

WHAT WE WANT EMPLOYERS TO KNOW

An employer guide to strengthening your business
through hiring a person with a disability



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WHY WE WROTE THIS GUIDE

We wrote this guide to share with employers some of the barriers that we face when we are working or volunteering. We know that these barriers can be broken down and that we can become an integral part of a workplace. We have the ability and desire to be contributing members of our society by being productive in a work or volunteer environment. We hope this guide is not only informative but inspires employers to open their doors to a person with a disability so that we can have the opportunity to reach our goals of becoming employed and give you the opportunity to better your business.

This guide was written on behalf of the Foundations for Success Program at Brantwood Community Services and funded by the Ministry of Social Services. It was written by some of the graduates of the Foundation For Success program. Our goal is to find meaningful employment in our community by using the skills we have learned through the program.

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(NOT PICTURED).

The Foundations for Success program is a pre-employment program at Brantwood Community Services. It is designed to address the employment needs of people with disabilities by offering in-class instruction, an onsite volunteer placement in the Brantwood Café followed by a community volunteer placement. A referral is made to L.Tara Hooper when the participant is ready for employment. Participants discuss their employment goals and work on developing the skills required for a work environment.

*EMPLOYER

Employer in this guide refers to employers of businesses that have hired or desire to hire people with disabilities as well as employers who provide volunteer placement opportunities.



DISABILITY DEFINED

"Disabilities is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations.

Disability is thus not just a health problem. It is a complex phenomenon, reflecting the interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives. Overcoming the difficulties faced by people with disabilities requires interventions to remove environmental and social barriers."

(Definition of Disability as defined by the World Health Organization - <http://www.who.int/topics/disabilities/en/>)

"I SEE DISABILITY
AS A LIFETIME CHALLENGE
OF PROVING TO PEOPLE
THAT THEIR OWN THOUGHTS
ON DISABILITY
ARE WRONG."
- BILLY A.

"DISABILITY IS
DIFFERENT FOR EVERYONE.
WE ALL HIT DIFFERENT
BRICK WALLS."
- BRENDA P.



WHAT WE WANT EMPLOYERS TO KNOW

One of the barriers that people with disabilities face in the work and volunteer environment is attitudinal barriers. This is not a barrier that can be changed or broken down with some power tools. This barrier comes from the belief that people with disabilities are not capable of being contributing members of society and that we are less valuable in workplaces and our communities. The change to breaking down this barrier can start with you! We want employers to know that people with disabilities should not be painted with the same brush. We all have different personalities and are not all the same. We are like you – we have strengths and we have weaknesses. We wrote a list of things that we want employers to know. This list we developed has come from own past experiences in work and volunteer settings.

- Be honest with us.
- Let us prove us ourselves – judge us by our abilities and strengths and not by what you think we can do.
- Work as a team with us. Involve us in decisions about our jobs.
- We also want to have new experiences and try new things. We too, have a desire and are motivated to move up the ladder.
- Although we may not communicate in the same way as you, we do have a voice that wants to be heard.
- Disability does not equal inability.
- Talk directly to us. Don't talk to the person who is accompanying me. If you have a question about us ask us. Don't be nervous to talk to us. Make an effort to get to know us and work with us.
- If you want to offer assistance please ask us before you jump in and help us. We do appreciate help when we need it but sometimes we are just completing a task in a different way than you complete it.
- Treat us like any other employee. Don't talk to us like we are a child. Talk to us like you would speak to other people our age.
- Don't be uncomfortable to have a conversation with us. We know that talking to people with disabilities may be something you are unfamiliar with. We like to talk about the same things as you do. We may share some similar hobbies and interests as you.
- If you have a question about us please ask us. We know ourselves best. If there are issues or problems concerning our performance come to us with those issues we want to work with you to problem solve.

"I WANT PEOPLE
TO SEE ME AS SOMEONE
WHO GIVES IT MY ALL.
I DON'T WANT TO BE SEEN AS
SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T
FIT IN SOCIETY."
- BRENDA P.



"I DON'T WANT PEOPLE TO SEE MY
DISABILITY FIRST. I WANT PEOPLE
TO SEE ME AS AN HONORABLE PERSON
AND TO TREAT ME WITH THE SAME
RESPECT THAT OTHER PEOPLE GET."
- DAVID C.

INCLUSION

Inclusion in the workplace is more than just welcoming someone from a diverse background through the front door. It is a proactive approach that recognizes people's strengths and incorporates those talents and abilities into their business. Inclusion is an action. It does not just happen by change - it takes work, commitment and dedication but the results to your company and the community are immeasurable. Inclusion accepts difference and values people's contributions. Inclusion has the power to strengthen and better businesses as a result of the increase in creativity, innovation and diverse experiences.

Inclusion for people with disabilities is an experience of having their abilities utilized and valued. They are actively involved participants who are meshed into the corporate culture and environment.



INCLUSION IN COMMUNITY MEANS THAT EVERYONE IS INCLUDED NOT JUST A CERTAIN GROUP. IT DOESN'T MATTER WHO YOU ARE OR WHAT YOU ARE. - BILLY A.

IN SOME INSTANCES I'M INCLUDED AND OTHER INSTANCES I'M NOT INCLUDED. IT SUCKS WHEN I'M NOT INCLUDED. COMMUNICATION IS IMPORTANT. TALK TO ME ABOUT WHAT IS GOING ON. WHEN I'M NOT INCLUDED I DON'T KNOW WHAT IS HAPPENING. TEAM WORK IS NOT HAPPENING WHEN A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY IS NOT INCLUDED IN THE PLANS. I ALSO WANT TO INTERACT WITH COWORKERS AND GET TO KNOW THEM AFTER WORK. - BRENDA P.



"INCLUSION MEANS A LOT TO ME. I LIKE TO BE INCLUDED IN EVERYDAY SOCIETY AND CONVERSATIONS. INCLUSION NOT ONLY MEANS THAT I AM PRESENT AT A PLACE BUT IT ALSO MEANS THAT I AM ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN THINGS THAT ARE GOING ON. PEOPLE ARE ACTUALLY RESPECTING YOUR INPUT AND THEY WANT TO HEAR YOUR INPUT AND THEY WANT TO HEAR YOUR SUGGESTIONS AS WELL."

- VIRGINIA H

DIVERSITY

When hiring people with diverse backgrounds it is often thought of in terms of culture, race and gender. We think diversity is more than the age, race and sex of an employee. It is recognizing that we are all composed of many different characteristics that may be similar or different than our coworkers. A person's experience that has resulted from their age, ability, gender, socio-economic status, religion and culture will be unique and distinct from those who have a different background. We do not want people to see diversity as "us and them" but an approach to appreciate the differences that people have and a way to see how we may also share similar experiences. Diversity is a celebration of people's distinction from one another and recognition that these things that make us unique can be valued, appreciated and utilized.

"DIVERSITY IS
IMPORTANT BECAUSE
IT BRINGS FRESH
IDEAS IN THE
WORKFORCE."
- BRENDA P.

"DIVERSITY IS
IMPORTANT BECAUSE
THAT MEANS THAT
PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT
COMMUNITIES AND
EXPERIENCES ARE
WORKING TOGETHER.
DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES
ARE VALUABLE IN THE
WORKPLACE."
- BILLY



WHY DOES INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY MATTER TO YOUR BUSINESS?

Inclusion and diversity in the workplace is not only important because it includes people with disabilities in the workplace but it is a benefit to businesses.

WHY SHOULD YOU HIRE A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY?

It Strengthens your Business.

Our world is rapidly changing with the advancement in technology, the speed in which things are done and with an aging workforce. For businesses to remain on top of their competition it is essential that companies hire employees who are engaged, committed and share the vision of the business. Hiring a person with a disability gives you access to an untapped pool of people who are innovative thinkers, problem solvers and highly motivated. When your business is more accessible to people with disabilities and an inclusive workplace culture exists, the creativity, innovation and strength of the business is evident.

“Smaller companies are also employing people with more diverse backgrounds. Why? Because they recognize that it makes their businesses better. It makes them more competitive, more collaborative, more creative and more responsive to the needs of a rapidly changing marketplace.”

(Source: *Taking Action: An HR Guide*)

It Strengthens your Community.

When businesses are dedicated to bettering their businesses and are open to providing employment opportunities for people with disabilities the importance and the benefit of full inclusion will be reflected in the community around us. Per-



ceptions surrounding people with disabilities will shift as the community is witness to the abilities and skills that people with disabilities have to offer. Our communities will become more inclusive and accessible which is not only a benefit to people with disabilities but to all people.

It Strengthens your Customer Base.

"By developing a strategy to hire persons with disabilities, not only will you be tapping in to an under-utilized group of qualified employees, you'll also be tapping into an often overlooked consumer market. It is estimated that in Canada, person with disabilities represent \$25 billion in consumer spending."

(Source: Ontario Disabilities Support Program and the Region of Waterloo Training and Adjustment Board, 2007)

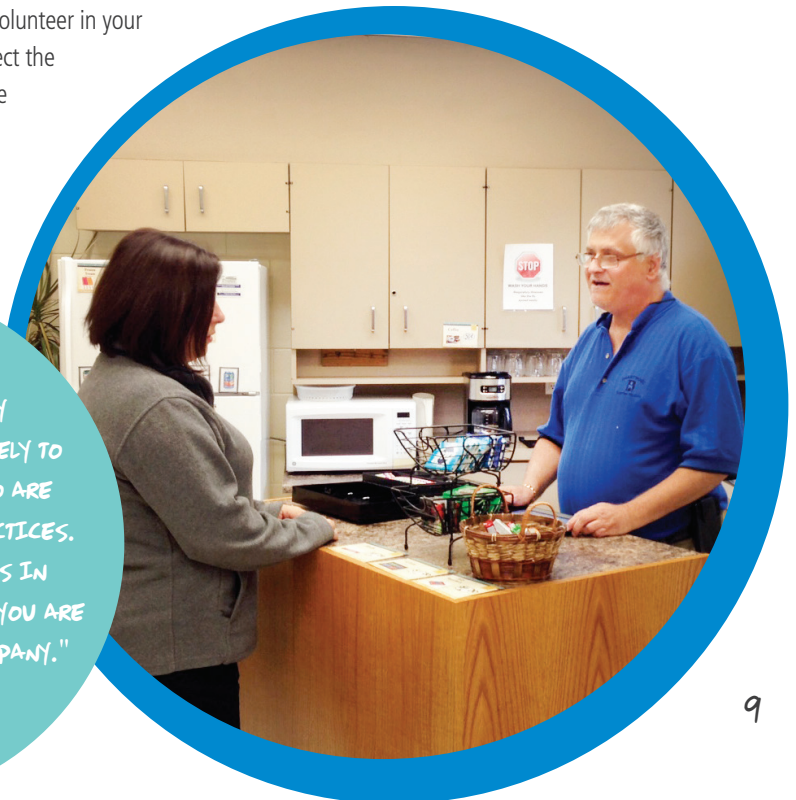
An employee with a disability may better understand the needs of others in the disability community and can be a resource when identifying what services and products are relevant and essential to reach a larger consumer base. Statistics show that there is an increase of disability in our population and that this rate will continue to increase. Hiring a person with a disability or having them volunteer in your agency will show that your employees reflect the needs of the community, the customer base will increase and customer relations will be strengthened.

"CUSTOMERS ARE
BECOMING MORE SOCIALLY
CONSCIOUS AND ARE MORE LIKELY TO
BE LOYAL TO BUSINESSES WHO ARE
DIVERSE IN THEIR HIRING PRACTICES.
INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES AIDS IN
ESTABLISHING THE IMAGE THAT YOU ARE
A REPUTABLE AND ETHICAL COMPANY."

(TAKING ACTION:
A WHR GUIDE)

It Strengthens your Employees and Workplace Culture.

When a workplace is inclusive and diverse there is an improvement in employee morale. A strong commitment to creating an inclusive workplace culture improves job satisfaction and productivity of all employees. Employees feel more valued and happy with their jobs, when employees feel valued they work harder and smarter. Innovation and creativity is bred when people from diverse backgrounds work together for the same purpose. Issues or problems that arise are seen from different angles because of the variety of experiences of the employees which leads the way to creative problem solving.



WORKING

Working is important to us because it gives us a valued social role, it shapes our identity and we feel respected when we hold a role or position that a person without a disability would also hold. When we gain employment we feel like an equal, and enjoy working as part of a team. We know that we have a lot to give and having the opportunity to demonstrate our skills in a work setting is rewarding. We know that we have a lot offer to a business in terms of innovation, creativity and dedication. By working we feel a sense of purpose and this reflects in our commitment to our employer.

"I NEEDED AN EXTRA HAND, A BIT MORE SUPPORT AT THE BEGINNING OF MY JOB. NOW I CAN DO THE JOB ON MY OWN AND I AM ACTUALLY GIVING OTHERS A HAND."

- BRENDA P.

"I WANT TO WORK BECAUSE I GET TO MEET NEW PEOPLE AND I GET TO HAVE A NEW EXPERIENCE."

- DAVID C.



"WORK IS IMPORTANT TO ME SO THAT I CAN HAVE INDEPENDENCE. IT SHOWS PEOPLE THAT I CAN LEARN NEW SKILLS." - BILLY A.

MYTHS AND FACTS

MYTH: People with disabilities can't keep up with other workers and take sick days more often.

FACT: Many studies show that employees with disabilities are just as productive and dependable as their co-workers without disabilities, and that staff retention is 72 per cent higher among persons with disabilities. That adds up to savings of millions of dollars every year in hiring and training costs. The experiences of many employers show that when businesses hire people with disabilities:

- *the pool of potential employees becomes larger*
- *staff retention rates increase*
- *absenteeism decreases.*

MYTH: A person with a disability cannot work in a position requiring physical labour.

FACT: It is important not to make assumptions about a person with a disability and what they are able to do. According to Statistics Canada (2006), 11.5 per cent of Canadians have mobility-related disabilities. But that does not necessarily mean that they can't work in a physically demanding job. It's ability, not disability, that counts.

MYTH: Accommodations and supports in the workplace would be difficult and costly.

FACT: The vast majority of people with disabilities do not require special workplace accommodations. For those who do, the cost is often minimal, if there is a cost at all – for example changing a desk layout (\$0), or purchasing a telephone amplifier (\$48) or a specialized chair (\$400). According to the Job Accommodation Network, more than half of all accommodations cost less than \$500.

MYTH: Workers' compensation rates increase when people with disabilities are hired into the workplace. Fact: Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) premium payments depend on the health and safety risk of the type of business, the size of the payroll, and on the company's health and safety record – not on whether employees have disabilities.

MYTH: It would be difficult to terminate an employee with a disability.

FACT: The laws regarding termination of employees for cause are no different for a person with a disability than for a person without a disability.

(Source: Ministry of Community and Social Services)



VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering gives us the opportunity to give back to our communities. It allows us to explore different interests that we have while gaining skills that can be transferred into a work environment. The experience of volunteering allows us to discover where our strengths lie. Through volunteering we get to meet new people, become familiar with different organizations and services while performing a socially valued role in the community. We become contributing members and feel valued and respected because we can give of our time and skills to benefit others. We appreciate all volunteering opportunities but when we volunteer in a business that does not typically rely on volunteers we have a timeframe in which we complete our volunteering. We are thankful for the hands-on experience that we receive but we want to be seen as an asset to a business and as someone worthy of employment so our volunteer placements are completed in a certain timeframe.

"I VOLUNTEERED AT AN ORGANIZATION CALLED WORD AND DEED, A SMALL NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION. I STUFFED ENVELOPEDS THAT WERE TO BE SENT TO INDIVIDUALS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. BECAUSE OF THAT EXPERIENCE I WENT TO ANOTHER COMPANY WHERE I WORKED IN A MAILROOM AND I WAS EMPLOYED ON A PART TIME BASIS THROUGH THE SUMMER MONTHS."

- BRENDA P.



"PEOPLE WOULD NOT ALLOW ME TO SHOW MY POTENTIAL. ESPECIALLY AROUND THINGS THAT REALLY INTERESTED ME SUCH AS HISTORY. THE VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE AT THE MUSEUM ALLOWED ME TO SEE THAT NOT ONLY WAS I A GOOD ADDITION TO THE MUSEUM BUT THE MUSEUM WAS GOOD FOR ME. MY RESPONSIBILITIES WERE TO HANDLE THE ARTIFACTS. I WAS ABLE TO HANDLE THE ARTIFACTS THE SAME WAY AS THE OTHER EMPLOYEES. THE EXPERIENCE ALLOWED ME TO INCREASE IN KNOWLEDGE, CONFIDENCE AND INDEPENDENCE. I WAS ABLE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT MYSELF THROUGH MY VOLUNTEERING AT THE MUSEUM. THE MUSEUM ALLOWED ME TO REACH MY FULL POTENTIAL. I WAS ABLE TO SHARE SOME OF MY KNOWLEDGE WITH THE PEOPLE AT THE MUSEUM AS WELL BECAUSE WE ALL KNOW DIFFERENT THINGS."

- BILLY A.

"I WAS VOLUNTEERING AT THE LIBRARY IN ST. THOMAS. WHAT I DID THERE WAS ARCHIVING. I TOOK OLD NEWSPAPER ARTICLES ABOUT THE LIBRARY, STARTING WITH THE OLDEST ONES AND PUT THEM ALL IN ORDER AND THEN GLUED THEM INTO A BOOK. IT TOOK MANY HOURS TO DO. FROM THAT EXPERIENCE I LEARNED HOW TO BE ORGANIZED AND THE CHRONOLOGICAL DATES OF WHEN THINGS HAPPENED WITH THE LIBRARY. IT HAD NEVER BEEN ORGANIZED BEFORE AND I WAS GIVEN A BUNCH OF PAPERS TO GO THROUGH. I HAD TO PUT EVERY PAPER IN ORDER. I FELT GOOD THAT I ACCOMPLISHED SOMETHING SO BIG. THEY WERE HAPPY THAT I HAD DONE THAT FOR THEM AND NOW THEY HAVE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE HISTORY OF THE LIBRARY."

- BRENDA P.



THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE

Language is important because we want you to see us first, not our disability! Put the person before the disability. We don't want to be seen as victims of a disease but as someone who is living with an impairment and has the desire to live a full and meaningful life. We are not defined by our disability, but by our perseverance, ability and desire to succeed. People who are able-bodied often identify themselves to others by their jobs and social roles. We define ourselves in the same way. We take pride in what we do and how we contribute to our communities. Please don't be nervous about saying the wrong words or be embarrassed if you use an outdated term, what matters most to us is that you see us before our disability.

PEOPLE FIRST LANGUAGE

LANGUAGE TO AVOID

Person with a disability	The disabled, handicapped
Person without a disability	Normal person, healthy person
Person with intellectual, cognitive, developmental disability	Retarded, slow, moronic, defective or retarded, afflicted, special person
Person with an emotional or behavioral disability, person with a mental health or a psychiatric disability	Insane, crazy, psycho, maniac, nuts
Person who is hard of hearing	Hearing impaired, suffers a hearing loss
Person who is deaf	Deaf and dumb, mute
Person who is blind/visually impaired	The blind
Person who has a communication disorder, is unable to speak, or uses a device to speak	Mute, dumb
Person who uses a wheelchair	Confined or restricted to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound
Person with a physical disability, Physically disabled	Crippled, lame, deformed, invalid, Spastic
Person with autism	Autistic
Person with cerebral palsy	CP victim
Accessible parking or bathrooms	Handicapped parking or bathroom
Person with a congenital disability	Birth defect
Person with Down syndrome	Mongoloid
Person who is successful, productive	Has overcome his/her disability, is courageous

(Source: Centre for Disease Control and Prevention http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/pdf/DisabilityPoster_Photos.pdf)

DEFINITIONS

BARRIER: A barrier is an obstacle that can make activities or a way of living difficult and sometimes even impossible for people with disabilities to overcome. People often think of barriers as structural inaccessibility but there are many more types of barriers that we cannot see with our eyes but we feel because the experience leaves us feeling powerless and unvalued.

Types of barriers that we face are:

Attitudinal barriers – This happens when we face discrimination because of people's assumptions of us. People assume that we cannot be productive and that we are incapable of being a member of the workforce.

Information or Communication barriers – For some of us the information that we want is inaccessible because the print is too small or websites are not accessible.

Physical barriers – These barriers include things in the physical environment that can make it difficult to access services. These include stairs, poor lighting, doorways that are too narrow for wheelchairs and inadequate space in washrooms, parking spaces and aisles.

Systemic barriers – Often times hiring practices are created with only people who are able-bodied in mind. The application process and the interview are not designed to allow people with disabilities an opportunity to apply for positions that they are qualified for. These practices are a hidden discrimination that we face.

(Source: Ministry of Ontario Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure)

"DISABILITY IS LIMITATIONS THAT PEOPLE EXPERIENCE NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF THE WAY THEY ARE PHYSICALLY CONSTRUCTED BUT ALSO BECAUSE OF THE WAY SOCIETY THINKS OF THEM AND TREATS THEM."
- BILLY A.

"PEOPLE LOOK AT DISABLED PEOPLE LIKE THEY CAN'T DO ANYTHING. THEY SHOULD LOOK AT THEM LIKE ANY OTHER PERSON AND SEE THAT THEY COULD BE CAPABLE OF DOING JOBS."
- VIRGINIA H.



RESOURCES

There are resources available to you if you want to hire a person with a disability or want to know more on how you can strengthen your business through inclusion and diversity. If needed, on the job training through employment supports can be provided to aid in a successful transition into the workplace. Information on accommodations, support and training can be found through the following resources:

Brantwood Community Services

Foundations for Success Program
Vicki Schweyer-Querney
Telephone: (519) 753-2658 ext. 148
www.brantwood.ca

Community Living Brant

Dunn Building
Telephone: (519) 753-6303
Fax: (519) 753- 4821
www.clbrant.com

L. Tara Hooper and Associates Inc.

Lisa Tara Hooper or Patti Plant Babcock
Telephone: (519) 752-2000
Fax: (519) 752-4292
www.ltarahooperandassociates.com

Ministry of Community and Social Services

Ontario Disability Support Program
Telephone: (519) 756-5790
Toll Free TDD/TTY: 1-888-814-7005
TDD/TTY: (519) 756-3693
<http://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/en/mcsc/>

St. Leonards Brantford Brant Employment Centre

Marilyn Kaus
Email: mkaus@st-leonards.com
Telephone: (519)-756-7665
<http://www.st-leonards.com/>



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