

Torys LLP Advances Inclusive Training Opportunities for Youth Through Partnership

Torys LLP has implemented a number of programs and initiatives over the years that promote a culture of belonging throughout the firm's five offices – from recruitment and talent development to networking and mentoring opportunities.

Torys engages students in the firm's summer administrative program which offers students an opportunity to work in a business services department, gain professional work experience, develop leadership skills and network with a large and diverse group of administrative and legal professionals.

One of Torys' partnerships is with Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital's (Holland Bloorview's) Ready to Work program that advances inclusion of high school and undergraduate students with disabilities. The Ready to Work program uses an evidence-based supported employment model¹ as well as job coaching to enable student success.

The benefits of partnering with a job coach

Torys reviewed available summer opportunities and candidate profiles in discussion with the Holland Bloorview job coach. This adapted selection process removes barriers that neurodiverse candidates may face in interviews. Zed and Andrew were matched with Torys' mailroom team.

Steps that set both the students and team up for success included:

- The students visited the office in advance of their start to get familiarized with the layout of the building, their workspace and to meet with their manager and colleagues.
- Holland Bloorview and Torys provided specialized training for the coworkers of Zed and Andrew, which focused on understanding neurodiversity in the workplace, effective communication, and ongoing feedback to support learning and development.
- Zed and Andrew worked with their Holland Bloorview job coach to prepare written accommodation requests, which included information on how Torys could support their success at the firm. Both students valued consistency in their work routines, demonstrations of procedures and the clear presentation of information about expectations. They also requested a job coach to help them throughout their work term at the firm.

- A job coach provided daily support to both the students and the firm at the start of the employment relationship. New ways of working were introduced. Job tasks were broken down into clear and concise steps to help the students understand. Sometimes colleagues demonstrated how to perform the task so the students could learn through observation.
- The job coach asked mailroom staff to write down common processes. It is common that a number of best practices at work are “unwritten” and this can be hard for neurodiverse workers to navigate². On occasions when the mailroom team members made judgement calls based on previous best practices, the job coach encouraged them to document these processes so the students could complete their tasks in the same manner. For example, mail is sometimes delivered directly to an individual and sometimes it is left in a mailbox outside the door – depending on whether the individual is on the phone, in a video conference or in a meeting. The job coach and Torys team worked together to make information like this explicit.

Looking back on a meaningful and memorable summer

Reflecting on the summer, members of the mailroom team shared:

“Zed and Andrew were both very organized and eager to help out in the mailroom. It was a very useful experience to work with individuals who have different learning patterns and it made us all appreciate the importance of giving and receiving clear instructions, as well as being more organized in our workday. It was an asset to have their job coaches on hand to assist.”

It was also an experience Andrew said he won’t soon forget, “I learned my coworkers are my greatest allies,” he said. “Good coworkers can make your job easier. It made me less worried about finding future jobs.”

For the many people at Torys who interacted with Zed and Andrew, the experience was equally memorable.

“Torys is extremely grateful for the learning opportunities presented by Holland Bloorview,” said Lynne Rollo, Chief Human Resource Officer at the firm. “And we look forward to continuing our partnership through their Ready to Work program.”

“Diversity, equity and inclusion are key priorities for us, and a true business imperative,” said Rhoda Seto, Director, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion at the firm. “It is critical to our success that we foster an inclusive and equitable environment, where our diverse

workforce can thrive as their authentic selves every day. And we are incredibly proud of the opportunity to partner with Holland Bloorview's Ready to Work program."

To learn more

Partnerships and resources help employers advance disability-inclusive employment. To connect with an employment support organization in your area or to learn more, visit:

- [Ontario Disability Employment Network \(ODEN\)](#)
- [The Inclusive Workplace](#)
- [Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital Employer Resource Hub \(youth-specific resources\)](#)

References:

¹Jetha, A., Shaw, R., Sinden, A.R., Mahood, Q., Gignac, M.A.M., McColl, M.A., & Ginis, K.A.M. (2019). Work-focused interventions that promote the labour market transition of young adults with chronic disabling health conditions: a systematic review. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 76, 189-198. doi:10.1136/oemed-2018-105454

²https://www.theinclusiveworkplace.ca/pdf/en/Support_From_Job_Coach.pdf