

Employment
Series for
Persons with
Disabilities

tips for

Service Providers



This booklet is for service providers who work with persons with disabilities.

It will enhance your counselling practices by helping you:

- understand how hiring persons with disabilities makes good business sense
- consider your attitudes, beliefs and concerns, and how they may impact your work with persons with disabilities
- use appropriate language to communicate with persons with disabilities
- evaluate how accessible your office and services are
- apply your counselling practices to meet the needs of clients with disabilities
- explore work search topics, including disclosure and accommodation
- develop strategies to support a successful transition to work
- 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
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Edmonton, AB T5L 4X9
Phone (780) 427-5775
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www.alis.gov.ab.ca/careershop
Catalogue Item #437188

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 prestataires de services

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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 clients with disabilities. They provide specific information and strategies related to employment for persons with

disabilities to support the skills and techniques you already use when counselling.

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 this 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.

times may have barriers that affect their employability.

- Persons with disabilities are working towards full participation in the labour market and society.
- Increased flexibility in government and other sources of funding may encourage persons with disabilities to maximize their employment opportunities without jeopardizing their medical and financial benefits.

You play a vital role in connecting your clients to the workplace. Service providers are aware of the strengths and contributions that persons with disabilities offer, as well as their goal of full participation. You help persons with disabilities meet their goals.

The Business Case for Diversity

As a service provider, it is essential to understand your role and how to effectively provide support and services for persons with disabilities. Since you are the bridge between your client and the employer, it is also critical for you to understand the business case for employers to diversify their workforce.

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 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).

A Vision for the Future

The vision is that persons with disabilities participate as full citizens in all aspects of Canadian society. The full participation of persons with disabilities requires the commitment of all segments of society. The realization of the vision will allow persons with disabilities to maximize their independence and enhance their well-being through access to required supports and the elimination of barriers that prevent their full participation.

In Unison: A Canadian Approach To Disability Issues, A Vision Paper (1998).

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:

4. Larger resource pool -

Persons with disabilities offer skills and expertise often overlooked or underutilized in the past. New technologies and increased access to post-secondary education means that persons with disabilities are capable of doing work that many employers would never imagine them doing.

5. Universal access -

Hiring persons with disabilities promotes universal access which, in turn, benefits everyone. Automatic doors installed to assist persons with disabilities also help other employees and customers with heavy

loads or children in tow. Larger print, larger computer monitors and improved lighting reduce eyestrain. Ergonomic chairs and workstations cut down on health complaints, and flexible work arrangements and teleworking also increase the job satisfaction of all employees.

6. Being prepared for the future -

As our population ages, employers will need to know how to value and support differences in mobility, learning, communication and work styles. The expertise and experience of people with disabilities in these areas will be a vital contribution to the workplace.

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)

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.

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)

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 for you to think about before you begin working with persons with disabilities: self-awareness, communication and the accessibility of your services.

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 with us past experiences, education and upbringing 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.

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.

People’s attitudes 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 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, in school, in the community, and from the media - and can be either positive or negative.

Answering the questions in the colour bar on the side will get

- Before You Begin

you thinking about the messages that have remained with you over time.

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

(Educator with a visual impairment)

Concerns

As a service provider working with persons with disabilities, you may have heard some common concerns expressed by employers and members of the public. 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)

As a service provider new to working with persons with disabilities, you may have some of your own concerns.

- How do I do an employability assessment?
- What additional questions do I ask?

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

Learn about the ways other organizations, which specialize in employment services for persons with disabilities, have handled the challenges you face as a service provider.

- Before You Begin

Learn by talking to people, hearing what they go through. For example, [in helping the client plan] you may need to understand the toileting routine of an individual with a spinal cord injury because that person requires an aide to assist several times a day.

(Psychologist working with persons with disabilities)

Don't try to be all and do all. Remember what you are there for and refer to other appropriate service providers once you have identified the [client's] issues.

(Counsellor with a disability-specific organization)

Know your limitations and be open and honest with your clients. Take care of yourself. You have to be healthy yourself and have a wellness plan. You don't want to "buy into" their problems and start providing solutions.

(Service provider in small community)

Take as much training as possible to understand the physical and mental effects of common disabilities.

(Social worker working with clients with disabilities, many with addictions)

Listen to the clients, be patient, believe in their abilities, and support them.

(Employment counsellor working with persons with disabilities)

Don't avoid addressing your feelings. Say, for example, "I'm feeling threatened by your behaviour ... " It's better than letting it go, because that person needs to know how he is perceived or comes across.

(Career counsellor)

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.

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

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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 further things to consider, based on certain types of disabilities.

Mobility

- 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.
- 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.

- Before You Begin

- Use alternate forms of instruction, such as colour coding or pictures.
- Ask them to repeat instructions to you or to demonstrate their understanding of your instructions.

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 client's desire for confidentiality and be clear on what that confidentiality entails.
- If you observe changes in a client's behaviour that causes you concern, talk to them and ask if you can help.

Resources

The Ten Commandments of Communicating with People with Disabilities.

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

Accessibility of Your Services

Accessibility includes more than physical access to facilities and services. It also means awareness of the availability of services within the community. If your organization's services are intended to be available to everyone, it is important for you to be aware of how accessible and user-friendly they are for persons with all types of disabilities.

There may be organizations and/or consultants in your community who can help you assess your facilities and services for their accessibility and make recommendations for improving them.

The following checklist can help you identify areas that you are doing well in, as well as some areas you may need to improve. This checklist may also be useful for clients researching an agency or service.

Rate your office or organization on the accessibility of your services.

Accessibility Checklist	Doing Well	Need to Improve
<p>Accessibility Services are available in alternate formats (e.g. Braille, sign language, large print) Services are accessible in alternate formats (e.g. on an Accessible website, telephone device for deaf)</p>		
<p>Location Location has "safe" and "accessible" entry and elevator Check:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ramp (The best gradient is 1:20; this means for each 20 cms there is 1 cm increase in height. A steeper gradient of 1:12 is acceptable. The ramp should have a non-slip surface, be well lit and have handrails) • Wheelchair accessible parking close to the front entrance • Elevators have low buttons and Braille markings • Adapted washrooms with wide doors and grab bars • Public telephones are accessible (coin slot -1.22m above floor level) and have volume control • Signage is in large font and contrasting colours 		
<p>Timing Scheduled events/meetings provide ample time for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Booking transportation to and from event • Booking interpreters (sign and oral) • Arranging for captioning on videos shown <p>Start and end time is adhered to in order to facilitate transportation that has been scheduled</p> <p>Social events are scheduled to maximize participation and to facilitate preplanning</p>		

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Accessibility Checklist	Doing Well	Need to Improve
<p>Written materials Utilize:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plain language concepts • Large font • Alternate formats (e.g. Braille, cassette tape) 		
<p>Registration form Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request for access needs (e.g. accessibility, alternate formats) • Request for allergy identification • Request for assistive devices preferred • Attendant requirements 		
<p>Seating arrangements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Room large enough for easy wheelchair movement • Table or desk tops are at a suitable height for wheelchair users • Seating location suitable for persons with visual or hearing impairments • No steep slopes 		
<p>Staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are easily identified, available to answer questions, and can guide clients to the correct locations, facilities, and resources available • Assist with computer access and on-line technologies • Familiarize clients with visual impairments to their surroundings 		
<p>Speakers/Trainers/Facilitators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have adhered to suggestions for written materials • Speak using plain language, and avoid jargon and acronyms • Provide frequent opportunity for physical movement to avoid prolonged sitting • Keep presentations within scheduled time frames 		

Checklist adapted and used with the permission of DAWN Ontario (DisAbled Women's Network Ontario) from *Access Checklist* (1993). <http://dawn.thot.net>

Ask Yourself

What do I do to make sure that the first meeting with a client goes well?

What steps do I follow to build a positive relationship with a client?

What do I think might be different about building a relationship with a client with a disability?

What do I need to do to address these differences and be prepared to work with a client with a disability?

The following sections provide important information on building strong client relationships, helping them to develop and implement a work search plan, and assisting in the transition to a work environment.

Building a Relationship

How you build your relationship with a client with a disability is very similar to that of working with any other client. However, your attitudes and beliefs will play a key role in your interactions.

The following basic steps are designed to help you assist persons with disabilities in developing an action plan.

Getting to Know Your Client

Getting to know your client and putting them at ease begins the moment they arrive at your office. Tips include:

- arrange your office or interview room so a wheelchair can fit in; or select an alternate space if the office

is not large enough

- organize the space so there is nothing your client could trip on
- get out large print materials or any visuals you might use
- have a paper and pen ready in case you want to draw diagrams or write notes for your client to take away
- be aware that your client may have to pre-arrange transportation and may have no control over arrival or departure times.

Meeting Your Client

Here are some tips when meeting a client for the first time.

- If their disability is visible, don't jump to conclusions about what they can or cannot do. Focus on the person and withhold judgement.
- Don't hesitate to shake hands and introduce yourself. Let the other person determine the strength and duration of the handshake.
- Use the same eye contact you would with other clients.
- If your client needs assistance getting to your office, offer to help. If you are not sure how, don't be afraid to ask.

- Getting Down to Work

Focus on the person not the disability.

Getting Started

Generally, the more background information you start with, the better you will be able to shape your discussion. As a service provider, there will be times when you may know nothing about your client and only find out about their disability in the course of your discussion. Or, you may know that your client has identified their disability on an intake form, or that they have an extensive file with medical reports and various assessments.

In the course of your initial interview, you may want to:

- ask a few questions to get a sense of your client's background
- mention confidentiality. Explain that you will ask them to sign a release form if you need more information from other sources
- explain why you are asking the questions you are. Your openness will encourage openness on the part of your client

- admit if you do not know about their particular disability or a medical term.

Most clients are comfortable explaining their disability and accommodation needs, particularly if they know this will be helpful in finding work. Additional information to help you discuss disclosure and accommodation with your clients is included in this booklet.

Make it as easy as possible for the person with the disability to say what needs to be said - open the door.

(Service provider with a disability)

Remember the Whole Person

Every aspect of their life impacts their employability.

This statement is true for all job seekers. For individuals with disabilities, there are often heightened impacts. Transportation, housing, support systems and finances are often more complex and challenging.

Even if you have your client's complete file, you will want to get a sense of the person beyond what a file will tell you. Ask the same questions you would ask other clients, such as what brings them to your office and questions about their background, education and work experience.

Other questions could include the following.

- Have there been times when you have had a successful experience in a workplace? What worked well for you?
- Have you had a problem in some areas?
- What specific things are preventing you from getting employment?
- How does your disability affect you in a working environment? What difficulties does it pose?
- Are there any restrictions on the work you can do? Or on how much you can work?
- Do you need any adaptations or worksite accommodations?
- Do you have any health issues that need to be addressed or that I should know about?

- Getting Down to Work

- Be clear about what you can and cannot do in regard to obtaining work for your client.
- Indicate what sort of commitment and participation you expect from the client.
- Recognize your own limitations. If you feel unsure or uncomfortable, ask someone else in your office with more experience or expertise to help you.
- Know your community resources. This will help you make appropriate referrals.

**When in doubt, refer.
Don't try to be everything
to everyone.**

If there are areas that are beyond your role, refer your client to an appropriate service.

Assessing Client Readiness

Is your client ready for training or employment? This may depend on whether your client has previous work experience, is new to the labour market, or has experience but is newly disabled. If you determine that they are not ready to develop an action plan leading to training or employment, or are not appropriate for your services, you may need to refer the client back to the referring agency or professional or make a referral elsewhere in the community.

As a service provider you may have to ask questions which you are not comfortable asking. These could be specific questions such as:

- Is there anything in particular that you need help with?
- Do you have any special toileting needs?
- Do you have a medication regime that you need to follow?
- What support systems do you have?

Questions like this shouldn't be a problem if you have developed a good rapport with your client and let them know why you are asking.

You will also need to ask your client what they need to have in place in order to take training, to look for or go to work on a regular basis. These could include some or all of the following topics.

- **Supports** - What people do they have to encourage them? Do family members support their plan to work? Identify friends or support group members who will listen to them and provide encouragement. Are there other community supports they can access?
- **Transportation** - Have they checked out transportation options, special arrangements and costs? Some of these options include low floor buses, car pooling, transportation services for the disabled, and vehicle modification.

Ask Yourself

How do I work with clients who have unique experiences or gaps in their work history that may impact the hiring process?

How do I assess the stability and readiness of clients in order for them to make successful career action plans?

What advice do I give them?

- **Health** - Do they have any health concerns that need to be dealt with before they enter the workforce? Are they stable on any medication they take? Do they have the stamina required for full-time or part-time work? Do they have disability-related health issues to deal with on an ongoing basis? Does their health care professional think they are able to work?
 - **Child Care** - Do they have adequate arrangements in place? Do they have a back-up plan if the caregiver or child is sick?
 - **Assistive Technology** - Do they have the technology or assistive devices they need for everyday living, as well as for learning and work? These could include voice-activated computers, hands-free telephones, or telephone devices for the deaf. If not, would they be able to effectively communicate what they need?
 - **Accommodation** - Are they aware of any accommodation they may require in a workplace or training situation? Can they offer suggestions to meet their needs, such as ramps, lighting, visual emergency alarms, or automatic doors?
 - **Funding/Financial Support** - Do they know what sources of funding are available to them or a potential employer? How will your client's current financial support be affected if they start working?
 - **Residency and Telephone** - Are they in a stable living situation where they have access to a telephone? Can employers leave messages for them?
 - **Communication Strategy** - What strategies have they developed that enhance their ability to communicate with others? Using e-mail, lip reading, or working with individuals or in small groups may work well for them.
- Respecting a person's right to privacy is of vital importance. Addressing personal issues should be done with tact and with a clear explanation of why the information is required.

- Getting Down to Work

I was a little insulted when my employment counsellor asked me if I had stable accommodation and access to a telephone. I may be unemployed but I've been independent and supporting myself for a long time.

(Job seeker with a mobility disability)

Addressing Feelings

As with any clients, you will encounter a range of attitudes and emotions. A client's attitude may appear to be a problem but, once you get to know them, you may find that it stems from past failures, low self-esteem or frustration.

Persons who are recently disabled and adjusting to their new situations may need to work through feelings of loss, anger or frustration before they are ready to look for work. They may require professional help dealing with their feelings of loss or grief, and may need to be referred to another type of service or agency at this time.

Fears faced by clients with disabilities are not unlike those faced by anyone who may have been out of the workforce for a period of time or who may have had negative employment experiences. These include:

- fear of change
- fear of failure
- fear of not being able to do what is expected or not being able to do it at the expected speed
- fear that past mistakes or negative past experiences will be repeated
- fear of not getting a job or of losing one because of disability-related health issues
- fear of not being able to get to work on time because of how long it takes to get ready or having to depend on specialized transportation services
- fear of being a "token" person with a disability and not being valued based upon skills
- fear of not having support on the job
- fear of being left out or ostracized at work

- fear that any employment earnings may jeopardize medical benefits and/or income support from government or other sources.

You will want to ask your client about any concerns or fears they may have in obtaining or keeping work. Once these fears are identified, the two of you can discuss strategies for effectively dealing with them.

Clients may be risking a lot to try new things. They may not admit it, but choosing to compete again, especially when they may have had painful failures, could be very frightening. Cooperative planning and clear communication of goals and means are essential.

(Social worker)

Ask Yourself

How have my client's disclosed their disabilities in the past? What were the results?

What can I learn from these experiences and the experiences of others to help my clients decide what is best for them?

How might these experiences apply to the topic of disclosure?

How much does an employer need to know to hire and/or to understand accommodation needs?

Disclosure

Disclosure of a disability may be the biggest question for your client in their work search process. They must think about disclosure both to you, as service provider, and to employers. Disclosure to a service provider may occur during the initial contact or later during the interview process. Disclosure to employers may occur at the initial contact or application stage, the interview stage, or at the time of the offer.

At some point the question of disclosure will likely come up, particularly if the disability is a visible one. Clients with disabilities that are invisible have the option of not disclosing at all, but must still consider what is the best choice for them.

Before discussing disclosure with a client, here are a few things you should know.

1. Based on interviews with service providers, employers and job seekers, all indicated that disclosure:

- is a very personal choice
- is an important and complex decision

- depends on the individual and the situation. What is right for one person may not be right for another, and what works for one employer may not be successful for another.
2. Disclosure should be left up to the client. This could be different when dealing with a placement agency that works specifically with persons with disabilities, though your client will still have some say in how much is disclosed.

It depends entirely upon the individual. I ask 'how do you want to approach this?' They need to know that if I am approaching an employer on their behalf, the employer will know they have a disability and want to know more.

(Community service provider)

- Getting Down to Work

To Disclose or Not To Disclose

Before helping your client decide if, when and how to disclose their disability, have your client think about and discuss the following questions.

- Is your disability visible?
- How do most people react when they learn about your disability? How do you deal with their reactions?
- When do you feel most comfortable and confident disclosing your disability?
- Are there any safety reasons (personal or organizational) that would impact your decision to disclose?
- How will your employer react to your disclosure? Will they think you are dishonest? Can you deal with their reaction?
- What misconceptions might the employer have about your disability?
- If you disclose, will you be able to reassure your employer that your disability will not affect your ability to do the work?
- Do you need accommodations for your interview? Or if you get the job?

- What do you know about this employer's policies and experiences regarding people with disabilities?

(Adapted from Career and Placement Services Tips, University of Alberta.)

Once your client has reached a decision, ask yourself one last question. Will disclosing their disability at this time and in this way help them reach their goal of getting work?

Not to talk about the disability may be fooling everybody - yourself and the employer.

(Psychologist working with persons with disabilities)

When and How Much To Disclose

There are a number of decisions to make when assisting your client with the disclosure issue. Disclosure to employers may occur as early as the initial contact or application, once employment commences, or at any time in between - and there are pros and cons for each step. There is no right answer. It is a very personal choice that your client must be comfortable with.

I disclose that I am blind on an application. There is no sense hiding it and surprising them at the interview. I also explain that I use voice-based software and have what I need to do the job. I don't want to waste an employer's time or my time, if they are not interested in hiring someone who is blind.

(Job seeker who is blind)

I don't say I have a disability on my résumé. I don't trust people's attitudes enough to tell them in advance. At the interview I can prove that blindness is not the issue and show my credibility.

(Educator with a visual impairment)

Disclosure Options

You may wish to review this chart with your client to help them evaluate their options and plan their disclosure strategies.

(Adapted from *Career and Placement Services Tips*, University of Alberta)

Options	Advantages
Third party referral	<p>A recommendation from someone the employer knows can increase the chances of being invited for an interview</p> <p>Employer is immediately aware of your situation</p>
Written application (résumé, cover letter, or application form)	<p>The employer may appreciate your willingness to be forthcoming and open</p> <p>The employer may be actively recruiting for a diverse work force</p>
When the interview is scheduled	<p>Employer has already expressed an interest in interviewing you</p> <p>Employer can prepare for interview (accommodations)</p> <p>A better opportunity to explain your situation</p>
After scheduling the interview	Same as above
At moment of meeting	Reduces risk of the employer forming preconceived opinions about your abilities
During the interview	Provides an opportunity for you to reassure the employer and answer their questions
After receiving an offer	If your disability will not adversely affect your ability to do the job, the employer cannot withdraw the offer

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Disadvantages	Recommendation
<p>Little or no control over what is said about you</p> <p>The information could be used to screen you out of the interview process</p>	<p>Use this option if the person making the recommendation knows you well and is supportive of your goals</p> <p>Follow up with a phone call to the employer to answer any questions they may have</p>
<p>Does not allow you to address questions the employer may have</p> <p>Limited space to explain your abilities, accommodations</p> <p>Could be used to screen you out</p>	<p>Use this approach if your disability might be an advantage in terms of being hired (the employer has an employment equity program)</p> <p>Focus on your skills and abilities</p>
<p>Employer may react negatively, feel you've been dishonest</p> <p>Employer may draw inappropriate conclusions and not give you serious consideration</p>	<p>If you require accommodations for your interview, you might want to disclose at this point</p> <p>If the interviewer is not the one scheduling the interviews, you may want to call back and disclose to him/her</p>
<p>Same as above</p>	<p>Same as above, plus it allows you time to prepare what you want to say and how to say it</p>
<p>Employer may feel unprepared for the interview or react negatively</p> <p>Interview setting might not be appropriate</p>	<p>If your disability is not visible, and you are self-confident and able to keep the employer's attention focused on your skills and abilities, you might want to use this method</p>
<p>Same as above</p>	<p>If your disability is not visible, you can disclose at this point and, focusing on your abilities, explain any accommodations you will require</p>
<p>The employer's reaction could be very negative</p>	<p>This option could be used if your disability is not visible, will not affect your ability to do the work and you will not require accommodations. If you are in this situation, you may also choose not to disclose at all</p>

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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*.

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

Remember that the costs of accommodation are pretty minimal. Often there are simple solutions.

(Employee with a mobility impairment)

Some of the types of accommodations include:

- making workplace facilities accessible
- 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.

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 people 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. Here are some examples.

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.

Ask Yourself

What process do I usually follow in helping a client to develop a plan?

How do I think that process would be different for a client with a disability?

What exercises or instruments do I like to use?

How do I think they might apply to clients with disabilities?

- As increased demands are placed on productivity and effectiveness, new technologies are introduced daily. Working at home or in satellite offices is becoming commonplace.
- 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.

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)

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)

Developing a Plan with your Client

As a service provider who helps clients develop action plans, you probably have a tried and true model or process you use. This being said, there are three issues you should consider when working with persons with disabilities.

1. Whose plan is it?

It is important to keep in mind when outlining the roles of client and service provider that planning is a collaborative process. The client may want you to decide what to do, how to do it, and then carry out the plan. Some service providers may take over and plan for the client, perhaps consciously or unconsciously, feeling that the client is unable to do so. This tendency may be based on stereotypes of people with disabilities or a lack of experience with independent individuals who are successful in a competitive labour market. While clients may need help with transportation or getting dressed, it does not mean that they need to be taken care of in every aspect of their lives.

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It is important for the client to take ownership of the plan.

Clients won't commit to doing something if it is not their plan. You can make suggestions, talk about the next steps, but you have to remember whose plan it is.

(Career counsellor)

2. Promoting independence

Being successful at employment, self-employment or training requires a certain degree of independence.

One service provider identified the benefits of independence as: "greater choices, greater freedom, no social worker to report to, no more eviction notices, feeling better about yourself, contributing to the community, a positive role model to their children, increased self esteem, more money, and less dependency on others."

Here are some ways you can promote independence for your clients.

- Communicate the expectation of responsibility. You want your clients to do things on their own.

- Expect your clients to follow through on checking out resources, doing research. Give homework assignments.
- Encourage your clients to drop off some of their own résumés to gain experience, and to call businesses and do follow-up calls with potential employers.
- Encourage clients to face situations, not hide. Support them in their decisions and show you have faith in their abilities.
- Let your clients know it's okay if they don't agree with you. Ultimately it's their decision that matters. Your job is to let them know the options and consequences.
- Encourage clients to be independent through employment, training, activity, support, insight, acceptance, and living life.

Provide support for each client based on interests and needs. Have clients do as much as they are capable of doing and we will support the rest.

(Community service provider)

3. Referring Clients

Depending on your role as a service provider, you may be involved in:

- developing part of the plan with your client or helping them to identify a goal
- referring your client to an agency that provides non-employment related services if your client requires additional supports outside the mandate of your agency. It is important for you to know the local agencies, services and educational institutions that can provide the specific training and/or job placement a client may require
- encouraging clients to participate in "mainstream" services such as career planning and job search workshops, a job finding club or self-employment program, where appropriate.

When referring clients, encourage them to research the program or service the same way they would an occupation. Help your clients understand that there may be several agencies or organizations in their community that provide similar services and that one may be a better match for them than another. When researching an agency, suggest they ask about or observe:

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10. Keep sessions brief, but frequent and sequentially related. Provide homework for your client.
11. Work frequently with your client and over a period of time. Group experience can be particularly helpful with clients with developmental disabilities as opportunities to practice verbal expression, explore occupational interests and discuss personal problems and coping techniques.
12. Help your client identify interests, abilities and needs and how they relate to work environments.
13. Expose your clients to job and workplace information and other life roles by showing pictures and slides, by visiting businesses and industries.
14. Adapt or modify material necessary to use with developmentally disabled clients. Be creative and don't be afraid to experiment.
15. Use a range of resources.

Taken from *What Works*. See *Appendix A: Resources* at the back of this booklet.

The Career Development Process

The typical career development process consists of steps such as getting to know yourself, exploring possibilities, setting goals, and taking action. The following may be of use when working with clients with disabilities.

Developing a Personal Profile

Identifying skills and strengths is no different than for clients without disabilities. The process used to identify strengths, skills and interests may have to be in a written or oral format depending on your client's disability.

Topics to explore include:

- past experience with employment or volunteer work
- how decisions were made in the past
- how life experience and self-concept have influenced career choices

- how lifestyle options have been approached
- environmental factors that affect the person and their choices
- other challenges that might affect learning and career development.

The only real difference may be in addressing your client's special needs and experiences. Focus on abilities and skills, and the client's solutions for meeting the challenges presented by the disability. Your clients with disabilities will have developed skills derived from meeting daily challenges. These skills include:

- creative problem solving
- flexibility
- recovering from a mistake or difficult or awkward situation
- sense of humour/positive attitude
- determination.

Long-Term Goals

Clients often have specific career goals in mind. Discuss these goals and help them to research the education and skills required, where the education is available and what it would cost, and the labour market demand for that occupation.

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things they cannot do anymore. A referral to a program that provides individualized support may be helpful.

Explore Options

Encourage your clients to explore options. The days when people with disabilities were only considered suitable for certain types of jobs or training are long gone. The criteria used to evaluate employment generally in our society, such as income level, resulting opportunities, security, and quality of working life can be used to evaluate the quality of employment of persons with disabilities.

Alternative forms of employment and alternative approaches to training, such as distance education and on-line courses, may be of interest to your clients. Explain the options clearly to them and help them to review the pros and cons of each, based on their own situations and needs. Other programs or services to consider include:

- on-the-job training
- apprenticeships
- self-employment program or entrepreneurial workshops to

help develop business plans and do research

- supported employment through agencies that provide job development and ongoing support at work. These agencies match individuals with job coaches to help orient them to the work environment
- other work search programs such as job finding clubs.

Other alternatives that clients may want to try when exploring work options include job shadowing, volunteer work, or a mentoring relationship. There may also be funding sources available you can refer your clients to. These could cover such things as adaptive technology, assistive services, or education and workplace supports.

Financial Assistance

Financial assistance for persons with disabilities and employers may be available from the federal and provincial governments.

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

Achievable Steps

As a service provider, your goal is to set clients up for success. This is particularly important for clients with disabilities as they may have low self-esteem or have experienced setbacks and frustration in the past.

Identifying manageable and achievable steps towards a goal helps to build a client's confidence. Recovery will be easier if only one step proves to be a roadblock rather than the whole plan.

We look at their end goal and talk about what we have to do. It's important to identify small increments - achievable goals. They need to feel success. They may have experienced quite a bit of failure and frustration in the past. Disappointment isn't so shattering if they take small steps.

(Community service provider)

If your role as a service provider includes ongoing client support, you can have them report on accomplishments or follow-up to see how they are doing.

Ask Yourself

How do I encourage my clients to explore and develop job opportunities?

How do I think my response to the first question would differ if I was working with a client with a disability?

What strategies do I currently suggest to my clients to research companies?

Which of these strategies would work in identifying receptive companies?

Some clients need to take small steps. For example, one client is taking a college course and learning to take the city bus in her wheelchair.

(Career counsellor)

Resources

What Works: Career Building Strategies for Special Needs Groups

Finding Out: How to Get the Information You Need to Make the Choices You Want

Multiple Choices: Planning Your Career for the 21st Century

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

Finding or Creating Opportunities

All job seekers are interested in finding the right job. The right job or opportunity involves a fit or a match between:

- client skills and abilities and position requirements
- client style and values and organizational culture.

Finding Receptive Companies

There is a greater likelihood of success in helping your clients to find work and fitting in when a company is receptive to hiring individuals with disabilities.

Receptive companies may:

- have a proven track record of supporting a diverse work environment
- have compliance requirements, such as employment equity (See *Appendix C: Legislation*)
- have hired someone you know who has a disability.

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Here are some ways you can help your clients go about finding receptive companies.

- **Networking** - This is critical in all work searches. To find companies that currently employ individuals with disabilities your clients will need to talk with other individuals, with or without disabilities, people who work in related and non-related fields, as well as chambers of commerce and professional associations.
- **Contact agencies that help persons with disabilities** - Agencies whose primary role is to provide services for individuals with disabilities will be helpful in identifying opportunities.
- **Research company publications** - Many companies that are committed to building a diverse workplace make reference to their commitment and policies in company and stockholder publications. Public libraries are an excellent source of this information. See *Appendix A: Resources* for websites to help your clients in their research.

- **Find out about federally regulated companies** - Contact your local Canada-Alberta Service Centre for a list of federally regulated employers and federal contractors. See *Appendix C: Legislation* for information about employment equity.
- **Review articles, advertisements and job postings** - Receptive companies often identify themselves as "equal opportunity employers." Reviewing newspapers, magazines, job postings and websites for employers displaying this information is a good way to target specific companies for further research, even if they are not currently advertising the work your clients are looking for.

In the case of federally regulated companies, the federal government and some municipal governments, it pays to have clients identify themselves as having a disability. These organizations are making an effort to increase the representation of designated group members among their employees.

- **Arrange information gathering interviews** - An information gathering interview gives your client a chance to learn more about a company, match their skills with the organization's needs, and expand their network.

Resources

Finding Out: How to Get the Information You Need to Make The Choices You Want

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

Applications, Cover Letters and Résumés

The purpose of an application, cover letter and résumé is to get employers interested enough to meet your client. The process is the same for people with disabilities as it is for other job seekers. However, some unique factors concerning your client's disability should be considered.

Ask Yourself

What advice and guidance do I provide my clients in regard to applications, cover letters, and résumés?

What do I think might be different when working with someone with a disability?

What factors do I take into consideration when assisting clients in preparing for an interview?

Are these factors any different for individuals with disabilities?

How important is self-confidence and self-esteem in preparing for and participating in a successful interview? How do I help clients in this area?

When preparing cover letters, résumés and applications, here are some things your clients should consider.

- Focus on strengths and abilities. Choose a résumé format that best allows them to portray their strengths and shifts the focus from any gaps in their employment history.
- Highlight transferable skills gained through volunteer positions and other experience.
- Identify how they plan on disclosing their disability. See the section on Disclosure for more information.

- Describe how their computer and other technical skills enable them to do the work they are applying for.
- Emphasize personal skills that relate to their work search.

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. So I speak to it as a strength, a component of my understanding and my skills developed through professional and personal experience.

(Service provider and employee with a visual impairment)

Resources

Positive Works II

Job Seeker's Handbook: An Introductory Guide to Finding Work

Job Search: The Product is You - Self Marketing Strategies and Tools

Self-Employment: Is it for me?

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

Preparing for Interviews

To be successful in their interview, your clients must anticipate questions. Help them prepare for typical "work-related" questions as well as those that go beyond work, whether they are asked or implied. These may include questions about:

- their disability
- the impact their disability has on work abilities and work requirements

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- accommodations - what they require and how much it may cost
- disclosure - they should be prepared with a well thought out, concise response that will give them the confidence to be able to handle a difficult question in the best possible fashion.
- Do you know of other persons with disabilities doing similar jobs and how they adapted?
- What transportation arrangements do you have? Are they reliable?
- How can you explain any gaps in your employment history?

Strategies for Success

The following strategies can help your clients get ready for the interview. Have them practice their responses to direct questions.

- What accommodations will you need to help you in this position?
- How can you perform all the functions of work with your disability?
- What concern might an employer have about hiring you? What will you do to overcome these fears?
- Do you know about devices that can assist you in doing your job in a way that meets your employer's expectations?
- What has worked well in the past?

Positive positioning or reframing -

Rather than identifying what is wrong, shift a negative to a positive by repositioning. Focus on what your clients can do. For example, you would want to frame gaps in their employment history in a positive way, "I took some time after my accident to reassess and develop the skills and abilities that would allow me to continue to be successful in the workplace."

Being an individual who has successfully managed these challenges provides me with a different perspective on life. I bring maturity, and appreciate things that other people take for granted. It builds character and substance and makes me stronger.

(Employee with a mobility disability)

Accommodation requirements -

Have your clients prepared to discuss any accommodation requirements and identify how things can work. Give specific examples to make it easier for the employer to understand. Research the actual costs and funding available.

I would advise a person with a disability to lay all the cards on the table but it isn't necessary to go into details. Employers are most interested in what an employee CAN do.

(Employer of a person with a cognitive disability)

Provide examples -

A picture is worth a thousand words, and so are examples. It is much more effective for your clients to convince a skeptical interviewer if they give examples and clear descriptions of how they have successfully performed similar work functions in the past.

Focus on skills and abilities -

Although the interviewer will take the lead in directing the interview, have your clients prepared to redirect the discussion back to their skills and abilities related to the position.

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- Focus on positive experiences they or others have had finding work.
- Refer to what their references have said.
- Provide reminders of positive comments from others.
- Focus on their abilities and successes in all areas of their life.
- Have them practice being interviewed and anticipating questions.
- Be prepared to confidently discuss their skills, abilities and disabilities, and positively address any gaps in their employment history.

Employers want to know about your skills and attitude. They want to know that you are a go-getter.

(Employee with a mobility impairment)

Keep Up The Good Work

In an article in *Abilities Magazine*, two out of three individuals reported they had stopped looking for work even though they said they still wanted a job, and only 14% felt that they had a reasonable chance of finding work.

Work searches take longer for individuals with disabilities than others, largely due to factors beyond their own control. As a service provider, there is a greater need for you to assist your client in keeping motivated and keeping up the search. Here are some tips your client can use.

- Redefine success by looking at the small victories along the way, such as gaining new contacts, getting interview practice, and learning more about a company.
- Celebrate success through checklists and lists of new contacts. Reframe rejections as positives.
- Keep focused on the plan and revise as necessary. Reflect on how much has been accomplished not how much there is to do.
- Network with other work seekers and with those who have been successful.

Every job interview, every workplace visit is a learning process and will help you be successful.

(Community service provider)

During my last job search, I received over 200 rejection letters. This seemed really depressing to me. Now I look at it as 200 people that now know me.

(Job seeker with a mobility disability)

Other Employment Options

Sometimes work opportunities present themselves in a variety of ways. By being open and willing to consider work alternatives, your clients will be able to choose an employment route that allows them to make their best contribution and meet the needs of their disability.

In order to find the right situation you may want to help them look at the flexibility that comes with the following opportunities.

- part-time employment
- multi-tracking
- job-sharing or work-sharing
- talent pools
- contract employment
- consulting
- self-employment
- entrepreneurship
- volunteering.

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Making the Transition to Work

Many employed and self-employed persons with disabilities have made successful transitions into the workforce because of one or more of the following factors.

- Their work was a good match to their abilities and vocational interests.
- Their disability was an asset in discharging some aspect of their work responsibilities.
- Their résumés reflected relevant “life experience.”
- They had successful role models.
- They had the opportunity for low-risk work practice prior to employment.
- They received training in identifying and addressing the attitudes and stereotypes of others.
- The employee, and their employers, had access to appropriate follow-up support for 6 to 12 months after placement.

From *Achieving Success: Employment Services for Persons with Disabilities*. See Appendix A: Resources at the back of this booklet.

You may want to review how you currently incorporate these factors into your services, particularly when working with individuals with disabilities.

Helping Your Client Succeed At Work

The following strategies may help your client to be successful in their new work.

Find a buddy - Encourage your client, early in their employment, to find a co-worker, a “friendly face” who will provide support and show them the ropes. This “buddy” becomes the first ally they have and can, in turn, lead to the development of other allies at work. This strategy has been identified as one of the most critical methods to build success. This kind of buddy or ally is different from a more formal buddy relationship arranged by a supervisor.

Find one person to connect with off the bat. Ask that person to help you get through the hoops of starting out. Be a little honest with them.

(Employee with a mobility disability)

Network - Networking was a large part of your client’s work search. Maintaining this network will be helpful in remaining connected, and as a safety net for future work searches.

Maintain balance - Your client will likely be very happy to have found a position and be very committed to doing a good job. Balance is important. Over-commitment and focus on the new job may adversely impact their attention to health and wellness, support systems and leisure activities. As a person with disabilities, there may be greater risks if ongoing health maintenance issues require regular attention. It may be a challenge to maintain their lifestyle balance, but it is crucial to their health and future success at work.

People have been incredible, very supportive. They ask if I need anything and will accommodate me. I work regular hours but have to be careful not to get too overtired or too stressed. I do what I can and I am allowed to go home early if I need to.

(Employee with a degenerative illness)

Conclusion

As a service provider helping persons with disabilities look for full-time or part-time work, or explore the opportunities available through volunteering or self-employment, you are aware of the valuable contribution these individuals can make to any organization.

Today, more businesses are also becoming aware of this fact. Your clients have repeatedly shown the skills and determination needed to overcome challenges and succeed in life - making them exactly the type of hard-working and dedicated employees that businesses are looking to integrate into their workforces.

You play a vital role in making a successful connection between the job seeker with a disability and the workplace. This booklet was written to answer many of your concerns or questions and support your efforts in helping persons with disabilities meet their employment goals.

Resources

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, including those who face severe disadvantages to securing employment. These kinds of employment activities would include:

- encouraging employers to hire persons with disabilities
- helping persons with disabilities start their own businesses
- providing work experiences leading to ongoing employment
- developing abilities and skills which help persons with disabilities find employment
- contributing to the integration of persons with disabilities into the workforce by offering specially adapted services for their particular needs
- improving access to employment, and employment services with specifically tailored assistance.

General information and information for sponsors can be found on the Internet at: www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/bcph-odi Information can also be obtained from your local Human Resources Centre of Canada (HRCC) or Canada-Alberta Service Centre (CASC).

Youth Employment Strategy
This Government of Canada strategy includes additional

support for youth (15 to 30 years of age) facing multiple barriers to employment. For more information, contact the Youth Info Line at 1-800-935-5555 or browse the Youth Resource Network at www.youth.gc.ca

Provincial

Alberta Human Resources and Employment

Assistance is available throughout the province for Albertans making career, education and work search plans. Alberta Human Resources and Employment also provides disability related employment supports that will help overcome any barriers caused by a disability.

If employees require disability related supports, including workplace modifications, they should contact the closest Career Development Centre or Canada-Alberta Service Centre to discuss the required supports. A career consultant will then contact the employer to discuss the employee's needs.

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

Resources

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.

Adolescent Employment Readiness Project

<http://griffin.multimedia.edu/~aerp>

Information on résumés, interview protocol, disclosure, health maintenance, employment aids and human rights written in an informal style.

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.

Canada-Alberta Job Order Bank Services (JOBS)

www.alis.gov.ab.ca/employment/LookingForWork/

Internet access to assist employers find workers in Alberta and help job seekers look for work opportunities.

Canadian Abilities Foundation

www.enablelink.org

Includes a directory of Canadian and international diversity links and diversity organizations; *Abilities* magazine.

The Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work

www.ccrw.org

CCRW offers workshops on developing partnerships with employers, addressing the issues of hiring people with disabilities and the return to work process for injured workers.

Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work — Job Accommodation Services. Provides information on job accommodations to employers, job seekers and service providers. Toll-free number 1-866-227-9527

Career Circuit

www.thecircuit.org

Career Circuit is an Internet-based network of youth service agencies across Canada; a database of career resources and free CD-ROM of selected resources; and free, practical training material to support youth service.

Career Digest

www.ab.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/common/careerdigest_E.shtml

A series of articles on career planning, work and work maintenance.

Counsellor Resource Centre

www.cccanada.org.ca

A forum for career development and employment counselling specialists throughout Canada to share best practices and exchange information.

DAWN Canada

www.dawncanada.net

The DisAbled Women's Network of Canada provides resources and information for women with disabilities. Phone 204-726-1406.

Resources

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.

Publications

A Way with Words: Guidelines and appropriate terminology for the portrayal of persons with disabilities. Human Resources Development Canada, Office for Disability Issues (1998).

Achieving Success: Employment Services for Persons with Disabilities. Human Resources Development Canada, British Columbia/Yukon Region (1998).

Beyond Traditional Job Development: The Art of Creating Opportunity. Bissonnette, Denise. Milt Wright and Associates, Inc., Chatworth, CA (1994).

Bridging the Gap: Government of Canada Programs and Services of Interest to Canadians with Disabilities. Human Resources Development Canada, Office for Disability Issues (1998).

CaPS Tips on... for People with Disabilities (series). University of Alberta Career and Placement Services (2000).

Employment Equity Career Counselling Study Guide. Government of Canada. Public Service Commission, Employment

Equity Career Counselling Office, Life-Role Development Group and Canadian Career Development Foundation (1999).

*Finding Out: How to Get the Information You Need to Make The Choices You Want.** Alberta Human Resources and Employment (1999).

In Unison: A Canadian Approach to Disability Issues, A Vision Paper. Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Social Services (1998). http://socialunion.gc.ca/pwd/unison/unison_e.html

*Job Search: The Product is You - Self Marketing Strategies and Tools.** Alberta Human Resources and Employment (1998).

Job Search Handbook for Persons with Disabilities. Ryan, Daniel J. JIST Publishing, Indianapolis, IN (2000).

*Job Seeker's Handbook: An Introductory Guide to Finding Work.** Alberta Human Resources and Employment (1998).

Job Strategies for People with Disabilities. Witt, Melanie. Peterson's Guides, Princeton, NJ (1992).

Resources

Videos

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

Job Interviewing for People with Disabilities

Cambridge Educational (1999).

Job Search Tactics for People with Disabilities

Cambridge Educational (1999).

Résumés and Applications for People with Disabilities

Cambridge Educational (1999).

The Ten Commandments of Communicating with People with Disabilities

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

Overview of Disabilities

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

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.

Two programs introduced by the Government of Canada ensure equal access to employment opportunities for all Canadians by directly obligating and assisting employers to implement employment equity:

- 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.hrhc-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

Legislation

Pre- and Post -Employment Inquiries

A distinction is drawn between pre- and post-employment inquiries in the *Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act*. Section 8 is concerned with the nature of pre-employment inquiries. 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

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.

Employment Standards

Alberta's Employment Standards Code describes the minimum rights and obligations of employers and employees. This includes rights and obligations related to payment of wages, hours of work and overtime pay, vacations and vacation pay, general holidays and general holiday pay, termination of employment and maternity and adoption leave.

Section 67 of the Employment Standards Code gives the Director of Employment Standards the authority to issue a permit to an employer of an individual with a mental handicap to pay that individual a wage that is less than the minimum wage. The Director must be satisfied that the proposed employment arrangement is satisfactory to both the prospective employer and the employee. This arrangement provides persons with a mental handicap an opportunity, that may not otherwise be available, to enter and become a productive member of the workforce.

A permit is not required where a mentally handicapped person:

- participates in a job placement through an evaluation and training centre
- whose work-related activities are a part of a day program or an assessment and work training program
- is a participant in a rehabilitation or therapeutic program.

These activities are not considered to be work as contemplated by the Employment Standards Code, therefore the provisions of the Code do not apply.

When a permit is required, the amount of the wage must be agreed to by the individual or parent or guardian, the employer, and the agency if one is involved.

For more information refer to the Alberta Human Resources and Employment website at www.gov.ab.ca/hre or call the province-wide Employment Standards information line at (780) 427-3731 (in Edmonton) or toll-free 310-0000 (in Alberta).

Deaf or hearing impaired call TDD/TDY 427-9999 in Edmonton. Elsewhere call 1-800-232-7215 for message relay service.

We'd Like to Hear From You

Employment Series for Persons with Disabilities:

Tips for Service Providers

Date _____

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Address _____

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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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Fax (780) 422-5319
E-mail info@alis.gov.ab.ca

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www.alis.gov.ab.ca/careershop

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