



Skills development barriers for persons with disabilities and the promising practices to address them

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Link to Full Report

<https://www.crwdp.ca/en/crwdp-reports#2023>

Who we are

The Institute for Work & Health is a not-for-profit research organization based in Toronto, Canada

We conduct and share research to protect and improve the health of working people. Our research is carried out in two broad domains:

1. preventing work-related injury and illness through studies of workplace programs and practices, prevention policies and the health of workers at a population level, and
2. improving the health and recovery of injured workers through research on treatment, return to work, disability prevention and management, and compensation policies

Our research is valued by policy-makers, workers and workplaces, clinicians, and occupational health, safety and disability management professionals

Project background

- Currently there is little to no information on the foundational and transferable skill levels of persons with disabilities (PWDs)
- Study set out to address the gap in knowledge through a literature review and key informant interviews
- Four research questions at the centre of the study:
 1. What do we know about the foundational and transferable skill levels and employment outcomes?
 2. What are the main barriers faced by PWDs to increasing their skill levels and further integrating into the labour market?
 3. What are some proven or promising practices or avenues to address these barriers?
 4. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the skill development and labour market barriers for PWDs?



Literature review

- Rapid review methodology to address study research questions 1-3
- Sources—PsycINFO, ABI Inform, Scopus, and an internet grey literature search
- Created a resource of 63 articles catalogued by country, study type, type of disability, research question(s) addressed in addition to the standard citation information
- Identified 12 surveys that assess the skill levels and employment outcomes of PWDs
- Classified surveys by name of survey, year, country, whether has a disability focus, skill types, number of questions, skill measurement details, target population



Overview of key informant interviews

- Focused on research questions 2-4
- Canadian and international experts/knowledge leaders in the disability community, public policy arena, industry, labour, and academia
- Identified interviewees through our CRWDP and IDEA contact list and relied on snowballing to find incremental candidates
- Interview process followed a semi-structured approach
- Interviews undertaken from March to June 2022



Interview questions

1. What are some examples of foundational and transferable skills that help PWDs secure employment?
2. Can you identify specific training initiatives/programs for persons with disability that effectively advance their skills for employment or help them find skill-matched employment?
3. Thinking about a time when skills training delivery failed, what would you say were the largest barriers to success?
4. How have gender, race, or other intersectional identities impacted skill training and employment for PWDs in your work?
5. How has the COVID-19 Pandemic affected skills development and employment opportunities for PWDs?

Interviewee profile

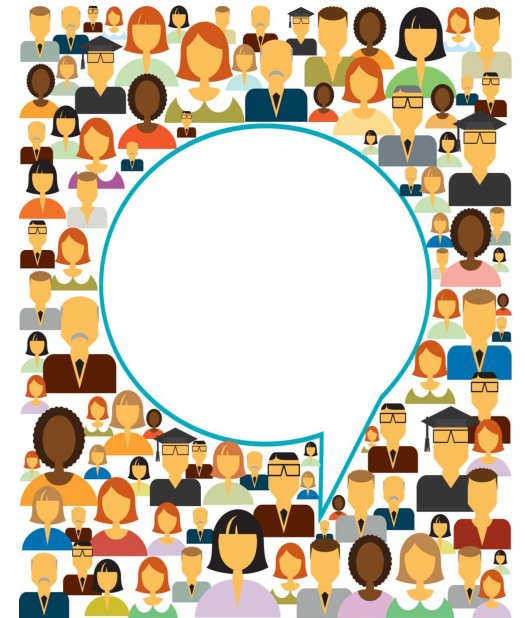
Category	Number
Interviews	13
Country	8 Canada, 4 United States, 1 Australia
Occupation	6 Directors, 2 Vice-Presidents, 1 Managers, 2 Owner/Co-Founder, 2 Professors
Organization	4 Academia, 5 Community Groups, 2 Canadian Government, 1 Business, 1 Social Enterprise

Summary of what we heard

Individual-, organizational-, and system-level consideration

Eight themes/prescriptions identified:

- i. Mainstream training opportunities
- ii. Contextualize foundational and transferable skills training
- iii. Value and accommodate different learning styles
- iv. Promote barrier-free hiring approaches
- v. Promote on-the-job training opportunities
- vi. Consider the whole person and their needs
- vii. Provide training for supervisors, managers, and co-workers
- viii. Support careers, mentorship, and advancement



i. Mainstream training opportunities

- Critical for society to adopt a social model of disability
- Barriers exist at all levels of the educational system due to view that PWDs are unable to work
- Begins in secondary schools and continues into post-secondary educations
- PWDs are often not encouraged, or given an opportunity to take on part-time jobs, summer jobs or internships in high school and post secondary studies
- PWDs need to be integrated into the mainstream to avoid them being pigeonholed into programs with low expectations
- Strong evidence that youth/young adults who have work experience during studies are substantially more likely to find a job and be successful in the labour-market



ii. Contextualize foundational and transferable skills training

- Skills that may help PWDs secure employment: 1) soft skills, 2) accessibility skills (e.g., navigating environments and using systems technologies), and 3) technical skills (specific skills required for a particular job)
- Focusing solely on advancing skills sets of PWDs is misdirected, as they do not necessarily lack skills—their abilities are on a bell curve like any other populations
- Barriers to employment opportunities exist even for the most talented and skilled PWDs
- Better to explore job matching based on existing skills and interests, than skilling up the individuals without a specific job opportunity in mind
- Promote and hone existing skills



Quote on short-sightedness of some training

“They are training first, when what needs to be examined are what are the actual skills required, and how do you prepare a person to be able to pivot from one position to another, to gain the skills they need to have a lifetime of employment, as opposed to fulfilling this particular gap that an employer may have right now. They are essentially creating disposable workers.”

iii. Value and accommodate different learning styles

- Need to accommodate different learning styles in educational programs
- Different learning styles should not be viewed as deficits
- Much of the discussion in this area touched on neurodiversity and the need for difference approaches in the delivery of curriculum
- A lot of cognitive strengths come with neurodivergences
- Cognitive differences are a gift if they are aligned with the tasks in a particular field

“Their cognitive gifts made them so effective at their jobs”



iv. Promote barrier-free hiring approaches

- Multiple barriers are created by conventional hiring practices
- Online platforms for resume submission and screening software biases against PWDs
- Move away from a focus on resumes and interviews to assess a person's strengths and capabilities, particularly for neurodivergent populations
- Consider task-based assessment processes
- An approach being promoted in some sectors is on-the-job testing for 2-3 weeks to observe both technical and soft skills capabilities
- Internships are seen as a better way to identify and recruit talent, while at the same time providing candidates with training opportunities
- Portfolio approach—having multiple interns concurrently—suggest for large employers

v. Promote on-the-job training opportunities

- Informants were quite critical of classroom training that mimicked real work context in a stripped-down manner—focus on experiential learning on-the-job
- Blend educational setting and industry experiences to better prepare PWDs for the job market
- Bring industry representatives into the classroom setting
- On-the-job training needs to be in the competitive labour market
- Sheltered workshops in their various forms need to be dismantled



vi. Consider the whole person and their needs

- Take a “whole person approach” where consideration is given to the needs of a person across all aspects of their lives
- Employment cannot work for a person unless all their life needs are addressed—consider the ecosystem of the person
- Range of wrap-around supports are available through community services
- Also take into consideration the skill needs for a lifetime of employment, rather than just at a point in time in a specific job
- Promote support circles (team of people who support the individual) to address multiple aspects of a worker’s needs in an employment opportunity



vii. Provide training for supervisors, managers, and co-workers

- Training for supervisors, managers and co-workers is critical to support diversity inclusion and belonging
- Could be an afternoon session where people are taught about autism, neurodiversity, and what to expect from persons on the spectrum
- Provide a forum for people to ask questions and get comfortable with diversity
- Returns on training can be substantial
- Mainstream management training on disability inclusion in post-secondary management training programs

“when supervisors and the department are trained, the experience is phenomenal...it is not as big an undertaking as some might think.”

viii. Support careers, mentorship, and advancement

- Mentorship and career advancement noted as an area needing substantial development
- Many programs fail to look to the future and only address the immediate needs of an employer
- PWDs are often pigeonholed into entry-level positions and are rarely given opportunities for advancement
- Employment support services should support PWDs to find careers not just jobs
- Career pathways may not necessarily be linear but should always have progression



“How do we shift out of celebrating someone in the same position at McDonald’s for 25 years?...To shifting the narrative from just employment to career development and growth across the lifespan”

Impact of intersectional Identities

- Discussions on diversity, equity, and inclusion often do not include disability and vice-versa
- Gender, race, and other intersectional identities can have important impacts on skill training and employment for PWDs
- When multiple factors contribute to marginalization it further reduces opportunities for employment
- Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) communities do not see themselves represented amongst those who provide services, which can be alienating for them
- Online tools, visuals, questions, and content for skills training need to be culturally sensitive for PWDs with intersectional identities to make connections with the content

“If service providers are helping others to develop their skills, if we’re not aware of those cultural lenses that might be at play, we can be working up against barriers that we don’t even know exist.”

Programs, services and other resources to support inclusive employment

A wealth of programs, services and other resources identified that support inclusive employment ... some examples from the 66 identified in the study report

1. Global Alliance on Accessible Technologies and Environments (GAATES) <http://gaates.org/>
2. The Global Initiative for Inclusive ICT <https://g3ict.org/>
3. Life Sherpa app (developed by Washington DC based group) <https://lifesherpapp.com/>
4. Uptimize platform—web platform with training regime for persons with Autism based in Australia <https://uptimize.com/neurodiversity-to-neuroinclusion/>
5. Neurodiversity Hub—community of practice <https://www.neurodiversityhub.org/>
6. Dandelion Program by DXC Technology (Australia)—program that is based on the ecosystem approach—team of people, consultant, tools www.dandelionprogram.com
7. Untapped Group—suite of ecosystem services with links to other platforms <https://www.untapped-group.com/>
8. Specialisterne—works with stakeholder around the world to support equal opportunities in the labour market for persons with neurodiversity <https://specialisterne.com/>
9. Autism Co-operative Research Centre (Australia) “myWAY Employability” initiative: <https://www.mywayemployability.com.au>
10. Disability: IN—Resources that empower businesses to achieve *disability* inclusion and equality <https://disabilityin.org/>

Promo for launch of IDEA (Inclusive Design for Employment Access)—May 18, 2023



VRAIE IDEA INCLUSIVE DESIGN FOR EMPLOYMENT ACCESS
VISION RADICALE POUR L'ACCÈS INCLUSIF À L'EMPLOI

INCLUSIVE DESIGN FOR EMPLOYMENT ACCESS (IDEA) LAUNCH EVENT

On May 18, 2023, we are launching the Inclusive Design for Employment Access (IDEA) Social Innovation Laboratory (SIL). And you are invited! Come learn how IDEA is building employer capacity to hire and promote persons with disabilities and create accessible and inclusive workplaces.

EVENT DETAILS

Date: Thursday, May 18th, 2023
Time: 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. EDT
Format: Hybrid (virtual and limited in-person)
In-person: Ontario Bar Association Conference Centre, 200 – 20 Toronto St., Toronto, Ontario
Virtual: Zoom link to be provided
Contact: tsalenieks@iwh.on.ca

<https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/inclusive-design-for-employment-access-idea-launch-virtual-attendance-tickets-602804042117>



Thank you

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