

Employment
Series for
Persons with
Disabilities

tips for

Employers



This booklet is for current or potential employers considering hiring persons with disabilities.

It will help you:

- understand how hiring persons with disabilities makes good business sense
- consider the impact your attitudes, beliefs and leadership may have on hiring and working with persons with disabilities
- know appropriate language to use when communicating with persons with disabilities
- modify your recruitment, interviewing and hiring practices to persons with disabilities
- consider accommodation strategies
- orient a new employee with a disability to your worksite
- connect with further resources, information and legislation.

Acknowledgment

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Formats:

Internet

Available on the Accessible website, WORKink
<http://ab.workink.com>

Print

Learning Resources Centre
12360 - 142 Street
Edmonton, AB T5L 4X9
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www.alis.gov.ab.ca/careershop
Catalogue Item #437162

Alternative Formats

For further information call the Career Information Hotline, (780) 422-4266 (in Edmonton) or 1-800-661-3753 (in Alberta). Deaf or hearing impaired call TDD (780) 422-5283 or 1-800-232-7215 for message relay service in Alberta.
E-mail info@alis.gov.ab.ca

Aussi disponible en français sous le titre La série sur l'emploi pour les personnes handicapées: conseils pratiques destinés aux employeurs

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Preface

This is one in a series of three booklets for:

- persons with disabilities seeking work
- current or potential employers of persons with disabilities
- service providers working with persons with disabilities.

For persons with disabilities, finding and keeping work is usually no different than for persons without disabilities. However, there are additional issues to deal with, including how and when to tell an employer about their disability.

For employers, recruiting and hiring job seekers with disabilities may be a new experience. The process is really not that different from hiring and retaining people without disabilities. However, some unique factors must be addressed, such as the appropriate terminology to use and questions about how a person's disability impacts their work.

For service providers, these booklets provide tips on working with job seekers with disabilities.

These booklets are intended to complement, not replace, other career development, work search and human resources materials. The focus is on providing practical tips and best practices on employability and employment from a cross-disability perspective. When appropriate, references are made to specific types of disabilities.

Additional information can be found in the appendices at the back of each booklet.

Appendix A: Resources offers a listing of organizations, websites, publications, and videos that may be of further use.

Appendix B: Overview of Disabilities provides a general understanding of the different types of disabilities.

Appendix C: Legislation provides an overview of federal and provincial legislation regarding the hiring of and working with people with disabilities.

The Business Case for Diversity

Diversity at Work

Diversifying an investment portfolio is considered a vital strategy for smart investors. The same applies to the workforce. For employers, diversity means incorporating a variety of different people within the organization to achieve strength through balance.

Today's work environment has changed. Technology, company structures and markets are different. Companies have seen the move from a homogeneous culture, where people were like-minded and of similar backgrounds, to a more diverse

In 1991, 4.2 million Canadians, 16% of the population, reported some level of disability.

Health and Activity Limitation Survey (HALS), Statistics Canada, 1991.

(Survey updated every 10 years)

culture, where people come from a variety of backgrounds, have a wide range of skills and operate in a world virtually without borders.

Diversity goes beyond employment equity. Employment equity is a legal requirement focusing on four "designated" groups that have traditionally been under-represented in the workforce – persons with disabilities, Aboriginals, visible minorities and women. (See *Appendix C: Legislation* for more information).

Organizational Culture

Companies are becoming more aware of the role of organizational culture in building a successful business. Organizational culture is the framework for how things are done in a company. Many organizations are moving toward corporate cultures committed to:

- greater teamwork and employee involvement
- more creativity and innovation
- work/life balance and respect for employee interests and needs
- improved communications

- ongoing learning, development and continuous improvement
- diversity.

Organizations need to follow through on what they say. Hiring individuals with disabilities is not only consistent with the values of most organizations, it also clearly demonstrates their commitment to diversity and employment equity.

Good Business Sense

Here are six sound reasons for incorporating diversity in your workplace.

- 1. Competitive advantage –**
It helps a company to have employees who come from all parts of society and who are, look, act, and think like the company's potential customers. A diverse workforce can help meet changing consumer demands and emerging niche markets.
- 2. Diverse perspectives –**
Persons with disabilities have considerable life experience solving challenging problems on a regular basis. Creative problem solving skills can help companies find new solutions and lead to more satisfied customers.



Beyond the Bottom Line

Employees with disabilities interviewed for this booklet often responded that they thought employers should hire persons with disabilities because they are just like anyone else – they have skills, are motivated and will make good employees.

Supervisors interviewed for this booklet noted additional benefits in the workplace such as other employees viewing all their co-workers as distinct individuals.

The majority of persons with disabilities have mild disabilities. This group has a very high participation rate in the labour force. Persons with severe disabilities are least likely to be in the labour force. Yet, despite more severe disabilities, 26% of this group do participate.

Health and Activity Limitation Survey (HALS), Statistics Canada, 1991.

(Survey updated every 10 years)

More employees are comfortable identifying their own needs for support and accommodation to assist them in being more productive and successful.

(Manager in a government department)

Co-workers see me making efforts and think how hard it must be for me. Then they know they can do it too.

(Individual with a mobility disability)

The presence of employee X benefits the other employees. It has been good for morale and the spirit of teamwork.

(Retail supervisor)

The employee [with a disability] comes to work every day and shows incredible motivation and drive. Other employees think "I should have that too".

(Manager in sales company)

Individuals in our team have built stronger communication skills. They are more conscious of how they communicate and how well they are understood.

(Manager with a disability who supervises persons with disabilities in a large organization)

To become aware of the messages that have remained with you over time,

Think About...

- What were my first experiences with persons with disabilities?
- How often did I see persons with disabilities?
- Did I have any friends with disabilities?
- When I was growing up, what were some of the messages, spoken or implied, that I received about persons with disabilities? (“Don’t stare at people who...” or “Stay away from...”)
- Did people around you express pity for people with disabilities? Did they talk about being disabled as a “test” or a “punishment?”
- Did people express surprise or amazement if a person with a disability was able to do something independently?
- What recent experiences have you had with persons with disabilities? How might they influence your attitude towards others?

The following sections cover important information used throughout the hiring process: self-awareness, communication and recruitment.

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is the basis for working with people who are different from yourself. Only by becoming aware, can you put their situation and needs into perspective.

We all carry past experiences, education and upbringing with us as we move from one situation to another. These can be a positive base for adding new teachings. They can also hinder us from learning new ways of doing things and developing new attitudes.

People's attitude upon learning of my disability can make it difficult for me to move to the next step of explaining how my needs can be accommodated.

(Individual with a visual impairment)

Disabilities confront us with our own frailties.

(Psychologist who works with persons with disabilities)

Messages

The beliefs and assumptions we carry with us are often in the form of messages or sayings, images, and language. These are messages we picked up at home, at school, in the community, and from the media – and can be either positive or negative.

Stereotyping is defined as creating an oversimplified, false or generalized portrayal of a group of people. Stereotyping does not allow for exceptions or individual differences and pre-judges a person's ability, skills and personality based on unfair assumptions. To be fair, an individual should be judged on his or her merit regardless of race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, physical and mental disability, marital status, age, ancestry or place of origin.

- Initial Steps

People feel discomfort at having to deal with something they don't understand.

(Educator with a visual impairment)

Concerns

As a supervisor who is considering employing a person with a disability, you may have some concerns. Consider the following misconceptions.

- Persons with disabilities can't keep up with other workers.
- There are only certain kinds of jobs that persons with disabilities can do.
- A person with a disability is likely to miss a lot of work.
- A person with a disability will have more accidents on the job.
- I don't know how to talk to a person with a disability.
- My staff wouldn't want to work with a person with a disability.
- I don't know how to supervise a person with a disability.
- It's too expensive to hire a person with a disability – all the costs of accommodation.

- It would be hard to fire a person with a disability if they didn't work out.
- Persons with disabilities don't really want to work.

All of the above statements are based on certain assumptions or stereotypes about persons with disabilities. **And, most importantly, they are false.**

Part of the challenge is educating oneself and getting past the stereotypes.

We don't like things that are different. We don't understand or like things that don't fit our mould. Our whole society is somewhat like this. It is related to the way we were brought up.

(Employee with a mobility impairment)

By understanding how your beliefs can affect, and possibly interfere with, your attitudes and behaviour towards persons with disabilities, you're more likely to reserve judgement and not jump to conclusions.

One barrier that people have is that they try to picture themselves in my position and then they think they couldn't do the job. They overlook the fact that I've been blind for a while and have developed all kinds of skills and experience in dealing with my blindness. I've learned to compensate.

(Job seeker who is blind)

Leadership

As an employer, you have developed a supervisory philosophy for your role. This philosophy is comprised of:

- what you believe about employees – behaviours and expectations
- what you believe about motivation and needs
- how you see your role
- what you expect from employees.

Your supervisory philosophy and beliefs have an impact on your leadership style. How you behave with, and treat your employees conveys a message to others. Your customers and staff will likely follow your lead.

Ask Yourself

Does my leadership style and philosophy support an inclusive work environment?

What do I expect from my employees in regard to skills and abilities, and how work gets done?

What do I do to bring out the best in people and help them achieve success?

How effective is my current style and philosophy in working with employees with disabilities?

*I lead by example in everything.
My staff understand our values.*

(Business owner who employs an individual with developmental and physical impairments)

Take Action

Supplement your beliefs and attitudes by getting more information, having positive new experiences with persons with disabilities, or contacting community agencies working with persons with disabilities.

Some of the ways you can do this include:

- reading material or visiting websites about disabilities and persons with disabilities
- volunteering with an agency assisting persons with disabilities
- attending diversity training or disability awareness training

Learn about persons with disabilities as skilled, productive workers, as post-secondary graduates and as active members of their community.

Think of one or two specific actions you can take to expand your awareness of persons with disabilities:

1. _____

2. _____

- talking openly to a co-worker with disabilities
- inviting a guest speaker from a community agency that specializes in community education or employment services for persons with disabilities.

- Initial Steps

Communication

Respectful Language

We often take the words we use for granted and don't think about how they sound to other people. Language reflects attitudes and stereotypes. Words commonly used ten or 20 years ago are not necessarily acceptable today.

Some words falsely give the impression that persons with disabilities are weak, deserve pity, and cannot be contributing members of society. Here are some examples.

If you're unsure about what words to use ask the person what their preferences are. You will find, as in any group of people, that not everyone has the same opinion. As long as you treat a person with respect and show your willingness to learn, your efforts will be appreciated.

In many cases there is no need to refer to a person's disability. Don't mention it if it is not relevant to the conversation. Simply say, "He has great computer skills." Don't add, "... and he's a paraplegic."

Say	Instead of
Has a disability	Coping with a disability Suffering from... Afflicted with...
Uses a wheelchair	Confined to a wheelchair Wheelchair victim or case
Has a mobility impairment	Crippled
Has seizures	Has attacks, fits, spells
A person with a developmental disability, or a person who is developmentally delayed	Mentally retarded
A person with a mental illness	Crazy, mad, loony
A person who is not disabled	Normal

Remember, when in doubt, that most people who have disabilities are more than willing to discuss their disability, if approached in a positive manner.

(Employee with a mobility impairment)

This next section provides examples of current language use, as well as tips for appropriate communication practices in the workplace.

- "Disability" or "impairment" refers to a condition which interferes with normal body structure or function.
- The term "handicap" is no longer used to refer to a person, but to a social and/or environmental barrier that prevents an individual from full participation in normal everyday activities.
- When talking about persons with disabilities, refer to the person first and then the disability. For example: a person with a disability; a person who has a mental illness; a person who is deaf, hard of hearing, or has a hearing loss; a person who is developmentally delayed.

Notes

- Avoid using terms like: the deaf; the blind; an epileptic; and a schizophrenic. Instead say: people who are deaf; people who are blind; a person with epilepsy; and a person who has schizophrenia.

Communication Tips

At the best of times, communication is a complex skill to master. Here are some helpful tips.

- Think about the language you use.
- Don't patronize people with disabilities. Don't tell someone with a disability you admire their courage and strength unless they've done something that you would compliment anyone on.
- Look at the person when addressing them. Avoiding eye contact only increases discomfort or tension.
- Speak directly to the person, even if they are with an attendant or interpreter.
- Focus on work-related topics, just as you would with employees who don't have disabilities. Remember that a person is more than their disability. The disability is

unimportant unless you are discussing accommodation.

- Treat people with disabilities as individuals.
- Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use expressions such as "See you later" or "Got to be running along" that seem to relate to the person's disability. There is no need to avoid common phrases or use special language.

Here are some things to consider, based on certain types of disabilities.

Physical Disabilities

- Ask first if you can be of assistance and listen attentively to their reply. Do not reach for walkers, wheelchairs or any other assistive devices, as they are part of an individual's personal space.

Resources

A Way With Words: Guidelines and appropriate terminology for the portrayal of persons with disabilities.

See *Appendix A: Resources* at the back of this booklet.

- Initial Steps

- When having more than a brief conversation with a person in a wheelchair, sit down and face them. Imagine how you would feel looking up at someone all day. Plus, it evens the power between the two of you.
- Don't be afraid to shake hands with a person with a disability. People with limited hand use or with a prosthesis can usually shake hands. Shaking hands with the left hand is also acceptable.
- For those who cannot shake hands, touch the person on the shoulder or arm to welcome them and acknowledge their presence.

Visual Impairments

- Speak in a normal tone of voice. It is not necessary to shout.
- Announce your arrival and your exit.
- Do not be afraid to use common words such as "look" and "see."
- Do not pet a blind person's guide dog unless invited. The dog is responsible for the safety of its owner and should not be disturbed while working.

- When you first meet, identify yourself by name.
- If identifying distance and direction, use "left" or "right" and "front" or "behind" and the appropriate number of paces.

Hearing Impairments

- Ask the interpreter to sit next to you or behind you so you can maintain eye contact with the person with the disability. The interpreter should not be seated near bright lights or windows.
- Always speak to the person, not the interpreter.
- Use written notes and information to supplement verbal communication or to provide basic information.
- Ask one question at a time to be clear and understood.
- During group discussions, make sure that only one person speaks at a time.
- Do not be afraid to use common words such as "hear" or "listen."
- Speak in a normal tone of voice, slowly and clearly.

- Ask how they prefer to communicate. Many people who are hard of hearing use a combination of methods to understand spoken language, including lip reading and interpreting body language.
- You can let a person who is deaf or hard of hearing know you wish to speak to them by gently touching them on the shoulder or elbow.
- Ensure there is good lighting to assist the person lip reading. Do not sit in front of or next to bright lights or windows as this creates a silhouette.

Speech Impediments or Non-speaking

- If you can't understand the person, ask them to repeat themselves. If you are still unable to understand, ask the person to spell or write the words.
- Avoid trying to complete the person's sentences. Be patient.
- Speak in a normal tone, using everyday language. There is no need to speak loudly. It helps to face the person while speaking.
- Have a note pad and pencil handy.

Ask Yourself

What have you found to be the most important factors to consider when finding the right candidate to fill a position?

Are these factors different if you consider hiring an individual with a disability?

Developmental Disabilities

- Use clear language and keep instructions simple.
- Avoid abstract concepts.
- When asked to clarify a question, use concrete examples.
- Do not talk in “baby talk”, broken English, or raise your voice.
- Use alternate forms of job instruction, such as colour coding or pictures.
- Ask them to repeat instructions to you or to demonstrate their understanding of your instructions.

Resources

The Ten Commandments of Communicating with People with Disabilities.

See *Appendix A: Resources* at the back of this booklet.

Learning Disabilities

- Use a variety of methods to communicate, such as writing, speaking, drawing diagrams or demonstrating what needs to be done.
- Eliminate distracting sounds and background noises as much as possible.
- Allow more time to go over items you want to cover.
- Focus on one thing at a time. Avoid jumping from one topic to another.

Mental Health Disabilities

- Respect the employee’s desire for confidentiality and be clear on what that confidentiality entails.
- If you observe changes in an employee’s behaviour that cause you concern, talk to the person and ask if you can help.

- Initial Steps

Recruitment

Most supervisors respond to the first question in the colour bar on the left page with, “An individual who...”

- has the skills and abilities to get the job done
- fits in and works well with the team
- is motivated and wants to do a good job.

Getting Employees On Board

When considering hiring an individual with a disability, these factors will probably be no different. However, your ability to see these skills and abilities may be different.

For all hiring decisions, consider these factors: Bona Fide Occupational Requirements (BFOR), Knowledge, Skills and Personal Suitability, and Accommodation.

Bona Fide Occupational Requirements (BFOR)

What is a bona fide occupational requirement?

The actual occupational requirements of the work based on a

current work description (e.g. if filing is no longer done on the job but remains on a dated job description, update the job description). Applicants will not be screened out as a result of inaccurate occupational requirements.

What does an employer have to do to establish a bona fide occupational requirement?

If a requirement may otherwise be discriminatory, but an employer feels it is necessary, or bona fide, there are three criteria the requirement must meet, according to the Supreme Court of Canada.

- The requirement must have a rational connection to the performance of the job. For example, there would be a rational connection between a requirement to be able to lift heavy objects for a warehouse worker, but not for a clerical worker. Another example of a rational connection might be requiring teachers in Catholic schools to be of the Catholic religion.
- The requirement must be imposed in the employer's honest and good faith belief that it is necessary for the job. That is, a standard or requirement cannot be imposed with

the specific intention of discriminating against a group, such as a requirement associated with physical strength to screen out women.

- It must be shown that it is impossible to accommodate the employee's needs without imposing undue hardship on the employer. For example, a cultural organization may find it impossible to accommodate an employee unable to speak the language of the clientele.

What is considered undue hardship?

The *Canadian Human Rights Act* lists three main considerations when assessing whether an accommodation creates undue hardship:

- Health
- Safety
- Cost.

What sorts of questions are asked in assessing undue hardship?

Did the employer consider alternatives? Instead of a hard and fast rule could individual testing work? For example, at one time in B.C., people who lacked peripheral vision because of a particular medical condition were unilaterally denied drivers'

- Initial Steps

The ultimate goal is to find the right person for the job and, once the right person is found, to determine the strategies that will ensure individual and organizational success.

The next step is to prepare the job description – defining the work to be done and the skills and abilities required to do it (bona fide occupational requirements). Consider the following.

- What are the results or outcomes required of this role?
- What skills and abilities are critical to achieve the results?
- Is the job defined in terms that are relevant and applicable for all?
- Is the job description based on current duties and responsibilities?

Keep in mind that there are different ways to get the same outcomes, and how the job gets done is secondary to getting it done well.

Short Listing

Matching an applicant's experience and skills against the job description is the main method of deciding who will be interviewed.

For all candidates, but even more importantly for candidates with disabilities, consideration should be given to transferable skills. These are skills that may have been used in a different job and can be easily transferred to this new position.

I don't apply for jobs I can't do.

(Employee with a physical disability)

You will find that individuals with disabilities may or may not disclose the nature of their disability on their applications or résumés.

In applying for jobs, I refer to my vision in the covering letter as I find it creates too much stress to work it into the interview. It's a challenge to know how to lead into it.

(Service provider and employee with a visual impairment)

If the individual has elected to disclose their disability:

- It should not disqualify them from the position.
- You may need to broaden your own perspective. Don't assume the individual can't do the work because of the disability.
- Use this disclosure to assist you in considering whether there are any accommodations to be made when inviting the applicant to come in for an interview, such as building access or interview room layout.

When in doubt, ask.

Interviewing

As the interviewer, you will want to:

- Ask if any workplace accommodations will be required for a successful interview.
- Ensure that any accommodation requests or requirements are addressed:
 - give directions to accessible entrances, elevators

Ask Yourself

What types of interview questions have worked best in the past?

Do I need any different types of questions when interviewing someone with a disability?

What do I normally do to put a candidate at ease and feel comfortable?

What do I normally say to put a candidate at ease and feel comfortable?

Do I need to do anything differently for an individual with a disability?

- ensure the interview room is accessible
- allow extra interview time to permit discussion of possible accommodation requirements.
- are based upon the bona fide job requirements
- are focused on the person's experience (previous work, volunteer or paid)
- solicit behavioural-based responses, drawn from actual experiences.

Some employers have chosen to ask all candidates what, if any, accommodation would assist in a successful interview process. Asking this question may encourage disclosure.

Preparing the questions

Many employers have found the most valuable or useful interview questions:

When interviewing an individual with a disability, ask the same questions you would ask anyone else. You need to know if this person has the knowledge, abilities, skills and personal suitability to perform the job.

If you have doubts about whether a question is relevant or not, ask yourself why you

Can I ask about the individual's disability, particularly about how it will impact their ability to perform the job?

If there is a need to discuss the possible impact of the disability on performance of the job, these questions need to be asked in the context of the job.

Do's	Don'ts
Are there any restrictions to the work that you can do?	How did you come to be using a wheelchair?
Is there anything that might impact your ability to do the job?	What happened to you?
Is there any part of this job you would have difficulty performing?	Just how much vision do you have?

- Initial Steps

are asking the question. If you decide that the answer directly relates to the candidate's ability to perform the job, then you are on the right track. If your response is more general and does not provide any information required to make a hiring decision, you may wish to reconsider the question.

Conducting the interview

What you do and say at the beginning of an interview is intended to help put candidates at ease. Whether or not they are disabled, keep in mind that everyone is different in their comfort, nervousness, and readiness for an interview.

At the start of the interview, you may or may not know that the individual has a disability.

For individuals with a disability that is visible, consider the following:

- Shake hands with the candidate. Let them determine the type and strength of the handshake. While it might feel awkward, it shows your acceptance of them as a person.
- When the candidate arrives, offer to remove a coat, open doors, carry materials, locate a chair, etc. Do not assume

assistance is required, but provide the opportunity for the candidate to comfortably get assistance.

- Do not reach for a walker, wheelchair or other assistive devices, as these are part of the candidate's personal space.
- Guide dogs in harness are at work and should not be distracted, petted or fed. Asking about the dog may be done to help to break the ice.

I don't mention before an interview that I have a guide dog, but sometimes the dog becomes an icebreaker.

(Job seeker who is blind)

Be as accommodating as you can. Often the candidate will be hesitant to tell you about the disability. You need to put them at ease. Remember the purpose of the interview is to assist them in presenting themselves in the best light.

(A government manager)

-
- If the candidate appears hesitant to discuss their disability, leave any questions about accommodation to the end of the interview.

Legislation

It is not permissible to request an applicant to provide any information about the general state of his/her health, appearance, height, weight or to request a general medical history or examination as part of the pre-employment inquiries. Nor can an applicant be required to disclose information about specific occupation-related impediments, defects or disabilities.

The Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission. For more information, see *Appendix C: Legislation.*

I'd like to see interviewers maintain the same kind of eye contact with me as they would with anyone else. I'd also recommend they speak in a normal tone of voice. If a person needs you to speak up, they'll ask.

(Job seeker with a mobility disability)

If, during the interview, either you or the candidate brings up the nature of the disability, here are some things to remember.

Ask Yourself

What is the purpose of checking references?

What are the best kinds of questions to ask when checking references?

What can I or should I ask related to the individual's disability?

What do I normally include in the job offer?

Do I need to do anything different when extending a job offer to an individual with a disability?

- Questions should be directly related to their ability to meet the job requirements.
- Clearly communicate the purpose of the question and how it relates to the job.
- If disclosure of the disability is requested, let the candidate know that it is necessary to determine how to accommodate and create a successful work environment.

If there is a need to look at the impact of health issues, discuss them in relation to doing the job.
(Federal government manager)

Reference Checking

Checking references is necessary to gather additional information about a candidate's ability to perform the job. This information may:

- supplement information you gathered in the interview
- validate information you gathered in the interview
- probe further into specific examples provided in the interview.

Usually, references are people that can directly comment on some component of the candidate's previous work experience.

The best questions to ask are about the person's ability to perform the job based on previous situations and experiences.

Is it appropriate to ask about the individual's disability?

Emphasis should be placed on the person's ability to perform the work. It is appropriate to ask questions such as:

- Would you hire them back?
- What was their attendance like?
- How much sick leave did they take?
- How was their performance?
- Were they able to successfully carry out and complete the requirements of the job?
Could you give an example?

Making the Offer

Once you have determined a candidate's suitability, it is time to make a job offer.

A consideration when hiring an individual with a disability is whether you have determined what needs to be in place to ensure success. Sometimes special accommodations need to be made. Have you explored the accommodation requirements, if any, and determined how they will be managed?

- Initial Steps

Alternatives – Partnerships and Job Carving (or Creating Roles)

Partnerships with Agencies

Many agencies provide a role in introducing organizations to individuals with disabilities. Here are some of the services these agencies provide to supervisors and individuals with disabilities.

- Initial contact with an organization/supervisor to identify employment opportunities.
- Presentation of clients' specific skills and abilities.
- Disability-specific education and awareness for supervisor and/or co-workers.
- Client support through the interview process.
- Client and supervisory support in determining accommodation requirements.
- Job coaching.
- Client and supervisory follow-up.

Agencies often make the initial contact. But as a supervisor, you may choose to take a proactive approach and contact a specific agency. Lists of agencies can be found in your local yellow pages under "Associations." If you are considering hiring someone with a disability, that person may be aware of community agencies that provide assistance and support to employers. Your local Career Development Centre or Canada-Alberta Service Centre can also provide that information.

Job Carving (or Creating Roles)

Not all individuals with disabilities are brought into organizations through a traditional hiring process or agency. Sometimes potential employees don't fit into established positions, or existing employees, due to an injury or new disability, may be unable to perform in their current role.

Opportunities exist for more flexible and creative employment such as job carving – structuring one or more jobs to make best use of all employees' skills and abilities.

You may have an opportunity to carve or create a defined role or position based upon an individual's availability or a specific hiring initiative. Here are some of the benefits.

- An agency or service provider may work with the employer and/or the potential employee to match an individual's abilities with work to be done. Often the agency will provide ongoing support for both parties through the initial phases of the employment relationship.
- Organizations may elect to take a little bit out of other jobs and create a new position. This often frees up existing employees to concentrate on other tasks. An example may be removing more repetitive work from other positions to create a job for someone who works best at repetitive tasks.

Reassignment of day to day reading to staff and assumption of more strategic planning and organization enabled growth and development of staff and better utilized my skills and interests.

(Manager who recently lost most of his vision)

Ask Yourself

When orienting a new employee, what type of preparations do I usually make

- In the work environment?
- With co-workers?
- With the new employee?

What do I think is different about bringing on an employee with a disability?

We have one employee who has a clearly defined role. The role was custom built based upon his skills.

(Employer of an individual with a developmental disability)

Here are some things to consider for successful job carving.

- Changes in supervision requirements, such as more frequent instructions and guidance.
- Alternative methods of conveying job instructions and adding new tasks.

One employee takes a bit more time to learn and remember tasks. A time is set out at the beginning of each day to review the work and discuss what needs to be done that day. New tasks are added as the employee becomes comfortable with the current tasks.

(Manager of a fitness facility working with an employee with a developmental disability)

- Co-worker involvement and support.
- Involvement of a community agency that works with employers to define roles, assist in training employees and ironing out some of the initial details.
- Job or work experience with defined time parameters.
- Stay positive. Be prepared to deal with some co-workers' negative perceptions about "make work" projects and short-term limited opportunities.

- A Working Solution

Now that you have successfully advertised for, interviewed, recruited, and hired a person with a disability, it is time to “get to work.”

Employee Orientation

As with any new employee, make the necessary preparations to ensure that they are successful and understand their work environment and expectations.

- Prepare and assign an office or workspace.
- Notify co-workers.
- Ensure that the new employee receives company literature or information.

Talking about Accommodation

When bringing on an employee with a disability, discuss their work situation with them. In some cases, no accommodations need to be made. In other cases, some accommodations will be identified.

Here are some things to consider about accommodation.

- Discuss accommodations prior to the first day of work. This allows any accommodations to be in place from day one.
- Ensure the employee is comfortable in bringing forward suggestions and needs as they arise.
- Workplace safety is critical. Initiate a discussion related to emergency evacuation, fire alarms, and any specific support or assistance required.
- Employee health and safety issues should also be discussed.
- Review job procedures and workplace practices. What accommodations can be made that will help build success?

You'll find information in the Accommodation section of this booklet.

Co-Worker Awareness

“How or what do you tell the co-workers?” is a frequently asked question among supervisors.

The decision to involve co-workers in advance should be made on a case-by-case basis. Employers who enlist the support of co-workers from the beginning often experience a more effective transition.

Points to consider

1. How do I create an environment of acceptance and productivity?

Before undertaking any specific awareness session, discuss this with the new team member. They may wish to be involved in the session, or have some suggestions as to what to include.

2. Is it appropriate to involve co-workers in planning accommodations?

Co-workers must be informed of any accommodation that directly impacts them. Greater ownership always occurs if the individual directly impacted by a change has some input in planning the change. Employees also have a valuable perspective on the actual work and can provide insights on how to get the work done. Once again, involving the new team member in these discussions starts everyone off on the right note.

3. Is a buddy system a good idea?

New employees may be uncomfortable bringing forward work-related and procedural questions to the

Notes

boss. Building alliances with co-workers, matching the person with the disability with a co-worker to develop a working relationship, increases opportunities for social interaction and new member integration to the team.

4. What about the idea of a mentor?

By definition, a mentor is a wise and trusted teacher. In the workplace, a mentor may be a peer who provides guidance and serves as a sounding board. It could be a long-term or retiring employee who can help the new member understand the culture of the workplace.

5. What about the individual’s right to confidentiality?

Disclosure of an individual’s specific disability related information is not appropriate and breaches their right to confidentiality. Any discussion between a supervisor and co-workers should focus on how to build a supportive and positive work environment. Any further disclosure should be discussed with, and initiated by, the person with the disability.

Employee Retention

Keeping an employee requires the supervisor ensure proper conditions are in place for success. Here are some key factors in retaining employees.

1. Orientation

Employers who do a good job of orienting new employees have much greater success with employee retention and productivity.

Orientation may include:

- organization and team information – vision, mission, values, structures
- introductions to team members
- clarification of work expectations, procedures, resources, and how performance will be measured and evaluated.

2. Inclusion in Group Activities

All employees want to fit in and be treated with respect. You and your staff may feel awkward at first if you’ve never worked with an individual with a disability before. Keep accessibility and accommodations in mind when planning social events or training opportunities, much like you would consider dietary restrictions. Ask for input, and soon it will become second nature.

- A Working Solution

Even informal occasions such as a going away party need to be planned. If possible, check out the location in person, to determine accessibility.

When we plan work related social activities we always need to consider accessibility. Initially, I had to be reminded, now it has become second nature.

(Manager of a number of individuals with visual and mobility impairments)

3. Accommodation

You'll find that accommodation discussions and strategies regarding work processes and the tools or technology to support the employee are ongoing. As individuals perform their job, they may identify new ideas to help enhance productivity.

My supervisor asks me on a regular basis if there are any other things that can be done to help me work more effectively or productively. As I become more familiar with my job, I identify additional things, such as a special screen for my computer.

(Employee with a mobility disability)

4. Performance Expectations and Feedback

Since the individual has been hired to perform a job, performance expectations for this job must be discussed and mutually agreed upon. Similar performance expectations should exist for employees, with or without a disability.

Here are some comments from a number of employees interviewed for this booklet.

- They really appreciated it when expectations were challenging and realistic.
- On occasion they felt that "less was expected of them because they had a disability."
- People were reluctant to give them feedback on their performance, particularly when a mistake had been made or where there was room for improvement. Co-workers and supervisors were afraid to hurt their feelings.
- Supervisors were uncomfortable providing fair and accurate performance appraisals.

I'd like to know that they are hiring me and keeping me because of my skills.

(Employee with a mobility disability)

5. Career Development and Training

Employees with disabilities need the same access to career development, training and career opportunities as individuals without disabilities.

6. Abilities Committee

One employer in a large organization mentioned that they had formed an Abilities Committee where persons with disabilities and others can get support and bring forward issues and challenges. This committee serves as a support group and also identifies opportunities for the employer to enhance the work environment and be more proactive in building diversity in the work place.

Resources

Tips Sheet on *Planning and Hosting Accessible Meetings and Conferences*

Available from Human Resources Development Canada, Office for Disability Issues website.

See *Appendix A: Resources* at the back of this booklet.

Ask Yourself

What types of accommodations have I requested myself?

What types of accommodations have my employees requested or require?

What types of accommodations have I seen in my organization?

What were the costs of these accommodations?

How did these accommodations affect employee productivity?

How did these accommodations affect employee morale?

Accommodation

What is Accommodation?

Accommodation is the identification and implementation of work processes, tools and technology that will be used to assist an individual to be successful in the work environment.

It may not be done the same way as other people do it, but the outcome is the same.

(Employee with a mobility disability)

Accommodation is all about improving employee productivity. Often this is done through technology and process-related supports and interventions such as upgrading computers with new

Financial Assistance for Worksite Accommodations

Financial assistance for employers to make worksite accommodations may be available from the federal and provincial governments.

See *Appendix A: Resources* at the back of this booklet.

For more information:

Call the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work - Job Accommodation Services (JAS) at 1-866-227-9527. JAS is a telephone consulting service which provides information on job accommodations to employers, job seekers and service providers.

keyboards and software, providing ergonomic furniture, and incorporating flexible work schedules to accommodate personal and professional commitments.

Accommodation for individuals with disabilities is no different.

- Most accommodations cost very little and can be easily introduced.
- Although government funding is available, most employers consulted in the preparation of this booklet indicated that accommodation costs were minimal and the majority chose not to pursue funding.
- Accommodation is a collaborative process between the employee and the supervisor and at times may also include co-workers.

- A Working Solution

80% of accommodations suggested by the Job Accommodation Network for persons with disabilities can be made for less than \$500.

Job Accommodation Network in Canada is now called Job Accommodation Services (JAS) at Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work. See *Appendix A: Resources* at the back of this booklet.

- Accommodation is an ongoing process of making adaptations as necessary to improve productivity and working conditions.

Some of the types of accommodations include:

- making workplace facilities accessible

What is Reasonable Accommodation?

An employer has a legal obligation to take reasonable steps to accommodate an employee's individual needs. For example, ensure that washrooms are accessible.

For more information on Duty to Accommodate, see *Appendix C: Legislation*.

- modifying work schedules
- restructuring jobs
- acquiring or modifying equipment or devices
- providing support services or qualified assistants
- changing job locations
- retraining and/or reassigning employees
- reorganizing the workspace for easier movement.
- Tasks, or parts of tasks are being reassigned on a temporary or permanent basis based upon skills, interests and abilities.
- Workplaces are introducing larger computer monitors, improved lighting and ergonomic chairs to reduce work stress.

Why Consider Accommodation?

You can view accommodation as compensation for a person's disability. Or more appropriately, you can view it as an enhancement of a person's ability. Most worksites require some degree of accommodation to make a new employee comfortable and productive. For example, raising the height of a desk or chair is a type of accommodation.

With an aging workforce, many organizations are looking into alternate work relationships and accommodations in order to retain skilled and experienced workers. Examples include:

- Working at home or in satellite offices to meet increased demands on productivity and effectiveness.

An employee with MS has a heavier load of tasks which require desk work as opposed to process work away from his desk. We also moved his desk so it would be more accessible to the outside, in case of emergency.

(Supervisor commenting on accommodations made in the workplace)

Accommodation is important in creating a good work environment. I like the idea of going in and out the same door as my co-workers. If I have to use a ramp at the back of the building, I miss out on some of the social interaction as people are leaving or coming to work. It adds to that us/them feeling.

(Employee who uses a wheelchair)

Appendix A: Resources

The following resources provide disability-specific general information, training availability, answers to questions, and additional sources of information and assistance.

Organizations

Agencies

There are many agencies that operate on national, provincial and community levels.

- Agencies that specialize in working with and advocating for a specific disability group or disease and often provide public education.
- Agencies that work with a cross-section of persons with disabilities to assist them in developing skills and accessing education and employment.

These agencies likely know of local consultants or organizations that provide diversity or disability awareness training, if they themselves do not.

Agencies are usually listed in the telephone directory under Associations or Societies. The

reference librarian at the local library can often help to identify local resources.

Colleges and Universities

Local colleges and universities offer programs and services for students with disabilities and many have faculty who specialize in disability related issues and research. The employment or student counselling offices can also provide information and contacts.

Government Funding Sources

Federal

A listing of programs, services, and funding sources offered by the Government of Canada can be found in *Bridging the Gap: Government of Canada Programs and Services of Interest to Canadians with Disabilities*. This publication can be obtained by phoning 1-800-665-9017 or by faxing the Enquiries Centre, Human Resources Development Canada at 1-819-953-7260. *Bridging the Gap* can also be found on the Internet at www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/bcph-odi/documents/bridging_gap/index.shtml

Human Resources Development Canada

Aboriginal Disabilities Information Centre

The Information Centre provides disabled Aboriginal people with information on agencies, contact people and organizations. This centre will:

- provide resource information to Aboriginal, Métis, and non-Aboriginal people with disabilities
- determine the needs and make the appropriate referrals to community services, support programs and government agencies.

Contact information:

Box 33, Suite #130
9700 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 4C3
Phone: 448-3711 (in Edmonton)
toll-free: 1-877-448-3711
(in Alberta)

Opportunities Fund

The federal Opportunities Fund aims to help persons with disabilities who are not eligible for Employment Insurance funded programs prepare for, find and secure work. The Fund finances a wide range of employment activities for people with disabilities who are unemployed,

Resources

Call the toll-free RITE line 310-0000 for the location of the office nearest you.

Career Information Hotline

Consultants provide information on career planning, work search skills, educational options, occupational descriptions, educational funding and referrals. Call the Hotline at 422-4266 (in Edmonton) or toll-free 1-800-661-3753 (in Alberta). Deaf or hearing impaired individuals in Edmonton call TDD 422-5283. Elsewhere call 1-800-232-7215 for message relay service. You can also e-mail the Hotline at info@alis.gov.ab.ca

Canada-Alberta Job Order Bank Services (JOBS)

A free job order bank service for Alberta employers and job seekers. Employers can phone or fax their job vacancies or JOBS. Information about work opportunities is made available to job seekers in three ways: on the Internet www.alis.gov.ab.ca/employment/LookingForWork/, on a toll-free telemessage, and at JOBS kiosks around the province. Employers can post openings by calling Canada-Alberta JOBS at 427-5627 (in Edmonton) or toll-free 1-800-999-1546

(in Alberta). Alberta job seekers can call the telemessage at 917-4899 (in Edmonton) or toll-free 1-800-727-2925 (in Alberta).

Municipal

There may be resources (such as a community service directory) and services at the local level through public libraries and departments dealing with social services or parks and recreation.

Hospitals and Health Services

Medical libraries and resource centres, and specialists working with a particular disability may be resources. They may bring in guest speakers or have resources which they make available to other professionals and families of persons with disabilities.

Websites

There is a huge amount of information for and about persons with disabilities on the Internet. Each website listed below provides links to other websites.

Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission www.aadac.com

This website describes the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission's services and products. In addition, information and statistics are presented on alcohol, drugs and gambling topics.

Alberta Human Resources and Employment www.gov.ab.ca/hre

Information on employment standards, proper notice and other workplace information, including a fact sheet outlining disability related employment supports that may be available.

Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) www.alis.gov.ab.ca

The Internet gateway to career, learning and employment information in Alberta.

Resources

Human Resources Development Canada, Alberta/NWT/Nunavut Labour Market Information

www.ab.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/lmi

In addition to labour market information, this site has external links to websites for employers, job seekers, entrepreneurs and persons with disabilities.

Human Resources Development Canada, Office for Disability Issues

www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/bcph-odi

Information on HRDC programs and services for job seekers and employers. Sections "For Job Seekers with Disabilities" and "For Employers of Persons with Disabilities." Fact sheets on planning and hosting accessible meetings and conferences, job accommodation, and representing persons with disabilities.

Indie, The Integrated Network of Disability Information and Education

<http://laurence.canlearn.ca/english/learn/accessguide/indie/index.html>

A comprehensive resource for persons with disabilities worldwide. Can do a search of information ranging from adaptive technology, sites

sorted by disability types and disability organizations to resource centres and libraries.

Premier's Council for Persons with Disabilities

www.premierscouncil.ab.ca

Many links to additional sites of interest.

WAEN – Wide Area Employment Network

www.waen.org

Has an employer and recruiter help centre with Frequently Asked Questions.

WORKink – The Virtual Employment Resource Centre

<http://ab.workink.com>

A wide range of services including:

- Services for work seekers – job postings, résumé databases, training opportunities, lists of agencies, and WORKink chat rooms and on-line counsellors.
- Services for employers and professionals – articles, Ask a Disability Specialist, links to résumé databases, and success stories.

Videos

All Ways Welcome

Workshop facilitator's guide and one video. Part of the Open for Business Accessibility Program, Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Recreation (1990).

Changing Perspectives

Video and CD-ROM focused towards employers interviewing and hiring persons with disabilities. EmployAbilities (2000). For more information call (780) 423-4106.

Disability Awareness

CD Rom is available from the New Brunswick Easter Seal March of Dimes (CRCD).
E-mail crcd@nbnet.nb.ca

Supervising an Employee with a Disability

Trainer guides and two videos. Irene M. Ward and Associates (1999).

The Ten Commandments of Communicating with People with Disabilities

Resource guide and video. Irene M. Ward and Associates (1996).

Overview of Disabilities

Brain Injury Disorder

Damage to the brain can occur as a result of accidents, falls, disease, tumours, strokes, and cardiac arrest. Although brain injuries can result in physical disability, cognitive, emotional, speech and behavioural problems may have a greater effect on the individual and family. Brain injury from trauma is the leading cause of death and disability for Canadians under 34 years of age.

Examples of supports include finding the preferred form of communication, elimination of distracting noises, use of tape recorders and computers, and job restructuring.

Developmental Disabilities

Developmental disabilities refer to substantial limitations in present functioning, characterized by significantly below average intellectual functioning. A developmental disability manifests before age 18. Related limitations in adaptive skill areas may include: communications, self-care, home living, social skills, community use, self-direction, health and safety, functional academics, leisure, and work.

Examples of supports include giving clear instructions, limited environmental distractions, use of checklists and diagrams, job restructuring, support systems, and job coaches.

Hearing Impairments

Many people with hearing impairments have some residual hearing or can lip read. Individuals with hearing impairments may be:

- **Deaf** – Individuals who are unable to hear or recognize speech even with a hearing aid.
- **Hard of hearing** – Individuals who have mild to severe partial hearing loss; those who can hear only portions of words.

Examples of supports include hearing aids, amplified telephone handsets, use of a sign language interpreter, giving written instructions instead of oral ones, and telephone device for the deaf.

Overview of Disabilities

Progressive/ Degenerative Illnesses

Conditions or diseases such as lupus, multiple sclerosis, myalgic encephalomyelitis (chronic fatigue syndrome) which may be slowly progressing and/or in remission. These may affect an individual's energy level, strength and ability to concentrate.

Examples of supports include flexible hours and reduced stress.

Substance Abuse Disorder

Substance abuse is the recurrent use of substances such as alcohol or other drugs resulting in problems carrying out obligations at work, at school or at home.

- Disabilities that can arise from the chronic use or abuse of alcohol or other drugs are mood and sleep disorders, social or interpersonal problems, and poor or deteriorating health.
- Commonly abused substances are legal drugs such as medication and alcohol and illegal drugs such as marijuana, heroin and cocaine.

The process of recovery from substance abuse, a lifelong process, begins once an individual enters treatment or independently stops using substances.

Examples of supports include reliable support systems and a balanced lifestyle.

Visual Impairments

Over 85% of those with visual impairments have some degree of useful vision:

- **Totally blind** – Individuals with no light perception.
- **Legally blind** – Individuals with 1 to 10% of their vision; they may have limited areas of sight, light and shadow perception, colour distinction or tunnel vision.
- **Impaired vision** – Individuals who have lost an eye or have diminishing eyesight.

Examples of supports include Braille scanners, large type publications, voice-activated software, large computer monitors, and guide dogs.

- The Legislated Employment Equity Program
- The Federal Contractors Program.

Federally regulated employers are subject to the regulations of the Legislated Employment Equity Program. Contractors with 100 or more employees and goods and services contracts with the federal government of over \$200,000 are subject to the Federal Contractors Program. <http://info.load-otea.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/>

Provincial Legislation

Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship

The Alberta *Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act*, www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca outlines what constitutes discrimination in the area of job applications, advertisements and employment practices.

Section 7 of the Act states that:

7(1) No employer shall

- (a) refuse to employ or refuse to continue to employ any person, or
- (b) discriminate against any person with regard to employment or any term or condition of employment,

because of the race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, physical disability, mental disability, marital status, age, ancestry, place of origin, family status or source of income of that person or of any other person.

Section 8 of the Act states that:

8(1) No person shall use or circulate any form of application for employment or publish any advertisement in connection with

employment or prospective employment or make any written or oral inquiry of an applicant:

(a) that expresses either directly or indirectly any limitation, specification or preference indicating discrimination on the basis of race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, physical disability, mental disability, marital status, age, ancestry or place of origin of any person, or

(b) that requires an applicant to furnish any information concerning race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, physical disability, mental disability, marital status, age, ancestry or place of origin.

The Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission provides the following information to assist in defining employment applications:

Physical Disability

It is not permissible to request an applicant to provide any information about the general state of his/her health, appearance, height, weight or to request a general medical history or examination as part of the pre-employment inquiries. Nor can an applicant be required to disclose information about specific occupation-related impediments, defects, or disabilities.

Legislation

Thus, an employer can make any post-employment inquiries that are necessary as long as these are not used in contravention of Section 7. It is best to phrase these inquiries in a manner which reduces the possibility of the information being used, or perceived as being used, to the new employee's disadvantage.

Note: A complaint must be filed with the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission within one year of the alleged incident.

The Commission provides information sheets on topics such as:

- Mental or Physical Disabilities and Discrimination
- Employment: Duty to Accommodate
- Stereotyping, Prejudice and Discrimination

Duty to Accommodate

The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that an employer has a legal duty to take **reasonable** steps, in policies or conditions of work, to accommodate an employee's individual needs. This duty applies to all grounds of discrimination covered under the *Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act*. However, this legal duty does

not apply if the only way to resolve the problem will cause the employer undue hardship.

Undue Hardship

The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that the employer's hardship must be "substantial in nature." For example, a physically disabled employee, as part of his/her job duties, may be required to carry boxes up a flight of stairs. If the business has no elevator, it may be deemed an undue hardship to expect the employer to install an elevator to accommodate the employee. However, it may be possible to have another employee do that task. In exchange, the disabled person could assume one or more of that employee's regular tasks.

Accommodation which is reasonable in one case may not be reasonable in another. Every case should be handled in an individual manner.

Union Agreements

Unions or union contracts cannot prohibit an accommodation that is considered reasonable, even if that accommodation contravenes a collective bargaining agreement.

An employee must consider an accommodation that is deemed

reasonable. Accommodation requires give and take by both the employer and the employee.

In some cases, an employer may not be required to accommodate employees if the discriminatory rule or condition of work can be shown to be **reasonable** and **justifiable** as with a bona fide occupational requirement (BFOR).

Contact the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission at:

Northern Regional Office
8th Floor, Standard Life Centre
10405 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 4R7
Tel: (780) 427-7661
Fax: (780) 427-6013

Southern Regional Office
310, 525 - 11 Avenue SW
Calgary, Alberta T2R 0C9
Tel: (403) 297-6571
Fax: (403) 297-6567

In Alberta, outside of Edmonton or Calgary call toll-free 310-0000

Deaf or hearing impaired
Edmonton: (780) 427-1597 TTY
Calgary: (403) 297-5639 TTY
Elsewhere call 1-800-232-7215 for message relay service.

More information is available through an automated fax request line at (780) 422-8723.

We'd Like to Hear From You

Employment Series for Persons with Disabilities:

Tips for Employers

Date _____

Did you find the information in this publication useful?

Would You Like to Receive a Catalogue of Our Products? Yes

In what way?

Name _____

Organization _____

Address _____

How could we improve it?

Postal Code _____

Phone _____


FAX _____

Do you have any suggestions for other products that would be of value to you?

Please return this form to

Alberta Human Resources and Employment
People, Skills and Workplace Resources
12th Floor, Seventh Street Plaza, South Tower
10030 - 107 Street
Edmonton, AB T5J 3E4
Fax (780) 422-5319





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www.alis.gov.ab.ca/careershop

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