

High Performing Employment Service Provider

LEADS Employment Services, London, ON

Introduction

In the employment service delivery sector, the concept of **high performance** does not fall within the more traditional definitions such as being a **faster organization**. Instead, when considering the delivery of human services such as employment supports, being a **high-performing organization** takes a more complex definition. These are organizations that consider their ethical responsibilities to **every** stakeholder involved in their service delivery from clients, colleagues, employers, and the public. These are organizations that understand that collaboration and partnerships drive employment outcomes for the clients they serve. High-performance service providers focus on quality of service delivery and the impact their work has in community growth, and most importantly, on the overall quality of life for the job seekers they serve.

ODEN identifies and studies high-performing employment service providers and curates case studies that promote best practices they have adopted and the lessons they have learned in the journey to becoming a **high performer**. To create consistency and objectivity when selecting organizations to study for a case study, ODEN has identified measurable metrics for which evidence can be provided to support the selection of the organization for a case study. These metrics are classified under three categories:

- Employment focus
- Business focus
- Focus on nurturing the talent pipeline

Employment focus

This refers to the service provider offering, among other programs, services that connect job seekers who have a disability to employment opportunities. Some of the evidence used to evaluate this engagement include details of employment programs and services; details on the breadth of employment opportunities offered and obtained for job seekers who have a disability; and impact measurements to support the quality of employment services provided in their community.

Business focus

This category refers to the efforts, work, and services to engage with the people who have the jobs — employers!

When evaluating how well the service provider works with the business sector, ODEN looks for evidence such as:

- Examples of their marketing efforts
- Services promoted to businesses
- Relationships with the business community

- Whether the case is made for the ROI on inclusive hiring from the business as well as the social perspective
- Supports to the business community are as robust as they are for the job seekers

Focus on nurturing the talent pipeline

This refers to active and intentional ways to engage with “will-be” job seekers. Building relationships with the community is important so that the service provider is seen as the go-to service provider when a job seeker is looking for supports. ODEN looks for evidence that the organization demonstrates strong relationships with other stakeholders outside of employment such as:

- Families and school boards
- Evidence that innovation and promising practices are a core value
- Evidence that partnerships and collaborations are important drivers for the organization

Using these three categories as guidelines, ODEN has identified that [LEADS Employment Services](#) is candidate for a **high-performance case study**.

Background on LEADS Employment Services

As noted on their website, LEADS Employment Services is a not-for-profit employment and skills development agency established in 1986. They provide specialized services for people who have a disability and/or facing barriers to enter the workforce. They serve the business community by providing employers with services such as candidate screening, matching and onboarding support. LEADS provides their expertise to employers by making accessible to them training and accommodation recommendations.

LEADS provides employment services throughout Southwestern Ontario, in Elgin, Huron, Lambton, Middlesex, Oxford, Perth, Bruce and Grey counties. LEADS has a record of delivering high-quality employment services and improving employment outcomes for job seekers who have a disability.

To date, LEADS has placed over **25,000 candidates** with more than **16,000 employers** and has helped thousands more develop life management, employment, community access and life skills. For the fiscal year 2022–2023 LEADS served over **2,300 individuals** and secured **928 employment placements and 234 youth volunteer placements**.¹

In their Annual General Meeting 2023 presentation, LEADS provides a comprehensive description of their desired service outcomes, clearly identifying how their work impacts stakeholders engaged by their organization, from:

- Job seekers (individuals) achieving employment skills, a sense of belonging and inclusion; to

¹ About Us. LEADS Employment Service website. <https://leadsservices.com/about-us>

- Employers who can access a productive, committed and diverse workforce to meet their business needs; to
- The community at large who choose to invest in, and support, LEADS' work and purpose²

In the next section we summarize how LEADS works with these stakeholders to achieve their outcomes and drive inclusive hiring in their community.

Stakeholder engagement

As mentioned earlier in this case study, high-performing organizations consider their responsibilities, work and impact with relation to **every** stakeholder involved in their service delivery: from job seekers; to employers, their staff and colleagues; and to the community.

LEADS has demonstrated in a number of ways how they excel in meeting these commitments. During interviews with LEADS staff members, and through light research of their website and other public materials, a number of examples have been curated to support this case study.

Employment focus

This section refers to LEADS offerings and services that connect job seekers who have a disability to employment opportunities. Through interviews with lead staff, ODEN learned that LEADS takes a **dynamic approach** to their employment services. Always adapting. Always evolving.

Marketing their services is an integral part of the process to build relationships in their community. LEADS has a strong online presence (website, social media, advertisement; and special-guest appearances on TV and on social media).

But they also take a strong face-to-face approach to building relationships by participating in many in-person events focused on sharing with employers the message that people who have a disability are a productive, committed and diverse workforce to meet their business needs.

LEADS uses both rural and urban demographics, and adapts to the setting — ads in community newspapers work well in rural communities. In urban settings, LEADS uses TV and social media platforms.

Their Job Developers are very adept at operating at grass-roots level; that is, at working alongside local communities to promote inclusive hiring. By keeping in mind that anyone can get a job and that any business can be supported to hire inclusively, they keep the process of job development front of mind — opportunities have to be received as they come.

² Annual Report 2022–2023. Leads Employment Service presentation page 3.
https://leadsservices.com/sites/default/files/2023-10/Leads_AGM_2023.pdf

LEADS strategically measures impact to adapt their services and focus engagement. Data collection comes from many sources such as case workers; and by using technology such as Google Analytics. Staff are responsible for measuring and following up on a number of data points such as:

- The number of referrals they received
- Appointments with job seekers
- Jobs searched with clients
- Application for services with information about where they came from – school boards? ODSP office? OW office? Self-referrals?

An organization can tell a better story about their work and their impact when they have data and LEADS has 15 years' worth of data!

And as more data is evaluated, more things are being tracked to move the organizations' mission in the right direction. This dedication to data collection has numerous benefits. For example, for the year 2022–2023 LEADS can very accurately demonstrate their impact.

In their Annual Report 2022–2023, they note: “2,393 people were served, with 60% of those people being 30 years and older and 40% being youth (15–30 years). They worked to fill 928 employment placements, 543 full time and 385 part time jobs, employing 747 people. They also measured that 71% of the clients they served were fulfilling 20 hours of work per week or more. Of these 928 job placements, 622 or 71% had a retention rate of over 3 months. And the average hourly wage for their clients in this period was \$17.12 cents, higher than the provincial minimum wage”³.

Business focus

This section illustrates LEADS efforts, work, and services to engage with the people who have the jobs — employers!

It is evident from LEADS' website that employers have a prominent and equal focus when it comes to service delivery for the organization. Employers have a dedicated section that brings them to a page where they can easily post their job openings. Simple. User friendly.

What employers do not see via the website is the work **behind the scenes** that LEADS Job Developers and Case Workers will be doing – surveys and intake processes will determine what training candidates will need. But it is not only about hard skills. It is also about soft skills.

For example, LEADS staff will prepare clients to:

- Be resilient
- Deal with changes

³ Annual Report 2022-2023. Leads Employment Service presentation page 3.
https://leadsservices.com/sites/default/files/2023-10/Leads_AGM_2023.pdf

- Build workplace relationships

This allows for soft skills to be enhanced before making a warm transfer to the business.

The staff also spend significant time finding out what the employer needs, to match their needs to available candidates. LEADS staff will conduct needs assessments — LEADS created their own **What Are Your Needs** training for getting employers to communicate their business needs more clearly.

Relationships with the business community are clearly displayed throughout the LEADS website. Their website has a number of customer (employer) testimonials. LEADS has received several awards and recognition from Chambers of Commerce. Most recently, LEADS Employment Services was the 2023 Winner of the Best of London Free Press, an award supported by the [London Economic Development Corporation](#).

LEADS has a very active presence in a number of social media platforms where they highlight disability-inclusive businesses. By advertising about these employers, LEADS also creates awareness within the community at large — **a free benefit for these employers**. Promoting inclusive businesses pays off — people who have a disability are also consumers!

ODEN’s research has shown that “spending by Canadians who have a disability is expected to increase to 21% from 14% by 2030 ⁴. See figure 1 for an example of LEADS Business Highlights.

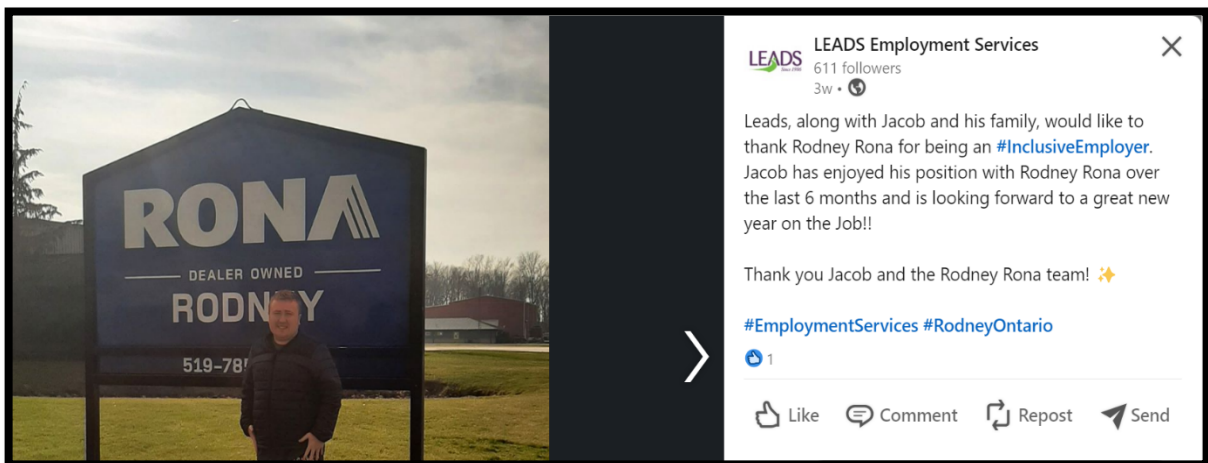


Figure 1. LinkedIn Post by LEADS Employment Services highlighting a candidate who has been working for an inclusive employer. Posted the week of January 18, 2024.

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/leads-employment-services/>

⁴ “Businesses Need to Reignite DEI Conversation That Includes Disability Now, During NDEAM — to Ensure Future Success” by Dean Askin, ODEN’s Communications Strategist. <https://www.odennetwork.com/businesses-need-to-reignite-dei-conversation-that-includes-disability-now-during-ndeam-to-ensure-future-success/>

Another example that illustrates how LEADS services are geared to the **business community** is the pilot project they initiated with [Home Depot](#) in 2022. Home Depot has two demographics they want to focus on: youth and people who have a disability. To support this effort, LEADS created an exclusive online portal for job seekers looking to apply for job openings with Home Depot.

By filling a profile in the Home Depot portal, LEADS clients will be:

- Notified first of openings for jobs
- Considered for openings by Home Depot staff when there is a match of skills and business needs

This portal serves as an active bridge between the demand and supply sides! A win-win for all involved: the employer, the client and LEADS.

Focus on nurturing the talent pipeline

This section refers to engaging in active and intentional way with “will-be” jobseekers, demonstrating relationships with other stakeholders in the community to nurture the pipeline of candidates who will fill job vacancies in the community.

LEADS has a demonstrates well this commitment. The pilot with Home Depot, focused on engaging youth, is a way to engage with community stakeholders outside the employment sector, such as families and school boards nurturing the next pipeline of job seekers.

LEADS also supports the development of youth employment skills by supporting youth volunteer placements. In 2022–2023, they worked with 92 youth volunteers to fill more than 230 volunteer placements, as described in their Annual Report 2022–2023⁵.

LEADS’ initiatives such as [Pawlooza](#) builds relationships with stakeholders in the community — volunteers, participants, businesses — interested in driving their corporate social responsibility in an innovative way.

This festival brings together the community to support a worthy cause — rescuing, rehabilitating and rehoming stray dogs. But at the same time it brings awareness of the work LEADS does in the employment service sector. With 300 volunteers and over 25,000 people attending Pawlooza, LEADS has established a strong presence in their community.

⁵ Annual Report 2022-2023. Youth Volunteer Placements 2022-2023 page 12.
https://leadsservices.com/sites/default/files/2023-10/Leads_AGM_2023.pdf

Teamwork makes the dream work

For LEADS leadership, the concept of relationship building starts internally, with their own staff. During the pandemic, many staff at LEADS took on roles outside their job description. For many clients supported by LEADS, their Employment Specialist was the only person connecting with them at a time of forced isolation.

And staff took this responsibility to heart. They would drop off food, tablets/laptops and Internet sticks to job seekers who needed them, in both rural and urban areas. The office was closed but staff were accessible to clients, ensuring the services continued. That is the kind of **teamwork that made the dream work** during an unprecedented circumstance.

Below are a couple of testimonials that demonstrate how the work the team does impacts their clients:

“Jennifer came to LEADS in hopes of receiving assistance and support in gaining employment. Jennifer had been struggling with anxiety and depression and was feeling a lack of confidence in getting back into the workforce after a workplace injury in 2014.

When Jennifer started at LEADS she was staying at her parent’s house and sleeping on their couch. With the assistance and guidance from her Employment Specialist at Leads, Jennifer set forth to work toward her goal of securing employment and obtaining her own apartment. They brainstormed different jobs and roles that Jennifer may be suited for based on her skills and experience. Keeping in mind Jennifer’s current living situation, Jennifer and her Employment Specialist had an idea to apply for Building Superintendent roles.

Jennifer’s Employment Specialist tailored her resume for a Superintendent role and started applying for these positions. Jennifer had a job interview within a couple of weeks of applying and was offered a position as a Building Superintendent role in London at a brand-new apartment building. Not only did Jennifer gain employment, but also had a place to live independently. Jennifer is doing well and is enjoying her position and is thankful to the LEADS Team for all their assistance”.

Terra Maxey-McFarland, LEADS Employment Specialist

“Danielle had come to LEADS in 2022 after her husband passed away, a great loss in her life. She disclosed a struggle with anxiety as well as some physical limitations to her back which made it difficult for her to lift and carry items.

Danielle wanted to pursue her interest as an animal groomer as she had groomed birds for various customers in the past. With the assistance of her

Employment Specialist, Danielle updated her resume, job searched, and was connected with employers, including Pet Smart, where Danielle was successful in gaining employment.

In preparation for her new job, LEADS assisted Danielle in purchasing her grooming tools, clothing, and slip-resistant shoes. Danielle is enjoying her position in the field of her interest, where she is grooming all varieties of dogs. She is currently working towards her Pet Grooming Certification”.

Mary Smith, Leads Employment Specialist

As noted by the testimonials, LEADS’ work is not only impacting employment outcomes for their clients. It is impacting their quality of life.

Three years after the pandemic, in a new employment service reality, the teams are doing more with less and that has meant a recognition by both the LEADS Board of Directors and Leadership that resources need to be pooled; and that work as **community** is more important. This sentiment is best expressed by LEADS Chief Executive Officer Wendy Lau, in her expression of gratitude for her team, as noted during their Annual General Meeting:

“Our teamwork determines LEADS’ success in reimagining our operations and strategically aligning each piece to the constantly evolving environment with one focus: gainful impact on our clients’ lives and community welfare.

The community appreciates and recognizes your efforts with their nomination and award for the ‘Best 2023 Employment Agency Award’, London Free Press. Your teamwork remains steadfast for our fundraisers, Pawlooza. Your energy and commitment to improving support for our clients need to be cloned.

We are not and never will be the status quo. We are fluent and light on our feet to thrive in the shifting paradigm.”⁶

If you have any questions regarding the information presented in this case study, please email us at info@odenetwork.com.

⁶ The Power of Team Synergy. Annual Report 2022-2023. https://leadsservices.com/sites/default/files/2023-10/Leads_AGM_2023.pdf