
Part 6:

Recommendations

This section outlines the recommendations made by the employers, apprentices, journeypersons, and the working group. These suggestions may help guide future activities in the apprenticeship and disability communities.

Recommendations from Employers ¹

Create special programs for employers in the skilled trades

Employers in construction did say they were willing to hire apprentices with disabilities on a field project, if there was a special program. This program could involve allowing a construction company to work on a project in a government building with apprentices with disabilities. The tight timelines for the project could be removed from the bid so that the journeypersons working with the apprentices would have the time to train them properly. Apprentices would maximize their learning opportunities and would gain valuable work experience. Along these lines, the Quebec government within the context of the Work-

1 Also see recommendations in Stuart-O'Hara Inc. Knowledge Management Services, "Closing the Gap Report on Employer Forum, Highlights," (Toronto: Stuart-O'Hara Inc., July 2005) <http://www.closing-the-gap.ca/pdf/4%20Highlights%20from%20the%20Employer%20Forum%20W.pdf>.

place Apprenticeship Program is already considering support for special training projects for persons with disabilities.²

Employers who work in residential construction could hire persons with disabilities to consult them on how to make sites more accessible. Considering that the number of persons with disabilities is growing, this measure would help employers tap into a growing market of potential customers. Homebuilders could then construct the homes with participation from apprentices with disabilities.

Discuss with employers their responsibilities

The Ministry of Labour and insurance companies could clarify the rules and regulations around hiring persons with disabilities, liability, and making workplace accommodations.

Support employers through incentives

Employers recommended that accommodation advice, sensitivity workshops, and financial incentives would help them hire and accommodate persons with disabilities.³

2 Quebec Government, "For Equal Employment Opportunities National Strategy for Labour Market Integration and Maintenance of Handicapped Persons," (Quebec City: Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, 2008), 35.

3 A recommendation to develop tax incentives to encourage employers to make accommodations was made by the House of Commons Committee as well. See House of Commons Canada, "Employability in Canada: Preparing for the Future Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities," 39th Parliament, 2nd Session, (Ottawa: Government of Canada, April 2008), 97.

Help apprentices sell themselves to employers

Train apprentices to articulate their value to employers. Make sure they can explain to employers their skill sets and dispel myths regarding their disabilities.

Recommendations for Apprentices

Create awareness about available learning supports before apprenticeship technical training

Apprentices and employers both identified that there are learning supports available, but they are not necessarily well advertised. You have to be persistent in order to access them. As a result, some individuals do not get the help they need to be successful. Dispelling fears about technical training and informing persons with disabilities about how they can be helped is important. Apprentices said they would be willing to volunteer to speak to students about what is available to help them.

Apprentices recommended that those interested in the trades find out the accommodation requirements prior to doing their technical training. The administrative process for accessing the appropriate accommodations can be time consuming in some cases. When apprentices are in the technical training component they definitely do not want to miss classes because it can be hard to catch up, according to the focus group participants.

Create networking and information-sharing opportunities with technical training institutes and industry in order to educate employers and potential apprentices about the resources available, including information related to supporting apprentices with learning disabilities.

Develop a mentoring program for persons with disabilities in the skilled trades.

Connect journeypersons, pre-apprentices, and apprentices in specific trades. Apprentices and journeypersons could share tips with pre-apprentices on how to get accommodations and how to approach employers.

Ensure support for apprentices with disabilities

Apprenticeship stakeholders may benefit from working together to ensure that apprentices with disabilities have access to a full range of supports to succeed in their apprenticeship programs.

Use tutors that have knowledge of the trades

Apprentices said it was very important that they are connected to tutors when they are completing the technical-training component of their training.

Tutors and readers with knowledge of and experience in the trades would be helpful. Tutors in math, for example, are not as helpful as someone who knows practical, trade-specific examples of how theory can be applied. Readers can read the questions more clearly if they know the context. Retired journeypersons could be an effective pool of tutors because they have a lot of knowledge and experience in the trades. Such a program could be piloted and evaluated to determine its impact.

Conduct a communication and awareness campaign

According to the focus group participants, greater awareness of the potential benefits of employing persons with disabilities, the types of accommodations available, and the supports available is needed.

Ted works for the City of Winnipeg as a carpenter. He has a hearing limitation but is able to communicate with other staff through the use of a wireless device and interpreters. For him, it was a relatively easy process to get the accommodations he needed to effectively do his job. Still, Ted says that more work needs to be done to educate employers about persons with disabilities: “I would like to see the ... businesses [educated] about persons with disabilities.”

Additional Recommendations

Clarify issues through further research

More trades-specific research is needed to understand the business case for hiring and accommodating persons with disabilities. The unique nature of the skilled trades environment needs to be taken into account.⁴ What is the return on training investment for accommodating a person with a disability in the skilled trades?⁵

Research could explore whether, and to what extent, pre-apprenticeship programs can assist in attracting and retaining persons with disabilities in apprenticeships.

The business case for learning supports could be explored.

4 See Tabatha Griffin and Lisa Nechvoglod, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, “Vocational Education and Training and People with a Disability: A Review of the Research,” (Adelaide: Australian Government, 2008), 4 <http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/proj/nr07122.pdf>. A Canadian Plastics Sector Council study also recommended a similar study be undertaken. See FMP Ltd., for the Canadian Plastics Sector Council, “Profitability in Diversity,” (Ottawa: FMP Ltd., July 31, 2005), 13-14. <http://www.cpsc-ccsp.ca/PDFS/CPSC%20TERC%20FINAL%20REPORT-ENGLISH%20FINAL.pdf>.

5 *Ibid.*, 19.

Inventories could be developed. An inventory of pre-apprenticeship programs across Canada could help persons with disabilities find exploratory training opportunities. Since some persons with disabilities are unaware of the training opportunities available and lack work experience, a pre-apprenticeship program may help them gain exposure to the trades and acquire practical hands-on experience⁶

An inventory of the learning supports available at the various technical training institutes could help employers and apprentices know where to go for assistance.

Encourage partnerships between training organizations and disability agencies

Strong partnerships among training organizations, disability employment agencies, and employers are essential to successfully recruiting and placing persons with disabilities in apprenticeship training.⁷ Most of the success stories in the literature have involved good relationships among employment agencies, training organizations, and employers.⁸ Given these findings, there may be value in encouraging stakeholders to develop stronger partnerships.

6 A similar recommendation was also made in Paul Seccaspina, Daniel Kaltianinen, and Frank Buchan, “Accessibility to Employment by Persons with Disabilities, The City of Greater Sudbury,” Absolute Abilities Business Development Centre, (Toronto: The Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities, March 31, 2001), 48, 55.

7 See Tabatha Griffin and Lisa Nechvoglod, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, “Vocational Education and Training and People with a Disability: A Review of the Research,” (Adelaide: Australian Government, 2008), 9, 16, 18 <http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/proj/nr07122.pdf>.

8 *Ibid.*

Profile success stories

Examples of success stories of positive workplace accommodations could be communicated to employers and apprentices.⁹

Create user-friendly guides

In order to address some of the knowledge gaps identified in this project, workplace-accommodation guides could be developed for both employers and persons with disabilities. These guides would provide information in a format that was concise and user-friendly. A guide could provide employers with information on how to make accommodations, share best practices, and provide province- and territory-specific information on resources and legislation. A similar, but separate, guide could be written for persons with disabilities. This could include information on the accommodation policy of the Red Seal program, interview tips, tips related to finding an employer-sponsor, as well as helpful resources and supports.

9 A Canadian Plastics Sector Council has made a similar recommendation. See FMP Ltd., for the Canadian Plastics Sector Council, "Profitability in Diversity," (Ottawa: FMP Ltd., July 312005), 13-14. <http://www.cpsc-ccsp.ca/PDFS/CPSC%20TERC%20FINAL%20REPORT-ENGLISH%20FINAL.pdf>.

"Government could start its own mentoring system for apprentices ... [for] people with learning disabilities in the workplace. If the government had this kind of system, it would probably help a lot of people." — Apprentice electrician, Alberta

Conclusion

There is an opportunity to potentially enhance the effectiveness of apprentices at the workplace by making accommodations. Existing research from the disability community indicates accommodations can lead to increased productivity, improved company morale, and higher retention rates. Most accommodations can be implemented at a minimal cost. Although more trades specific evidence supporting the business case for accommodations would be useful, the findings from the secondary research suggests that employers and apprentices have much to gain through accommodations. These potential benefits are crucial at a time when maximizing productivity is critical to a company's bottom line. A lack of awareness, according to the findings of this study, is preventing some employers and apprentices from achieving these benefits at their workplaces. Improved communication about the existing resources would help connect employers and apprentices to supports they need. Hopefully, this preliminary research will fuel further research and dialogue that will lead to increased awareness and enhanced communication among the members of the disability and skilled trades communities.