keep inclusion front of mind at NTI.

Janelle Skinner,
NTI-Coursera
Learner



"I always tell persons with disabilities to use NTI to their advantage... Sometimes, because persons with disabilities already carry so much, the financial aspect can make things difficult. They may not have the resources to travel to a class or pay for a course. With NTI-Coursera, you can do it from the comfort of your own home and at your own pace. Use them."

Persons with disabilities were included in the original design of the NTI Learning Management System, ensuring accessibility was never an afterthought. Those same principles continue in our NTI-Coursera integrated platform, where transcripts, captions, audio and free, self-paced learning allow learners to engage with content in ways that work for them. The option to revisit lessons and retake assessments offers added flexibility for different learning needs and abilities.



As our advocacy grew, it naturally found expression in other areas of our work. It is reflected in our online sign language course with Bonnie Leonce, our documentaries Labelled Disabled and Deaf Talks, and disability etiquette training through NTI's Art and Heart of Service.

That commitment continues through campaigns like Spot De Sign, our radio show Midweek Mindset, recognition of learners with disabilities at NTI's 5th Anniversary Awards, and our partnerships with organisations serving persons with disabilities, most recently the Paralympic Association of Barbados.



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Visit our website nti.org.bb



Scan QR Code:
Try our Disability
Awareness
and Support Course!



**Maria
Holder- Small**
Change Artist, NTI
Former President, BCD

PARTNERS IN INCLUSION



In many ways, NTI's commitment to PWD reflects perfect alignment with the Barbados Council for the Disabled and their decades of work in our nation. As they celebrate their 50th anniversary, we thank them for their relentless efforts on behalf of PWD. Next step: a fully accessible Barbados.