

Students have a care

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Program offers help to those with disabilities

By CHRIS HUNSLEY
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FOR STUDENTS like Sean Miller, a post-secondary education might not have been possible without the help of Carleton University's Attendant Care Program.

The 28-year-old English masters student, who suffers from cerebral palsy, is confined to a wheelchair.

He left Toronto eight years ago specifically because of the personal care Carleton offers disabled students. Academically, he holds his own but, physically, he needs help getting out of bed, cooking his meals and completing many daily chores.

"It's like a long-term care facility except it's in a university," explained Matthew Cole, executive director of the ACP.

The 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week personal care program — at the university since 1987 — employs 24 student attendants to help disabled students with their daily needs.

It's been such a success, Cole has also administered the program at Algonquin College the last two years. Algonquin is the only college in the province to offer the program.

"It's students helping students," said Cole, who began as an attendant in 1989 when he was a student and never left. "We're their hands and we're their legs."

No limit

Recently, every school in the province was required to file a report with the Ontarians with Disabilities Act outlining the state of accessibility on campus. Now that all publicly funded institutions must, by law, be fully accessible to the province's 1.5 million disabled people, Carleton and Algonquin hope other schools will take note of the award-winning program.

"It would be nice to see the whole issue of accessibility get more profile and schools become more accessible," said Larry McClos-



Suzanne Bird SUN

MITCH ST. PIERRE, front, and Mark Gosselin at Algonquin College. Algonquin is the only college in the province to offer an attendant care program.

key, associate director of student life services at Carleton, who explained that Carleton's disabled student population stands at 5% — almost double that of most schools.

Until other schools adopt similar programs, Carleton and Algonquin will accommodate clients from across the country, with no limit to the number of students in the program.

"One of the reasons I chose Carleton was because of that (ACP) program," explained Dr. Tammie Ricci, who was diagnosed with juvenile rheumatoid arthritis at the age of two.

The North Bay native, recently voted one of *Ottawa Business Journal's* 40 Under 40, came to Carleton in 1993 to pursue her master's degree before completing a PhD at York University, Ontario's only other school to offer the ACP.

She believes one of the reasons disabled people are increasingly accessing post-secondary education is due in part to the personal support programs.

Although other resources are available to

disabled students requiring personal care, they may not be adequate, explained Brad Smallwood, a 27-year-old fourth-year Carleton psychology student from Brampton who's afflicted with muscular dystrophy and has been in a wheelchair for 15 years.

Worth the money

Community housing with attendant care is unreliable for out-of-town students because of long waiting lists. Students regularly wait years for a space, and the province's Direct Funding Program, which covers the cost of an attendant for two or three hours a day, requires students to hire and manage their own attendants.

For high-needs users that could be extremely difficult, Smallwood explained.

The ACP program, funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, costs about \$1,000 per day to service 18 students at the two campuses. At that price, most involved feel it's a bargain.