



Compilation of Case Studies

Edition One

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Partnership & Collaboration



Ontario
Disability
Employment
Network

Réseau ontarien
d'aide à l'emploi
pour les personnes
handicapées

**Partnership Case Study - Essex County Region
2021-2022**

*Impact of School-Employment Service Provider Partnership
on Employment Outcomes for Youth who have a Disability*

Community partnerships can help schools prepare students for college, career, employment and citizenship by offering additional opportunities, supports and enrichment for young people. For students who have developmental disabilities, such partnerships are critically important. A partnership between Community Living Essex County and Community Living Windsor has extended to include school boards in their regions resulting in advancement of employment outcomes for youth who have developmental disabilities.

The following is a case study illustrating the partnership established between Community Living Essex County, Community Living Windsor, and their regional school boards to support the delivery of the jobPath curriculum in their Special Education classes, encourage summer employment and to engage youth and their families in conversations about employment well before graduating high school. In establishing these relationships, the stakeholders created a collaboration that ensures students are accessing and developing employability skills during their school years. Also, the employment service providers have an opportunity to get to know the students before they leave the education system. This allows for a person-centred employment preparation approach that better supports employment outcomes for these communities.

The partnership was created to strengthen and further develop existing partnerships with schools in the Windsor-Essex region. Just as the closure of a student learning program that supported several families was occurring, jobPath was just being launched. Community Living Windsor (CLW) and Community Living Essex County (CLEC) started to advocate to their local school boards the importance of using the jobPath curriculum within the school system, to better prepare students for the workplace before they left the educational system. Back in 2015, CLEC received some funding through the MCCSS and partnered with CLW, that included as a main goal, to collaborate with all the school boards and to increase summer employment opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities.

Testimonials presented from educators who have partnered with these agencies clearly indicate the importance of these relationships. The educators value the involvement of the agencies in the future of their students and their families. And thanks to these partnerships, since 2017, 70 students have received supports to gain summer employment and obtain critical skills, they will need to enter the workforce permanently.

Impact of School-Employment Service Provider Partnership on Employment Outcomes for Youth who have a Disability

Introduction

It is well documented that community partners can help schools prepare students for college, career, employment, and citizenship by offering additional opportunities, supports, and enrichment for young people. These types of partnerships are critically important for communities supporting youth who have developmental and intellectual disabilities.

According to the findings from ODEN's Youth Success Strategy for the Developmental Sector, the research found that where there is intentional collaboration between education providers, employment service providers, and employers, youth who have developmental disabilities have greater access to skill development and opportunities necessary for successful employment outcomes. And while the research found that current funding models and policies have created barriers for success in youth who have intellectual disabilities, some communities are finding innovative and practical ways to collaborate to remove these. This is the case for the communities of Essex County and Windsor.

The following is a case study illustrating the partnership established between Community Living Essex County, Community Living Windsor, and their regional school boards to support the delivery of the jobPath curriculum in their Special Education classes, encourage summer employment and to engage youth and their families in conversations about employment well before graduating high school. In establishing these relationships, the stakeholders created a collaboration that ensures students are accessing and developing employability skills during their school years. Also, the employment service providers have an opportunity to get to know the students before they leave the educational system. This allows for a person-centred employment preparation approach that better supports employment outcomes for these communities.

Understanding the Need for Partnership

In the late 1990s, in the community of Windsor, Ontario, families of children and adults who have a developmental disability were dependent on a program called "Work Matters" to help their children learn employability skills. The Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board ran this program within their Adult Education Centre until 2017.

But according to employment service providers in the community, *Work Matters* did not result in high success rates, and the students were not achieving meaningful employment after graduation. Furthermore, its funding was coming to end in 2017.

To help support some of the families who depended on Work Matters, Community Living Windsor offered "[Work for All](#)" as an alternative. Work for All is an employment skills training program offered then, and offered now, hand-on opportunities for people who have an intellectual disability.

In April 2015, Community Living Essex County, together with Community Living Windsor, partnered together to create a diverse and inclusive workforce across Essex County: **First Choice-Employment** project. Branching from the First Choice-Employment Steering Committee, three working groups carried the project goals.

One of the first things the steering committee did was establish an educational sub-committee called the **Strengthening Relationships Subcommittee** which had representation from both school boards, Workforce Windsor-Essex, St Clair College's Community Integration through Cooperative Education (CICE) Program, Community Living Essex County, Community Living Windsor, Student Links (Community Living Ontario). This subcommittee would evaluate how well employment services were connecting with schools. This committee advocated to promote jobPath (then known as JobStart) to every secondary school in the region.

Building Employment Skills – Introducing jobPath.

The education sub-committee had become familiar with jobPath, a pre-employment curriculum designed for people who have an intellectual disability to gain employment skills. They coordinated jobPath training with Community Living Sarnia, the creators of the jobPath curriculum and the associated resources. Teachers and special education coordinators from the local school boards in Windsor and Essex were trained.

jobPath is a six-week curriculum designed to help job seekers learn more about their own interests, strengths, and skills. The curriculum is a combination of in-class activities, guest speakers and workplace tours in the community. Community Living Essex County uses the material as part of their services through their Career Compass Employment Services.

Community Living Essex County's first in-person jobPath was facilitated in 2017. That same year, they launched *Youth in Action: Summer Work Experience* which began as a pilot project to develop and promote summer employment opportunities for youth returning to school, utilizing the jobPath curriculum as a tool in the first three days of the summer employment program. This was based off successful practices across the sector, and from the feedback received from families and educators.

Putting Theory to Practice

Since 2017, 70 students have gone through Career Compass' Youth in Action summer employment program. They have seen a gradual increase in the number of students who have a disability accessing the Youth in Action program AND the number of graduating students, leaving the education system, wanting to receive employment supports. CL Essex County credits the intentional and increased presence inside the school as leading to the increase in the overall number of youth seeking out employment supports. Participation during the COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging but has continued

Community Living Essex County has obtained feedback from the partner school boards to describe the importance of this collaboration:

Maggie Ducharme who is the Special Education Department Head at St. Thomas of Villanova described *“we have had an excellent partnership for many years with CLEC and the jobPath for a number of years. They have done their program both in person and online for our students. Several of our students have received support with the summer jobs program as well. We have also had students gain full time employment after high school through their association with the program.*

During 2019, the Youth in Action program had 34 students enrolled with 7 of them continuing to part-time employment after the summer program was over.

The support that CL Essex County provides the students is important and families recognize that. According to Ms. Ducharme *“families appreciate the individual approach taken with each student to discover their strengths and their areas of need as well.”* And when it comes to the value of the partnership, Ms. Ducharme says *“We value the partnership we have dealing with such caring and professional staff. It is evident how much they care about our students and their future plans for success.”*

Chad Barrette, Vice Principal of St. Ann Secondary School described how *“I had the fortunate experience of having Tammy come into my Life Skills classroom over the period of two semesters to facilitate jobPath lessons, one was in person and the other was virtually. She was personable and happy and connected very easily with the students. She gave many lessons on job readiness skills and made them hands on and at the learning level of the students. She really knew how to scaffold the lessons so that she could take the students to the next level and was sensitive as to not make the students feel centered out.”*

Mr. Barrette comments on the ability of the Career Compass staff to work with students and staff alike in a matter that was composed and professional. He indicates that the school appreciates the ability of the service provider to improvise when technology does not work but most importantly how to work well with students: *“Our students really liked jobPath; they learned many soft skills that do not come naturally for many in the class. We practiced over and over again the soft skills and saw a few videos of students in Life Skills Co-op all over Essex County performing jobs that our students came to see as possible for them. Through Tammy, the students began to see themselves as part of a community that uses the skills that they have to empower themselves to become more independent members of the community.*

Addressing Issues and Concerns

Like any partnership, the collaborations that Community Living Essex County and Community Living Windsor have created have experienced some challenges. But together, they worked on solutions.

Some schools were unsure about hosting an employment specialist (external resource) in the school and having them work alone with students. One of the ways they overcame this challenge was to have a teacher present in the classroom to help support and supervise.

They also found that the jobPath curriculum was not a good fit for *all* students. Some students chose not to continue with the program because through the process of self-discovery they identified that employment wasn't their main goal at the time. The jobPath program was offered off-site (not in the school) offering a neutral location, but for some students participating, transportation was a barrier for their involvement.

As noted previously, the COVID-19 pandemic brought some significant challenges to programs across all sectors and partnerships with schools to deliver the jobPath curriculum was not the exception. The virtual delivery of the curriculum did not have the same impact as when it was delivered in person. And despite the challenges, CL Essex County and three schools were able to work together to re-work the curriculum to allow it to be delivered as effectively as possibly virtually.

Angela Staley-Klassen, a Special Education Coordinator with the Windsor Essex Catholic District School Board emphasized the value of the partnership when she said, *“the partnership and collaboration between Community Living Essex County and the WECDSB has been a truly rewarding experience. Our students are provided with multiple highly engaging hands-on and virtual opportunities to prepare for employment. Thanks to the partnership, our students are able to practice pre-employment skills with the guidance of the jobPath facilitator, apply these skills through school co-op experiences and bridge into more permanent employment once they graduate.”*

Promoting Partnerships Beyond Essex County -Community of Practice

To further support this partnership and jobPath ODEN launched the jobPath [Community of Practice \(CoP\)](#) with 10 (ten) organizations across the province. Member of this CoP come together to support and learn from one another by creating resources and sharing promising practices that will strengthen their knowledge and skill using the jobPath curriculum.

If you have any questions regarding the information, please email us at info@odenetwork.com



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Réseau ontarien
d'aide à l'emploi
pour les personnes
handicapées

**Case Study: Partnership & Collaboration
2021-2022**
*Canadian Network Supporting
Inclusive Public Service Employment (CNSIPSE)*

Canadian Network Supporting Inclusive Public Service Employment (CNSIPSE)

Introduction

The following case study on partnership has been conducted by the Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN) with interviews and materials from LiveWorkPlay. This case study documents the inspiration, process behind, and learnings from the Canadian Network Supporting Inclusive Public Service Employment (CNSIPSE). CNSIPSE is a national partnership network of, to date, eight (8) organizations committed to improving employment opportunities in the federal public service for people who have a disability.

CNSIPSE was founded by LiveWorkPlay, an Ottawa-based charitable organization serving people with intellectual disabilities and autistic persons in community life and employment. Funded primarily by the Ontario provincial government, the work of the community team is funded under the auspices of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services while the employment team is funded by the Ontario Disability Support Program¹.

Their work developing relationships with, and facilitating accessible, equitable hiring practices within the federal public service are documented in their case study “Making Employment Within the Public Service of Canada Accessible and Successful for People with Intellectual Disabilities.” The broad strokes of that case study are excerpted here:

This case study chronicles a unique Inclusive Employment Initiative for people with intellectual disabilities and/or autism, designed and implemented by a community organization, LiveWorkPlay. This employment initiative features a targeted recruitment program with customized employee, supervisor, and organizational supports, which collectively demonstrate an accessible employment model for the federal Public Service of Canada.

The diversity found within the disability community is clearly illustrated by people with intellectual disabilities. With an inequitable employment rate of under 20 percent, people with intellectual disabilities are the most marginalized and vulnerable among us in Canada and historically have been severely under-represented in the federal Public Service. Yet, this remarkably diverse population also represents untapped potential as a largely available workforce whose inclusion brings creativity, innovation, and loyalty to their teams and yields wide-ranging benefits for employers, the economy, and all Canadians.

Aligning with the recently passed Accessible Canada Act, especially the employment pillar of the Act, the Public Service Accessibility Strategy, as well as the innovation objectives of Public Service Renewal, Blueprint 2020, this employment initiative demonstrated the

¹ Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP): <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-disability-support-program>

successful recruitment and hiring of 95 individuals as of December 31, 2019.”²

We encourage you to visit <https://liveworkplay.ca/psc-case-study-2021/> to access the study, and to learn more about the early stages of this inclusive employment initiative.

ODEN's case study looks at how the processes and learnings from the initiative done by LiveWorkPlay were translated into a national partnership network. The case study documents the decision to form the CNSIPSE and the pathway to its establishment.

Background

Located in Ottawa, LiveWorkPlay is especially aware of the underrepresentation of people who have a disability in federal roles. They felt the Government of Canada was long overdue for a change in its hiring practices for people who have a disability. They wondered what it would take to create an accessible, equitable, and disability-conscious hiring protocol with the Federal Public Service. They began their Inclusive Hiring Initiative, "Making Employment Within the Public Service of Canada Accessible and Successful for People with Intellectual Disabilities."

The initiative began with identifying critical areas in need of improvement within the Federal Public Service. Next, it focused on creating opportunities and pathways to employment for people who have a disability. LiveWorkPlay worked with the Public Service to identify and eliminate barriers to employment. They helped strategize ways to make the Public Service of Canada a plausible and accessible employment prospect for people who have a disability. This strategic initiative and collaboration resulted in promising employment outcomes for job seekers who have a disability. At last reporting, 145 people were recruited and hired.³

The specific pathway through this initiative is detailed in LiveWorkPlay's own case study. In addition to their published case study, LiveWorkPlay also shared their early successes with this initiative at the Canadian Association for Supported Employment's (CASE) annual conference held in Montreal in 2019 and updated at the Disability and Work Conference 2021.⁴

LiveWorkPlay's forward-thinking approach to employment caught the attention of like-minded organizations, and it soon became apparent that there was an opportunity to take this regional, organization-specific initiative to a national level. The seeds of partnership were sown.

² LiveWorkPlay, "Making Employment Within the Public Service of Canada Accessible and Successful for People with Intellectual Disabilities," LiveWorkPlay: Ottawa, April 2020, 4. <https://liveworkplay.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/LiveWorkPlay-PSC-Case-Study-2021.pdf>

³ Information updated by Anna Nelson of LiveWorkPlay via email, February 2022.

⁴ Panel discussion from the Disability and Work in Canada Conference (online) of December 2, 2021 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KthjJZnQxmK>

What is Partnership?

ODEN's *Partnership Guidebook* defines partnership as: "A relationship where two or more parties, having common and compatible goals, agree to work together for a particular purpose and/or for some period of time."⁵ In the case of LiveWorkPlay and the members of CNSIPSE, they have a shared and focused goal of increasing employment opportunities for people who have a disability in the Public Service. People who have a disability are underrepresented in the workforce. Their talents are too often overlooked, and their employment needs are frequently misunderstood. As such, there are countless organizations across the country working to find effective and innovative ways to support people who have a disability to achieve their employment goals. Working together with organizations with similar goals but with unique skills and resources can make for a more robust and successful experience.

Why Partner?

Simply put, partnership makes true the adage "many hands make light work." Resource and knowledge-sharing among partners can improve organizational effectiveness and service capacity, thereby increasing employment outcomes for people who have a disability. "In the Employment Service Sector, service providers can work with other organizations to increase organizational effectiveness and improve organizational efficiency. When you collaborate or partner for the benefit of job seekers and businesses in your community, you are focused on organizational effectiveness, and efficiencies are naturally created along the way."⁶

Employment service providers are under pressure to achieve employment outcomes in challenging job markets, using limited resources. When LiveWorkPlay identified opportunities for employment in the Federal Public Service, and they developed a sustainable system for ensuring equitable and accessible hiring practices for people who have a disability, their colleagues took notice. Employment service providers throughout Canada recognized opportunities in public service sectors in their own provinces and territories. They knew they could benefit from the experiences of LiveWorkPlay. Likewise, LiveWorkPlay realized they could have a greater impact on employment outcomes by helping other organizations to replicate their employment model. A partnership, in this case, helped to validate, promote, and expand the work that LiveWorkPlay was doing with the Federal Public Service, while also helping employment service organizations across Canada pursue new employment pathways.

⁵ Ontario Disability Employment Network, *Partnership Guidebook*, 2019, 3.

⁶ Ontario Disability Employment Network, *Partnership Guidebook*, 2019, 3-4.

Another benefit to partnership that LiveWorkPlay identified was the ability to socialize the core concept of their initiative. Canadians who have a disability should be represented in all aspects of Canadian life, including federal employment. Representation matters.

LiveWorkPlay recognized that the more employment service providers and federal employers bought into this concept, the more Canadians would come to expect people who have a disability be employed in all sectors. It was not just about individual employment outcomes. It was about creating a cultural shift in expectations.

Starting the Process of Partnership

LiveWorkPlay began to explore the potential for an inclusive employment strategy back in 2014. A part of that exploration included the formation of the Federal Employment Strategy Group (FESG). Described as “a strong team of champions, which functions together as a powerful and resourceful vehicle for knowledge transfer”, the FESG is a coalition of stakeholders dedicated to investigating, informing, and upholding inclusive hiring practices in federal service.

The FESG helped shape the inclusive employment model developed by LiveWorkPlay, and the working group continues to support the principles and practices of the model. In their case study, LiveWorkPlay notes, “The FESG shares experiences and enables real-time learning and best practices... This informal group, a 'coalition of the 'willing', continues to exist, progress, and provides an excellent example of an empowered workforce.”⁷ In other words, collaboration and informal partnerships were at the heart of LiveWorkPlay’s Inclusive Employment Initiative from its early days.

By 2019, LiveWorkPlay had a clearly defined model for inclusive hiring and demonstrated successes with that model. The following year they published their case study, and they began strategizing ways to extend the initiative’s benefits. LiveWorkPlay wondered: How do we support and share what we have learned beyond our organization? Given the demands on social services organizations, LiveWorkPlay knew that they could not support job seekers across the country. However, they also knew that great organizations existed throughout the nation that could take up the baton of the work LiveWorkPlay began, if they had the proper structure and guidance.

Developing a partnership network struck LiveWorkPlay as the most practical way to provide a framework to take the tools they had developed for the Federal Public Service initiative, and to share them with interested employment services organizations across the country. Even if they had the capacity to lead this initiative all on their own, LiveWorkPlay understood that there would be some region-specific factors to consider and that engaging local service providers in the process would ensure the best, most appropriate supports for job seekers.

⁷ LiveWorkPlay, “Making Employment Within the Public Service of Canada Accessible and Successful for People with Intellectual Disabilities,” LiveWorkPlay: Ottawa, April 2020, 3. <https://liveworkplay.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/LiveWorkPlay-PSC-Case-Study-2021.pdf>

LiveWorkPlay wanted to ensure consistency in service quality and expectations. A job seeker interested in working for the Public Service in Winnipeg should be able to count on the same standards of support and accessibility as a job seeker in Montreal, or in St. John's. Likewise, Public Service employers throughout Canada should count on well-informed service providers and well-prepared job seekers. Partnership offered the semi-formal process necessary to create a national standard and create a network of organizations accountable to each other and those standards.

In recruiting partners for CNSIPSE, LiveWorkPlay put feelers out for organizations across the country looking to replicate and promote their federal hiring initiative. The logic behind and outcomes from LiveWorkPlay's Federal Public Service employment initiative were so well-received that, in some cases, LiveWorkPlay was approached directly by interested organizations who wanted support in launching their own versions of the initiative. It was not long before a coalition of seven (7) organizations representing CNSIPSE was formed. The coalition included LiveWorkPlay, Avalon Employment, TEAM Work Cooperative, Action main-d'oeuvre, Community Living Mississauga, Gateway Association, and Semiahmoo House Society (Wise Employment Solutions). Alberta, British Columbia, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Quebec were represented in this first phase of the coalition.

Operationalizing Partnership

Though the value of partnership in expanding the benefits of their Federal Public Service initiative was apparent to LiveWorkPlay early on, they wanted guidance to ensure they were competent in their approach to partnership. When initial interest in partnership began to generate, LiveWorkPlay hired an external consultant to help them move forward with the strategic process. This was thanks to a grant LiveWorkPlay received from Innoweave. Mike Coxon of Third Sector Consulting assisted LiveWorkPlay in developing a maximum impact strategy to expand their partnership network.

Regarding the resources needed to establish CNSIPSE, LiveWorkPlay explained that people power was the primary resource. The partnership needed a coalition of enthusiastic staff to commit to the Inclusive Hiring Initiative's goals and contribute their experiences and ideas to the partnership. External funding to support CNSIPSE and its members has not been made available. Therefore, regular internal staff in the partner organizations are leading the movement for inclusive hiring in the Federal Public Service, with support from their fellow members in CNSIPSE. LiveWorkPlay explained that additional funding to support onboarding dedicated staff to the Inclusive Hiring Initiative would be ideal. However, they are making do with the network of support that the partnership offers.

Once the strategic plan was in place, LiveWorkPlay formally launched the CNSIPSE in the Winter of 2020. By the Spring of 2021, the first six (6) organizations to join the partnership had signed their memoranda of understanding, and the partnership was official. Invitations to attend the first meeting of the CNSIPSE were sent out soon after, and the CNSIPSE convened for the first time in May of 2021. A second meeting of the partners was held in November 2021. Since then, employment services organizations wishing to join the network

have had the opportunity to review its mandate and decide if they would make suitable partners.

Before onboarding new partners, LiveWorkPlay asks potential partners to consider if their organization has the capacity to support the inclusive hiring process and to see it through. While the goal is to have as many employment service organizations and federal employers take up this initiative as possible, the initiative is only as successful as its supporters are dedicated. LiveWorkPlay recognizes that different employment models, funding structures, and organizational cultures might present challenges to carrying out the work of the Inclusive Hiring Initiative. Therefore, LiveWorkPlay has been mindful of who has been invited to join CNSIPSE. To date, one (1) additional organization has joined the partnership (SCE Lifeworks in Manitoba) for a total of eight (8) members. The hope is to continue to expand the partnership, but not at the expense of it functioning effectively. Expansion will be strategic.

Moving Forward

In terms of CNSIPSE's future, LiveWorkPlay recognizes it is a delicate balance between growing the network and keeping it manageable. The strength of the partnership depends on an alignment of values, commitment, and focus. At this stage, the main goal is to hone the strengths of the partnership. It is in its early stages, and LiveWorkPlay is focused on guiding the partners through working out kinks in the process, getting some hires under their belt, and refining and proving the method of the Inclusive Hiring Initiative. Naturally, LiveWorkPlay wants representation from all provinces and territories in the CNSIPSE membership. Inclusivity and representation are the goals of the Inclusive Hiring Initiative, after all. It is only logical that would be reflected in CNSIPSE's partners. The partnership will grow as needs and opportunities for expansion arise.

Now that establishing the partnership is complete, the conversations among partners have shifted to solidifying shared goals, defining expectations, and sharing successes as an unfolding process. CNSIPSE was conceived as a supportive, action, and results-oriented network. To that end, LiveWorkPlay has developed checklists for success and resources to support its partners. It is important that consistency in expectations and quality of service is maintained. That said, they know that flexibility and individuality are important. The Inclusive Hiring Initiative is a person-centered employment model. The unique abilities of the service provider, the needs and goals of the person supported, and the needs of the employer are important to consider. Complete standardization is not the goal moving forward. Consistency of service quality and positive employment outcomes are foremost.

LiveWorkPlay has been encouraged by the realistic, honest, and productive conversations from the CNSIPSE partners. They acknowledge that each partner is at a different stage of the process, bringing different approaches to the table. The openness among the partners has allowed LiveWorkPlay to continually take stock of their employment model, and to enhance it based on new learnings and feedback. They note that it is necessary to be realistic, flexible, and humble in the early stages of what they hope will be a sea change in employment for Canadians who have a disability.

Lessons Learned

LiveWorkPlay has learned that there is no magic formula to a successful partnership. As the partnership grows and changes, so too will the needs of its members. The ingredients that have contributed most positively to CNSIPSE's success so far include alignment of vision and values, shared commitment among partners, strategic planning, flexibility, managing expectations, and a culture of openness.

At the most recent meeting of the partners, conversations around what a successful partnership looks like took place. Questions were asked such as: What does a fair partnership look like? What are the collective responsibilities of the partnership? What are the individual roles and responsibilities of partners? How do we as a collective remain accountable and uphold expectations? How do we maintain equal interest and commitment? What are reasonable and relevant data to collect from partners?

Over the next few months, CNSIPSE will be working to answer these questions, and to establish a more defined framework for the partnership with the support of their consultant. LiveWorkPlay will also be mindful of its role in guiding the partnership. They acknowledge that there is a delicate balance between sharing their knowledge and experience with the partners and “hand-holding” them through the process. The goal of the partnership is reciprocity. Ultimately what LiveWorkPlay wants is a self-sustaining inclusive employment model for government employers. CNSIPSE is a means to establish, socialize, and spread that model across Canada.

Key Takeaways

For LiveWorkPlay, the key takeaway from their Inclusive Hiring Initiative and the partnership that followed is that they are changing the world of work. They acknowledge that there are multiple perspectives on employing people with disabilities from various stakeholders. They note that there is the charity or 'do-gooder' case, the business case, and the rights-based case for employing people who have a disability. Through their Inclusive Hiring Initiative, LiveWorkPlay hopes to shift the conversation from these perspectives to one of inclusion and representation.

People who have a disability represent a significant portion of Canadian society. Their skills and contributions should be reflected in the world of work at the same rate people who have a disability are represented in the general population. LiveWorkPlay believes that including people with disabilities in the Federal Public Service is an ideal forum to promote this expectation. Federal agencies should represent the people they serve, and this includes people who have a disability. By modeling inclusive employment, federal employers are starting a call to action for provincial and municipal employers, and indeed all other employers across Canada.

Despite the many challenges wrought by COVID on the world of work, LiveWorkPlay sees this as a unique time to be thinking differently about employment and what is possible. COVID has demonstrated that flexible work is important to all workers, regardless of ability.



Creativity and flexibility support accessibility. COVID has demanded a shift in how we think about work. Now is the time to seize that moment to ensure all future conversations about work include people who have a disability.

CNSIPSE continues to evolve. For updates about 2023 and beyond, please visit <https://liveworkplay.ca/canadian-network/> for the latest information.

If you have any questions regarding the information, please email us at info@odenetwork.com



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Ontario Disability Employment Network
Business-Employment Service Agency Partnership Case Study -
NTEC & Fallsview Indoor Waterpark

AGENCY-PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERSHIP CASE STUDY –

Written in collaboration with Niagara Training & Employment Agency (NTEC)

Subject: Business-Employment Service Provider Partnership (Private & Not-For-Profit)

Sector: Tourism

Geographical Location: Niagara Falls, Ontario

Date: March 2020

PREAMBLE

To understand better the business community in which they operate, and support the labour demands needs for these businesses, the Employment Team at Niagara Training and Employment Agency (NTEC) began to join network groups that impacted local community development, not just employment related networks. NTEC joined the following groups:

- The Niagara Tourism Network,
- Business Advisory Committee for Niagara College CICE program,
- Chief of Police – Community Inclusion Council with the NRPS, and
- Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce.

By NTEC having a seat at these different groups, they are bringing the voice of the disability community to these networks. They are also promoting organic relationships and partnerships among the networks groups by introducing “champions” to groups they (champions) may have not been aware of. For example, NTEC brought a business champion to a meeting for the Niagara College CICE program to introduce the “business voice” into the educational and program discussions that the CICE team were conducting.

This involvement results in NTEC being recognized as an *active* contributor to the progress and development of the business community, and community at large. NTEC has been called and invited to participate in several business activities as a result.

ISSUE AT HAND

During the summer of 2017, the NTEC employment team read a local newspaper article highlighting the labour shortage that the tourism industry was experiencing. The article highlighted Fallsview Indoor Waterpark hotel. NTEC had already built a preliminary relationship with personnel at Fallsview Indoor Waterpark due to their networking activities. The strong, mutually beneficial relationships with local business networks allowed NTEC to approach the General Manager at Fallsview to help with their labour needs through a new pilot program.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

Team members from NTEC and Fallsview Indoor Waterpark met to discuss the immediate labour needs for the hotel. The waterpark was identified as a potential area where a new pilot could support several job seekers with one job coach. The preparation work included determining tasks and working areas that could naturally support the creation of a framework for a job-readiness internship program, for job seekers with minimal work experience, and lead by NTEC.

During discussions to establish the program, the employer identified that one of the barriers to hiring inclusively was funding. Through different funding opportunities, NTEC was able to support the salary for candidates who would participate in the 6 weeks internship. In turn, the employer committed to assigning supervisory support, full access to the facilities where the internship work would take place and access to performance management processes, so that the interns would have a full appreciation of what it was to work in a hospitality setting.

Reviewing the framework, both NTEC and Fallsview Indoor Waterpark agreed that an internship length of 6 weeks, 15 hours per week, would be ideal. This time period can result in a successful placement by promoting the development of all critical working skills, both soft as well as work related. This timeframe also would not impact NTEC's ability to pay the interns.

The framework included the support of a job coach from NTEC. NTEC also provided employment resources for waterpark supervisors and working staff to effectively integrate interns into daily work activities. These included resources such as task analysis review, scheduling plans, other on the job tools, etc. The interns were supervised by waterpark supervisors. At the end, 5 candidates were brought to take part on the 6-week internship program.

RESULTS

The pilot program concluded after 6-week. All five (5) candidates were hired by the Fallsview Indoor Waterpark for seasonal work, part-time work during the off-season and full time during the peak summer months. These employees have been employed for over 2 years. These employees earn minimum wage.

Following the success of the initial internship program, three (3) additional candidates were hired to work at the waterpark (2018). In addition to hiring, following the work with NTEC, the Fallsview General Manager, Andre Ross, has committed to be part of the Niagara College advisory committee; he believes it is important for educational institutions to prepare youth who have a disability to fulfill the labour shortage his industry is currently experiencing.

Mr. Ross shared his experience with this internship program with ODEN. From the start, André Ross was open to the idea of hiring more inclusively but he shared that, like many other businesses, he had some reservations:

- Would the employees require more supervision?
- Would they be able to do the work just as well as other employees?
- Would he have to be constantly involved with their work?
- How would you discipline or provide feedback without issues?

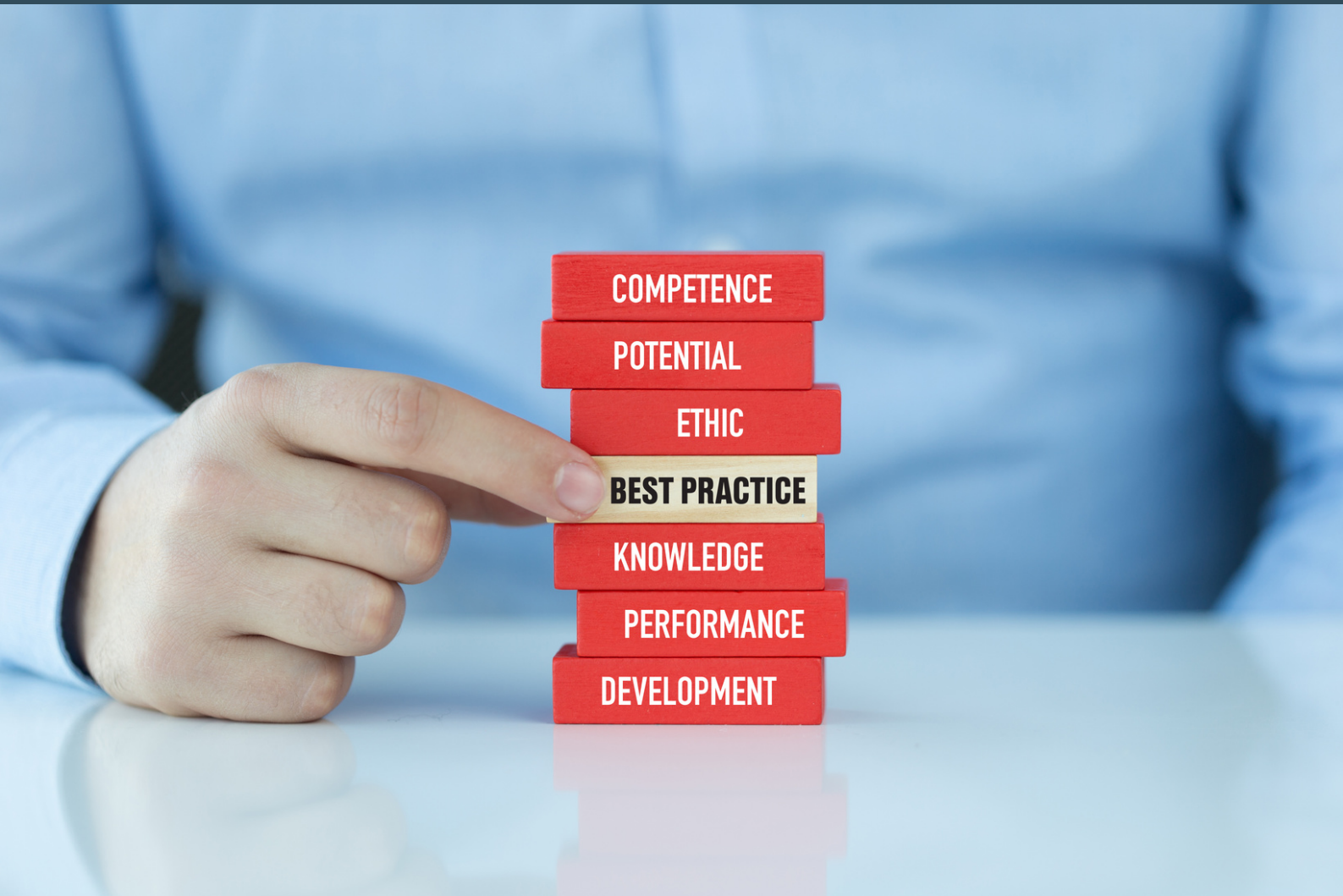
He admits now that the above were prejudgments and myths with no foundation and that the work these employees have done has been on par or above the work of other employees, who do not have a self-disclosed disability.

Now, after a couple of years of having employees who have self-disclosed disabilities, Mr. Ross is looking at how to implement hiring more inclusively in other areas of the hotel, to truly create an inclusive workspace.

LESSONS LEARNED

In discussing the case study, both NTEC and Fallsview Indoor Waterpark agree that the partnership has been successful. Several lessons have become evident while putting together this case study:

1. The skills obtained from this job readiness internship program can be applicable and transferrable to other job sectors such as long-term care.
2. Businesses need help to minimize the risk -this assistance can come in the way of resources such as Job Coaching, disability training, supporting co-workers and supervisors.
3. The employer identified earlier that treatment of employees who have a disability must be equal to other employees – to maintain performance for all.
4. Training for new employees in both slow and fast paced times is necessary particularly in the hospitality sector where seasonal peaks occur– Agencies must accommodate support for training more than one time during the year.
5. Having employees who have a disability helped the General Manager identified the need for a department lead – a cleaning manager. This new position allowed the employees who have a disability to have a consistent lead/supervisor that can provide more consistent and timely performance feedback. This has been an unintended benefit of hiring more inclusively – creating efficiencies.
6. Labour costs did NOT go up by hiring employees who have a disability. Productivity has not been impacted. These employees are more engaged and reliable.
7. Other benefits of hiring more inclusively – guests have really enjoyed seeing and interacting with employees who have a disability. We know that customers are coming back because we hire more inclusively.
8. The employees who have a disability have a great attitude, confidence and that morale expands throughout the resort.



Program Model & Promising Practices



Ontario
Disability
Employment
Network

Réseau ontarien
d'aide à l'emploi
pour les personnes
handicapées

**Program Model - Case Study
2020-2022**

MentorAbility Ontario-Mentorship Works
Mentorship Model that Promotes Employment Outcomes

Disability mentorship programs have several long-term impacts. For job seekers who have a disability, a mentorship connection can provide social benefits. If the mentorship results in an offer of employment, the benefit translates to economic impacts. For the employers involved in the mentorship sessions, these connections provide an opportunity to build awareness about disability inclusion. For employment service providers, these connections provide an opportunity to enhance business relationships and better support job seekers who may have no work experience. ODEN has supported the MentorAbility program in Ontario for the last three years and has identified the impact that this mentorship program has had in employment outcomes for participants.

MentorAbility Canada is a national supported employment initiative that facilitates unique, short-term mentoring opportunities between employers and people who have a disability. By providing and celebrating successful mentoring experiences in communities across Canada, this initiative is part of a national effort to promote the employment of Canadians who have a disability. This initiative is coordinated by the Canadian Association for Supported Employment (CASE) in collaboration with employment service providers in regions or provinces, known as provincial hubs, which are located across the country¹.

One of the focuses of MentorAbility is to ensure mentoring experiences are focused on the job seekers' passions, interests, and career choices. This mentorship provides the job seekers with an excellent career exploration opportunity. Employers who may have little to no experience supervising a person who has a disability have the opportunity to broaden their understanding of the value of an inclusive workforce. They experience first-hand the contribution that people who have a disability can bring to their workplace.

It is important to note that MentorAbility has a core focus on knowledge and information sharing, provide access to tools and resources to successfully facilitate positive and beneficial mentorship opportunities for employers, mentors, and job seekers.

The following case study examines the purpose behind the launch of MentorAbility, the pathways taken to successfully launch this Canada-wide initiative, promising practices, and success stories.

¹ What is MentorAbility? <https://supportedemployment.ca/mentorability/>

Overview of MentorAbility Canada

MentorAbility Canada project is a national supported employment initiative that facilitates unique, short-term mentoring opportunities between employers and people who have a disability. This project is funded by the Government of Canada’s Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities Program and was started in 2018. By providing and celebrating successful mentoring experiences in communities across Canada, this initiative is part of a national effort to promote the employment of Canadians experiencing disability².

This initiative is coordinated by the Canadian Association for Supported Employment (CASE) in collaboration with select employment service providers, called provincial hubs located across the country. The MentorAbility team consists of provincial hub coordinators, provincial trainers, and staff. Currently there are 8 partners across Canada including British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island, and 10 provincial hubs across Canada. Each site partners includes employers, mentors and proteges. See figure 1, for an illustration of the structure of MentorAbility Canada.

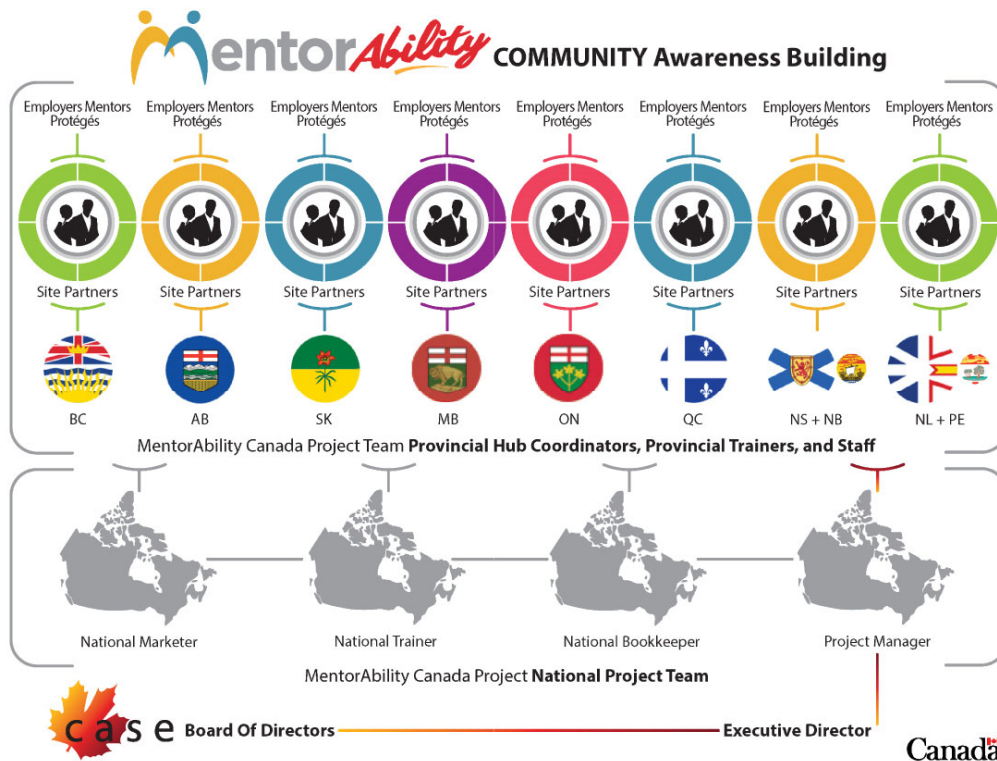


Figure 1. MentorAbility Canada (<https://supportedemployment.ca/mentorability/>)

² <https://supportedemployment.ca/mentorability/>











Provincial hubs are employment service providers that work directly with CASE to offer the MentorAbility program across Canada. Provincial hubs are the first connection point for local employment service providers (**site partners**), people who have a disability (**protégés**) and employers (**mentors**) to connect³.

See figure 2 for an illustration of this relationship.



Figure 2-MentorAbility Provincial Hub

Table 1 summarizes the provincial hubs supporting the MentorAbility program across Canada.

| Agency Logo | Agency Weblinks |
|---|---|
|  | https://inclusionbc.org/our-services/mentorability/ |
|  | https://www.c-a-s-s.org/our-programs/calgary-alternative-employment-services/ |
|  | https://gatewayassociation.ca/mentorability-canada-project/ |
|  | https://www.facebook.com/mentorabilitySK/?eid=ARDfoVROhkV1FRa7AiMdrS-3inswkp6EVTjma72npKF50EdDvJhlAu7c9sSwLv0TuNiy_BNmT2ojj83m |
|  | http://waso.ca/neww/ |
|  | https://www.odenetwork.com/initiatives/mentorability/ |
|  | https://www.marchofdimes.ca/en-ca/aboutus/newsroom/whatsnew/Pages/MentorAbility.aspx |
|  | https://sphere-qc.ca/initiatives/mentorhabiletés/ |
|  | https://teamworkcooperative.ca/ |
|  | https://www.avalonemploy.com/ |

³ What is a Provincial Hub? <https://supportedemployment.ca/mentorability/provincial-hubs/>

Mentorship Definition – Impacts & Benefits

Mentorship is defined as a relationship between a Mentor and a Mentee to guide and help mentees grow their skills, expand knowledge, and gain new perspectives on personal and professional development. There are different types of mentorships, including

- One-on-One mentorship, which involves one mentor and one mentee,
- Peer-to-Peer mentorship is mentorship among colleagues,
- Virtual mentorship which involves remote mentor to mentee support,
- Business mentorship involves team mentorship sessions among mentors and mentees and involves employers, and
- Group mentoring involves one mentor working with several mentees⁴

MentorAbility is *short-term* mentorship. Short-term mentorships focus on specific goals and results in a shorter period. This arrangement allows both job seekers, protégés, and mentors to focus on a specific *career exploration* goal.

MentorAbility matches protégés with mentors based on the interests of the protégés to discover and learn more about various careers. The mentorship provides an opportunity for protégés, through shadowing their mentor, to learn about different types of employment, ask questions, and reflect on whether they would like to further pursue employment opportunities in that career.

To support the mentorship connections, MentorAbility Canada provides a comprehensive tool kit for employment service providers to start a conversation with employers who are interested in becoming Mentors. These discussions present an opportunity for employers to learn about inclusive practices and supports.

Stakeholders in the MentorAbility Program

There are three principal stakeholders identified in the MentorAbility program: local employment service providers (**site partners**), people who have a disability (**protégés**), and employers (**mentors**).

Who Can Be a Mentor?

Any individual business leader who is interested in meeting a talented, motivated job seeker who has a disability is welcome to become a mentor. Mentors are working professionals, businesses, or organizations that can dedicate time during the mentoring day to meet and spend time with their protégé.

MentorAbility provides private businesses, non-profit organizations, and public sector employers with an opportunity to help promote the employment of people who have a disability, recognize talent and potential, develop lasting relationships with community leaders, tap into a pool of potential future employees, demonstrate community leadership,

⁴ <https://www.guider-ai.com/blog/types-of-mentoring>).

and also attract positive media attention. Employers can get involved by encouraging employees and managers to serve as mentors.

Businesses also receive opportunities to work directly with service agencies who can assist to connect with job seekers and gain access to the MentorAbility network across Canada. *Companies agreeing to mentorship are committed to and demonstrate intentional inclusive practices, promote and support changing the narrative in hiring people who have a disability, and advocate for the empowerment of job seekers who have a disability-* says Amy Widdows, ODEN MentorAbility Facilitator.

Below are some testimonials from Mentors.

“Everyone is able and talented.” – Employer

“Learning about this mentoring program opens another avenue for me to share my experience and knowledge about the workforce sector that I've been working in for over 25 years to younger generations eager to enter the environmental sector.” - Employer

“Prior to this engagement, I did not know that I could be of value to my community. This helped me make a connection and it provided me with an impetus to be more engaged in my community.” - Employer

Who Can Be a Protégé?

People who have a disability and who are actively seeking employment are welcome to participate to be matched with a mentor who is working in the career area of their interest. Protégés submit an application to their local coordinator, who will then work to facilitate a placement opportunity. People with any type or level of disability are welcome to apply— this is a cross-disability initiative. The only qualifier to participation is a strong and genuine desire to work in the community.

Below are testimonials from Protégés who have been matched to Mentors via MentorAbility.

“Career paths that I thought I couldn't pursue are applicable and worth seeking.” – Protégé

“I have many more options than the narrow view I held for myself before our conversation. For not only my immediate future, but also my long-term future.” – Protégé

“Anyone can succeed in this field despite your disability.” - Protégé

Who Can Be a Local Coordinator or Site Partners?

Local coordinators can be rehabilitation professionals working for local employment agencies, educators, disability community leaders, businesses and labour leaders, etc. Any individual or organization with a genuine interest in promoting employment and the full inclusion of people who have a disability is welcome to join as a Local Coordinator. Below is

a testimonial from an Employment Service Provider who has facilitated a number of mentorships via MentorAbility.

“The concept of short-term mentoring experiences versus job placements or work experiences is a great idea. Job seekers or the job-curious can try things out, learn more about the field, and get their feet wet in a way that may lessen anxiety.” – Employment Service Provider

MentorAbility –It’s Impact by the Numbers

The four pillars of the MentorAbility program are to increase employer capacity, increase stakeholder commitment, increase representation, and encourage employer outreach to service agencies for long-term support. The partner sites achieved these actions through a number of activities in their regions.

Employer capacity has increased by raising awareness, relationship building through mentorships, information sessions and workshops to promote their businesses, training for employers and service providers, and other virtual events.

Employer’s training, networking events, and webinars have helped change the narrative about inclusive hiring, by providing opportunities to expand knowledge on how to create inclusive hiring practices. Turning these intentions and learnings into action is vital. A development from the MentorAbility program has been the understanding of how disability intersects other identities -MentorAbility is working to engage other communities that intersect with the disability community to continue to raise awareness and ensure that a diverse representation of leadership across the country is also advocating for disability inclusion.

The program creates a unique opportunity for protégés to network in a non-judgmental environment as they learn about various career opportunities and in turn, raise awareness among employers about the talent and interest of people who have visible and invisible disabilities.

Employment service providers working with MentorAbility are committed to increasing employer engagement, raise awareness for inclusive hiring, and provide valuable opportunities to the job seekers who have signed up for the program. These local agencies play an important role in changing the narrative for intentional inclusive hiring while helping job seekers find meaningful employment.

Employment service providers participating in MentorAbility have access to

- knowledge sharing and transfer of promising practices,
- discussion with other agencies on how to tackle challenges or barriers,
- opportunities to expand knowledge and expertise,
- resources and innovative ideas.

These agencies have operated with a strong focus on collaboration and informally have built a community of practice.

All of these stakeholders working together have impacted significantly the protégés participating. As of September 2021, MentorAbility Canada had reported over 250 matches between Mentors and proteges nationally since the inception in September 2019. Nationally, over 130 site partners have become local coordinators and together they have facilitated over 400 workshops and events with over 200 community engagements⁵. The outcomes for MentorAbility Ontario are described in Table 2.

Table 2- MentorAbility Ontario – Engagement Outcomes

| Measurement | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 |
|--|---------------------------------------|--------|-------------------------|
| Number of Mentorship Matches | 38 | 31 | 48 [to October 2021] |
| Number of people hired | 30 people for the life of the program | | |
| Number of Mentors providing feedback following the mentorship (via surveys) | 48 (Year 3) | | |
| Number of Protégés providing feedback following the mentorship (via surveys) | 37 (Year 3) | | |

MentorAbility Success – Focus on Ontario

In Ontario, March of Dimes Canada (MOD) collaborates with the Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN) to co-lead the MentorAbility Ontario. These two organizations have an aligned mission and vision to raise awareness of the importance of mentorship and increase employment opportunities for people who have a disability.

MentorAbility Ontario was very deliberate to resist making this initiative centralized in one region; rather MODC and ODEN worked to expand the reach of MentorAbility Ontario to represent a wide range of communities. To increase awareness and engagement across the province, the organizations created an initial plan to travel across the region and deliver information sessions. However, travel was not possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the plans for MentorAbility Ontario changed to virtual engagements.

At the start of MentorAbility Ontario, the employment service providers engaged in the startup of the program believed strongly in its impact potential, and they intentionally advocated for it to other agencies. These early adopters became the early advocates to promote the benefits of this program for both job seekers who have a disability and employers.

⁵ Interview with Amy Widdows, MentorAbility Co-Facilitator for Ontario.

The COVID-19 pandemic amplified barriers among people who have a disability, disrupting financial stability among businesses, leading to higher unemployment rates in the province. Although these were significant challenges, during the pandemic, MentorAbility Ontario facilitated several mentorships as illustrated in table 2 previously.

Raising Awareness During Uncertain Times

The pandemic set severe restrictions in the traditional methods for promotion and marketing of new programs. In the past, a program like MentorAbility would have been promoted with methods such as tours and visits to organizations to engage many levels of stakeholders. However, the restrictions on travel and gatherings meant that MentorAbility Ontario had to think outside the box to raise awareness of this important initiative.

During the summer of 2020, MentorAbility Ontario successfully elevated their program by the launch an 8-week Summer Career Series Event. This series ran from July to August 2020, and each event was an hour in duration.

The Summer Career Series was meant to increase awareness and expand knowledge among job seekers who have a disability with an opportunity to explore different career options and opportunities. Industries highlighted during the 8-week [MentorAbility Summer Career](#) series event included:

- Entrepreneurship,
- Broadcasting,
- Finance/Banking,
- Manufacturing,
- Development Services,
- Recruitment/ Human Resources,
- Sales and Business.

Another innovative way to promote awareness of the MentorAbility Ontario program was the collaboration to record podcast episodes. In partnership with ODEN and MOD, [Spero Canada](#) offered a platform to promote the program. [Across the Desk](#), is an established podcast raising awareness about Autism and other aspects of disability. Two episodes were recorded and are available in the podcast to raise awareness on the importance of mentorship for people who have disabilities.

The podcast invites employers and protégés who have participated in MentorAbility to speak about their experiences and the benefits of this program while speaking about the importance of inclusive intentional hiring.

Challenges And Barriers Faced and Overcome

Although MentorAbility Ontario has experienced great success and has proven to be a very impactful program, acknowledging that there were some barriers at the start of the program is a necessary reflection of lesson learned.

One of the barriers faced early on were the concerns regarding insurance coverage, or the lack of it, for protégés visiting employer sites. This created a hesitation, whether real or perceived, for employers to join and become mentors. CASE, the program lead organization, understood that to remove that barrier, they needed to take a new approach and provide insurance coverage for the protégés. Removing this barrier increased the number of employers engaged across Canada.

As with many other programs that required in person interactions, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the MentorAbility program across Canada to pivot from in person mentorships to online events and support. Many of the smaller, local organizations that are participating in the program benefited from their involvement with a national organization that could provide supports to understand how to connect with job seekers in a virtual work environment.

Recommendations for Future Sustainability

MentorAbility Ontario has considered other ways to promote the uptake of the program with more employment services providers and with school boards that would benefit from having MentorAbility as part of their catalog of services offered.

Employment service providers can add MentorAbility to their menu of services as part of their *Employment Discovery Services*-a phase in the pre-employment process where job seekers explore career options. This Discovery phase can also help agencies better establish employment matches, so MentorAbility would benefit the pre-employment process prior to job development and placement.

MentorAbility can be introduced within high schools to assist students and teachers in the Co-Op matching and placement process as they are plan for experiential learning opportunities for students who have a disability.

MentorAbility Ontario has high hopes for the sustainable future of this program. Recommendation that this partner site would offer to reach this goal includes the implementation of centralized operations that allow for a centralized database to maximize support. For example – if a protégé from one region does not have the expertise or interest, that hub can reach out to other regional hubs to access expertise.

Mary Beshai – Director of MentorAbility Canada at Canadian Association of Supported Employment (CASE), shared how important it is to leave a legacy to ensure the mission and vision behind this program continues. A critical component is awareness and ease of access to the tools developed to support employers, protégés, and employment service providers. Currently, MentorAbility Canada focuses on the needs of the hubs across the nation and collectively works towards strengthening for long-term succession.

If you have any questions regarding the information, please email us at info@odenetwork.com



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Réseau ontarien
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handicapées

Ontario Disability Employment Network
The Power of Community of Practice (CoP)

Preamble

Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN) launched its' first Community of Practice (CoP) in the midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic to support Employment Service Agencies and school boards that deliver the Summer Employment Transition (SET) program and jobPath curriculum in Ontario.

The following will explore ODEN's journey with Community of Practice, illustrate the value and benefits, explore why and how ODEN successfully launched the Summer Employment Transition (SET) and jobPath Community of Practice, share tools including ODEN's Partnership Guidebook and recommendations on how organizations could create their own Community of Practice.

If you or your organization is thinking about starting a Community of Practice, this case study will guide you in your journey from concept to inception and building your CoP from the ground up. ODEN will also share some promising practices that will help you to successfully build and sustain your CoP.

Summary

Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN) is a Provincial network of over 140 Employment Service Providers (ESPs) united to increase access to employment for job seekers who have a disability. ODEN also works directly with businesses to improve their inclusive hiring practices and assist them with becoming disability aware and confident.

ODEN has been in existence for over 12 years and has worked with small, medium, and large businesses, Government and Employment Service providers.

Our mission is to:

- Increase employment opportunities for people who have a disability by addressing issues related to removing barriers.
- Expand knowledge among business and corporate sectors about merits of intentional disability inclusive hiring.
- Improve the skill and competency of employment service providers through knowledge sharing, training, and promotion of promising practices.

To design and launch a Community of Practice, it is crucial to have a precise understanding of what a CoP is, its fundamental role, value, and benefits. ODEN's Partnership Guidebook is a great tool to use for organizations thinking about developing partnerships, collaborations and even starting their own CoP. This Partnership Guidebook played a critical role in finalizing ODEN's *WHY* for building our first Community of Practice.

A community of practice (CoP) is a group of people who share common purpose, build capability, and come together to learn and fulfill both individual, group and organizational goals.

Building a community of practice can be extremely beneficial and holds long term value for both members and the organization. The long-term value and benefits include access to expertise, strategic capabilities and thinking, knowledge sharing and transfer, system capability, brainstorm opportunities and ideas, provide support, expand organizations' network, problem solve, and staying abreast on new innovations.

A CoP also provides an opportunity to benefit from one another by creating a pipeline of tools, resources and promising practices that will in return, strengthen member and organization's knowledge, skills, and experience. Great things can be accomplished even with limited resources when we work collectively in our communities.

ODEN's Journey

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March 2020, ODEN took the necessary steps, to re-assess existing methods of practice and make a quick shift in our delivery services, support and training for Employment Service Agencies, Businesses, School Boards, Communities, Post-Secondary Education Institutions, and communities across the province.

The pandemic heavily impacted the Employment Service Sector, in a way where Employment Service Providers (ESP)s, could no longer offer or conduct in-person support. There needed to be a rapid shift from in-person to a virtual service delivery to maintain and adequately support their clients. However, with COVID-19 regulations such as social distancing, there were several unknowns and questions facing ESPs, specifically around how to properly execute online delivery of services and continue online program delivery without reducing or impacting the quality of support and service provided to and received by clients.

Recognizing that this was an enormous concern, ODEN made the decision to launch its first Summer Employment Transition (SET)| jobPath Community of Practice in October 2020. When ESPs collaborate for the benefit of job seekers and businesses, there is focus on organizational effectiveness which results in efficiencies that are naturally created. The Summer Employment Transition (SET) program strives to connect students who have a disability with summer employment while receiving on-the-job coaching.

jobPath is an award -winning and internationally recognized curriculum that is used to help students who have a disability successfully transition from school to work. jobPath is delivered in a series of workshops and provides youth the opportunity to learn about themselves and interact in a group setting while preparing for employment.

As our first step, we used our Partnership Guide's - *Organizational Self- Reflection Worksheet*, to clearly define our purpose and our *WHY* behind creating a SET/jobPath CoP, determined the resources needed to build a CoP, agreed that ODEN will be facilitating the CoP, and designed a Terms of Reference to be signed by prospective members of the Community of Practice.

After conceptualizing what the CoP will encompass, ODEN contacted several ESPs across the Province to check-in, discuss support needed, understand existing concerns as well as grasp their interest in joining a SET| jobPath Community of Practice. Employment Service Providers rapidly confirmed their commitment and agreed that having a CoP that supports ESPs was vital especially during the COVID-19 pandemic to successfully deliver and support youth who are participating in the Summer Employment Transition or JobPath program.

The purpose of the SET/jobPath Community of Practice is to enable dialogue, increase engagement, introduce, and nurture knowledge sharing and transfer culture, support, share resources, collaboratively provide innovative solutions, promising practices, determine success measures and impact program delivery among Employment Service Providers, as it relates to the SET/jobPath program.

This CoP will also organically build, strengthen, and sustain relationships among ESPs to best deliver SET/jobPath program while providing the best possible outcome for youth and businesses.

Terms of Reference

To confirm commitment and ensure accountability from Employment Service Providers, ODEN constructed a Terms of Reference, which detailed the vision, mission, goals, commitment, and accountability to be agreed upon and signed by each SET/jobPath CoP member. We also created a strategic plan to help execute tasks, monitor progress, and guarantee that the goals and mission of the CoP will be met.

The SET/jobPath CoP members committed to: Attending all scheduled meetings with one representative including an alternative representative from each Employment Service Agency to actively engage in and contribute to the CoP. Members will agree to provide support, help identify promising practices, engage in knowledge share and transfer, assist with the production of an evaluation tool to report, and monitor progress, help identify outcomes, cultivate, and document case studies on how both the Summer Employment Transition (SET) program and jobPath curriculum are being delivered across different settings, including in-person and online program delivery in Ontario.

It is important to recognize that even if a Terms of Reference has been signed off on and committed to, doesn't necessary mean that the set goals or mission of the CoP will be met, this could simply be due to a lack of accountability.

Accountability is equally important as member commitment. Which is why we decided to include a clause on accountability for current and future CoP members in our Terms of Reference. This CoP Accountability consists of members assisting in identifying innovation and promising practices, developing relationships among ESPs to foster collaboration, create a safe space to cultivate knowledge sharing and transfer and delivering on CoP tasks as illustrated within the SET/jobPath CoPs Terms of Reference.

Here is an example of accountability, if a member volunteers to complete a task before the agreed upon deadline and was unable to complete this task without communication or reason, this could result in the individual/s managing the CoP to suspend or withdraw the individuals' membership. In order for a CoP to successfully function, there needs to be equal distribution of commitment, responsibility, engagement and participation among members.

A Community of Practice may not succeed if there is a lack of understanding on the expectation from members, this concern can be resolved by having a transparent conversation with prospective members and clearly state who the CoP is for, goals and needs, accountability, expectations, and regulations. All of which *MUST* be illustrated within a CoP Terms of Reference or Partnership document. Here is an example of a clause that could be inserted as part of a CoP Terms of Reference; if a member has missed more than 3 meetings without reason or communication and didn't make the necessary arrangements for alternative representation, the CoP may ask the member to give up their seat to allow for another member.

Having a specific clause in a Terms of Reference that clearly showcases the mission, goals, expectations, commitment, accountability, and regulations can really assist in recruiting the appropriate members to help with the succession of your Community of Practice.

RACI Model

Another approach to ensure there is equal distribution of engagement, initiative, and tasks among members, is to use the RACI Model – reference in ODEN’s Partnership Guide. A RACI Model is used to identify expectations and accountability to avoid confusion from members and to ensure that necessary tasks are being met. When members know what is expected of them it is easier to successfully contribute to a CoP.

The RACI acronym stands for: *R – Responsible*: Any member who agrees to take on a task is responsible for completing the task. *A – Accountable*: Any member who has agreed to completing a task must answer to that task. *C – Consulted*: Members who provide information and expertise to a CoP, ex: share their insight, resources, or promising practices to name a few and lastly, *I – Informed*: Any member who takes on a task must communicate the progress, challenges to the CoP, should any delays or concerns occur other members of CoP could assist. Failure to openly communicate about the progress could affect other members and the outcome of the task.

The first step in an RACI is to list all tasks needed for in one’s CoP, the second step is to discuss, assign and write down which member/s will be taking the lead or collaborating on each and the third step is to collectively decide on which member will be assigned responsibility (*R*) and Accountability (*A*) for each task, as well as who will be consulted (*C*) and informed (*I*). This will bring clarity on expectations from your members.

Performance Review

Implementing a performance review for members in a CoP will help identify and confirm if all members are equally engaging and contributing to a Community of Practice. Member performance-reviews evaluate their level of engagement, their initiative, division of labour and pinpoint whether members are collaborating to the benefit of the CoP, if it leads to new opportunities, better outcomes, or resources. A performance review can also examine member commitment and help determine whether a member or members need to be dismissed for succession of a CoP.

In addition, impact measurement plays a pivotal role in identifying and evaluating the impacts of a project or an organization. It can also help with systemic and sustainable change while commissioning those involved to account for their performance.

The SET/jobPath Community of Practice members – Employment Service Providers (ESPs), measure the impact on SET/jobPath online program delivery by continually conducting qualitative and quantitative methods to understand client experience, quality of training, as well as gather data around # of clients who have successfully transitioned to employment following SET and or jobPath program.

This Community of Practice will continue to refine, reflect, and strive to reach goals, celebrate achievements, measure impacts, conduct evaluations, enable collaboration, build a repertoire of tools, resources and focus on innovation and promising practices as it related to SET & jobPath curriculum.

Resources and Appendices

1) Creating Communities of Practice

<http://www.communityofpractice.ca/background/what-is-a-community-of-practice/>

2) Appendix 1: ODEN Partnership Guidebook, RACI Template

3) Appendix 2: ODEN Partnership Guidebook, Organizational Self- Reflection Worksheet

Resource 1: Organization Self-Reflection Worksheet (page 1 of 4)

Prior to entering into a partnership or collaboration for greater service deliver, gather your Employment Service team members and explore your answers to the following questions. This will help create awareness of what strengths and needs your Employment Services has, what your clients are getting from your current service, and where you can work most effectively with other organizations to increase success for your clients, as well as your organization overall.

1. What Employment Services do we deliver well?

RECORD YOUR ANSWERS. Provide as much detail as possible. Use additional pages if you require more space

RECORD ANY NEXT STEPS. Note any necessary follow-up and date to be completed by.

| | |
|--|--|
| | |
|--|--|

Resource 1: Organization Self-Reflection Worksheet (page 2 of 4)

| | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| 2. What employment services could we deliver better? | |
| RECORD YOUR ANSWERS. | RECORD ANY NEXT STEPS. |
| | |
| 3. Where are our clients succeeding? | |
| RECORD YOUR ANSWERS. | RECORD ANY NEXT STEPS. |
| | |
| 4. Where are our clients failing to succeed? | |
| RECORD YOUR ANSWERS. | RECORD ANY NEXT STEPS. |
| | |

Resource 1: Organization Self-Reflection Worksheet (page 3 of 4)

| | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 5. What organizations do we already collaborate with either formally or informally? | |
| RECORD YOUR ANSWERS. | RECORD ANY NEXT STEPS. |
| | |
| 6. What organizations could help us provide better Employment Services in our area? | |
| RECORD YOUR ANSWERS. | RECORD ANY NEXT STEPS. |
| | |
| 7. Why do we want to partner with another organization? How does it benefit us? | |
| RECORD YOUR ANSWERS. | RECORD ANY NEXT STEPS. |
| | |

Resource 1: Organization Self-Reflection Worksheet (page 4 of 4)

| | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| 8. What do we have to offer another organization in a partnership? | |
| RECORD YOUR ANSWERS. | RECORD ANY NEXT STEPS. |
| | |
| 9. What sources of funding do we have access to? | |
| RECORD YOUR ANSWERS. | RECORD ANY NEXT STEPS. |
| | |
| 10. Is our organizational leadership aware of our intention to work with another organization to deliver improved service? | |
| RECORD YOUR ANSWERS. | RECORD ANY NEXT STEPS. |
| | |



Ontario
Disability
Employment
Network

Réseau ontarien
d'aide à l'emploi
pour les personnes
handicapées

**Program Model - Case Study
2020-2022**

***Introduction and Expansion of Project SEARCH in Ontario
An Evidence Based School-to-Work Transition Model***

The Project SEARCH Transition School-to-Work model is an evidence-based, business-led, one-year employment preparation program for students with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities in their final year of high school. Students are immersed in training through internships at a worksite, while receiving classroom instruction for employment skills and career exploration activities. The model also provides individualized job development so that students graduate with a strong possibility of moving directly into the workforce quickly. ODEN has been a strong supporter of introducing this model in Ontario.

The employment service sector benefits from the identification and promotion of innovative and high performing program models. One of those models is Project SEARCH, a school-to-work transition model first introduced in Cincinnati, USA. The following is a case study illustrating in general terms details of Project SEARCH, how it operates and how it benefits students who have an intellectual and/or developmental disability.

ODEN first learned about Project SEARCH while attending a national conference in 2017. From that point forward, after identifying this model as a promising practice for the Disability Sector, ODEN started to promote the model with Employment Service Providers, Educators and Families. By end of 2019, two Project SEARCH sites were established in Ontario at Halton and Toronto. By the end of 2021, despite the challenges brought up by a global pandemic, two more sites were established in Hamilton (2020) and Milton (North Halton, 2021).

ODEN and stakeholders from the existing sites continued to advocate for Ontario to adapt this model in a wider, systematic way. The model and its impact outcomes were presented in many conversations to the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services and Ministry of Education. By the spring of 2021, the Ministry of Education confirmed that they will support the license costs for up to 22 Project Search sites in Ontario for the upcoming school year. Through 2021, ODEN continued to support the roll out of Project SEARCH Ontario sites, both existing as well as those starting up in the Fall of 2022. Meanwhile, an informal Canadian Project SEARCH community of practice has emerged; all the existing sites collaborate to support each other during the pandemic and to provide mentoring to the sites just starting.

The core concept of this case study is to provide a timeline and illustrate the efforts to bring Project SEARCH to Ontario.

Introduction and Expansion of Project SEARCH in Ontario

Introduction

The employment service sector benefits from the identification and promotion of innovative and high performing program models. One of those models is Project SEARCH, a school-to-work transition model first introduced in Cincinnati, USA.

ODEN was first introduced to Project SEARCH in 2017 when members of the team attended a session at the CASE (Canadian Association for Supported Employment) conference, where Oly Backstrom, President and CEO of SCE-Life Works (Winnipeg, Manitoba) presented about Project SEARCH. It was very clear to the ODEN team that this model was an innovative and effective way to prepare young people who have intellectual and /or developmental disabilities for successful employment.

This case study illustrates in general terms what Project SEARCH is, how it is operated and how it benefits students in a community. The core concept for this document is to provide a timeline and illustrate the efforts to bring Project SEARCH to Ontario as a promising model that delivers successful employment outcomes for people who have a disability.

What is Project SEARCH?

Project SEARCH is an international, transition-to-work model, evidence-based, business-led, one-year employment preparation program for student with intellectual and developmental disabilities in their last year of high school (aged 18-20 years).

Its main objective is to prepare students for employment with on-the-job skills training. This is achieved through a combination of classroom instruction and hands-on career training at real work site locations.

Students are immersed in training through three supported internships over a 10-month period (at a worksite), while receiving classroom instruction for employment skills and immersive career exploration activities. The model also provides individualized job development so that students graduate with a strong possibility of moving directly into the workforce quickly.

An impressive 80% of Project SEARCH graduates achieve competitive employment upon graduation¹. Competitive Employment is defined as:

- Employment in an integrated setting (coworkers with and without disabilities work alongside each other)
- Year-round employment (not seasonal)
- 16+ hours of work each week
- Paid the prevailing wage.

¹ <https://projectsearchcanada.org/index.html>

Project SEARCH Background

Project SEARCH was developed in 1996 by Erin Riehle, who at the time was the Director of the Emergency Department at the Cincinnati Children's Medical Centre. She observed that there were almost no employees in the hospital with developmental disabilities, whilst the community they served was made up of people who had developmental disabilities. She questioned whether people who have developmental disabilities could be trained to fill some of the high turnover roles, entry level positions within her department. She presented this idea to Susie Rutkowski, who was at the time, the Special Education Director at Great Oaks Career Campuses. Erin and Susie formed a partnership and together they launched Project SEARCH.

Project SEARCH is now hosted in 600 sites worldwide including in two provinces in Canada (Manitoba and Ontario). To be a host site, a license must be purchased at approximately \$20,000 Canadian (fluctuation based on the exchange rate). This fee includes the full course curriculum, consulting, and planning support for establishing the program within the business site.

Project SEARCH sites must comply with rigorous monitoring and use evaluation tools that collect data on outputs and outcomes. They also mandate the quality of the employment opportunity and previous sites are accountable for ensuring appropriate employment opportunities are provided. If any Project SEARCH site does not comply with the baseline requirement for post program employment (wages, hours, opportunity for advancement, level of inclusion etc.), the site can be removed from the Project SEARCH network and lose its license.

Candidate selection follows a rigorous process. Project SEARCH provides a selection matrix and assessment tools that guide the process for accepting students into the program. The steering committee makes the final decision on successful candidates.

Ideally the candidates are students in their final year of high school who are interested in employment upon graduation. They are independent in travel and self-care but would benefit from intensive on-the-job support and enhanced soft skills that prepare them for the world of work. The program is not appropriate for students who have no interest in work, or who require additional life skills development before engaging in the world of work.

For example, the student should be able to identify an area of work interest, can navigate public transit, works well with others in a classroom setting, and is independent in self-care or has supports in place. Most importantly, the host site and internship opportunities should match the skills and interest of the student.

Project SEARCH comes to Canada - Winnipeg

Project SEARCH was first brought to Canada by SCE Lifeworks in Winnipeg, Manitoba in 2011. They purchased a license and established local partnerships to secure workplaces for the internships and classroom and with the local school boards. Manitoba Hydro & Government of Manitoba were the first co-host sites in 2011. Health Sciences Centre

(HSC) Winnipeg was added in 2016. Both have classrooms located on site and are staffed with a teacher and skills trainers. They each have the capacity to take 12 students per year.

Each day starts in a classroom where students learn employability skills. A large part of the students' day is spent in worksite rotations developed throughout the sites. Students end their day back in the classroom, reflecting on the day, journaling their key learning, problem solving, and planning. The program runs for ten months on a school cycle, and it takes place during the last year before high school graduation.

Skills Trainers provide training to students for each work experience, while site supervisors and managers will provide natural supports one would receive in a work setting. Students receive continual feedback from Project SEARCH staff, co-workers, and supervisors.

[Project SEARCH Winnipeg](#) works in partnership with the following local school divisions (Boards): Pembina School Division; Seven Oaks School Division, St. James Assiniboia School Division, Seine River School Division, Louis Riel School Division, Sunrise School Division, Winnipeg School Division and Division Scolaire Franco-Manitobaine.

While interviewing Oly Backstrom for another project [Youth Success Strategy for the Developmental Sector], Oly was able to provide information on the success rate for the last graduating Project SEARCH cohorts.

Project SEARCH defines successful employment outcomes as a “competitive wage in a non-seasonal position, working minimum three months, within one year of graduation”. Table 1 illustrates the rates of employment for Project SEARCH Winnipeg in the last 5 years.

Table 1 – Project SEARCH Employment Outcomes

| Class Year | Employment Success Rate | Highest Hourly Wages |
|-----------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| 2016 [one site] | 82% | \$19.02 |
| 2017 [2 sites] | 71% | \$17.00 |
| | 57% | \$16.00 |
| 2018 | 50% | \$20.61 |
| | 83% | \$13.99 |
| 2019 | 60% | \$26.66 |
| | 57% | \$17.97 |
| 2020 | 62% | \$16.50 |
| | 28% | \$12.00 |



Project SEARCH – Ontario

In 2018, ODEN started to socialize and promote Project SEARCH with Employment Service Providers and Family Networks as an impactful program that can benefit youth who have a disability in Ontario. The first two stakeholders to consider Project SEARCH as a potential initiative for their communities were The Autism Job Club (Halton) and Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital (GTA).

Championing the process to introduce Project SEARCH in Halton was the leadership team at Halton Healthcare-Oakville Hospital. ODEN assisted in the coordination and support of stakeholders involved. By the fall of 2019, the *first* Project SEARCH Ontario was launched in a partnership between Halton Healthcare as the employer in partnership with Community Living Oakville, Autism Job Club, DistinctAbility, the Halton District School Board, and CUPE Local 815.

In parallel to the launch of [Project SEARCH Halton](#), ODEN was supporting the launch of [Project SEARCH Toronto](#) with University Health Network (UHN) as the employer and, in partnership with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), Toronto Catholic District School Board (TDCDB), Holland Bloorview, Community Living Toronto and United Way of Greater Toronto (UWGT) and ODEN. Project SEARCH Toronto first cohort of participants started their internships in the Fall of 2019.

ODEN continued bringing attention and awareness of the Project SEARCH model through presentations for educators and family networks. On January 2020 ODEN was the keynote speaker for the Regional Special Education Council (RSEC). RSEC is comprised of the Supervisory Officers from the 16 publicly funded school boards from Niagara to Windsor. The Supervisory Officers also invite their System Principals to attend these learning sessions. In attendance were 37 members of the RSEC group.

Following the presentation at the Regional Special Education Council, ODEN was invited to present at the joint meeting of the Special Education Advisory Groups (SEAC) for the Hamilton Wentworth District School Board (HWDS) and the Hamilton Catholic District School Board (HCDSB). At this keynote speaking session (February 2020) ODEN deliver the seminar **Employment: The Gold Standard for Inclusion** which includes the Project SEARCH model as a proven, evidenced based, model to support school-to-work student transitions. The Superintendent of Special Education for the Hamilton District School Board (HWDSB) embraced the model and set out to bring the program to Hamilton.

The HWDSB established an advisory board for Project SEARCH and invited ODEN to be represented on this, along with representatives from the Canadian Down Syndrome Society, the Down Syndrome Association of Hamilton, Community Living Hamilton, PATH Employment and the YMCA Hamilton-Burlington.

[Project SEARCH Hamilton](#) launched during the pandemic (September 2020) and given the public health restrictions in place, the options for host business sites were limited. However, they were successful in establishing three internship rotations within the school board's head office. The classroom was also located in this building. It was staffed by a



HWDSB teacher and educational assistants who have taken on the role of Skills Trainers, supported informally by the employment service provider agencies in the steering committee.

A fourth site was established following the success of Project SEARCH Halton. In the Fall of 2021, [Project SEARCH North Halton](#) was established with Milton District Hospital, Community Living North Halton, Halton Catholic School Board and CUPE Local 815.

Advocacy Efforts for Ontario Project SEARCH Sites Continue

With three Project SEARCH sites operating, and a fourth one in planning stages, ODEN and stakeholders from the sites placed their efforts in advocating and promoting this school-to-work model with both Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) and Ministry of Education. The advocacy work and conversations with these ministries resulted in a confirmation in early 2021 that Ministry of Education would support the license costs to operate up to 22 Project SEARCH in school boards Ontario for the upcoming school year (September 2022).

While the Ministry of Education managed the proposal and identification of schools that would be selected, ODEN offer to support a successful roll out of Project SEARCH sites by coordinating and hosting information sessions for Employment Service Providers in the Disability sector to socialize the Project SEARCH model and generate interest in engaging with school boards that would be running a classroom in the future.

In late summer 2021, ODEN began to coordinate the invitation and registration process for agencies in the areas selected by the Ministry of Education which included Barrie, Brantford, Cambridge, Durham, Guelph, Kawarthas, Kitchener-Waterloo, London, Niagara Falls, Renfrew County, Sault Ste Marie, Sudbury, York and Thunder Bay.

ODEN identified agencies that provide employment supports and that are in the locations mentioned, sending invitations with background information on the potential start-up for Project SEARCH in their local school boards. Two information sessions were hosted in November and December 2021. These sessions were hosted in collaboration with from Project SEARCH, Holland Bloorview (supporting Project SEARCH Toronto), Community Living Oakville (supporting Project SEARCH Halton) and ODEN.

At the time of documenting this case study, the final number of Project SEARCH Ontario sites, resulting from the Ministry of Education offer to support the school boards with license costs, remains unconfirmed but at least seven school boards have expressed their interest.

Conclusion – Next Advocacy Steps

Project SEARCH has proven to be a successful, evidence-based model for transition-to-work programs engaging youth who have intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. The data from [world-wide sites](#) supports this claim.



In Ontario, four sites have been operating since 2019. However, it is important to highlight that year 2 and 3 of operation for these sites have happened during a global pandemic. And because of this environment, several typical functions of the program were impacted. For example: some of the sites may have run with less students to maintain physical distance; the number of hours of in-placement learning may have been reduced because of closures forcing classrooms to move to virtual instruction.

Despite all the disruptions from the last two years, all four sites continue their commitment to the programs initiated in their communities. Working virtually as a result of the pandemic has also offered a level of connection for all [Canadian Project SEARCH](#) sites that may have been unlikely prior to the pandemic. An informal Community of Practice is developing from all Project SEARCH Canada sites, both for sites already established (Winnipeg and Ontario) and those who are considering starting a site (Prince Edward Island). ODEN is an active supported of this Project SEARCH community of practice.

ODEN will continue its efforts and actions to support, promote and help build capacity for Project SEARCH sites. ODEN continues to support Government advocacy for this model, the network is involved in develop and distribute learnings throughout the network, helping to identify potential community service providers in locations where Project SEARCH sites are starting, convening and communicating with stakeholders and potential new stakeholders and promoting the model in presentations and sessions, to ensure that Ontario and Canada adapt widely this leading model.

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Case Study –2021-2022
Promising Practices Employment Service Provider
Virtual Service Delivery

Promising Practices in Virtual Service Delivery

Introduction

KW Habilitation is a developmental services (DS) organization serving Kitchener-Waterloo, and surrounding communities. Their portfolio of services includes Community and Employment Supports, Inclusive Housing and Affordable Housing, and Early Learning Child and Family Resources for children who have a disability in licensed childcare programs. When the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in Ontario in March 2020, DS organizations across the province were forced to quickly adapt their methods of service delivery to ensure minimal disruption to the lives of the people they support.

Like most organizations during the earliest days of the pandemic, KW Habilitation was initially focused on how best to manage “for now”. However, soon it became clear that the pandemic was going to be longer and harder to manage than originally thought. It was then that KW Habilitation began developing a multifaceted approach to service delivery, one that prioritized continuation of services, service quality, mental health, and physical safety. After nearly two years of providing services during the pandemic, Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN) spoke to KW Habilitation about how they developed their COVID-19 service strategy, and about how that strategy evolved as circumstances and needs dictated.¹

When COVID-19 first impacted Ontario, outcomes were uncertain, but directives were clear: Where and however possible, limit physical contact among people. With no precedent or provincial plan yet in place, individuals, employers, institutions, and organizations had to determine for themselves what that looked like. KW Habilitation was determined to embrace a positive mindset and maintain connections with their community, while promoting safety and reducing fear around the pandemic.

People living in inclusive housing through KW Habilitation remained in their houses, but were required to follow strict COVID-19 safety protocols, as mandated by MCCSS and Public Health. Protocols included but were not limited to the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), limiting visitors to the residences, and being strategic about which staff and residents were out in the community to do practical business such as grocery shopping. Like all people being supported by KW Habilitation, those in inclusive housing were educated about additional safety measures such as frequent hand washing and physical distancing, so that they could work to protect themselves.

In terms of some of KW Habilitation’s other offerings, programs such as community

¹While KW Habilitation has an Early Learning program, majority of discussions focused on services for transition-age-youth and adults. This case study reflects that conversation.

inclusion activities, independent living, cooking and baking, and tutoring were temporarily suspended to reduce physical contact between members of their community. In the short-term, KW Habilitation knew that protecting the safety of staff and people supported was more important than gathering in-person. They could not offer these programs traditionally, and they had not yet developed ways of delivering them alternatively. That would come later.

While people being supported could do temporarily without the specific curriculum and activities included in KW Habilitation's day programs, they could not do without the connection and sense of community that attending these programs provides. Following the mandated suspension of traditional day programs, the agency needed to figure out how to keep people connected to KW Habilitation. The purpose of this was two-fold. First, KW Habilitation knew their day programs were important to the lives of the people they support. Should they become disengaged with the organization, they may not resume attending programming when it was feasible to do so. Second and more importantly, KW Habilitation knew that maintaining mental health would be key to enduring the pandemic. KW Habilitation worked to ensure that people receiving services remained connected to the community, even if they were not being supported in traditional ways. This was accomplished through regular engagement via phone calls and wellness checks to people being supported and their families.

People receiving services were offered opportunities to meet online for social connection, and for things like mindfulness exercises and wellness check-ins. Initially a stopgap measure, these online gatherings were a precursor of what was to become a cornerstone of pandemic programs—resuming services by delivering them virtually. But in the earliest days of the pandemic, KW Habilitation was just beginning to explore the possibilities technology held for the organization. Even then, they recognized that virtual connection can only accomplish so much.

Things like virtual affirmations and mindfulness apps were important, but so were food deliveries, and physically distanced visits from KW Habilitation staff with treats and words of encouragement. KW Habilitation saw these various forms of checking in as ways of reassuring the community that, "We're still here. We've got your back." Their outlook was that they were working as a community to protect and support each other, even if things looked different than they once were. People being supported and KW Habilitation staff alike needed to feel appreciated. They needed to have some routine and purpose, and to not be left behind

Next Steps

Planning around a pandemic was not easy. With provincial guidelines changing seemingly from week to week, it was difficult to know what could be done, and how it should be done. Physical safety and mental health remained priorities for KW Habilitation throughout the pandemic. However, as the pandemic dragged on continuation of services and service quality needed to be prioritized as well. No one could predict how long the pandemic would continue, and KW Habilitation community members could no longer be left in limbo. They

needed to resume typical activities, even if that meant resuming them in non-traditional ways.

It soon became clear that technology was going to play a large role in services delivered during the pandemic. Therefore, it was essential that people receiving services had access to the required technology. Some people receiving services had tablets and smartphones of their own which they could use to access services. Others needed assistance acquiring such devices. KW Habilitation received a small stock of tablets through Autism Speaks' Samsung Tablet Program, which they were able to lend to people who needed them. Some people receiving services had Passport Funding, which they could apply to purchasing technology. Those in inclusive housing were able to share technology when it was in short supply, as they lived in a pandemic "bubble" which allowed them to safely share resources. The sharing of resources among those in inclusive housing encouraged socialization and shared learning, a positive outcome from a difficult situation.

In addition to reducing barriers to acquiring technology, KW Habilitation worked to reduce barriers to using technology. In cases where internet was unreliable or unaffordable, staff made sure that their clients' devices had data built in, so internet access was not a barrier. Sessions in tech use and digital literacy were developed to support people using technology. Operating devices, navigating video conferencing platforms, and learning cyber safety and virtual etiquette were among the most essential skills practiced.

Some anxiety and intimidation existed initially about using technology to provide services. Staff wondered if they had the knowledge and capacity to use it properly. They worried over whether tech was accessible and safe for people receiving services. KW Habilitation struggled to imagine what predominantly tech-based programs would look like, and they wondered whether it could reasonably facilitate the types of services they offer.

Virtual Programming

Before long, KW Habilitation staff observed that some programs were well-suited to virtual learning and learning from home. For example, aspects of their independent living programs such as their cooking and baking programs ran more smoothly when people receiving services were learning and practicing these skills in their home environments. The added step of transferring skills learned on-site at KW Habilitation to their home environment was eliminated. Without the benefit of in-person support, participants had to troubleshoot on their own, thus increasing their capacity for independence and problem-solving.

Although there was a learning curve navigating virtual platforms to access services, even this was as much a boon as a barrier. Receiving services virtually required participants to increase their digital literacy. KW Habilitation had been working to increase the organization's tech capacity prior to the pandemic. They were valued partners on a tech-focused pilot project leading up to the pandemic. The pandemic reinforced the learnings from that project, and further motivated staff to increase their tech skills to provide the most relevant, accessible services.

Employment services were among the most challenging to navigate throughout the pandemic. The changing world of work due to the pandemic meant that both the service delivery method *and* the content of employment services needed to evolve. During this time, employment and related services meant different things to different people. For some people receiving services, they needed support to continue doing their jobs safely with respect to emerging COVID safety protocols. For others, they needed support securing employment insurance (EI) to have a financial safety net when it did not feel safe, or it was not possible for them to continue working under COVID. For those preparing to enter the workforce, they accessed employment programs such as LEG Up!, an employment and skill-building program for people who have a developmental disability, and KW Career Compass, a portfolio of employment services for people who experience barriers to employment, including LEG Up! To Work—virtually.

As the pandemic wore on, how these services were offered evolved. For example, LEG Up! started out as a binder-based curriculum from which KW Habilitation staff would develop their lessons. Prior to COVID, LEG Up! was run as an in-class workshop, with a facilitator and 6-10 people. It was a two-hour class. When switched to online, the class was offered in one-hour virtual sessions with one facilitator and up to 15 people.²

The journey from in-person to classes to virtually facilitated sessions began with translating the curriculum into PowerPoint slides that could be shared over a virtual meeting platform. Over time, instructors saw an opportunity to create a more professional, engaging set of resources to deliver their employment programs. They began using the graphic design platform Canva to support their training.

Using technology to support virtual offerings also meant that KW Habilitation could open the program to participants outside the Waterloo Region, with hundreds of people registering to access them. For example, when LEG Up! ran in July 2020, KW Habilitation had 141 registrations. In the same month in 2021, the agency had 358 registrations. Comparing the registrations overall for the years 2020 and 2021, in 2020 there were 926 registrations for LEG Up! programs. By contrast, there were 1362 registrations in 2021. This shift has meant a need to build capacity, resulting in KW Habilitation hiring one additional full-time member to their thriving LEG Up! program. The LEG Up! team is now three people strong.³

As their virtual programs evolved, service providers noticed some additional benefits to virtual service delivery. People receiving services had different levels of experience and comfort with technology, and those who were more comfortable with the technology would offer peer support to others navigating the platforms. In this way, their employment programs became about more than just employment. They became spaces fostering digital literacy, peer mentorship, and increased independence. Depending on the needs and goals of the person receiving services, sometimes 1:1 coaching and support was more appropriate. The loss of an in-person classroom setting for

² Notes, Stacey Mitchell in conversation with Ingrid Muschta, 2021.

³ Notes, Stacey Mitchell in conversation with Ingrid Muschta, 2021.

some was challenging, and the virtual platform was not always able to replicate the value they found when receiving services in-person. That said, this was a good reminder that the best services are person-centered. The social value of learning with one's peers is important, but so are services tailored to the individual interests, goals, and needs of a person. 1:1 phone or web meetings easily facilitated such person-centered services.

Overall, not only did technology allow KW Habilitation to maintain services for people who depended on them; it also allowed them to reach people outside the region. Technology provided an opportunity to build capacity to deliver quality services, such as onboarding additional staff to serve their growing list of participants.⁴

One of the main takeaways from this challenging journey providing employments services is that constant and continuous employment is not the only goal. The value of work includes having an income, using one's skills and talents, experiencing independence, developing social relationships, and being a part of the community. KW Habilitation learned they could foster these experiences outside of traditional employment, and traditional employment programs. Specific, extenuating circumstances dictate whether preparing for work, securing employment, remaining employed, or temporarily opting out of employment are the best fits for the person receiving services. The unique situation created by COVID changed the way the world thinks of work, in many ways to the benefit of all current and prospective workers, regardless of ability.

Key Takeaways

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted nearly every aspect of individual and community life. That said, these disruptions presented an opportunity for learning and evolving. Below is a list of some of the key learnings and takeaways from KW Habilitation's experience modifying services due to COVID-19:

- Consistent communication with people receiving services and staff is first and foremost. People need to know that they are being supported, and how they are being supported, no matter what.
- Honesty and transparency about processes are key. Navigating the pandemic was challenging for everyone. It was a learning process, and it involved trial and error. A "how can we..." attitude was instrumental for persevering and succeeding. Being open about the realities and challenges was important for community-building.
- Flexibility, patience, and grace are essential to quality service delivery. Even in non-pandemic times, providing and receiving social services can be challenging.

⁴ Notes, Stacey Mitchell in conversation with Ingrid Muschta, 2021.

Staff and people receiving services alike benefit from flexibility and compassion.

- Further, flexibility can foster creativity. Thinking outside of the box when providing services can create accessibility and opportunity.
For example, the need to pivot to virtual services increased access and engagement for some people receiving services, such as those living in rural communities, or those experiencing transportation barriers.

Feelings of uncertainty, instability, or overwhelm do not just apply to COVID. Learning to deal with adversity, and to problem solve are essential skills for everyone involved in developmental services. These skills should be reinforced in the sector.

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Employment Service Provider Case Study

**Employment Modernization Fund
Innovative Community Support Services (ICSS)**
“Opportunities: Community Employment Supports”

Innovative Community Support Services (ICSS) secured a two-year Employment Modernization Grant from the Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services (MCCSS) to increase the focus on competitive employment within their programs for individuals who have a developmental disability and move towards community-based supported employment. The Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN) was contracted to conduct a series of stakeholder consultations and report on the results of these sessions.

The following is a typical case study that illustrates the steps and processes required for Transfer Agencies funded by MCCSS, such as ICSS, to reimagine and improve current employment opportunities programs delivered under the Community Participation Supports umbrella. ODEN has successfully guided organizations and their stakeholders, including staff, leadership, clients, families, and external contacts, through engagement sessions that identify real and perceived strengths, opportunities, capacity, and areas to develop in the process of modernization for the organization's employment support offerings.

The engagement process follows an established but flexible procedure: the organization indicates a desire to transition from traditional day program activities of training and skill development to practical community-based employment supports. A presentation is created and delivered to the leadership team to articulate how ODEN can support this desire. When engaged, ODEN's Diversity & Inclusion Specialists consult with the organization to better understand their current programs and the clients served. Several stakeholder engagement sessions are conducted to determine the organization's capacity and requirements as they shift to full community participation. The process concludes with ODEN providing recommendations for next steps that speak to their specific organization's needs and help sustain employment service delivery.

The following Case Study examines the pathway ICSS mapped to develop and deliver an employment service program for existing and new clients with complex support requirements. It identifies areas where ODEN provided support to ICSS to achieve their goals. It illustrates the success ICSS's "Opportunities: Employment Support Program" achieved quickly and concludes with public testimonials offered by several stakeholders engaged with the agency.

Innovative Community Supportive Services (ICSS)

Summary

Innovative Community Support Services (ICSS) is a non-profit charitable organization located in Orleans, Ontario. ICSS is committed to creating and providing families & individuals with innovative, high-quality, and cost-effective community-based programs and services that promote a strong sense of well-being while positively contributing to their culturally diversified community.

ICSS's vision includes providing quality services and support to people with developmental disabilities and their networks. ICSS works to achieve their mission is based on 10 Service Principles as described in their website [About ICSS](#). In general, the principles speak to the organization's commitment to upholding individuals' rights, respecting their dignity and independence, and focusing on individuals' abilities, personal growth, and full community participation.

In April 2018, ICSS successfully secured a two-year Employment Modernization Fund (EMF) grant to increase the focus on competitive employment within their existing programs for people who have a developmental disability and move towards community-based supportive employment. This new initiative was called *Opportunities: Employment Support Program*. When ICSS applied for funding, their project planning identified the following areas of work:

- Improving knowledge and training of ICSS staff on developing and determining an individuals' potential for competitive employment. This staff development would support the transition from training and skills development programs to supported employment within ICSS's current Community Participation programs.
- Develop a program model that would address the range of employment supports needed to ensure employment inclusion for all people who have a disability.
- Create a framework for employment supports that considers:
 - Zero exclusion and an individual person-centered approach
 - Understanding that everyone can be employed with the right job match and the right support
 - Ensuring employers get the right employee and the job seekers gets the right job
 - Sharing resources and working collaboratively to enhance services based in the community.

The new initiative, Opportunities: Employment Support Program, had three key objectives to meet:

- Transition ICSS traditional day program supports to community-based supports with competitive employment opportunities
- Support 10-20 job seekers in this program
- Provide competitive employment opportunities for people who have a developmental disability in a workplace-based in the community.

In March 2019, ICSS contracted ODEN to conduct stakeholder consultations as part of their efforts to achieve their project goals. These consultation sessions engaged stakeholders such as staff, executive leadership, program supervisors, clients, families, and external organizational contacts who could provide insight to better understand opportunities, capacity, and areas for future development at ICSS.

Process of Understanding

Intensive stakeholder consultations were conducted to better understand the steps required to operationalize the transformational shift that ICSS was undertaking, from traditional day programs to practical community-based employment services.

These engagement sessions had two areas of focus: (1) to identify the current state of readiness to pursue a competitive employment program model and (2) the capacity of staff to transition into full community participation programming and service delivery for the job seekers they support. To gather insight into the population served and their needs, a tour of the ICSS program facility was conducted.

The engagement sessions revealed that a uniform vision exists among ICSS's staff, management, and leadership with respect to the definition of community participation. This uniform vision meant that ICSS was well-positioned to embark on this transformation of services, supported by clients and families who already were asking for employment type service from the organization.

ICSS identified potential concerns and barriers including staffing shortages, funding streams, waiting lists, and the large number of programs and services the organization currently offers, which may impede the ability to deliver quality service in the realm of supported employment. These concerns are also coupled with the potential barriers around revenue generation, attracting new participants, and delivering quality services for businesses, a new area that has the potential to sustain and grow the reputation of ICSS in their community.

Building on Awareness

A discovery process by ICSS identified strengths and potential opportunities and examined exiting program structures. This work allowed future thinking on reallocation of resources to sustaining programs well beyond the ending of EMF grants.

In all engagement sessions with stakeholders, the participants identified strengths within the organization, including management and staff high degree of positive morale, and a desire to grow the organization. Engagement sessions with external stakeholders also revealed that many job seekers, the clients that ICSS works with, are currently employed, or have already had part-time positions and experience working. This was information that not all ICSS staff were aware of and was only discovered because of the stakeholder engagement sessions.

When asked, families confirmed that they were supportive of the goal for *modernization* for ICSS's Employment Supports Program. Job seekers were already asking for support from ICSS staff to obtain paid job opportunities.

The process of building awareness for what ICSS wanted to achieve from the modernization of employment services also uncovered some potential challenges. Challenges such inconsistent scheduling due to staffing shortage, high turnover rate with part-time employees, lack of capacity due to diverse programming and supports offered, and lack of program alignment with what participants requested.

These strengths and potential challenges were analyzed in-depth during discussions with ODEN staff and ICSS team members. Collaboratively these illustrated opportunities and potential threats to this project.

Putting Theory to Practice

As noted previously, ICSS and their stakeholders collectively confirmed a series of opportunities to enhance community engagement and program delivery. These practices included enhanced fee-for-service offerings, community programming resources, implementing person-centered planning for new participants, individualized outcome measures, and support from the Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN) via staff capacity and development through training.

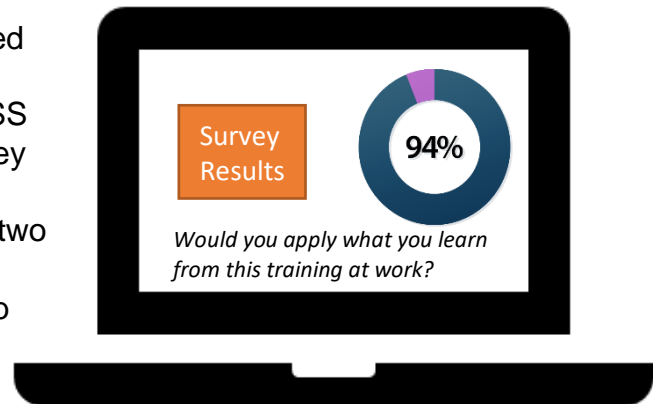
To kickstart ICSS's commitment to enhance staff capacity and development, ICSS received JobPath training facilitated by Diversity and Inclusion specialists from ODEN. JobPath is an award-winning and internationally recognized curriculum used to help students who have a disability successfully transition from school to work. JobPath is delivered in a series of workshops and provides youth the opportunity to learn about themselves and interact in a group setting while preparing for employment.

The second step that ICSS undertook to promote learning, knowledge expansion, professional development was to register 32 ICSS staff in the ODEN's Employment

Service Provider Training administered by ODEN's Diversity & Inclusion Specialist in 2019.

The Employment Service Provider Training is designed specifically for organizations offering employment services for people who have a disability. Each day has a critical focus to enhance knowledge and learning. Day 1 focuses on building a foundation of understanding of employability. Day 2 focuses on in-depth marketing and job development and Day 3 involves discussions about the importance of job coaching, quality assurance, and customer satisfaction.

Findings from the post-survey administered following the ODEN Employment Service Provider Training showed that 94% of ICSS members stated they could apply what they learned from the training in their work. Participants also expressed that their top two takeaways were job coaching skills and learning how to best support & engage job seekers and employers.



"I really enjoyed the training and learned a lot and would like to receive more training in the future."

ICSS Staff Member.

"I loved the training. It was very interesting. I would love to become a job coach one day. Thank you so much! "

ICSS Staff Member.

Following the training received, ICSS regrouped and reflected on some of their core principles which strive towards individual focus and personal growth. These principles align with individualized pre-employment skills-building training for job seekers who do not have an employment history and have served well as the foundation for that "pre-employment" program.

Pre-employment skills are soft skills needed for work transition, and these skills may include "pathways" to manage stress and anxiety and increase self-confidence within oneself. ICSS staff also provided tools and resources to job seekers to help alleviate stress and anxiety while enhancing self-confidence at job interviews.

Another step that ICSS undertook to serve clients better as they enter the workplace was to adopt the MentorAbility initiative. In October 2019, ICSS became a Service Provider Partner for MentorAbility Ontario to amplify and raise awareness about meaningful employment and disability-inclusive hiring.

MentorAbility is a nationally supported employment initiative that facilitates unique, short-term mentoring opportunities between employers and people who have a disability. It was agreed that MentorAbility is a way to help job seekers and ICSS support staff with development during a period of pre-employment activities known as career discovery and exploration. ICSS matched job seekers to mentors from MentorAbility Ontario, and these matches helped with career guidance as job seekers became protégés of the program.

Through MentorAbility, job seekers supported by ICSS have participated in events that included businesspeople with experience in sales, owner-operators, early childhood educators, and animal groomers. These opportunities instilled self-confidence in job seekers and provided a channel to discuss their passion and interests. Mentors talked about their roles and importance. ICSS tracked opportunities for skills building for the job seekers they support.

Engaging a New Stakeholder – The Business Community

Following the training and professional development that ICSS staff took, it was time to engage more intentionally with a new stakeholder – the business community.

ICSS needed to reach out to the business community with a new message - focusing on raising awareness and addressing the impact of disability-inclusive hiring. To this end, ICSS introduced new branding: ICSS Employment Solutions, complete with a new logo– see figure 1.



Figure 1. ICSS Employment Solutions Logo

To promote the message that inclusive hiring is a good business proposition, ICSS Employment Solutions reached out to employers who actively hire job seekers who have a disability to provide testimonials – business speaking to business is an impactful practice.

“One of the things about Cross Fit Fortis – it is for everyone, it is about inclusivity and equality, Kevin (employee) work's hard, with a smile on his face and gets the work done and is a hard worker.”

Cross Fit Fortis.

These businesses included Russell Foodland, Cross Fit Fortis, and Home Hardware. They all spoke to how inclusive hiring drives success, innovation within their businesses while increasing retention.

"I recognize that hiring inclusively from a diverse talent pool helps us innovate, learn and grow our businesses and hiring inclusively benefits the employer because we have happy and very reliable staff members"
Russell Foodland.

ICSS has implemented several recommendations addressed during the training sessions facilitated by ODEN: they have created a social media presence to connect with employers ([LinkedIn](#)) and job seekers ([Facebook](#)). Through these communication channels, ICSS is directly connecting all stakeholders and creating opportunities to showcase inclusive businesses.

This type of digital engagement has also helped promote ICSS Employment Solutions' work with both jobPath and MentorAbility. Throughout their Facebook page, job seekers' success stories are showcased, building confidence for job seekers, mentors, and the community at large.

Continuing the Journey

ICSS and their Employment Solutions staff continue to work towards putting into practice the lessons obtained from their original project to transition traditional day program supports to community-based supports with competitive employment opportunities.

Steps and initiatives that ICSS took in 2019-2020 have resulted in significant engagement with all stakeholders as they create or refine programs to support more people who have a disability to enter the workforce. A clear example of this level of engagement includes the number of participants accessing MentorAbility in their first year of involvement. ICSS had 10 protégés accessing mentorship relationships, a great number considering that ICSS were looking to have 10 to 20 job seekers accessing their initiatives under the new Employment Support Program.

ICSS Employment Supports continues to move forward with initiatives that drive the business case message that disability-inclusive hiring is a great business proposition.

If you have any questions regarding the information, please email us at info@odenetwork.com.

List of References – ICSS Employment Services Digital Footprint

National Disability Employment Awareness Month - Innovative Community Support Services – October 2019 <https://youtu.be/SgbX9bVHPSA>

MentorAbility – ICSS Participation - <https://youtu.be/iKXDMC974cE>

Promoting ICSS Employment Solutions to Employers – October 2020
<https://www.facebook.com/icssemploymentsolutions/videos/465515367723488>

Promoting ICSS Employment Solutions – Spotlight on Business: CrossFit Fortis
<https://www.facebook.com/icssemploymentsolutions/videos/400943217624041>

Promoting ICSS Employment Solutions – Spotlight on Business:
Inclusive Hires: Russell Foodland
<https://www.facebook.com/icssemploymentsolutions/videos/2013805275427993/>

Promoting ICSS Employment Solutions – Spotlight on Businesses: [Embrun Home Hardware Building Centre](https://www.facebook.com/icssemploymentsolutions/videos/3007639722797689/) <https://www.facebook.com/icssemploymentsolutions/videos/3007639722797689/>

National Disability Employment Awareness Month - Innovative Community Support Services – October 2020 <https://youtu.be/IQfyoak4iSI>



High Performing Employment Service Providers



Ontario
Disability
Employment
Network

Réseau ontarien
d'aide à l'emploi
pour les personnes
handicapées

High Performing Employment Service for people who
have a disability in South Western Ontario

A Case Study in 2020

Prepared for the Ontario Disability Employment Network by Laura Stokley, Community Living Sarnia

Abstract

The following Case Study provides a description of a high performing program in South Western Ontario, which provides multiple services and supports designed to improve the employment outcomes of people who have a disability. The study includes an overview of the services, program components, metrics, testimonials from businesses, and participant successes.

For more information about the services and supports featured in this case study, contact the Ontario Disability Employment Network at info@odenetwork.com

There is a problem in our community (and many others) where people who have a disability are not entering the workforce and instead are leaning on government systems as their main income support. At jobPath we believe this problem can be solved with early intervention, the opportunity for employment and support from agencies who are upholding high standards when it comes to employment for people with different abilities.

The following case study provides an overview of a high-performing practice that results in strong employment outcomes and reflects person-centred and person-directed practices.

Employment Transitions is a service of Community Living Sarnia-Lambton and has three major service components:

[Talent Management Services](#): Educates employers. Connects candidates to in-demand jobs. Fosters long-term relationships and support for businesses.

[Summer Employment Transitions](#): Connects students to summer jobs and after-school jobs.

[jobPath](#): Employment Discovery sessions for people who have a disability.

Our key factors for success is that we start early, working with families and even teachers to raise expectations and set the foundation for a life that included work. Provide extensive opportunity for self discovery and exploration,

START EARLY and Work with Families to Raise Expectations:

When setting up children for success in the workplace it starts at a much younger age than most people think. Many people who have a disability aren't connected to an employment service until they leave the secondary school system; for many youths this doesn't happen until age 21.

Early intervention is critical. Preparing for the workforce must start at an early age. It's critical for families to start planning for their child to have a job as early as possible. Employment Transitions connects with families through parent groups and our school board connections to encourage families to undertake activities that will lead to a successful transition to the workforce. Families are encouraged to promote increased responsibility around the home at a very early age such as chores, odd jobs for neighbours, and eventually summer jobs and after school jobs. Families are also encouraged to discuss their child's future with a focus on high expectations learning and employment.

Summer and After-School Jobs

Summer Employment Transitions has operated as summer student jobs service for youth who have a disability since 1988. It is open to all youth who self-identify who have a disability from age 16 through 29 if they are a full-time student. This service which relies upon a patch-work of government grants and private donations to operate is considered the largest of its type in Canada. At their peak 89 students worked in 100 jobs. All jobs are paid at minimum wage or higher. In 2017, Summer Employment Transitions was selected as the '2017 Innovative Practice Award' from the Zero Project at the United Nations. The Zero Project is the research arm of the of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

It is extremely important to work with the local school board to have the opportunity to speak to students about summer jobs and after school jobs. jobPath and the employment transitions team run a summer employment transitions (SET) program for students who have a disability so they can start to experience the working world as early as 16 years of age. SET is designed specifically for students who are in school and returning to school in the fall who want to work for the summer. It is a 7-week program that allows students to see what it is like to work for a summer while being supported by a job coach. This program allows students to gain concrete skills they will use in employment at an early age so they can keep working on them until graduation, it allows them to learn what it means to be a team member who is depended on by other people, it allows them the opportunity to slowly learn things like the bus route in their community and how to get around independently, all these skills are going to be critical when they graduate school and transition into the workforce upon graduation and building their independence.

Building on the partnership with the local school boards SET runs each summer during the months of July and August, this program is available to any student who has a disability and is looking to gain skills and experience in the workforce. Each student is partnered with a job coach who goes to each shift with them to ensure it is a successful summer and that the students is learning how to do the job

properly and learning all the soft skills they will need to enter to workforce permanently upon graduation.

All job coaches in the summer employment program are college and university students who have been hired for the summer to provide peer-to-peer role modelling for the students who have a disability. This way the students can learn from their job coaches who are close to the same point in life as them and see the transition they make throughout the summer as well. Often times we will have students and job coaches who return for more than one year of coaching so not only do the job coaches get to see their students mature year to year but the students also get to see how their job coach changes over the years and makes more and more steps to get into the workforce upon graduation, often times the students begin emulating the job coaches because they can relate to them on a personal level because they are all going through the same transition within a couple years of each other.

Young people who have these skills at an earlier age help gain support for community-based work experiences from everyone in the community (educators, businesses etc.) which is now missing in secondary schools. Experiential learning is a critical piece for individuals who are looking to transition into the workforce after graduation. There are studies that prove that training individuals who have a disability in a real work setting before transitioning them into the workforce is much more successful than teaching them in a traditional classroom setting and then attempting to place them into employment in the community.

Connecting early raises the bar on expectations for youth in the community, it allows youth to dream of working and slowly gaining the skills to do it. It raises the bar for students, families, educators, other service providers, businesses and the entire community.

DO EXTENSIVE EMPLOYMENT DISCOVERY

People who have developmental, intellectual or other significant disabilities face significant challenges when it comes to the accuracy and usefulness of typical evaluations and assessments. Some evaluations may be standardized checklists. Others are “situational assessments” where situations are usually made-up and not related to the individual’s strengths and interests. Often, evaluation professionals have a very limited time frame to get to know a person and create an opinion (such as: is this person able to work?). These evaluations usually do not answer the question, “Who is this individual?”

The Discovery process is an evidence-based alternative to comparative, standardized assessments, and evaluations. Discovery is a person-centered planning process that involves getting to know a person before supporting them in developing a plan for employment (Callahan, 2001). It is in-depth study of one.

The Canadian unemployment rate is 22% for people who have disabilities (Stats Can, 2017). The labour force participation rate for working-age adults with a developmental or intellectual disability is only 26% (achieving social and economic inclusion: from segregation to 'employment first', CACL, 2011).

jobPath Employment Discovery Process

The whole concept of jobPath is to move away from more formalized vocational assessment to a process where a person can practice self-determination and self-discovery. At the same time, the jobPath staff can assess true barriers to employment which are more often related to people skills or soft skills (e.g., What will my support needs be? Am I motivated to work? Am I dependable? Can I take direction? Can I work in a team? Do I prefer to work alone? How well do I accept criticism? etc.)

jobPath Employment Discovery has been helping people who have a disability find employment in Sarnia-Lambton since 2002. It is a 6-week curriculum based employment discovery workshop for people who have a disability, it explores many things such as self awareness, motivation and employability skills.

Throughout the 6-week employment discovery workshop, staff are working with individuals to learn as much as they can about the participants. Staff are working on self awareness for that individual, career management and self discovery, life management (ensuring all aspects of their life are in order so they can gain and maintain competitive employment), employability skills (how not to get fired) and assessing whether individuals are motivated, reliable and dependable. Each person who enters jobPath is gaining the skills they need to not only gain employment but retain it. Retention is one of the main focuses of jobPath.

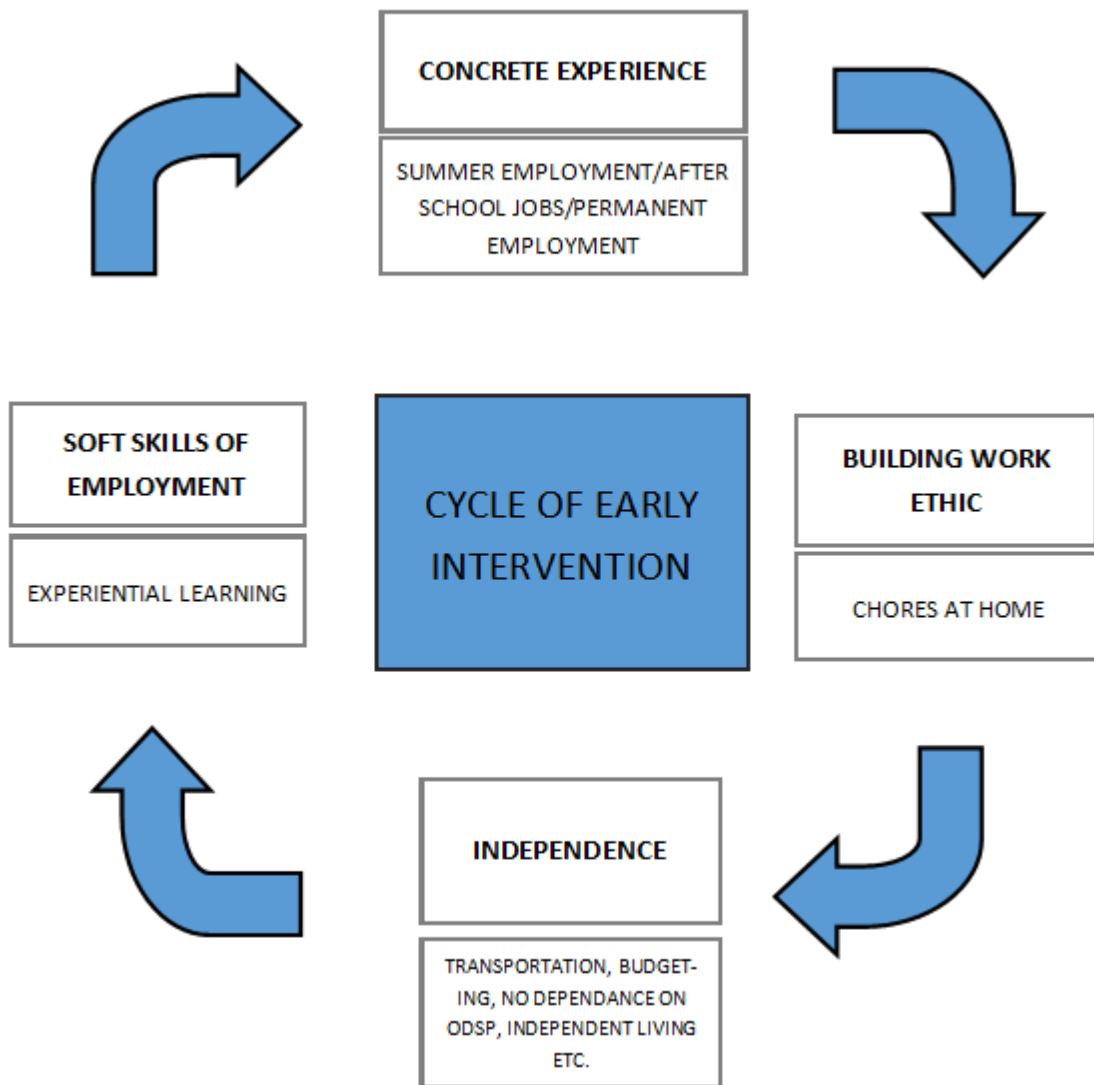
Each individual is placed into employment based on their abilities, needs, likes and what they actually want to do. It is critical for an individual to be placed in a job where they are going to excel and enjoy it, we cannot place candidates into a job they hate and expect them to be successful. jobPath spends 6

weeks with each person to determine exactly what is a good job match for them to ensure that that retention piece is met. jobPath is available for any person looking for permanent competitive employment.

Often, the main participants are youth who have recently graduated high school or post secondary school and are looking to enter the workforce. If they do not have any experience from when they were in school a lot more resources are required to get them ready for work. Transitioning into employment is much more natural when there is previous experience. You can appreciate the previous pieces of this study when you see why it is so important to have early interventions that prepare someone for a lifetime of employment. jobPath is a fluid program that caters to each individual group and the makeup of that group. It is purposely not meant to be a canned program so there is flexibility to deal with issues at hand as they arise with the times (ie. Social media at work, hygiene discussions for some groups but not others etc.)

There is a problem with too many agencies creating a revolving door syndrome where program participants get hired, fired and placed into any job that will take them just to get a 'target' or 'point' jobPath does not believe in this system as it only sets up everyone involved for failure. jobPath partners with many local businesses to provide them with quality reliable staff members, it is very important that businesses are happy with your service as they deserve a great employee and should be able to trust the agency they are working with. Once businesses hire from jobPath they see the benefits to their business, such as less turnover and higher morale.

At the time of this Case study creation, jobPath had worked with over 720 individuals who needed assistance in finding work.



jobPath Curriculum Overview

All pieces are critical in preparing for employment

WEEK 1: GETTING TO KNOW YOU

1. Introduction and housekeeping
2. Ice breakers and team building
3. Basic communication and first impressions
4. Assertive communication
5. Personality assessment

Week 2: GETTING ON THE PATH TO SUCCESS

1. Resume skills and learning styles
2. Goals
3. Stress
4. Conflict resolution
5. Work assessment (activity based on group)

Week 3: ACING THE INTERVIEW

1. Networking
2. Dress for success
3. Acing the interview
4. Interview practice
5. Mock interviews

Week 4: LIFE SKILLS - EMPLOYMENT AND BETTERING YOURSELF

1. Nutrition
2. Food handling
3. Cooking day
4. Finance
5. Addictions

Week 5: WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY

1. Safety- fire and police
2. First aid
3. Services available
4. Whmis
5. Workers rights

Week 6: FUTURE JOB RETENTION

1. Time Management
2. Attitudes
3. Job Retention
4. Addressing Change
5. Reflections, Final Day Activities

QUALITY ASSURANCE IS BUILT INTO THE MODEL

In order to ensure we are providing the best service to our employers and service recipients we are constantly evolving.

One of the scariest phrases in the English language is ‘This is the way we’ve always done it.’ We would all be stuck in a terrible situation if we lived by that model, its crucial to evolve and be ever-changing. We provide surveys on a regular basis to employers (new and old) for feedback on our services, surveys are completed by jobPath participants, their families, job coaches, summer employers, year-round employers and referral sources as well. It is very important to get feedback from all aspects of the services you offer; we are continually focusing on improvement.

Below are examples from our Client Feedback surveys for the 2019 year.

EMPLOYERS

| 1. How would you evaluate the outcome of your involvement with the Summer Employment Transitions program? | | | |
|---|--------|----------|----------------|
| | Counts | Percents | 0 Percents 100 |
| Excellent | 20 | 69.0% | |
| Perfect | 6 | 20.7% | |
| Satisfactory | 3 | 10.3% | |
| Poor | 0 | 0.0% | |
| Below Expectation | 0 | 0.0% | |
| Totals | 29 | 100.0% | |




| 7. With the support of the job coach, how would you assess the quality of the work performed by the student compared to the standards performed by other employees in a similar position? | | | |
|---|--------|----------|----------------|
| | Counts | Percents | 0 Percents 100 |
| Excellent | 23 | 56.1% | |
| Perfect | 10 | 24.4% | |
| Satisfactory | 7 | 17.1% | |
| Poor | 1 | 2.4% | |
| Below Expectation | 0 | 0.0% | |
| Totals | 41 | 100.0% | |


STUDENTS

| 4. The amount of help provided to you by the job coach at your job was: | | | |
|---|--------|----------|----------------|
| | Counts | Percents | 0 Percents 100 |
| Perfect | 24 | 51.1% | |
| Excellent | 19 | 40.4% | |
| Satisfactory | 4 | 8.5% | |
| Below Expectations | 0 | 0.0% | |
| Poor | 0 | 0.0% | |
| Totals | 47 | 100.0% | |

| 5. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being low, 5 being high), how valuable was the work experience you gained this summer? | | | |
|--|--------|----------|----------------|
| | Counts | Percents | 0 Percents 100 |
| 5 | 24 | 60.0% | |
| 4 | 12 | 30.0% | |
| 3 | 3 | 7.5% | |
| 2 | 1 | 2.5% | |
| 1 | 0 | 0.0% | |
| Totals | 40 | 100.0% | |

PARENTS

| 5. How would you evaluate the value of the life skills your son/daughter/dependent was able to obtain from the Summer Employment Transitions program this year? | | | |
|---|--------|----------|---|
| | Counts | Percents | Percents |
| | | | 0 100 |
| Excellent | 14 | 51.9% |  |
| Satisfactory | 7 | 25.9% |  |
| Perfect | 6 | 22.2% |  |
| Poor | 0 | 0.0% | |
| Below Expectations | 0 | 0.0% | |
| Totals | 27 | 100.0% | |

| 9. If you could, would you like your son/daughter/dependent to be in the Summer Employment Transitions program next year? | | | |
|---|--------|----------|--|
| | Counts | Percents | Percents |
| | | | 0 100 |
| Yes | 27 | 100.0% |  |
| No | 0 | 0.0% | |
| Uncertain | 0 | 0.0% | |
| Totals | 27 | 100.0% | |

As part of the model, we offer a 'Life-time Warranty' on the support we provide to the businesses we partner with. This means, when an individual is placed into employment there are always going to be supports available when needed, whether it be 6 months down the road or 3 years later. Often times duties will change for someone if they have been employed as the business changes, evolves so do the duties (think cashier positions diminishing with self-checkout, cashiers then have to learn new roles in other areas of the business) this is where our job coaches come back in to the business and re-coach (if needed) on new duties.

This model assures better long-term career development for service recipients as well as builds trust with the employers. Building that trust allows for many more opportunities down the road, once a business knows they can trust you, they will come back to hire more and more individuals, but the service quality MUST be there. This includes regular site visits, phone calls, supporting those businesses and the tough job of assisting with outplacement if it happens to not work out with someone. There are a lot of myths around hiring people who have a disability and firing someone who have a disability is a big fear of many employers, this is where we can assist and alleviate some of the burden and be there for that process and support the business in their choice.

jobPath has positioned itself in the marketplace as a partner that can help save businesses money. Many years ago, jobPath moved away from a charity sell to a business one. Businesses see hiring someone who have a disability as good for their bottom line for many reasons. A person who have a disability is likely to stay in a job 7 times longer than the average person reducing turnover rates and reducing the need to post, interview and train new staff.

Business Champions

We live in a world where word of mouth and listening to your peer's advice is how a lot of people do business. It is important to have business champions you can call on when needed. These champions will approach other businesses for you and let them know that hiring from you is a great business decision. Having business owners/manager advocate for you has much more of an impact on another business hiring from you. The new business is more likely to take the word of a peer than that of someone who is trying to advocate from an agency/employment service.

Below are examples of what our champions had to say about our services:

“I HAVE BEEN WORKING WITH THE STUDENTS AND COACHES AROUND 10 YEARS AND AM VERY PLEASED WITH THE WORK THEY DO. VERY HARD WORKERS—WOULD RECOMMEND TO HAVE THEM WORK FOR ANYONE. THEY ARE GIVEN JOBS TO DO AND THEY COMPLETE THEM WITH GREAT SUCCESS.”

—EMPLOYER

“WE HAVE SUPPORTED THIS PROGRAM FOR MANY YEARS. WE’VE ALWAYS BEEN HAPPY WITH HOW ITS RUN, AND THE STUDENT & COACH WE ARE ASSIGNED EACH YEAR”

—EMPLOYER

“EXCELLENT WORK THIS YEAR, HELPS US OUT A LOT. THE STUDENT WAS VERY GOOD AT ALL THE JOBS WE HAD THEM DO. WELL DONE. EXCELLENT JOB COACH AS WELL, VERY PLEASANT AND WORKED RIGHT ALONGSIDE THE STUDENT. THANK YOU.”

—EMPLOYER

Employer/Business Relationships

Having strong relationships with businesses allow for better job matches since we can learn all about the environment we are placing people into. It allows jobPath staff to see all the factors of a work environment that would determine best fit when considering candidates such as: loud noises, light levels, types of personalities that are in specific roles (so we can find natural supports in the environment), are there a lot of people or is it good for someone who needs a small crew?, what is the age range, male/female dominant, hot/cold etc. All these factors work into better job matches.

When you have employers who regularly use our services you do not have to rely on wage subsidies to get someone hired. Wage subsidies rarely result in long term employment and they also send a terrible message to the people using them; 'the person you are about to hire isn't worth your time or money as an investment'.

Employees do not become assets, because employers do not provide the same investment for a person on a subsidy as they would for a person who is hired at their own cost. There appears to be less commitment to ensure that the employee has the necessary skills for ongoing work in the employer's workplace. They are more likely to avoid reconciling work related issues that may arise, as they have not made the same financial commitments to these employees. Thus, they are less likely to call upon the service provider to reconcile problems.

It is crucial to consider the message that we are sending, directly or indirectly, to potential employers in our community when marketing the people we serve. If we truly believe in the 'product' we are selling, do we really need subsidies to entice businesses to hire people who have a disability? Might it appear that we are trying to make up for some shortfall in the quality of the 'product' that we are promoting? Because jobPath does not rely on wage subsidies we are able to make better job matches - we spend time with the job seeker, getting to know them and their skills and interests versus throwing money at an employer for someone we know nothing about.

PARTNERSHIP WITH STAKEHOLDERS IN A COMMUNITY IS CRUCIAL

One major factor in the success of the jobPath program is its partnership with local school boards, post secondary institutions, municipalities, business members and families. jobPath currently has 2 active **partnerships** with the school boards in Lambton Kent.

High School Partnership example

As part of the jobPath initiative, local school boards and jobPath staff partner to ease the transition of students who have a disability by flowing them through jobPath in their last year of school on top of a co-operative education placement. Students who are in the second semester can enroll in jobPath. Once that jobPath session is complete the student will return to school and complete a co-op to harden all the skills they learned in jobPath and then transition to the workforce after the school year ends.

Some students will not return to school after jobPath and will gain paid competitive employment which also classifies as their co-op. There are 2 different paths the students can take because sometimes students are ready for employment, other times they need a little bit more time to transition, our partnership with the local school board makes this possible by providing guidance and support to the students along with the jobPath staff.

For these models to be successful there is a lot of planning that goes into it for each student. There are planning meetings with the school staff, planning meetings with the families, presentations to the school boards and many behind the scene meetings to arrange transportation and solid employment transition plans.

There is a second partnership with the local school board that is for students who may need a little bit of extra support and this one begins in their second last year of school. These students will complete a co-op in their second last year, transition into the summer employment program, return to school for their last year and then come into the jobPath program in the spring to prepare for graduation. These students will then transition to competitive employment after jobPath.

Sometimes based on the students' needs this path is the right one for them. Each student's specific needs and abilities are taken into consideration when being put forward for either of the partnerships listed above. It is not boxed and very flexible based on what's needed.

The pathway of the program looks like this;

- 1 student from each LKDSB area high school in the ALLP program will take part in a 2-year Transition plan, while receiving support in their last year co-op to an employment pathway upon graduation from high school

- Students who are in their second last year will be in a co-op placement during second semester, they will receive support 1 day a week while on co-op from a Community Living job coach
- During the summer break (going into their last year) those 5 students will take part in the Community Living Summer Employment Transition Program
- Students will return to their last year of school and complete first semester – fully in their ALLP classroom environment
- Second semester of their final year, the 5 students would attend jobPath Employment Discovery workshop in addition to their co-op placement
- jobPath is a 6-week employment discovery workshop for people who have a disability who are looking for permanent competitive employment
- Students will transition from jobPath to community employment

College Level Partnership Example

In Sarnia a local college, Lambton College, has a Community Integration through Cooperative Education (CICE) program which assists students who have a disability gain post secondary education. CICE is a fully integrated two-year College Certification program. This is a modified program designed for individuals with learning disabilities, developmental disabilities, brain injuries, and other related learning challenges. The program provides students with an opportunity to enhance their academic skills through integrated college classes, while also developing vocational abilities through career-based field placement and experiential learning opportunities.

The team of CICE Learning Specialists and the Employment Liaison provide students with in-class support, weekly tutoring outside the classroom, and job coaching. Students receive supports in the form of modifications and accommodations. Examples of modifications include altering the overall curriculum, changing the level of learning by adjusting the course learning outcomes, and tailoring assignments and tests to meet individual learning needs. Accommodations depend on the student's abilities and generally include note-taking, scribing, extended test times and other related supports both inside and outside the classroom setting.

jobPath partners with the CICE program to transition students into the workforce in their area of study upon graduation. Each Fall and Spring, jobPath staff attends the college and speaks to the 1st year and 2nd year students about opportunities for assistance in gaining employment in the community. Students often flow through the Summer Employment (SET) program for a few years then onto jobPath once they have graduated making the transition a very smooth process.

jobPath and the SET program partners with the local municipalities in and around Sarnia to promote the hiring of people who have a disability from the top down. Having the city of Sarnia and surrounding municipalities as employers is a great way to promote hiring from the disability talent pool. Our local Mayor is a champion for hiring people who have a disability and



will speak to any municipality or business about the benefits of hiring. Each year the City of Sarnia hires a minimum of 10 students to work as summer students and also work with the jobPath program to hire year-round in permanent roles.

Partnership is a two-way street

jobPath staff are involved in many groups and committees in the community, including but not limited to Community Integration through Cooperative Education advisory committee, Southwest Employment Network, Age friendly Sarnia, Chamber of Commerce Business after 5 committee, Jumpstart for Teen Transition committee, Lambton Employment Action Committee and Rotary Club of Bluewaterland. jobPath also has an HR department which is very involved in our local HRPA chapter which helps us make warm calls to local HR professionals in the community.

Through these groups and committees jobPath staff are able to make connections and network for employment opportunities, build relationships with referral sources and learn about everything happening in the employment world in our own community, there is no better way to learn than right from the people who are immersed in the businesses of your community.

Families are integral to the success of the people who partake in our employment services. Families are the ones who set up their family members for success right from the start at home. jobPath staff begin meeting with families at a very young age but on top of that staff also sit in on IPRC meetings at the schools with the families, staff meet with families one on one to brainstorm ideas and set realistic expectations for the people receiving employment services, families can be a great help to the individual seeking employment when they are set up for success from the very beginning.

OUTCOMES

Because of the variety and success of services provided for people who have a disability in the Sarnia-Lambton area we are changing the mindset of families who didn't think employment could be an option for their family member or young adult child who has a disability. Community Living Sarnia-Lambton, jobPath Employment Discovery and Summer Employment Transitions are committed to setting the expectation for youth who have a disability that employment is the expectation NOT living on ODSP or being part of congregated day programs.

Our services reduce the revolving door syndrome, because we are able to get to know the people we are putting into employment settings we are able to make better job matches which result in longer retention and individuals not returning for further assistance in finding a new or different job. When people supported are transitioning to employment at such an early age, we are reducing the reliance on the income support system saving money for the province. Many youth who could stay in school until they are 21 are leaving early to seek employment due to these programs which results in less resources within the school system. We are changing the mindset of families, we are setting the bar higher for people who have a disability, we are helping the income support systems and we are ensuring people who have a disability are able to become tax paying citizens who spend money back into their own economies.

Where people who have a disability are after getting assistance with employment in our community

Where are people now? (Sarnia)

| # People | Employed | Job Searching | ill | Post-Secondary Ed | Moved | Volunteer/Com Inv. | Left Prog./don't wish to work |
|----------|----------|---------------|-----|-------------------|-------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| 85 | 47 | 5 | 6 | 15 | 2 | 10 | 9 |

- ▶ Past 5 years – data specific to persons with an intellectual disability
- ▶ Sum of rows do not total 85 as 5 people in school & working, 4 people in CI/Volunteer while also job searching
- ▶ Almost 80% are working, attending post-secondary ed, or volunteering;
Majority are working, in college, or both
- ▶ *Note:
 - All 'Volunteering' takes place in traditional volunteer jobs
 - All jobs min wage or better

These numbers show that 55% of individuals who received assistance with employment have retained their jobs; much higher than the national average of 26.1% for people employed who have a disability.

Danielle



Danielle is a young lady who went through the flow of jobPath services and is now employed as a permanent full time head cashier at Lowe's Canada. Danielle's story looks like this;

- Summer Employment Transitions- working for Steeves and Rozema cleaning and helping sort snacks and meals for residents of long-term care
- School
- Summer Employment Transitions- working for the City of Sarnia in the horticulture department assisting with gardens and parks throughout the community
- School
- Summer Employment Transitions- working for Steeves and Rozema in the maintenance department painting, shovelling and keeping the property tidy
- School
- Summer Employment Transitions- working for The Cooperators answering phones, filing and sorting paperwork
- Danielle gained excellent customer service skills in this role which would help her later in her employment goals
- Graduated from high school
- 2017- Attended jobPath Employment Discovery
- Danielle had goals of working with the public in a retail environment. She was matched up with a cashier position at Lowes and within 5 months was offered full time hours and less than a year after that she was promoted to a head cashier position and oversees other staff on shift
- Daniele has been successfully employed at Lowe's Canada for 3 years and recently paid for her own upcoming wedding using all local vendors and suppliers who in turn have benefitted from people becoming employed and not using the income support system

James



James' first work experience was in Summer Employment Transitions, from there he gained the skills he needed to be successful in employment and has been employed at Nova Chemicals for 10 years in 2020. His story is below;

- Summer Employment at Bright's Grove Pizza and Subs assisting to prepare pizza's, meals and take orders
- School
- Summer Employment at Huron Oaks Golf Course James' duties included: sweeping and raking, garbage collection, washing equipment and crash pad, cleaning up around clubhouse and the shop, changing the water in the ball washing stations, and other miscellaneous tasks
- Graduated from high school
- James took jobPath in 2010 and excelled in the workshop as he stood out as someone who had work experience and knew what was expected of him in an employment setting
- James got matched up with a job at Nova Chemicals and has been employed there for 10 years as of March 2020.
- James is on the maintenance crew for the Nova Corunna site and recently bought a house in Bright's Grove. He lives independently and has been able to make a living for himself because he has the skills to maintain employment



Inclusive Businesses



Ontario
Disability
Employment
Network

Réseau ontarien
d'aide à l'emploi
pour les personnes
handicapées

**Inclusive Business Case Study
2021-2022**

*Creating Inclusive Workplace Practices
by Leveraging the Power of Lived Disability Experiences*

ODEN identifies and evaluates promising practices in the business sector and translate that knowledge to make it accessible to other businesses looking to start, or advance, their inclusive hiring journey. In this case study for Inclusive Business Practices, ODEN has interviewed Jolene MacDonald, Founder and Creative Director of Accessibrand.

The following case study looks at Accessibrand, a business which demonstrates principles of hiring and operating inclusively. ODEN met with Jolene MacDonald, founder of Accessibrand, to learn more about how the business is reducing barriers and expanding opportunities for people who have a disability, both as employees and consumers. Jolene shared with ODEN the story of how Accessibrand came to be, the philosophies that guide how she operates and plans to grow her business, and the promising practices that distinguish Accessibrand as an inclusive business.

As a founder, Ms. MacDonald talks about the process that brought her to create Accessibrand – a design, marketing and communications business looking to bring digital accessibility into the Canadian business landscape. It was Ms. MacDonald’s own experiences with disability, both personal and parenting a child with a disability, which served as the catalyst to create a workplace that allowed both flexibility to accommodate their lived experience and the opportunity to combined disability and accessibility as the foundation for meaningful work.

In an effort to truly reflect the community they serve, businesses and consumers who include people who have a disability, Accessibrand founder made the conscious decision to hire inclusively and with an emphasis on hiring people who have lived experience with disability. That bold move meant that Ms. MacDonald had to rethink and redesign traditional hiring practices and business models that can be exclusionary of people who have a disability.

The following Case Study provides a reflection on how Accessibrand fosters inclusion of people who have a disability in its business practices.

Creating Inclusive Workplace Practices by Leveraging the Power of Lived Disability Experiences

Summary

ODEN identifies and evaluates promising practices in the business sector and translate that knowledge to make it accessible to other businesses looking to start, or advance, their inclusive hiring journey. The following case study looks at Accessibrand, a business which demonstrates principles of hiring and operating inclusively. ODEN met with Jolene MacDonald, founder of Accessibrand, to learn more about how the business is reducing barriers and expanding opportunities for people who have a disability, both as employees and consumers. Jolene shared with ODEN the story of how Accessibrand came to be, the philosophies that guide how she operates and plans to grow her business, and the promising practices that distinguish Accessibrand as an inclusive business.

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Introduction

The following case study looks at Accessibrand, a business which demonstrates principles of hiring and operating inclusively. The Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN) met with Jolene MacDonald, founder of Accessibrand, to learn more about how the business is reducing barriers and expanding opportunities for people who have a disability, both as employees and consumers. Jolene shared with ODEN the story of how Accessibrand came to be, the philosophies that guide how she operates and plans to grow her business, and the promising practices that distinguish Accessibrand as an inclusive business.

What is Accessibrand?

Accessibrand is described as a disability collective, a company whose aim is to build, “a design-abled, inclusive world, one business at a time.”¹ Specializing in design, marketing, and communications, Accessibrand provides services to ensure businesses’ digital customer-facing content is accessible and inclusive. It also prioritizes hiring people who have a disability.

In an increasingly digital world, web content is the welcome mat for a business. Some businesses operate both a physical storefront and have an online presence. Most businesses are used to and

¹ Accessibrand, <https://accessibrand.com/Services.htm>

compliant with the idea that spaces should be physically accessible. Ramps and push button access into buildings are commonplace. However, many businesses overlook the importance of digital accessibility. They either neglect or don't know how to incorporate the necessary features to make their web content accessible to all customers.

Increasingly, businesses are doing away with storefronts altogether. This means that the only entry point to that business is online. It is crucial, then, from both a human rights and a business standpoint that web accessibility is a priority. Accessibrand provides the tools and services to achieve this. Their list of services includes graphic design, branding, marketing, accessible documents, content development, websites, user testing, accessibility training, illustration, and advocacy.²

Accessibrand Story

Accessibrand's founder Jolene MacDonald had an active career in graphic design prior to creating Accessibrand. Like many people, Jolene was a working parent trying to figure out how to have a successful career while parenting. Add to that equation that Jolene was parenting a child with disabilities and living with her own health limitations, and the math became more complicated.

There were additional demands on Jolene's time, advocating for her child's rights and needs, and attending to the many appointments that often come with parenting a child who has a disability, not to mention Jolene's own health. Jolene began to question: How do you have a career, be a mom, and add disability and advocacy to that? Through her own lived experience, two things became apparent to Jolene: 1) The status quo of the world of work was inflexible and unrealistic for many working people. 2) Disability and accessibility could no longer be separate from her working life.

Jolene knew that she wanted to continue her career, but that she also desired flexible work for herself that would incorporate her needs and the needs of her family. She began to think about how her needs as a working mom, as a person with health limitations, and as a parent of a child who has a disability overlapped with the needs of other working people. She soon realized that everyone, regardless of ability, needs employment opportunities that capitalize on their skills and goals, while accommodating the realities of their lives. For people who have a disability, these realities are often more complex. However, that shouldn't preclude employment. It should simply encourage flexible thinking about employment. This was the inspiration behind Accessibrand, a business with these very characteristics at its core.

Accessibrand Philosophy

Jolene is upfront about the fact that, like many people prior to having lived experience with disability, earlier in her career accessibility wasn't at the forefront of her mind. However, once she was aware of the lack of accessibility in her industry and in the workforce, she was committed to never again working in ways that are inaccessible.

Jolene believes that accessibility is an essential ingredient to any successful business. The way she puts it, you need to incorporate accessibility as a key ingredient in your recipe. You don't sprinkle accessibility on top after the fact.³ However, she is aware that clients seeking Accessibrand services

² Accessibrand, <https://accessibrand.com/Services.htm>

³ Jolene MacDonald (founder), "How Working In Accessibility Changed My Life: Accessibrand," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YL_VRPcm5RE.

are all at different stages in their journey to becoming accessible and thinking inclusively. They also have different motivations, some primarily compliance-based, for wanting to make their businesses digitally accessible.

Accessibrand emphasizes that its services are designed to foster inclusion and access. However, the business recognizes that this is not the starting point for all clients. Therefore, Accessibrand strives to keep an open mind, while steering its clients away from a litigation and compliance mindset to an inclusive one. This is to the benefit of businesses seeking services. The more inclusive they are, the more customers they will attract. As one of Accessibrand employees points out, making things more accessible for people who have a disability tends to make things more accessible for all. The world and the web become more navigable for all users.⁴

Why Spotlight Accessibrand?

Accessibrand represents a positive feedback loop of accessibility. That is, each element of the business positively feeds into the pursuit for access and inclusion. On the personal side, the business was created in earnest because its founder required more flexible work for herself and her family. And the principles behind the business were established because of the founder's lived experience with disability.

On the business side, in her previous work as a graphic designer, Jolene saw how the industry was lacking in accessibility. People either weren't aware of the need for digital accessibility, or they didn't have the know-how to design inclusively. By creating a marketing and design business with accessibility at the forefront, Jolene was filling a gap in the market. Accessibrand goes beyond the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) to create inclusive, user-friendly, and business-enhancing digital content.

On the inclusion and advocacy side, Accessibrand is committed to providing services for and by people who have a disability. The company hires predominantly people who have a disability, or who are intimately connected to disability. The needs, lived experience, and expertise of Accessibrand employees are considered when designing products and services, but also when conceiving of how the business should be run. Accessibrand was born out of its founders need for greater workplace flexibility. Flexibility is recognized as a need among all staff members, and the way the business operates reflects this. Accessibrand's business operations are explained in greater detail in the following section. Suffice to say, Accessibrand strives to lead by example. Their portfolio of services is geared towards making other businesses inclusive and accessible. They can only do this in good faith if they "practice what they preach" in their business operations.

Innovative and Promising Practices

Jolene heard feedback from disability communities that they wanted to work, but that they were not given the resources, opportunities, and access necessary to be successful on the job market. Jolene decided that Accessibrand would be staffed inclusively and with an emphasis on hiring people who have lived experience with disability. For her business to be truly inclusive, Jolene knew she had to rethink traditional hiring practices and business models, which can be exclusionary of people who have a disability.

⁴ Andrew Tutty (auditor/designer), "How Working In Accessibility Changed My Life: Accessibrand," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YL_VRPcm5RE.

Here are some of the ways that Accessibrand fosters inclusion in its business practices:

- **Inclusive and intentional hiring of people who have experience with disability is an essential feature of the business model.**

Since Accessibrand services are geared towards accessibility, lived experience with disability is considered an essential skill, not a barrier to employment. To create and evaluate accessible products and services, you must capitalize on the knowledge and skill sets of people who have a disability.

- **People who have a disability are not only consulted in business, but they are also compensated for their specific lens.**

You cannot replicate life experience. It is a valuable commodity that deserves compensation.

- **A collective model of operations ensures everyone's abilities are highlighted, everyone's needs are met, and that all the work gets done.**

Everybody contributes to carrying out the work of the business according to their abilities. No one person is solely responsible for any one thing, and everyone works together to fulfill the needs of the business based on their abilities and circumstances. This builds capacity within the team, who see themselves as supporting each other, and working towards a common set of goals.

- **Flexible, self-guided schedules of work are offered.**

Currently four (4) employees are on the payroll permanently. The rest of Accessibrand staff are independent contractors. This arrangement allows Accessibrand to carve out a scope of work for an employee that is in line with their abilities, and their needs. Employees can engage with work according to a schedule that accommodates the realities of their lives.

- **Skills development is an integral part of Accessibrand culture.**

Some employees are well-suited for casual or freelance work. Others may have a goal of self-employment or moving on to other endeavours. Accessibrand works to cultivate employment skills that its employees may have missed out on due to previous barriers to employment. E.g., Learning how to prepare an invoice, draft an estimate for services, develop a rapport with clients, manage basic business affairs, etc. Accessibrand aims to develop skills within the organization, as well as to increase the capacity and future employability of its staff.

- **Trusting employees to carry out their work to the best of their abilities, and in ways that suit their needs is a company value.**

Accessibrand recognizes that a standard 9:00-5:00 schedule doesn't suit all people. Employees are trusted to determine their own course of productivity and to engage with work to the best of their needs and abilities. Work periods and workflow are subject to change based on individual circumstances. If everyone is contributing, all the work is getting done as a collective, and everyone's needs are taken into consideration then employees are empowered to navigate work how they see fit.

- **Creativity, flexibility, and adaptability are also company values.**

The limitations due to COVID have demonstrated that creativity, flexibility, and adaptability are more easily integrated into workplace culture than previously thought. Jolene suggests that if businesses were successful during COVID, especially if they ran remotely, they should ask themselves, “Why?” They should consider how they managed to adapt and be effective. They should consider which elements of COVID policy improved workplace culture, health and safety, and productivity, and consider which practices they can and should sustain.

Paving the Way

Accessibrand is a new business, but feedback from disability communities so far has been positive. Case in point, most talent hired by Accessibrand approaches the company for employment opportunities. Accessibrand does not have to invest much energy in recruitment. People who fit the profile of a suitable candidate for Accessibrand are so underserved that they are driven to inclusive companies. Jolene believes that the workplace culture Accessibrand is building gives them a competitive advantage in terms of attracting talent. She notes, “It’s obvious from one small business trying something different how much people want this.”⁵ Jolene attributes this to the fact that Accessibrand prioritizes showing rather than telling when it comes to inclusivity.

As strong a start as Accessibrand is off to so far, one small business cannot revolutionize the world of work alone. Jolene hopes that businesses she engages with will take a cue from Accessibrand and start applying the same principles to their own company culture. It’s the ripple effect of engaging with an inclusive business that will make big waves in the disability community. Jolene knows this kind of cultural shift can be overwhelming. She encourages businesses to take the first step, whether that is hiring a company like Accessibrand to improve accessibility in marketing and digital content, or some other meaningful step towards inclusion. She advises businesses set for themselves actionable and achievable measures to increase inclusivity, and then build from there. It’s a process, to be sure, but an essential one.

Summary of Learning

Accessibrand is just one example of how a small company can make a significant impact by thinking strategically about access and inclusion. Below is a summary of learnings which may be helpful in getting businesses started on the path to disability inclusion:

- Engage with disability communities, first and foremost. Consult with them, employ them, and capitalize on their lived experience. Let them steer the direction of the work.
- Flexibility, creativity, adaptability are integral components to inclusive businesses.
- Disability is an untapped market, both on the labour side and the consumer side. Don’t underestimate the value of this community.
- Lead by example. It is better than compelling someone to fall in line.

⁵ Jolene MacDonald in conversation with Ontario Disability Employment Network.

- Don't discount people or businesses who don't "get it" when it comes to accessibility. Be willing to go on the journey with the uninitiated. Embrace the opportunity to help them learn and grow.
- Appreciate that a single positive step is still a step in the right direction. Acknowledge efforts made by individuals and businesses to be more inclusive, and then challenge them to build on that effort.

If you have any questions regarding the information, please email us at info@odenetwork.com



Ontario
Disability
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Réseau ontarien
d'aide à l'emploi
pour les personnes
handicapées

**Inclusive Business Case Study
2021-2022**

*Corporate Disability Inclusion Initiatives
And the Impact on Local Hiring Practices*

ODEN identifies and evaluates promising practices in the business sector and translate that knowledge to make it accessible to other businesses looking to start, or advance, their inclusive hiring journey. In this case study for Inclusive Business Practices, ODEN has curated knowledge from the ODEN Champion's League by interviewing Lino Tesolin.

The following is a typical Inclusive Business case study that illustrates promising practices in the business sector to move the workforce participation agenda forward and create positive changes in the employment situation for people who have a disability.

Lowe's is a business that has been very intentional in their inclusion of people who have a disability in their workforce both nationally and internationally. A number of disability inclusion initiatives have received a lot of attention recently. To find out how these disability-inclusive corporate initiatives impact local stores and their hiring practices, ODEN reached out to one of their Business Champion, Lino Tesolin, who has managed a number of retail stores including Lowes.

Mr. Tesolin has management work experience with a number of large retail chain stores including Loblaws, Sobeys and Lowes. During the interview, he provided a number of insightful points on how to create an inclusive workplace. He pointed to the need for support for hiring managers; the importance of bringing awareness of community partners and the role they play in supporting hiring initiatives, and the concept that employees who have a disability who have worked in retail have a number of transferrable skills that can be applied in other sectors.

The following Case Study provides a reflection from a Business Champion well versed in managing retail chain stores for what it takes to create an inclusive workplace. Lino Tesolin provides a perspective on the impact of corporate initiatives at the local level, and he concludes the interview by reinforcing the fact that hiring managers need support to create inclusive workforces. They are the link in the hiring process that makes disability inclusive initiatives, whether global or regional, work.

Corporate Disability Inclusion Initiatives And the Impact on Local Hiring Practices

Summary

ODEN identifies and evaluates promising practices in the business sector and translate that knowledge to make it accessible to other businesses looking to start, or advance, their inclusive hiring journey. In this case study for Inclusive Business Practices, ODEN has curated knowledge from the ODEN Champion's League by interviewing Lino Tesolin. Mr. Tesolin has over 30 years of management experience in the retail sector working with Loblaw's, Sobeys and Lowes.

Recently, Lowes has received attention because of the disability inclusive initiatives that they are implementing, including hiring veterans who use service dogs and creating an American Sign Language (ASL) system of vests, badges, and pins to support customer and staff relationships in their stores. It is clear that for Lowes, promoting a culture that celebrates disability-inclusion is part of their corporate DNA and ODEN wanted to evaluate how these macro inclusive corporate initiatives impact and influence the local, regional stores.

Lino Tesolin was approached to discuss the steps for creating inclusive work environments and implementing practices that managers and supervisors can establish when working with employees who have a disability. In addition, the interviewer discussed how corporate initiatives can influence and support regional initiatives for inclusive hiring. Mr. Tesolin provided a number of insightful points:

- A good manager knows their business and knows when hiring with diversity can work. There is always a way to find the best fit for the candidate.
- Hiring managers make things work. They need support to create inclusive workplaces.
- Retail has multiple leadership layers – whether assistant store managers, department managers, leads and others. All leadership roles must own the responsibility to be disability inclusive.
- It is important for manager to promote development of everyone in the business, including employees who have a disability – set the tone that everyone supports each other and has an interest in winning together.
- Supports for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives at the corporate level may not make it to the *hiring manager* level. When there is no strong corporate hierarchy or dedicated HR departments, businesses need more support to establish any disability inclusion initiative.
- When managers hire talent without a disability, they hire at different levels of competencies and based on people's **potential to develop** skills, the same should be done for people who have a disability.
- Retail workers who have a disability have transferrable skills that are needed in other sectors – hard work ethic, a high desire to be part of a team, diligent focus and a desire to contribute, a desire to share ambitions and goals.

Mr. Tesolin concluded the interview by reinforcing the fact that hiring managers need support to create inclusive workforces. They are the link in the hiring process that makes disability inclusive initiatives, whether global or regional, work.

Introduction

ODEN identifies and evaluates promising practices in the business sector and translate that knowledge to make it accessible to other businesses looking to start, or advance, their inclusive hiring journey. Sometimes, that knowledge can be curated from disability inclusion champions such as the ODEN Champion's League. This is a group of business leaders who have demonstrated a leadership role in promoting the inclusion of people who have a disability in the workplace. Based on their personal and professional experiences, Champions League members have made a commitment to promote and advocate to their peers, the benefits of including people who have a disability in the workforce.

In 2019, Lino Tesolin, Manager of East Windsor Lowe's, Windsor, Ontario was inducted to the ODEN Champions League in recognition of his 30 years of promoting inclusive hiring practices. Since then, Mr. Tesolin has worked with ODEN to move the workforce participation agenda forward and creating positive changes in the employment situation for people who have a disability.

Internationally, Lowe's has been intentional in their inclusion of people who have a disability in their workforce. Recently, they have been featured for a number of disability-inclusion initiatives; for example: the creation of [American Sign Language \(ASL\) red vests, badges and pins](#). In Canada, Lowes has also been featured as an inclusive employer with stories from Regina, Saskatchewan on how they [accommodate service dogs](#) to stories from Southwestern Ontario highlighting the home improvement store chain during National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), both in [Windsor](#) and [Sarnia](#).

It is clear that for Lowes, promoting a culture that celebrates disability-inclusion is part of their corporate DNA and ODEN wanted to evaluate how these macro inclusive corporate initiatives impact and influence the local, regional stores.

Supporting Hiring Managers

In 2022, ODEN reached out to [Lino Tesolin](#) from Windsor, Ontario, an ODEN Business Champion League inductee and a veteran store manager for Lowes, to discuss how corporate initiatives impact local stores. During this interview, Mr. Tesolin indicated that he is now semi-retired and no longer working with Lowes but that he is open to providing insight into hiring and inclusive workplace practices that span the course of 30 years as a manager at Loblaw, Sobeys, and Lowes.

The theme for this interview was the creation of inclusive work environments and practices that managers and supervisors can establish to support employees who have a disability and how corporate initiatives can influence and support regional initiatives for inclusive hiring. Having managerial experience with three major retail chain stores, Mr. Tesolin can certainly provide much insight.

ODEN asked Mr. Tesolin to comment on concrete and achievable actions managers and supervisors can do to support hiring candidates who have a disability. He commented that managers need to *"understand their business and understand how overall business labour objectives fit into "hire practices". Managers are always under pressure behind the scenes to take on and act on labour or wage responsibilities."*

When asked what “knowing your business” means, Tesolin commented: “Retail has changed. Grocery stores have gone from being a large 3,000 square feet and having 6 departments to being superstores with 40,000 to 60,000 square feet and having well over 18 departments”. He continued to comment that all retail stores, despite of their size or the products they offer, whether it is lumber, vegetables, clothing, etc., they all have the same internal operating pressure: to manage labour and the complex responsibilities associated with it while creating a profitable business. He notes:

“A good manager knows their business and knows when hiring with *diversity* can work. **There is always a way.** The hiring manager learns the business first and then they will always find what I call “best fit for the candidate”. Mr. Tesolin also made the point that “it is always expected of **hiring managers** to make things work; they are the ones who need the tools that make them feel supported and comfortable. Hiring managers need to be empowered”. This is where Mr. Tesolin commented that support from ODEN and other networks is critical. Businesses need to know that there are resources for hiring managers that they can access.

When discussing how leadership’s commitment drives disability inclusion, and supports the efforts of hiring managers, Mr. Tesolin commented:

“In retail, there are **multiple layers** of leadership, and each layer must be invested in driving diversity and inclusion of people who have a disability so that the initiative can be successful. Know your management team and their strengths. When you have “Assistant Store Managers,” “Department Managers,” “Leads” and other various levels of supervisors, you have many decision makers influencing labour responsibilities. All leadership roles must own the responsibility to be *disability inclusive.*”

“Acting together to promote disability inclusion needs to be more than just a management thought”, said Tesolin. He said: “Leadership can use many well-known approaches to develop their workforce whether it is the “*team environment*” and “*winning together as a team*” approaches. These are critical to create and “promote development of **everyone** in the business, including employees who have a disability; it is important to set the tone that everyone supports each other and has an interest in wining together-as a team”. Leading by example is essential.

Influence of Corporate Initiatives at the Local Level

ODEN wanted to learn from Mr. Tesolin how do corporate initiatives that may be of national (or global) scope translate or influence local initiatives. How can regional managers leverage corporate commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) to influence hiring talent who have a disability. Mr. Tesolin was frank in his perspective:

“Most corporations these days support and recommend hiring initiatives that support a corporate commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Yet, often, the message or information may not make it to the *hiring* manager depending on the type and size of the business”. He commented that the situation can also be different for businesses that do not have a strong corporate hierarchy or dedicated human resources departments. These businesses, more than others, may have to reach out for help to establish any disability-inclusion initiative.

When asked how hiring managers can find support, Mr. Tesolin commented based on his own experience, often with the support from his local Community Living:

“Most communities have a chapter of “Community Living” in their area or close by. They are fantastic at guiding and mentoring managers in the proper direction”. They often support with onboarding, day-to-day supports, or even just during orientation and the first few weeks.

Mr. Tesolin noted that businesses may not be aware that several “social service” type organizations exist in their community and who support both the business and the new employee to succeed in the workplace. The new hire may also have a history with the agency helping and that is great, the agency can support the employer by ensuring that information is transferred to the employer to make the onboard process more inclusive.

Dealing with Misconceptions

ODEN asked Mr. Tesolin what misconceptions or myths continue to “box” talent and create barriers to hiring people who have a disability. He noted that while he has seen a lot of progress in the 30 years he has been in the workforce as a manager, there are still misconceptions that need to be corrected; including that people who have a disability may not be fast enough or be able to pick up on the skills set needed for the roles. He noted that when managers hire talent without a disability, they hire *“at different levels of competencies and based on people’s **potential to develop** skills, the same should be done for people who have a disability”*.

Managers should remember the point made earlier, “approach the hiring responsibilities and outcomes from a teamwork approach, the success for the store is dependent on everyone supporting one another”. He also noted that it is important to remember that “a manager hires people to support their growth in their store”.

When asked how workplaces change when employees who have a disability enter the workforce, Mr. Tesolin, noted on a few benefits:

- Work feels like a family and in retail, the feel of familiarity can promote a store!
- The community is supported by the store -hiring from the community is important,
- Customers see the store and their employees as a “valued” organization,
- The store shows that they “care” in more than just words – customers see in action that the community is “valued” by this business, and
- The business reflects the advances and evolving nature of our society

“With a strong economy coming out of the pandemic, retail stores need to evaluate these benefits, and have an open mind to embrace the philosophy of “possible” when it comes to hiring people in their community who have a disability”, said Tesolin.

Developing Talent Who Have a Disability

It is well documented that the retail sector has unique characteristics. Each industry and sector are different, however, ODEN asked Mr. Tesolin about his perspective on how other industries or sectors can engage talent who have a disability. He noted that this talent pool has a lot to offer other sectors and that their skills, competencies and desires to contribute to the workforce are strengths that any sector or industry would benefit from. He recalls that in the past, when he has hired candidates who have a disability that they demonstrated:

- Hard work ethic,
- A high desire to participate in teamwork environment,
- Diligent focus and desire to contribute,

- A desire to be accepted and succeed in their new role,
- A desire to support other team members,
- A desire to share ambitions and goals,
- A desire to be recognized,
- A desire to be treated equally.

According to Mr. Tesolin, Managers who hire inclusive become better managers because of the human connections that they develop and their desire to support the community. Managers understand the importance to support new hires who have a disability and how pairing up with more experienced staff is a win-win. Managers who hire more inclusive spend more time talking to their staff, talking to understand the make up of their team, learning who they are and that investment in people make a great difference in the success of an inclusive hiring initiative.

When asked about the topic of skills that young people who have a disability can develop and work on *before* they consider entering the workforce, Mr. Tesolin noted that confidence, self-esteem, acceptance, and being on time were important. He noted that young people should have an “understanding of some of employment basics such as health & safety, time management such as breaks and lunch rules, time clock or punch-in rules, teamwork, goals towards success, key company mandates or objectives (performance and profit)”.

Mr. Tesolin concluded the interview reminding ODEN that hiring managers need to be supported. Networks like ODEN provide resources that help hiring managers to feel empower to know that not all hires work out, and that is part of natural turn over -which should be considered as good turn over, an opportunity to learn how to do inclusive hiring better the next time.

If you have any questions regarding the information, please email us at info@odenetwork.com



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pour les personnes
handicapées

**Inclusive Business Case Study
2021-2022**

*Driving Disability Inclusive Hiring Practices
in the Manufacturing Sector*

ODEN identifies and evaluates promising practices in the business sector and translate that knowledge to make it accessible to other businesses looking to start, or advance, their inclusive hiring journey. In this case study for Inclusive Business Practices, ODEN summarizes the work that Onward Manufacturing in Waterloo, Ontario has done to hire talent who have a disability supported by KW Career Compass.

The following is a typical Inclusive Business case study that illustrates promising practices in the business sector to move the workforce participation agenda forward and create positive changes in the employment situation for people who have a disability.

The COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted industries such as tourism and hospitality, but other sectors experienced unprecedented growth and product demand as people spent more time at home due to pandemic-related restrictions. Onward Manufacturing Co. Ltd., in Waterloo, Ontario, is an example of a manufacturer experiencing a peak in product demand while dealing with existing labour shortages issues.

For Onward, reaching out to the disability community in their talent acquisition process may have started as an out-of-the-box-thinking approach but it has become a “business as usual” solution, with a proven track record, for this fast-growing business. By building a relationship with their local disability employment service provider, KW Career Compass, Onward is not only accessing talent but also critical supports that ensure a successful employment match.

Inclusive hiring also created onboarding and training methods that resulted in efficiencies and were surprisingly easy to implement. These resources included tasks lists, visual reminders, work sampling, evaluation check lists, and job coaching/support. These services and supports have been good for both the employees and their managers. The result has been increased productivity and top performance.

The following Case Study provides a summary of how a business in a growing industry such as Manufacturing, has tapped into a pool of reliable, dependable and motivated employees by hiring from the disability community. The case study also showcases how local Employment Service Providers support the business at all stages of the employment cycle to ensure the employment match is a success.

Driving Disability Inclusive Hiring Practices in the Manufacturing Sector

Introduction

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Canada's manufacturers were reporting labour and skills shortages. Research from the Business Development Bank of Canada in 2018 indicated that almost **40 percent of Canada's small and medium-sized businesses were having difficulty hiring new employees**¹. The situation was the same for Ontario manufacturers, and the pandemic has further increased this labour demand.

While some industries such as tourism and hospitality were *negatively* impacted by the pandemic, other sectors experienced unprecedented growth and product demand as people spent more time at home due to pandemic-related restrictions. Onward Manufacturing Co. Ltd., in Waterloo, Ontario, is an example of a manufacturer experiencing a peak in product demand while dealing with existing labour shortages issues.

Onward Manufacturing, established in 1906, produces gas barbecue grills in Canada and the United States, with products sold under the Broil King, Broilmate, Sterling and Huntington brands throughout North America and to over 40 countries around the world. In Canada, Onward Manufacturing has two facilities located in Waterloo and Kitchener, Ontario. Onward has 400 total employees across all its locations in North America and generates \$113.17 million in sales (USD)².

Workforce Labour Solutions that are Out-of-the-Box Thinking

Businesses impacted by labour shortages are using a variety of methods and approaches to attract talent, which have been in existence for many years, but under-utilized.

For Onward, reaching out to the disability community in their talent acquisition process may have started as an *out-of-the-box-thinking* approach but it has become a "*business as usual*" solution, with a proven track record, for this fast-growing business. By building a relationship with their local disability employment service provider, KW Career Compass³, Onward is not only accessing talent but also critical supports that ensure a successful employment match.

Approximately 16 years ago, Onward hired James, a candidate who was accessing employment supports from KW Career Compass. Since that first hire, they have successfully hired three other employees who have a disability, all who are still working there.

Onward sees KW Career Compass as a key partner, a resource for their hiring process, and often the *first* contact for jobs that need to be filled. KW Career Compass has simplified the hiring and onboarding process, becoming a time saver for Onward Manufacturing. Along with pre-screening and preparing candidates, the Employment Service provider offers on-the-job supports for the

¹ Labour shortage in Canada: Here to Stay. https://www.bdc.ca/en/documents/analysis_research/labour-shortage.pdf

² https://www.dnb.com/business-directory/company-profiles/onward_manufacturing_company_limited.d9b47db0a4836172632658a55f76b8c1.html

³ KW Career Compass, <https://www.kwhab.ca/kw-career-compass/>

employee and the supervisors as they join the team and are onboarded. This local workforce development relationship between the business and the supporting agency creates a *disability inclusive hiring process* that results in a win-win situation.

Auditing, or work sampling, prior to a candidate joining the team is another service offered by the Employment Service provider. The Job Coach audits and learns the job, identifies candidates in their program, and introduces them to the job and setting through brief half-day work-sampling sessions. This process allows for the evaluation of a candidates' skills, based on what the employer's needs are.

This relationship has resulted in longevity of hires from KW Career Compass. Onward is also confident in other retention services offered including supporting the addition of new tasks and changes to job duties, including promotions.

Accessible and Inclusive Hiring are Business as Usual Practices for Onward

When asked the reason for hiring from the disability community, Onward said "simply, this is a good business practice".

According to the Warehouse Manager, "James sets an amazing example for other employees, because of his productivity and work ethic. James meets and exceeds our expectations". Inclusive hiring also created onboarding and training methods that resulted in efficiencies and were surprisingly easy to implement. These resources included tasks lists, visual reminders, work sampling, evaluation check lists, and job coaching/support. These services and supports have been good for both the employees and their managers. The result has been increased productivity and top performance.

The four employees hired by Onward are full contributors in their local community. When asked why working was important to him, Graeme, one of the two employees who works in the order picking and packing department said:

"I wanted to have my own independence. I want a place of my own and I knew that I needed a full-time job to be able to support myself".

After a year of employment with Onward, Graeme fulfilled his goal. He lives independently, works in a job he loves and has pride in being a contributor to his local economy.

Manufacturing is a growing source of employment, particularly in mid-sized cities and smaller communities. At Onward Manufacturing they have tapped into a pool of reliable, dependable and motivated employees, hiring talent from the disability community, with assistance from their local employment service provider. This has boosted their bottom line and enabled them to meet the growing demand for their products.

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Business Engagement Process

Case Study – Art & Science Digital Experience

Art & Science Digital Experience Design contacted ODEN to learn about supports and education available to hire from the disability talent pool and build their internal capacity to retain and manage employees who have a disability while cultivating a culture of diversity and inclusion.

The following is a typical case study that illustrates the steps and processes required to ensure successful and sustainable employment for candidates who have a disability. This process is similar to that of other progressive, inclusive employers such as Rockwool, Chudleigh's, Dare Foods, and others.

Most of ODEN's business referrals come through presentations at Human Resources Professionals Association chapters, local Chambers of Commerce and/or Rotary clubs. These presentations illustrate the benefits of creating inclusive hiring strategies and demonstrate the 'viability' of people who have a disability in the workplace. We typically, but not always, engage a Business Champion to participate in these presentations or connect with the business in question to gain credibility. The goal is to create the appetite to hire inclusively and to position ODEN as a business resource that will help the business create the capacity needed to do this inclusive hiring on its own.

Once a business has contacted us, we research the business and create a personalized presentation and business case that speaks to their specific industry and individual needs. The starting point, always, is to assess what the business' needs are. This is a radical shift from simply asking the business to hire people who have a disability. If we can convince the business that we can meet their needs, the disability part comes easy.

With businesses looking at significant commitments and multiple hires, we typically present them with a proposal based on a negotiation of the work needed to ensure a successful outcome. Each proposal is different, with some being more complex than others.

In every case, we have the goal of helping the business build internal capacity, confidence, and comfort at managing people who have a disability in the workforce as a natural course of doing business. Education and training are core to every proposal.

The following Case Study examines Art & Science Digital Experience Design (Art & Science) and their goals to learn how to include people who have a disability in their hiring process. It illustrates the intentionality of Art & Science to embark on a journey of inclusive hiring and the services provided by ODEN to support their goals.

Art & Science Digital Experience Design

Summary

Art & Science Digital Experience Design (Art & Science) is described on their website as a team of creative technologists who do not see “art” and “science” as two separate things¹. They defined themselves as a team that has reached a balanced combination of analytical and creative skills to ensure that the best technology is the one that is put forward for the job at hand.

Art & Science has a ten-year record for creating digital experiences for some of the largest companies in Canada, launching new brand designs built from inception, and helping enterprises from the ground up by providing customer-centric strategies.

Art & Science wanted to learn about supports and education available to increase their success with hiring employees who have a disability and build their internal capacity to retain and manage all employees, including those who have a disability. A discovery session was conducted to understand the business and professional needs of their team.

This session allowed the managers at Art & Science realized that they are familiar with how their work impacts people who have a disability from a technology user perspective. However, they have a business need to create an inclusive workforce and develop a process that better engages job seekers who have a disability in all their hiring initiatives.

The outcome of that discovery session would be the creation of clear goals that resulted in an *Inclusive Hiring Strategy*. Art & Science would embark on a journey to become a more inclusive employer, build disability confidence and lastly, build internal capacity to onboard, manage and retain employees effectively.

¹ <https://artscience.ca/who-we-are/>

Process of Understanding

The Senior Management team at Art & Science requested a brainstorming and discovery session on August 28, 2019, to better understand the steps needed to formalize a strategy. This process would ensure that candidates who have a disability are part of their hiring practices.

This session, facilitated by ODEN’s Diversity & Inclusion Specialists, involved looking at short-term and long-term goals and identifying the requirements to achieve them. Figure 1 illustrates the summary of the discussion between Art & Science and ODEN.

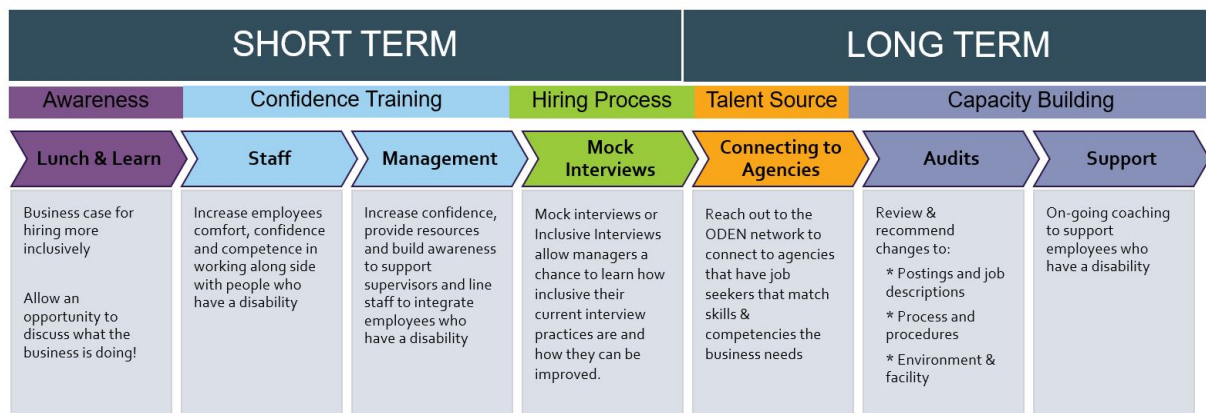


Figure 1 Art & Science Strategy Resulting from Brainstorm session (August 2019)

One of the first steps in building an inclusive workforce, including employees who have a disability, is to build awareness and education about the disability demographic.

Following the Discovery session, Art & Science provided a “lunch & learn” session, in January 2020, as the first steppingstone for their entire team in this intentional Disability Inclusion Journey. That session allowed all employees to have an opportunity to hear, many for the first time, the Business Case for Hiring Inclusively. This session set the stage for the Confidence Training sessions. It allowed a safe space for employees to discuss why their organization was reaching out to the disability community as a source of talent.

The next step in the Disability Inclusion Journey is Disability Awareness and Confidence training for both staff and managers. To better understand their needs as a business and organization, the team at Art & Science committed to this training, beginning with a series of surveys for 30 employees.

Surveys provide an opportunity to measure a team's current level of awareness and understanding of disability in the workplace. At Art & Science, the staff completed a pre-training survey. The results were analyzed so that customized Awareness and Confidence training could be designed.

The survey revealed that in general, most Art & Science employees (71%) have worked with a person who has a disability. A large portion of those employees, 46% of them, confirmed that they had experience challenges when interacting with a co-worker who has a disability. When asked how confident they felt about having the resources and tools needed to support employees who have a disability, 52% of the employees felt that more work was needed in this area.

Overall, 84% of the employees at Art & Science believed that creating an inclusive workplace culture would increase employee morale.

Discussions with Senior Managers at Art & Science following the pre-training survey provided them with a good understanding of their employees' disability confidence status and allowed the creation of bespoke training. The training was focused on *Knowledge of Accessibility* - how to work with someone who has a disability, and *Disability Awareness & Confidence*- how to ensure that support for employees who have a disability is built throughout the organization's processes.

Building on Awareness and Creating Confidence

Disability Confidence means empowering everyone with the knowledge required to be responsive to the broader abilities, competencies, and needs of people who have a disability, including, but not limited to, co-workers and customers. Understanding how to discuss disabilities and address people who have a disability is essential for promoting equality and creating a sustainable, inclusive workplace environment.

The Disability Awareness Confidence Training hosted by Art & Science in their Toronto Head Office in February 2020 engaged all employees. It provided the team members with materials that included background on the facts about disability, dispelling myths that create barriers and biases, and reinforcing the business case for a more inclusive workplace.

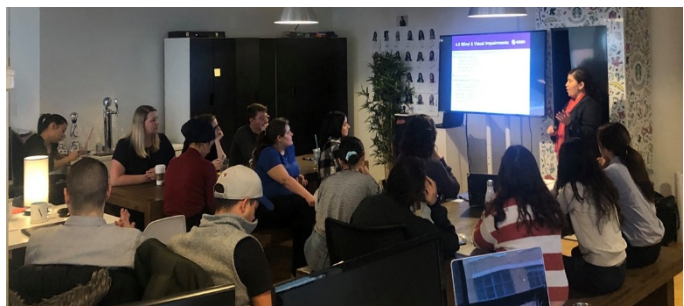


Figure 2 Disability Awareness & Confidence Training Co-Worker Session (February 2020)

The training was customized for two groups: co-workers and managers. Different audiences require different resources and tools. These tools have helped the team at Art & Science build their internal capacity to attract, hire, onboard and promote employees who have a disability. Post-training surveys showed that most employees would be interested in furthering their knowledge on unconscious bias, mental health illness in the workplace, conducting meaningful conversations, and additional training around disability types.

When asked how the training had benefited them, employees shared that the training had:

- increased their confidence to communicate with someone who had a disability
- increased understanding of how language is impactful
- how assumptions about people who have a disability create barriers.



Figure 3- Post training survey for Art & Science staff -example of responses (February 2020)

They also highlighted that they learned about their misconceptions on accommodations for employees who have a disability and how modifications can be inexpensive and straightforward.

Putting Theory to Practice

Training to build Disability Confidence is a great way to allow employees and supervisors an opportunity to learn, in a safe space, how to create workplace interactions that are disability-inclusive. Following the strategic steps highlighted in the session in August 2019, the management team at Art & Science recognized that an opportunity to “practice” what the team had learned in the training session was an excellent next step.

Managers participated in *Disability Inclusive Interviews* (Mock Interviews) to gain hands-on experience interviewing candidates who have a disability. These sessions aim to evaluate how inclusive the current interview processes are for a business looking to engage the disability community.

These disability mock interviews are organized as any other formal interview would and follow a well-organized process described in Image 1. Art & Science hosted a number of Disability Inclusive Interviews in October 2020. It is worth noting that the delay between the Confidence Training (February 2020) and the Inclusive Interviews was caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

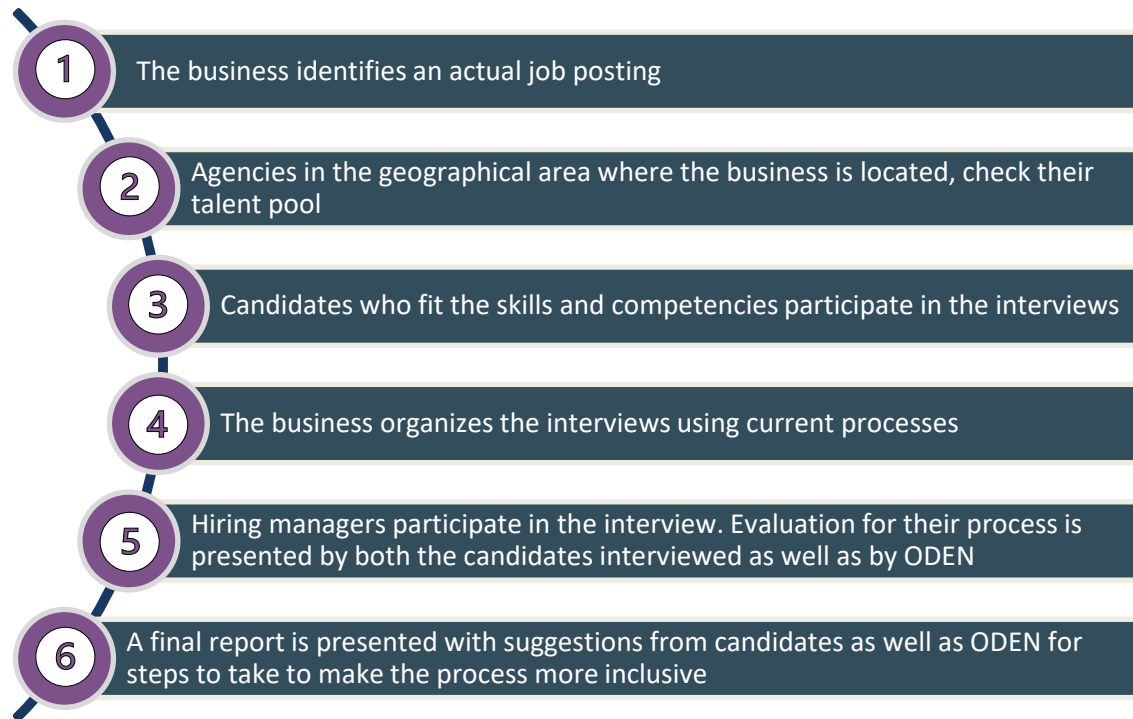


Image 1 - Steps in the Disability Inclusive Interview process

Art & Science provided a job description for a posting they were advertising. This posting was used to connect to employment service providers who support candidates matching the skills and competencies that Art & Science needs. The candidates approached welcomed the opportunity to practice their interview skills in a safe environment. They appreciated the opportunity to provide feedback to the employer on how well they conducted a disability-inclusive interview.

In total, three 30-minute Disability Inclusive Interviews were hosted by Art & Science in October 2020. Three managers participated in these interviews. Two agencies from the network put forward three candidates that fit the skill profile. As illustrated in the process above, evaluations for both the managers and the candidates were done by ODEN Diversity & Inclusion Specialists. In the end, four 30-minute information sessions were organized, three with the interviewees (candidates who have a disability) to obtain their feedback on how well the interviewers (Art & Science managers) conducted the interviews.

The fourth session was held with the interviewers, and they were critiqued and provided suggestions to increase their skill and confidence in interviewing. They were also provided with positive feedback on all they had done well. This feedback was then organized in a report describing the process that Art & Science undertook, from strategy building in August 2019 to inclusive interviews in October 2020.

Continuing to Build Inclusion

Art & Science has taken significant steps to embark on an intentional journey to be a disability-inclusive employer. Since 2019, the team at Art & Science has conducted disability awareness sessions; surveys to analyze disability knowledge gaps in their workplace; training sessions to building confidence when working with and supervising employees who have a disability; and conducted Disability Inclusive Interviews to better put into practice their acquired disability knowledge.

The journey to build inclusion in all their processes and procedures is not over.

Art & Science continues to seek connections to Employment Service Providers that can provide the talent they need.

Art & Science has received recommendations to establish an onboarding process that will include natural supports for employees who have a disability, for example, mentorship programs. ODEN remains committed to supporting Art & Science in these recommendations and any further work in their Disability Inclusion journey.

When done with intention and managed well, disability inclusion processes will become part of the DNA in Art & Science's HR practices and will be the typical onboarding process for any employee, whether they have a disability or not.

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TD Bank - Strategic and Intentional Inclusive Hiring Case Study

Preamble

TD Bank is invested in providing an accessible and supportive environment for all employees. Their commitment to fostering an inclusive culture includes people who have a disability.

The following Case Study examines TD Bank's ongoing commitment towards inclusive hiring to include people who have a disability, as well as their intentionality and strategies for inclusive hiring. This case study will also reflect on TD Bank's reported benefits of being disability-inclusive in recruiting and hiring practices, highlight key promising practices, and the long-term mission towards increasing disability inclusive hiring at TD Bank.

In 2018, 1 in 5 Canadians reported having a visible or invisible disability, and this number will continue to grow. As you read this case study, take some time to reflect on your own business practices. How disability-inclusive is your business when it comes to recruitment and hiring practices? How many employees or colleagues have self-identified as having a disability? How would you rate your workplace culture today? And lastly, how will your business implement change to be intentionally inclusive?

Summary

TD Bank was founded in 1855. It is the 26th largest bank in the world and named the Top 10 bank in North America. TD Bank including their subsidiaries have hired over 89,000 employees and have served over 26 million customers across the globe. In North America alone, TD Bank has over 2200 branches and serves more than 17 million clients. They have also won “Best Place to Work in 2019 - Disability Equality” award for the past five years.

TD Bank has intentionally committed to fostering a culture of inclusion and made their business stronger by engaging with people with a wide range of experience and abilities, regardless of background, religion, race, gender, physical ability or sexual orientation. When it comes to being disability- inclusive, TD Bank is also committed to and invested in providing an accessible and safe environment.

Diversity and Inclusion plays a fundamental role in their values to support their clients, employees and communities. TD Bank believes in creating an inclusive environment where everyone can bring their authentic selves to work, instilling a culture that recognizes unique talents, a wide range of abilities and making a better workplace, by continually working towards a barrier- free environment for all. They also strive to see their clients be represented in their employees which means attracting every member of society to their company.

To better understand TD Banks position on disability-inclusive hiring, the Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN)’s CEO - Jeannette Campbell and Communications Strategist, Dean Askin, interviewed, Paul Clark - President & Direct Investing at TD Bank and Derek Burleton – VP and Deputy Chief Economist at TD Bank through our podcast called *You Can’t Spell Inclusion without a “D”*. The purpose of this interview was to gain key insights into:

- How disability inclusive hiring helps the economy
- The long-term benefits for businesses who hire inclusively
- Understand the *why* behind common hesitations, that prevent businesses from being disability-inclusive
- Why the talent pool of people who have a disability can be described as “*Secret Weapon*” for a business’ success.

TD Bank shared that it’s not just about bringing in any new talent for them but rather to hire the best talent and they demonstrate this by accessing a variety of talent pools. When an organization has a diverse team, they have succeeded in creating a culture of inclusion and organically drive innovation.

“Secret Weapon”

We asked Mr. Burleton why he used the phrase “*Secret Weapon*” to describe people who have a disability. He stated that in order to understand the *why* behind using this phrase, it is fundamental to take an in-depth look into the barriers many people who have one or more disabilities face, “the barriers they have been presented with and continue to pioneer and overcome is the true testament to their strength and resiliency”. He further illustrated that his team members who have a disability, approach their work in a way that has resulted in transferable skills and techniques that has transformed TD Banks’ approach and practices.

However, as TD Bank has discovered, hiring people who have a disability is only the first step towards truly inclusive hiring. It is equally important to ensure quality support during and after onboarding is provided. This support should include providing accessible accommodations, accessible workplace, a focus on talent retention, and continuous education to dispel misconceptions and misinformation about disability.

Even though there is an undeniable benefit to hiring people who have a disability, misconceptions and misinformation have often led to hesitation from businesses to be disability- inclusive in their hiring and retention practices.

This hesitation stems from many businesses not understanding the true value of behind the contributions of people who have a disability can bring to businesses. As a strong advocate for disability- inclusive hiring, TD Bank continually addresses misinformation, misconceptions, and misperceptions to help eliminate the exclusion of people who have a disability and aim to bridge the gap and increase disability-inclusive hiring.

One of the most common misconceptions involve accommodation costs. Businesses believe that hiring people who have a disability will result in astronomical expense. However, studies have shown that less than one-quarter of all employees with disabilities need accommodations, about 70 percent of such accommodations cost less than \$500 per employee and one-third of accommodations costs result in \$0.

Nearly, 20 percent of accommodations costs are \$50 or less. In many instances, the refinements prove beneficial for employees who happen to be shorter, taller, less agile, or, older as well.

Another common misconception many businesses have is that hiring people who have a disability will result in high turnover and decreased productivity. In reality, employee retention rates are 72% higher among people who have a disability, and 86% of employees who have a disability have average to above-average attendance records.

TD Bank's President & Direct Investing, Paul Clark, shared that it is vital for an organization to truly understand the value and contribution that someone with a disability can bring to their organization and only then can there be an intentional shift towards career progression, development and organizational advantage.

Mr. Burlerton reflected on his own journey when he first began working with TD Economics in the late 1990s. He recalled several of his colleagues speaking about the *best economist* that TD Economics has ever had. The *best economist* they were referring to was blind and provided tremendous talent and skills, despite the lack of accessible technology in the late 90s. He further explained how much that colleague still inspires, energizes and propels him to continue his efforts to reduce barriers in inclusive hiring.

Economy

One of the largest concerns in today's labour market derives from the aging workforce and the threat it is going to have on economic growth and business profitability.

Having a disability-inclusive workforce will result in an increase in GDP. *Canadians with Disabilities – Seizing the Opportunity*, took a macroeconomic lens and concluded that when the gap in disability inclusive hiring is bridged, unemployment rates will decrease by 1/3 by 2030 with 292,000 more people who have a disability joining the workforce, resulting in a growth in the GDP of 1.4% (approx. \$36 billion).

For businesses to bridge the gap in disability-inclusive hiring, significant improvements, refinements, and promising practices need to be implemented. Here are some key suggestions presented in the *Seizing the Opportunity* report on how businesses can help bridge the gap.

The question stands, what are some ways businesses can foster inclusion and help bridge the gap in disability inclusive hiring?

It is important for a business to innovate with a purpose. When it comes to accessibility, TD Bank strives to ensure accessibility methods are met by conducting extensive tests before launching a product.

An example of promising practice was when TD Bank launched their mobile banking app that enabled clients to make deposits by taking a picture of their cheque. In order to examine whether the app was client ready, they had to see if it met their inclusion and accessibility standards, however when the app went through more extensive testing their inhouse specialists identified the need for better technology to ensure compatibility with people who experience tremors. As a result, TD Bank made the necessary changes and relaunched their application. Before launching new products and services, it is crucial to reflect on whether the

product or service is accessible by everyone, and take the necessary steps to refine, reinvent and continue to innovate with purpose.

Another important step for a business is to foster an inclusive and accessible workplace. TD Bank continues to have an inclusive work environment by ensuring all employees feel welcomed and safe to bring their authentic selves to work. They developed a Persons with Disabilities Committee over a decade ago to discuss ideas, concerns, and solutions from employees who have a disability. When the committee was initially created, executives with a disability did not feel comfortable talking about their concerns or concerns that were discussed had to stay confidential. But today, many write blogs, talk about their challenges, and candidly bring suggestions and solutions forward.

A third component is providing the necessary training. Accessibility training is provided to all of TD Bank's customer-facing employees to expand knowledge about TD Accessibility services and learn how to properly support and serve all customers, including people who have a disability. TD Bank also conducts extensive research on universal design, to provide quality to clients and people of all abilities including accessibility standards when properties and IT services are designed.

Future Goals of TD Bank

While they are proud of their company and consider themselves to be leaders in the inclusion space, TD Bank expressed that they would like to see greater impact from their recruitment and talent development in disability inclusive hiring.

TD Bank will continue to drive action through change in disability inclusive hiring. Derek Burleton and Paul Clark hope that the misconceptions surrounding accommodations for people who have a disability are eliminated and instead see more focus on their contributions. They also shared that they would like to witness more businesses refine their inclusive hiring processes, practices and encourage businesses to work closely with Employment Service Agencies in their area to support with hiring jobseekers who have a disability. Lastly, they would like to see an increase in labour work force inclusion among people who have a disability and see barriers to join labour markets removed.

This case study around the power of inclusive hiring demonstrates the benefits of hiring people who have a disability for businesses, the economy and the labour force. It addressed misconceptions and misinformation surrounding people who have a disability and shared thoughts, and lastly, provided suggestions for businesses on promising practices and how to create and sustain inclusive practices in a workplace.

From their hiring practices to their accessibility training, the creation of Persons with Disabilities Committee to their promising practices, TD Bank has committed to continuing to work towards a welcoming, barrier-free and inclusive culture for everyone. We have much to learn from their example.

Resources

- 1) Diversity and Inclusion Revolution: Eight Powerful Truths, Deloitte Development LLC 2018
https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/insights/us/articles/4209_Diversity-and-inclusion-revolution/DI_Diversity-and-inclusion-revolution.pdf

- 2) “Getting to Equal: The Disability Inclusion Advantage”, Accenture Report 2018
[Getting to Equal: The Disability Inclusion Advantage | Accenture](#)

- 3) Business Facts, Ontario Disability Employment Network
<https://www.odenetwork.com/businesses/faqs-quick-facts/>

- 4) Canadians with Disabilities: Seizing the Opportunity, Derek Burleton and Brian DePratto
<https://economics.td.com/canadians-with-disabilities-accessibility>

- 5) “You Can’t Spell Inclusion without a “D”” – Episode 2, Ontario Disability Employment Network Podcast, <https://www.odenetwork.com/podcast-episode-2-disability-secret-weapon-for-business/>



Ontario
Disability
Employment
Network

Réseau ontarien
d'aide à l'emploi
pour les personnes
handicapées

Ontario Disability Employment Network
Business Engagement Process
Case Study – Canadian National Exhibition

Over a five-year period (2016-2021) the CNE committed to increasing the number of employees who have a disability to 18% of their 18-day Exhibition workforce. By Year 2 they had achieved their target and expanded to include seasonal and Casino positions.

For the CNE, the hiring goal reflected the disability population in Canada, and the community in which they operate.

The following is a typical case study that illustrates the steps and processes required to ensure successful and sustainable employment. It is like that of Rockwool, Chudleigh's, Dare Foods and many others.

Most of ODEN's business referrals come through presentations at Human Resources Professionals Association chapters, local Chambers of Commerce and/or Rotary clubs. These presentations are based on the illustration of the benefits of creating inclusive hiring strategies and demonstrating the 'viability' of people who have a disability in the workplace. We typically engage a Business Champion to participate in these presentations to gain credibility. The goal is to create the appetite to hire and to position ODEN as a business resource.

Once a business has contacted us, we research that business and create a personalized presentation and business case that speaks to their specific industry and individual needs. The starting point, always, is to assess what the business' needs are. This is a radical shift from simply asking the business to hire people who have a disability. If we can convince the business that we can meet their needs, the disability part comes easy.

With businesses that are looking at major commitments and multiple hires, we typically present them with a proposal, based on a negotiation of the work that is needed to ensure a successful outcome. Each proposal is different with some being more complex than others.

In every case we have the stated goal of helping the business build internal capacity, confidence and comfort at managing people who have a disability in the workforce as a natural course of doing business. Education and training are core to every proposal.

The following Case Study examines the Canadian National Exhibition and their 5-year plan to increase the number of employees who identify as having a disability. It illustrates the intentionality of the CNE, the leadership required to make this initiative a success, and the services provided by ODEN to support their goals.

The Canadian National Exhibition

In partnership with ODEN and a collective of our Employment Service Providers

Summary

The Canadian National Exhibition (CNE) is Canada's largest community event and one of the top five agricultural fairs in North America. It was founded in 1879 as the Toronto Industrial Exhibition and since then, it has enjoyed a distinguished history as a showcase of the nation. Visitors come to experience the latest innovations in technology and commercial products, to enjoy the popular entertainers of the time, and to engage in a collective community celebration. In April 2013, the CNE and the Canadian National Exhibition (CNEA) became organizationally independent from both Exhibition Place and the City of Toronto. It is now a not-for-profit organization that is financially stable and not dependent on government subsidy. The Association's new independent status enables it to retain revenues generated and reinvest them into the CNE of the future.

The CNE has changed significantly over the years and it continues to be one of Ontario's great annual traditions and an event that offers substantial entertainment value. Taking place over the 18 days leading up to and including Labour Day, it is affectionately embraced as an end-of-summer ritual by more than 1.6 million visitors every year. These visitors represent the rich diversity of Toronto and Canada.

The CNE has adapted to changing societal norms and expectations and continues to deliver fun experiences for millions. In recent years it became apparent that the CNE needed to evolve its approach to serving persons with disabilities. The CNEA has more than 140 volunteer opportunities, 650 18-day jobs, 600 Casino Jobs, and 50 Seasonal (2-4 month) Jobs annually.

At the direction of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the CNE, in 2016, an independent advisory council was formed to provide advice to CNE leadership on options to ensure that its culture became more inclusive for persons with disabilities and that policies evolved to meet societal expectations over time. After extensive market research and consultation with experts, the Council prepared recommendations for the CNE to consider. The recommendations from this independent body were fully endorsed, embraced and expanded on by the CNE's CEO and Board of Directors. (see: <https://youtu.be/uuRjfhymP9s>).



The organization developed an Accessibility Plan and commitment as follows:

The Canadian National Exhibition is dedicated to ensuring that all guests and members of the organization are treated fairly and equitably. The organization is committed to improving accessibility and inclusivity at the CNE at all levels, from employment through to admissions and customer service. The CNE strives to be a leader in accessibility in North America and ultimately to become an inclusive destination in terms of entertainment and innovation for persons with disabilities.

The CEO was the organization's champion on all matters related to accessibility and inclusion, which shows in the organization's commitment as follows. (see: <https://youtu.be/5EWFzlcXyCM>)

The CNE took action to increase hiring of people who have a disability and publicly stated the following policy for recruitment:

At the CNE we are committed to fostering an inclusive, accessible work environment, where all employees feel valued, respected and supported. The CNE offers accommodation for applicants with disabilities as part of its recruitment process.

Overview of service delivered by ODEN

In 2016 the CNEA contracted the services of the Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN) to support the implementation of their Inclusive Hiring Strategy. The CNEA Foundation which focuses on philanthropic funding had developed a specific focus on hiring youth who reflect the diversity of the community including persons with disabilities. During the initial year ODEN supported the CNEA to lay the foundation for a successful hiring strategy. Accessibility Audits and training was conducted to determine the physical and human resource needs. As a result of this work the entire organization became aware of what it takes to create a truly inclusive work environment and customer experience.

Year One (2017)

In early 2017 ODEN convened a working group made up of government and non-profit employment service providers whose ultimate goal was to provide candidates for the CNE employment opportunities. ODEN developed the strategy to create this inclusive workforce and provided the project management to ensure communication and collaboration across the group.

ODEN then made recommendations to language and functionality for the on-line application portal, reviewed all job descriptions and made recommendations to remove barriers, reviewed Human Resource processes and procedures, and provided a redesign of the interview process that was more accommodating. Lastly, ODEN delivered Disability Awareness & Confidence training to CNE staff and vendors before bringing on board the employment agencies that would provide candidates and support services.

ODEN recognized that in order for this initiative to be successful both stakeholders (CNEA and the Employment Service Providers) needed to be aligned and understand the expectations, roles, and responsibilities of all parties. To achieve this, ODEN worked with the Employment Sector to facilitate information sessions about the CNE opportunity and processes, developed the collaboration with government (ODSP-ES and TCU-EO) program staff and policy makers to secure agency support. ODEN then coached agencies on ways to utilize the CNE application portal and processes and worked with the collective of agencies on the development of support strategies i.e. job coaching for the new hires.

As a result of the interventions and supports from ODEN

- 103 employees of 601 self identified as a person who has a disability
- 15 Employment Service Providers were engaged
- The CNE reported a 94% re-hire rate for employees who have a disability (which is a success measure for the HR department)

Year 2 (2018)

Building on the success of the previous year for the CNEA, ODEN was again contracted to support the Inclusive Hiring Strategy for a second year. For this, ODEN helped the CNEA to solidify their ability to independently hire from the disability talent pool in the future by building the capacity of the organization to work with employment service providers and, to feel confident in their ability to hire independently as their reputation of inclusivity grew. ODEN also expanded the capacity building and awareness sessions to North American Midways – a major participant in the CNEA.

To do this end, ODEN provided Project Management support for the summer hiring season, created and delivered “Advanced Training for Managers and Recruiters”, established a peer mentoring program and the training platform, and convened employment agencies to provide candidates and support services. The principles of this mentoring program were to focus on a strength-based approach to help youth with disabilities build workforce skills and perform their job duties, build supportive relationships between co-workers, and build self-confidence, social development and work skills for all employees. At the end of the formal mentoring relationship, each employee was presented with a Leadership Certificate to acknowledge their achievement.

ODEN also recognized the need for Service Quality guidelines and documented the responsibilities of employment service providers – leading to an agreement in which agencies ‘signed off’ on the requirements to participate as a service provider in the initiative (See Appendix A).



For the Employment Services Providers, ODEN delivered training sessions on the CNE hiring processes, coordinated agencies in their responses to CNE – in order to streamline communication and improve engagement with the CNE, developed the strategy whereby participating agencies could collaborate on job coaching and supports – creating efficiencies and addressing any potential gaps in on-the-job-support, and worked with KPMG to provide mock interviews for potential candidates, developing interview skills and confidence for the job seekers. This engagement also resulted in Disability Awareness Training for KPMG employees.

As a result of the interventions and supports from ODEN

- 127 of 594 employees self identified as a person who has a disability
- First employees who have a disability were hired by Exhibition Place
 - Exhibition Place offered full time permanent position to one of their 4 summer students
- First employees who have a disability hired by North American Midways
- CNEA Mentorship program launched successfully

In the first two years of the Inclusive Hiring Strategy, the CNEA exceeded their goal of 18% of the workforce being comprised of people who identifies as having a disability. The 18-day staff compliment was 21%.

As a result of this success the CNEA engaged with ODEN for an enhanced approach to the initiative.

Year 3 (2019)

The CNEA indicated that they had grown their internal skill and capacity to manage the initiative and process themselves with mentorship/support from ODEN. In order to achieve this, they hired an accessibility specialist to support their work, who conducted an accessibility audit of all CNE jobs/roles at the 2019 Fair.

The CNEA increased their target for engagement from 8 to 12 employment service agencies and expanded their recruitment goal of 20% of workforce to be comprised of people who have a disability to all functions at the CNE including Midway jobs and the Casino (which hires over 600 people annually). This increased the labour pool by more than 50%, meaning a much larger number of hires from the disability talent pool. As a result of the work that they did with ODEN in past years, the CNE was confident in engaging service providers to assist them in developing a pre-employment training for summer students which was delivered in collaboration with the CNE. ODEN delivered disability awareness and confidence training for new managers, recruiters and student mentors with a focus on mental health and accommodations at work.

As a result of the interventions and supports from ODEN

- 196 of 1,287 employees self identified as a person who has a disability (reflects the enhanced Hiring Initiative that encompassed all job opportunities at and with the CNE)
- The CNE is becoming the most accessible public Fair in all of Canada
- They have created an accessible and inclusive workforce that reflects all aspects of society
- The internal capacity and confidence of the CNEA and its workforce is firmly established

Appendix A

CNE Summer Jobs Initiative

Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN) will be partnering with Canadian National Exhibition (CNE) for their Inclusive Hiring initiative. This project supports the CNE's efforts to hire youth with disabilities for a variety of summer jobs at the CNE.

Agencies participating in the project must meet the following criteria:

- Be available to work on the project starting April
- Have a minimum of one dedicated staff to coordinate the hiring process for their candidates
- Staff participating in the project will be available for 3 in person meetings hosted by ODEN between April and October
- Have youth candidates who are ready, willing and motivated to start the hiring process in early May
- Candidates are available for all shifts (**hours of operation are 10 am to midnight for the CNE and 12 pm to 6 am for the Casino**)
- Candidates have access to computers and staff support (as needed) to apply for positions
- Job coaching support available for applications, in-person interviews, orientation sessions, and all shifts for the duration of the CNE
- Agencies will not use wage subsidies for this employment opportunity

APPENDIX B

In many respects the proof of an inclusive and productive work environment is reflected by the people who work there. The following quotes are from employees with disabilities describing, in their own words, their experience working at the CNE.

Luigi L - Auditor- EnerCare Centre

“I learned to deal more professionally with people. Visitors were very helpful and cooperative as well as exhibitors following all rules and guidelines. This made my job a lot easier. For me it was a step up and in the right direction for future employment possibilities or interviews. It also made me feel more comfortable when things ran smooth.

The support from Supervisors was great. Whenever there was some issue of any sort, I always got an immediate response as well as all coworkers.

I had a good time working at the C.N.E. because I enjoy crowds and being with people.

“ Izabella I BLC – Lost and Found

“I had a really wonderful time working at the CNE this summer. Every day, I looked forward to coming to work. I had the pleasure of working with a phenomenal team at the lost and found station. My colleagues were very easy to get along with and ensured a positive work environment. I truly enjoyed engaging with the variety of situations that presented themselves during my time at the lost and found station. I am very grateful for the opportunity and would like to express my sincere thanks to all those at the CNE and at Spinal Cord Injury Ontario for enabling me to actualize my potential through a meaningful and engaging experience.”

Aaron G – Gate Attendant – 1st full time job in Canada

“Yes, I did gain self-confidence on 18 days working at the CNE, How did it help to me? It's helps me a lot because I gain knowledge and gain new friends, gain more confidence to myself, to manage my time, to interact with other people and to work independently.

I worked hard on this because this is my first time working at the CNE. I would like to show to all people even I have disabilities, I can do it, It's all about accepting, go beyond your limitation is a key to have success in life and to live normal. Thank you for the opportunity you gave to me looking forward more to work with your company. “

Ann K – 1st Year Info Booth Attendant -

I thoroughly enjoyed my work at the CNE this year. My colleagues, both youth and experienced, were friendly and shared any experience and knowledge they had, and most were a pleasure to work with. All supervisors were friendly and approachable, supportive and helpful. I very much enjoyed moving around to different info booth locations, in order to have a well-rounded familiarity with the grounds.



We had the opportunity to provide suggestions for improvement in the areas of both the guest experience and the working environment. I gave comments through that avenue several times, and on the second-last day one of my colleagues and I compiled a list of suggestions that she was planning to submit. I'm looking forward to next year's CNE to see if those suggestions are acted upon.

Nicol E – Gate Attendant

“I also want to thank the CNE management for providing an opportunity to people with varied abilities, as well as students, to show what they can do on the job and truly to live up to this commitment of guaranteeing diversity in the workplace. I think the rest of Canadian Industry could learn a thing or two from the way that the CNE handles diversity in the workplace.”

Franklin McFadden 3rd Year Gate Attendant

“The greatest reward about working for the Canadian National Exhibition is that it is much more than a job. An employee at the CNE is a team member who is valued and appreciated regardless of their abilities. I consider it an honour and a privilege to work in an environment that embraces many of the characteristics that I live by daily: Supporting others, teaching by example, and respecting values. As I look back now, having completed my third year with The Canadian National Exhibition, I take pride in knowing that my best efforts everyday have made just one person smile today.”

If you have any questions regarding the information, please email us at info@odenetwork.com



Ontario
Disability
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Réseau ontarien
d'aide à l'emploi
pour les personnes
handicapées

Ontario Disability Employment Network

ROCKWOOL Case Study

NDEAM 2019

How Accessible Recruiting Helped ROCKWOOL Succeed

One of the key functions of any successful business is keeping up with demand. And when products are in very high demand, it's often time to boost production and hire more staff. But finding and bringing on new talent that will excel at your company isn't always straightforward – just ask ROCKWOOL.

The company is a global manufacturer of stone wool insulation. The manufacturing sector is a major economic driver for Ontario's economy. It makes up roughly 12 percent of provincial GDP and supports about 30 percent of Ontario's economic activity. But, like so many other manufacturing sector leaders, ROCKWOOL has faced the common business challenge of labour shortages.

In 2016, demand for ROCKWOOL's product grew dramatically — normally a manufacturer's dream situation. But ROCKWOOL faced a serious problem. It was having a very hard time finding the right employees to work at its plant in Milton, Ontario. Efforts to bring on new talent to help increase production fell flat.

Making small recruitment revisions was a huge help

Then, the company took a new approach to recruitment. After teaming up with the Ontario Disability Employment Network and the Bob Rumball Canadian Centre of Excellence for the Deaf, ROCKWOOL made a few changes to make its hiring practices more accessible. ROCKWOOL staff did some practical orientation and training, made interviews accessible with ASL interpreters and job coaches, and extended their training period to allow for more on-the-floor learning to ensure successful onboarding.

By learning more about people with disabilities who are looking for work, the company tapped into a skilled and dedicated labour force.

The result? The company held interviews with candidates from the Deaf community and ended up hiring six new staff for its Milton location. The plant made some low-cost changes to become more accessible. For example, it installed mirrors in several places so that Deaf workers can see each other and use sign language to communicate. Beyond helping the new employees, this change also improved visibility and safety for all of the employees in this noisy plant.

Accessibility is good for business

The company's new employees have shown great skills, attitudes and commitment to their jobs. The company's Milton plant has also benefited in another important way. Many ROCKWOOL staff are now keen to learn sign language and to make their workplace more inclusive and accessible.

As production continues to grow, the company will likely need to hire more employees. Over the next two years, ROCKWOOL is committed to hiring more people with disabilities. Meanwhile, it continues to

work with the Bob Rumball Canadian Centre of Excellence for the Deaf.

By changing its recruitment strategies, ROCKWOOL opened itself up to a talented and often overlooked labour pool that has helped it become a more productive and diverse workplace. Bringing on talented new employees has helped the company boost its bottom line and satisfy the growing demand for its products. Now that's smart business!

Numbers you need to know: manufacturing sector

Ontario's manufacturers are reporting labour and skills shortages. According to a recent survey by the Business Development Bank of Canada, almost 40 percent of Canada's small and medium-sized businesses are having difficulty hiring new employees.

According to Government of Ontario labour market and information statistics, there are significant manufacturing sector job openings projected for 2017 to 2021. For example, that means up to 7,000 positions for shippers and receivers, up to 5,000 positions for food and beverage processing labourers, and up to 4,000 positions for metal working and forging machine operators.

Contact ODEN



866-280-6336



info@odenetwork.com



www.odennetwork.com

