

# Makers Like Me – Michaels’ Disability Inclusion Program

## Introduction

Research has demonstrated the benefits of diversity and inclusion for businesses including outperforming competitors, capturing new markets, and achieving higher revenues. With these and other benefits in mind, more businesses are developing their inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA) journeys. A strong commitment toward IDEA is important and beneficial to employers, employees, jobseekers, and customers.

The following case study highlights Michaels Canada’s ongoing journey of disability inclusion. The information presented has been obtained by interviewing Michaels’ leadership representatives, Matthew Kingsbury, Michaels Store of Excellence Manager (Kingston), and Casey McEuin, Manager Inclusion and Diversity, Michaels Canada.

As one of the leading retail companies specializing in arts and crafts in North America, Michaels has demonstrated its commitment to creating a diverse and inclusive environment for both employees and customers. Focusing on the **Makers Like Me** program, a hiring initiative to intentionally recruit jobseekers who have a disability, the case study illustrates how this disability-inclusive recruitment and hiring initiative has benefited Michaels stores in Ontario. By working with local employment service providers, several Michaels stores have successfully recruited talent who have a disability and matched their skills to specific roles. This hiring initiative has been a win-win situation for all stakeholders participating — Michaels, the local employment service providers and jobseekers who have a disability.

## Michaels Stores — An Arts and Crafts Store for Everybody

Founded in 1973, Michaels Stores, Inc., also known as Michaels, is one of North America’s largest specialty retailer chains of arts, crafts, framing, floral and wall décor. Michaels first Canadian stores opened in Toronto, Ontario, in 1993. To date, there are 134 Michaels stores across Canada. Michaels has demonstrated a progressive business mindset by committing to disability inclusion in the workplace.

In 2014, Michaels Canada launched a Multi-Year Accessibility Plan to outline the policies and processes they would implement to improve employment opportunities for people who have a disability. In 2024, they released an updated [Multi-Year Accessibility Plan](#), which states their strong commitment to disability inclusion and to improving opportunities for people with disabilities. This public statement shows how Michaels Canada is taking accountability and actions to create an inclusive environment for both employees and customers. For example, Michaels follows accessibility requirements under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) to ensure its website and stores are accessible. They provide accessibility training to its associates and vendors. These are some of the actions Michaels Canada takes to make progress and advancement for disability inclusion.

Their Multi-Year Accessibility Plan also acts as a strategy for Michaels to communicate with its customers on supporting inclusive hiring and other diversity and inclusion goals. Research has found that more consumers consider corporate's commitment to social responsibility, equity, and diversity when looking to spend their disposable income. A [study](#) in 2021 by Facebook showed that 59% of survey participants were more loyal to companies that stand for diversity and inclusion in online advertising, preferring to buy from these companies. Another 2021 [study](#) from the Angus Reid Institute and the Rick Hansen Foundation found that 62% of Canadians would be more likely to do business with a company if they knew the business had specific policies to support employees who have a disability. The public statement on Michaels' website about their commitment to diversity and inclusion is more than a communication strategy about the development of their goals — it also helps build a positive online presence.

The plan also served as a starting point for Michaels' journey to disability inclusion. To date, Michaels has done well in achieving their original goals to create an inclusive environment for both employees and customers. In 2019, Michaels launched **Michaels Resource Groups**; these groups are meant to raise awareness around diversity and inclusion as well as providing support for employees coming from equity-deserving groups so they can reach their professional growth. In 2021, Michaels Canada adopted the **Makers Like Me** program, which was first run in stores in the United States, and piloted the inclusive hiring program in Ontario.

## **Makers Like Me – A Meaningful Initiative for Disability Inclusion Hiring**

The **Makers Like Me** program is an inclusive hiring initiative adopted by Michaels Canada to intentionally recruit talent who have a disability. This initiative first started in

the United States prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. After two years of observation and planning, Michaels Canada decided to adopt the initiative and pilot it in Ontario before rolling out across the country. By building partnerships with local employment service providers, Michaels Canada expanded their talent pipeline. To date, **38 local Michaels Stores have participated in the hiring initiative and have successfully hired 55 employees who have a disability and offered 13 co-op opportunities to students who have a disability.** These number continue to grow as the **Makers Like Me** program is in its development stage to launch nationally across Canada.

One of the people interviewed for this case study, Matthew Kingsbury, has been largely involved in the development of this initiative in Canada since the start. Aside from his responsibility as a Store Manager, Matthew is also a **Makers Like Me Champion** leading the development and implementation of the Makers Like Me program across other stores. Mr. Kingsbury has been with Michaels for more than 25 years and his experience brings insight to support the rollout of such an important program. He shared his excitement about being part of the **Makers Like Me** program and witnessing how the company has become more diverse and inclusive. But he has also candidly acknowledged the challenges found with the program.

One of the major obstacles they faced was the common lack of disability awareness in the workplace among store managers and other employees. Some store managers were hesitant to participate in the program as they did not have the confidence to work with and provide onboarding training to employees who have a disability. To overcome this challenge, Michaels identified advocates and allies within the company, like Matthew, and invited them to become one of the **Makers Like Me** program champions. This resulted in support for other store managers, educated peers on the benefits of hiring team members who have a disability, and reduced fear and stigma associated with onboarding a team member who has a disability. With passion and commitment to disability inclusion, the **Makers Like Me** program has overcome obstacles and brought talent who have a disability into Michaels' workforce.

Michaels recognizes other benefits and advantages of nurturing a disability-inclusive workforce. The **Makers Like Me** program has addressed a labour shortage by recruiting jobseekers who have a disability. The commitment to disability inclusion has been recognized by customers and other employees; the program has enhanced customer engagement, market share, and employee relations and retention. By hiring team members who have a disability, Michaels has also enhanced their operational efficiencies — managers revisit and improve their onboarding process and training for their employees from new perspectives, making sure that the onboarding is flexible and accessible for everyone.

The program has also enhanced community engagement thanks to partnerships between Michaels and local employment service providers. Michaels has experienced how a successful partnership can lead to positive change. The process of job matching is complex and can be exhausting for both jobseekers and human resources professionals. The partnership between Michaels and local employment providers streamlined the disability-inclusive hiring process and filled potential knowledge gaps about disability in the workplace. In addition, Michaels also received retention support from employment service agencies ensuring the new team members who have a disability could have the support they needed to excel in their roles.

An example of a collaboration with a disability employment service provider is the collaboration between Michaels Canada and LiveWorkPlay in Ottawa. Michaels Canada is featured in a LiveWorkPlay [business video](#) where the benefits of the inclusive hiring program are highlighted. In the video, Cass, a Store Manager at Michaels, and Darcy, an employee who has a disability, shared the mutual benefits for both Michaels and candidates who have a disability. Working closely with LiveWorkPlay has opened Cass's door to an untapped talent pool of people who have a disability and allowed her to bring in more qualified candidates who later become great assets to the store.

The **Makers Like Me** program has benefited Michaels Canada, demonstrating how being a disability-inclusive business is a win-win proposition for both the business itself and the disability community. Michaels is working with ODEN and employment service providers across the country to expand the **Makers Like Me** program nationally.

## Ongoing Support — Disability Inclusion Doesn't End at Hiring

Mr. Kingsbury also stressed another important aspect of Michaels Canada's efforts towards disability inclusion; aside from the **Makers Like Me** program. He has worked to create processes that advance diversity and inclusion at Michaels Canada. One of these processes is accessible onboarding training. During the case study interview, Mr. Kingsbury emphasized the importance of having accessible training for employees who have a disability. Accessible training ensures new employees are equipped with the confidence and skills to excel in their roles. Hiring initiatives like the **Makers Like Me** program are one step in the diversity journey of a company; accessible onboarding training is essential to reaching a mature state in the disability inclusion journey.

Mr. Kingsbury recognizes that there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach when it comes to employee onboarding. When it comes to matching the right talent with the right job, embracing their strengths and uniqueness is an important step. He shared a story of onboarding with disability inclusion in mind.

Through the **Makers Like Me** program, they met a knitting expert. They saw the potential in the person and how her experience aligns with Michaels’ mission. They worked with a service provider to ensure American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation was available during the interview process. As they learned more about her skills and passions, they decided to hire her. The hiring team worked with her job coach and scheduled ASL interpretation for two-day, in-store onboarding training. This new team member completed all her training and now works independently with the support of her team as needed. The story is an excellent example of accessible onboarding, working with employment service providers.

To ensure employees who have a disability feel like they belong in their workplaces, beyond the onboarding period, Michaels created the resource group **Ability**, a group that celebrates and embraces disability. Michaels **Ability** helps demystify myths about disability in the workplace and creates awareness around how to support employees who have a disability in the workplace. Mr. Kingsbury shared that he joined Ability as he is personally connected to the population and would like to support the group by providing resources. The group works closely with Michaels’ Inclusion and Diversity team to identify any gaps regarding disability inclusion.

This resource group is important to the advancement of diversity and inclusion at Michaels Canada because it provides a safe space for employees who have a disability to connect to their workplace community.

These two examples demonstrate that disability inclusion does not end the moment an employee is hired; businesses do well in implementing multiple approaches to continue their journey to disability confidence.

## “You belong at this craft table” — more than just a slogan

For Michaels Canada, slogans like “You belong at this craft table” are more than just a marketing effort, they are drivers for diversity and inclusion. From launching a multi-year accessibility plan to developing a national hiring initiative, Michaels Canada has been a leader in achieving disability inclusion in its workforce, eliminating barriers for employees and in turn creating more accessible user experiences for their customers. Making all feel like they truly belong in this space and at the “craft table.”

ODEN will continue to work with Michaels Canada to promote the success of the **Makers Like Me** disability inclusion program as they roll this out across other provinces in Canada.

If you have any questions regarding the information presented in this case study, please email us at [info@odenetwork.com](mailto:info@odenetwork.com).