

**Partnership Council  
on Employment Opportunities  
for People with Disabilities**

**Initial Report**

**May 11, 2015**

## Table of Contents

<b>Partnership Council on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Initial Report</b> .....	<b>3</b>
About this report .....	3
<b>Executive summary</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Setting the scene</b> .....	<b>6</b>
What is a disability? .....	7
The number of people with disabilities is growing .....	7
The cost of overlooking people with disabilities .....	8
[SNAPSHOT – MATTHEW SANTOS] .....	9
[BY THE NUMBERS].....	10
The business case for hiring people with disabilities .....	10
Government is failing people with disabilities .....	12
[SNAPSHOT: D2L] .....	13
A call to action .....	15
Recommendations:.....	16
Work plan .....	23
References .....	24
Appendix 1.....	26
<b>Member biographies: Partnership Council on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities</b> .....	<b>26</b>

# Partnership Council on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities

## Initial Report

### About this report

The Ontario government has made it clear: hiring qualified people with disabilities is not only the right thing to do, it's good for business and good for the economy.

But unemployment among people with disabilities remains far too high, while misconceptions over potential workplace accommodations are common among employers and the current structure of many government support programs discourages this group from working. To help address these issues, the government created the Partnership Council on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities in April 2014.

The Council's mandate is to champion the hiring of people with disabilities and provide strategic advice to the Ontario Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure that contributes to enhancing employment opportunities for Ontarians with disabilities. The Council's focus is to understand the current employment environment for Ontarians with disabilities while seeking ways in which the government can take action to enhance employment opportunities for this group. The Council's advice to the Minister is to include clear recommendations on the following:

- how the government can engage business leaders in promoting the hiring of Ontarians with disabilities;
- removing barriers to employment for people with disabilities, and how government and businesses can work together to ensure businesses are creating an inclusive environment that is accessible to all;
- specific best practices that Ontario employers can showcase/ emulate;
- possible refinements to existing business support and training programs to support hiring of Ontarians with disabilities; and
- other options / recommendations that will support employment opportunities and greater workplace participation for Ontarians with disabilities.

The thirteen Council members were appointed by the Minister and come from business, advocacy organizations, the non-profit sector and the disability community. They bring different backgrounds and perspectives to the Council's work, but they all share a common vision for a strong and inclusive economy for Ontario.

The members have been working diligently over the past year. This report is a summary of their findings and recommendations to date.

## **Executive summary**

The Government of Ontario has the opportunity to help reduce impending labour shortages while decreasing the need for social assistance costs by effectively engaging a greater number of people with disabilities in the workforce. To succeed, the government must face the challenges of helping to create cultural change in our society, particularly among employers, and to commit to restructuring many of the approaches used to help people with disabilities enter and remain in the workforce.

Let us be clear: it is an unacceptable failure of our commitment to human rights for people with disabilities to be so underrepresented in our Ontario labour markets. The members are not backing away from this or suggesting that the underrepresentation of people with disabilities is anything but an unacceptable failure. Rather, we are recommending collaboration with business and government and approaching the challenge as a matter of culture change because previous strategies have not worked and there is ample evidence to suggest that this approach will be more successful.

In its initial report to the Minister, the Council recommends the following actions:

### **1. Create Strong Strategic Leadership**

Appoint a Cabinet Minister and dedicated Deputy Minister with the responsibility to develop a pan-ministry strategic plan for people with disabilities.

### **2. Government as a Role Model**

Lead by example through employment of people with disabilities in the Ontario Public Service (OPS) and the broader public sector and procuring services, providing

grants or financing to organizations with a strong orientation towards supporting employment of people with disabilities.

**3. Engage Youth with Disabilities**

Develop enhanced strategies to ensure youth with disabilities gain labour market attachment at an early age.

**4. Work to Effecting Cultural Change – Heighten business awareness of the value of employing those with disabilities**

Develop awareness campaigns focused on benefits of hiring people with disabilities and importance of complying with Ontario’s regulations. Improve tools to make it easier for small business to comply with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)*.

**5. Proactively Involve Employers in Planning**

Engage employers directly in addressing barriers and challenges they face in hiring candidates with disabilities.

**6. Eliminate Barriers**

To get more people permanently into the workforce, Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) will continue reviewing the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) to ensure funding of employment services is connected to performance in meeting labour market demand thereby helping to place more candidates with disabilities in the workforce. Employment will help raise people out of poverty, reduce their dependency on social assistance and ensure they are contributing to the tax base

**7. Set Goals and Ensure Accountability**

Monitor the performance of public and private sectors in increasing the number of employed with disabilities.

**Introduction**

Incenting the business community to adjust its behaviour is a complex task. Businesses are not so simple that a short term tax cut or refund incentive will create a lasting behaviour change. Businesses have deep-rooted behaviours based on finite knowledge, and like people, require a significant cultural shift to change. Engaging business in driving change around hiring people with disabilities is one such cultural shift.

Employers have various drivers and while corporate social responsibility and “doing the right thing” can be somewhat motivating, these motivations can come under attack during periods of recession, competition or market changes. And

when there are threats, the business activities that are in any way options or simply “nice to have” are typically cut.

When it comes to hiring people with disabilities, this is a cultural change in which we believe business should engage. We believe this runs deeper than a social movement framed by doing the right thing. We believe there is evidence that shows hiring persons with disabilities is a true business benefit with long-term sustainable business advantages. We frame the business case for employers in the following categories:

- People with disabilities represent an untapped labour pool in a competitive labour market;
- People with disabilities bring unique skills and insights that can help employers better understand their customers/clients;
- Qualified individuals with disabilities bring diversity of background and insights that can create an environment where diversity of thinking is embraced and encouraged;
- Diversity of thinking creates a mitigation against disruptive labour forces, and can actually create new market options when businesses are threatened;
- Staff with disabilities bring depth to teaming activities, increasing empathy, engagement and morale in teams;

However, the current challenge for government is that business doesn't know what it doesn't know. And culture change is, quite simply, hard. So while the case is compelling, it is challenging to have businesses adapt their approaches and processes to hire people with disabilities. In order to achieve this goal, we will need to nudge employers by understanding how they are motivated and driven to achieve financial results. We need to nudge them to explore new hiring sources, to bring job applicants with disabilities into their teams, to try new approaches to serving customers/clients and to take some risks for the sake of improved, yet previously untested, outcomes.

## Setting the scene

Imagine you've just graduated with a law degree from one of Ontario's top law schools and you're looking forward to getting a position with a good law firm. But two-and-a-half years after you have finished articling, you're still looking for a position while your classmates are productively employed in their chosen fields. You know it's not because you're not qualified; it's because you use a wheelchair and prospective employers don't understand how to handle a person with a disability – or they just don't want to be bothered.

That's what happened to Matthew Santos. And he's hardly unique. It's an experience that plays out over and over again all across Ontario for far too many people with disabilities – whether they're university or college grads, or just ready, willing and able to be trained for less skilled jobs.

### **What is a disability?**

According to the AODA, 2005, a “disability” is defined as:

- any degree of physical disability (infirmity, malformation, or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury)
- a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability
- a learning disability
- a mental disorder
- any injury for which benefits were claimed

It's important to remember that the notion of disability resides with society, not the individual. Most people with disabilities can be easily accommodated in the workplace.

However, we are a culture that tends to focus more on people's disabilities rather than their abilities, and we do this at an early age, placing a sector of our society at a disadvantage right from the start. Children with disabilities within the education system are too often isolated from their peers, and are prevented from early opportunities to interact with the working world through activities such as co-op work placement.

This omission from aspects of everyday life impedes their normal social development and reinforces to society at large that people with disabilities are different.

For people with disabilities from youth through to adulthood we are too frequently a culture of exclusion rather than one of inclusion.

### **The number of people with disabilities is growing**

In Ontario today, 1.9 million people have a disability of some sort – making people with disabilities the largest minority group in the province by far. And their number will grow over the next two decades as our population ages. Our workforce will age along with it, with the result that a substantial number of employees will develop a disability during their working life.

While 41 per cent of Ontario's adults with disabilities have a post-secondary education – compared to 53 per cent in the general population – the unemployment rate among people with disabilities is 16 per cent, compared to 7.6 per cent for people without disabilities. And people with disabilities who are working earn on average \$31,000 a year, compared to \$44,000 for those without disabilities.

As serious as these statistics are, they're not the whole story. An unemployed person is someone who is not working and looking for work. Large numbers of people with disabilities have stopped looking for work because no one will hire them. In addition, there are people with physical, mental or developmental disabilities with a range of education levels that have never been considered a part of the workforce. With adequate training and ongoing support, many of these people can be productive, employed members of society.

### **The cost of overlooking people with disabilities**

Today, an increasing number of businesses across Ontario, particularly small- and medium-sized firms, report having difficulty filling job vacancies. While a disappointing 70 per cent of Canadian small business owners say they have never hired a person with a disability, 75 per cent of Ontario small- and medium-sized enterprises who have employees with disabilities report that they meet or exceed their expectations.

Yet, people with disabilities are clearly a significant talent pool. Overlooking them means not only are employers losing out on potential good hires at a time when competition for talent is heating up, but unemployment among people with disabilities is costing Ontario taxpayers a staggering \$3.5 billion-plus a year through the ODSP alone. And the program's caseload continues to grow steadily, with more than 325,000 cases in 2014.

By getting more people with disabilities into the workforce, these costs could be decreased substantially, while Ontario's GDP could increase per capita by as much as \$600 a year.

At the same time, from the perspective of the welfare of our society, the cost of overlooking the active engagement of more people with disabilities in the provincial workforce is significant. A much higher level of unemployment among working age people with disabilities contributes to this group being twice as likely as other Canadians to live below the poverty line.

Unemployed Ontarians with disabilities and no additional source of income receive ODSP support which in major urban centres frequently relegates them to subsistence living.

It should be presumed that all working age adults and youth with disabilities can work to the best of their ability and capacity, working side by side with co-workers without disabilities. Some people may require assistance to achieve this goal, whether through typical workplace accommodations or personal support strategies like job coaching. Such accommodations should not deter from the objective of paid employment.

Expanding opportunities of employment for people with disabilities, whether physical, mental or developmental, while ensuring the existence of support systems to help them remain in the workforce will provide government with a powerful tool to reduce poverty in Ontario.

Many people with disabilities are willing and able to contribute to the economy of our society; however, they need greater opportunities to do so.

### **[SNAPSHOT – MATTHEW SANTOS]<sup>1</sup>**

When Matthew Santos was 11 years old, he was diagnosed with Morquio Syndrome B, an extremely rare metabolic disease. By 16 he was using a wheelchair for mobility, but he never let it hold him back. Inspired by his high school law teacher, he set his sights on becoming a lawyer, and all through high school and his undergraduate studies at the University of Toronto he played wheelchair basketball, helping his team win gold and bronze medals at two Canada Games. When Matthew graduated from Osgoode Hall Law School and completed his articling, he was confident he would get a good job. But two-and-a-half years later – having sent out hundreds of résumés – he was still looking, while his classmates were gainfully employed. “It was really difficult,” he says. “I got one interview, that’s all, and it led nowhere. I kept asking myself: ‘What’s wrong with me?’”, even though I was convinced it was because I self-identified as a person with a disability.” With help from a mentor, Matthew eventually landed a job with Deloitte and is now one of four lawyers in the firm’s commercial group. He travels to work using the Go Train and Deloitte didn’t have to make any special accommodations to his workplace. “The volume of work is challenging sometimes, but I love my job.”

<sup>1</sup> Approved by Matthew Santos, by email, April 7, 2015

## **[BY THE NUMBERS]**

- 1 in 7 people in Ontario have a disability
- 1 in 10 Canadians have a learning disability
- 90 per cent of Canadians believe people with disabilities are not fully included in society
- 70 per cent of Canadian small business owners have never hired someone with a disability
- 29 per cent of Ontario's small businesses report having difficulty filling job vacancies
- 55 per cent of Canadians with disabilities believe that hiding their disability increases their chances of getting hired and promoted

## **[QUOTE]**

"Canada's ability to compete internationally is predicated on its ability to innovate, to create, and enhance the productivity of its businesses. As an engine for growth and employment, it is critical that small businesses expand the talent pool upon which they rely, to include university and college educated people with disabilities who are ready, willing and able to help them compete, not just within their local markets but on a world scale."

Sonya Kunkel, Managing Director, Diversity, BMO  
Financial Group

## **The business case for hiring people with disabilities**

It's been well documented that Ontario is facing a growing skills shortage in key sectors, including the trades, mining, financial services, information and communications technology, and hospitality and tourism. According to the Conference Board of Canada, Ontario could face a shortfall of 364,000 workers by 2025, one that can only be partly helped through immigration.

People with disabilities represent an underused talent pool, and tens of thousands of them are or will be looking for work.

They're Ontarians with existing skills or who are able to be trained. More than 45,000 students with disabilities are enrolled in colleges and universities in Ontario, and are preparing for careers in virtually all sectors. These members of our society are capable and eager to contribute and be productive. Matching them with the skills needed by employers will give them this opportunity.

While some small businesses and organizations in all sectors do hire qualified workers with disabilities, we know there remains an assumption on the part of the majority of small business owners that employees with disabilities have higher absenteeism and lower retention rates, lower performance levels and are expensive to accommodate.

But the assumption doesn't hold up against the hard evidence, as many of the world's largest multinationals have already discovered. It's quite the contrary, in fact. There is a solid business case for hiring and supporting workers with disabilities especially in today's global business environment where it's been shown that leveraging diversity leads to improved profits.

### **People with disabilities are set to transform business, as employees and consumers**

Workers with disabilities generally have better retention and productivity rates, as shown by studies by DuPont and others. They also have a beneficial impact on other employees, particularly millennials, who will comprise 75 percent of the global workforce by 2025, and who are looking for employers who value and embrace diversity.

They also help to drive innovation by providing a different perspective that can inform products and services, provide connections into a large market – people with disabilities have spending power of over \$55.5 billion a year in Canada alone – and have a positive impact on a company's brand image. The case for hiring people with disabilities is based strongly on business fundamentals – higher productivity, greater employee engagement and retention and potential access to new markets – all of which translates to enhancing the bottom line.

As for accommodations, which are defined as reasonable adjustments to a job or work environment, 57 per cent of accommodations needed by employees cost absolutely nothing, while 36 per cent require an accommodation with a one-time cost of \$500 on average, according to the US Job Accommodation Network. And the most common accommodations are modified or reduced hours and job redesign.

## **Government is failing people with disabilities**

It's not just business that is holding workers with disabilities back. Many government initiatives and programs are problematic as well. The Ontario Disability Support Program can act as a disincentive as portions of the income people with disabilities earn is clawed back once earnings exceed a certain threshold. It's also focused on supply – finding people with disabilities jobs, any jobs – rather than demand – preparing them to fill a need in the labour force.

The Lankin Report (Brighter Prospects: Transforming Social Assistance in Ontario, 2012) urges the province to repair a social services system that through its bureaucratic complexity fails to meet the needs of many of its recipients, trapping them in a system that makes finding meaningful employment increasingly unlikely. This is especially true for recipients with disabilities.

The Drummond Report (Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services, 2012) identified clear opportunities to improve the efficiency of employment training by integrating distinct programs offered by three separate provincial ministries (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, Ministry of Community and Social Services and Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade) under one organization, namely Employment Ontario.

A study conducted by Deloitte and Social Capital Partners (Working Together: Implementing a demand-led employment and training system) identified an employment training system with network providers focused on gaining funding to support job seekers with limited ability or incentive to actively engage with employers. Whether for job seekers with or without disabilities, the system is focused on the supply side – the people seeking jobs – rather than the demand side, the type of

skills needed by employers. The result is an employment supply chain best described as designed for only very limited success.

The requirements of the AODA, which is designed to make Ontario accessible to everyone by 2025, are confusing and poorly understood by many employers, particularly small enterprises, and enforcing compliance has been an uphill battle. By December 2014, a shocking 62 per cent of companies in Ontario had failed to file a compliance report. Yet, accessibility is fundamental to harnessing both the talents and spending power of people with disabilities.

### **[SNAPSHOT: D2L]<sup>2</sup>**

D2L is transforming the way people learn with its innovative Brightspace software platform. To stay at the leading-edge, the Kitchener-based company is always on the lookout for the best and brightest employees – and with this as its prime objective doesn't hesitate to hire people with disabilities. That's why, when D2L was invited to take part in Disabilities Mentoring Day, the company signed up. The one-day event – which is a partnership between the Making Cent\$ of Abilities Coalition and Dolphin Digital Technologies – matches mentors from the business community with qualified people with disabilities. At last year's event, Matt Pharoah, a recent Masters in Computer Science graduate of the University of Waterloo with Asperger's Syndrome, shadowed D2L senior development manager Dinah Davis. At the end of the day, Matt had a mock interview and so impressed the interviewer, he was called in for a formal interview. Dinah hired him. "Matt is very focused and dedicated," she says. "I think he's got a very successful career ahead of him."

### **[BY THE NUMBERS]**

57 per cent	of accommodations needed by employees cost absolutely nothing
70 per cent	of businesses report having no idea how much accommodation really costs
\$10,000	their best guess on how much it costs to accommodate an employee with a disability
\$500	the actual average one-time cost of accommodating an employee who requires it

<sup>2</sup> Approved by Joanna Woo, HR Programs and Data Specialist, D2L, by email, April 13, 2015

\$55.5 billion the annual spending power of people with disabilities in Canada

40 per cent of our consumer base in 20 years will be people with disabilities

**[QUOTE]**

“It’s just good strategy to do this (recruiting employees with disabilities). In the end, you’re going to grow your business, you’re going to grow your market share and you’re going to end up in the leading place in the market.”

Paul Clark, Executive Vice President, Specialized Commercial Banking and Lead, Persons with Disabilities Committee, TD Bank <sup>3</sup>

**[SNAPSHOT: Megleen Inc. – Tim Hortons]**

When Tim Hortons franchisee Mark Wafer hired Clint Sparling, a young man with Down Syndrome to work at his busy Ontario café he didn’t know the decision would transform his business and inspire a two-decade crusade for inclusive employment.

Sparling is a hard worker, never complains and is always happy to be there, says Wafer. He rarely takes sick days and boosts morale among the other employees. Nearly two decades later, Sparling is still part of Wafer’s team, is married and owns his own condo.

Wafer’s stores’ stats are a testament to the potential of employing people with disabilities. As a result of being an inclusive employer, among his franchises the average annual employee turnover rate is 38 per cent compared to the industry average of 100 per cent. It costs about \$4,000 to train a new employee.

In 2011, the absenteeism rate among Wafer’s 33 employees with disabilities was zero. He has never made a work-related injury insurance claim for an employee with a disability.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/m/touch/news/story/1.2764814>

<sup>4</sup> Hyperlink: [\(revised and approved by Mark Wafer, Owner of Megleen Inc. on April 24 2015\)](#)

## A call to action

As we've outlined, there is a clear business case for employing people with disabilities. For the employer, recruiting and developing employees with disabilities results in higher retention, lower absenteeism and increased innovation and customer goodwill – all of which translates to a better bottom line. For government, social services costs are moderated, and for the province, an underutilized minority are enriching their lives and making a meaningful contribution to society.

Yet unemployment among Ontarians with disabilities who are candidates for employment is a staggering 16 per cent. And this figure doesn't include the thousands of people with disabilities who have no labour market attachment because they've given up trying to find work or have never been considered part of the workforce.

In today's competitive marketplace, where diverse talents are needed in order to compete successfully, this is unacceptable.

The community of people with disabilities is very diverse as are their capabilities for employment. While many self-advocate, many also depend on social assistance. Current social assistance programs only partially address the employment needs of people with disabilities. A patchwork of providers is competing for funding and a lack of incentives for jobseekers supported by ODSP. Employers currently play virtually no role in development and delivery of our employment and training programs. Today, the supply chain of people with disabilities and employment opportunities is almost exclusively focused on matching jobseekers with any available job.

While there is no single solution to improving employment for those with disabilities, there is a broad vision of a more balanced approach.

- Greater emphasis on the demand side, engaging employers more directly, and treating jobseekers and employers as equally important customers
- Modelling social assistance with a focus on sustained employment
- Government and employers partnering on investments in training, and career development for those with disabilities based on current and future job needs

- Bringing together stakeholders in various communities across Ontario to address the misalignment of supply and demand and enhancing responsiveness to local employer needs and the diversity of local labour markets
- Piloting and testing opportunities for improved alignment of the capabilities of people with disabilities to future labour market needs

## **Recommendations:**

### **1. Create strong strategic leadership**

Action requires strong leadership.

The Ontario government has strong leadership for women, children, youth, seniors, Aboriginals and Francophones, but no visible leadership for people with disabilities and no broad action beyond physical accessibility.

For example, the senior and Aboriginal communities have dedicated Cabinet Ministers. And children & youth, Aboriginals and Francophones have dedicated Deputy Ministers. Yet the largest minority group in the province does not have direct representation.

The Ontario government needs to establish the same visible leadership for people with disabilities at the most senior levels in formal and informal discussions and debates within government, and to be a constant advocate for this community. Policies for people with disabilities span all ministries and require relentless support.

The Partnership Council urges the government to take a leadership role by appointing a Cabinet Minister with a clear mandate in their title that will provide the necessary leadership over the coming years. The Council also recommends that the Minister be supported through a dedicated Deputy Minister who will ensure a coordinated effort across all government ministries. There is an urgent need to establish this leadership and ensure that Ontario continues to lead in the evolution of a truly inclusive culture.

Authority within this role needs to cross all Ministry and branch jurisdictions. It must prioritize employment and make specific recommendations that set funding and policy directions and guidelines that support this priority. Government funding of services for people with disabilities must move away from older segregated day programs i.e., sheltered workshops – that build

lifelong dependency in favour of employment-related services and supports.

To emphasize the urgent need for this level of leadership, it is noted that the government recently made a major announcement regarding \$55 million in funding for youth apprenticeship programs without taking the opportunity to highlight support for youth with disabilities that could be included in the program.

We would encourage this focused leadership to put the following actions early on in their agenda:

- Through consultations with stakeholders including employers, advocacy organizations and people with disabilities, develop a strategic plan for people with disabilities to be actively engaged in the workforce and in society. A plan that drives progressive policies that become enshrined in legislation as appropriate. The primary strategic focus should be on children and youth to better prepare the next generation, and to ensure effective inclusion from a young age.
- Align the existing policy conflicts between and within ministries (e.g., various marginalized groups compete against each other based on who funds what), ensuring they support execution of the strategic plan.
- Collaboration to align over time the many areas of policy conflict between the federal and provincial (e.g., wage subsidies, accessibility and inclusion).
- Partner with corporate leaders to champion the hiring of candidates with disabilities, and ensure a strong understanding within government of the opportunities, challenges and barriers facing people with disabilities.
- Work with municipalities, employment service providers and other key stakeholders to develop provincial standards and best practices for providing employment services, particularly for those with disabilities who are in receipt of ODSP income support.
- In consultation, develop a strategy to engage the broader public sector to adopt a proactive approach to hiring people with disabilities and ensure policies and procedures align with provincial initiatives designed to promote cultural change.

The investment of establishing this leadership is significant but can be more than offset by eliminating overlapping government policies and programs and reducing the growth in the cost of social assistance benefits.

## **2. Government as a role model**

The government needs to lead by example through engagement of people with disabilities in the Ontario Public Service and the broader public sector (agencies, hospitals, etc.) and through its means of operation.

When government procures services, provides grants and supports business financing, there should be a positive preference to engage organizations that support the employment of people with disabilities.

The Council recommends the following:

- Ensure representation of people with disabilities within its own workforce.
- Give priority R&D funding to the development of innovative technologies, tools and services to support people with disabilities in the workplace and daily living.
- Require vendors of record with the Ontario government and private-sector grant recipients be AODA compliant and demonstrative employers of people with disabilities.
- Ensure that employment-related announcements specifically reference people with disabilities.
- Challenge municipalities, regions and all provincially regulated agencies across the province to develop policies and procedures which achieve measurable outcomes resulting in greater opportunities for employment of Ontarians with disabilities.

## **3. Engage youth with disabilities**

Co-op programming in high school and university presents an opportunity to nudge business. Students with disabilities should be exposed to co-op terms while in high school to gain needed work experience and soft skills. This engagement with the labour market will also create some attachment that drives students to work towards permanent job placement, and that

drives employers to appreciate the value created by these individuals and dispel myths about barriers to hiring job applicants with disabilities.

Where these programs can be implemented, they should not be optional. Fear or lack of understanding around these programs may encourage school boards or universities to opt out, but for cultural movement to be successful, these actions must be across the board. All students with disabilities should be allowed the opportunity to be awarded a co-op placement. And although volunteering is important, it is not the same thing as paid employment. So finding the employers to take on these co-ops will require some drive, education and engagement with business at a tactical level. Through these programs considerable practical training and awareness can be provided to both businesses and the people currently working within them.

One of the difficulties in moving businesses to hire students with disabilities is the effort required to match talent and employer. Government can assist by connecting youth with employment opportunities. Efforts need to be placed on helping youth with disabilities gain summer/part-time/after-school jobs. This initial job experience and resume-building activity is a key foundation to helping individuals become attractive to employers. There are partnering opportunities for the non-profit, government and business sectors to create these experience opportunities together.

Similarly, creating apprenticeship opportunities for individuals to gain specific skills will also help people with disabilities create strong job-entry resumes. Mentoring and apprenticeship activities in business are currently valued and are a typical way for business leaders to give back. These opportunities will not only support those valued activities, but will also go a long way toward breaking down barriers and myths. As advocates for people with disabilities spend time with businesses and understand their needs, they will be able to understand the barriers and practical ways to break these down.

Any activity in the education sector should be driven with knowledge of the demand side of the supply chain. This includes, getting to know the employment sector, understanding the skill sets they are currently looking for and are expecting to be looking for based on market trends. All educational and training activities should be related to skills required for known and available jobs.

The Council recommends the following:

- The development of enhanced strategies to ensure youth with disabilities gain labour market attachment at an earlier age.
- The Ministry of Education ensure provincial school boards do not allow schools to opt out of co-op placements for students with disabilities, and employment should be a key focus in the Individual Education Plan (IEP) planning process.
- Placement of increased effort on assisting youth with disabilities to obtain summer and after-school jobs. Current restrictions that limit employment agencies from engaging in youth employment based on the notion of “school attachment” need to be lifted.
- The development of a strategy through the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities to encourage businesses to increase work placement and co-op opportunities for students with disabilities. The strategy should be flexible to adapt to regional employment variations, be developed with the direct involvement of local businesses and promoted through business channels (chambers, business improvement areas, etc.).

#### **4. Work to effect cultural change – heighten business awareness of the value of employing people with disabilities**

There’s a clear business case to be made for hiring employees with disabilities, but buy-in from more small- and medium-sized businesses is crucial.

The Council recommends the following:

- Develop and launch two separate awareness campaigns, aimed at both the broader public and private sectors, with a particular focus on small businesses that are overwhelmingly responsible for new job creation.
  - One campaign will promote the benefits of hiring and developing people with disabilities as a means of improving bottom-line performance.

- The other will focus on Ontario's accessibility regulations and the importance of complying with them.
- Ensure that all government advertising, and in particular employment-related announcements, specifically reference people with disabilities.
- Have business speak to business on employing people with disabilities by supporting advocacy organizations and enlisting business associations.
- Utilize the programming opportunities at TV Ontario as well as the full array of social media vehicles to raise awareness and educate the population on opportunities for people with disabilities in society and in the workplace.
- Make it easier for small business to comply with the province's accessibility requirements by improving communications tools and empowering small business support organizations to provide support where needed.

## **5. Proactively involve employers in planning**

Employers know what skills they're going to need in the future. Government needs to engage employers and their associations across the province to identify future employment needs, and this should inform publicly funded education curriculums.

The Council recommends the following:

- Engage employers and their associations directly in addressing the barriers and challenges they face in hiring people with disabilities.
- Designing transformational training services to ensure they are demand driven, i.e., they train for the *real* jobs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and include work environment socialization where needed.
- Foster the identification, development and means of sharing effective practices across employer networks.

## **6. Eliminate Policy Barriers**

The Partnership Council's focus is on creating employment for Ontarians with disabilities. However, experience from employers indicates there are significant barriers to employment supported through government policies. The most significant involve people supported through social assistance.

In addition, there are employment recruiting agencies that know the PWD community well enough to source from it the specialized talents businesses are often seeking. There are various business models associated with these agencies, but typically they operate on a fee-for-service basis. Government's ability to seed fund some relationships between businesses and sourcing agencies could remove the initial risks of engaging with new sourcing agencies that would access labour pools of people with disabilities for business.

The Council recommends the following:

- The Ministry of Community and Social Services continues to review ODSP with a view to reorient the program so it provides clear financial incentive to get – and keep – a job. Particular emphasis should be placed on youth employment. The program's funding of employment services should be reviewed and tied to how well it achieves the goal, focusing on job market needs and getting people with disabilities permanently into the workforce. Employment will help raise people out of poverty, reduce their dependency on social assistance and ensure they are contributing to the tax base
- Do not pursue or allow sub-minimum wage permits for workers with disabilities under any circumstances.
- Help stimulate employment through a focus on supporting the sourcing of people with disabilities, accessibility in the workplace, and continued training and support of people with disabilities once in the workplace, rather than through direct wage subsidies.

## **7. Set goals and ensure accountability**

- Good intentions won't change anything. In measuring the increase in the number of employees with disabilities, government needs to establish key metrics, publicly provide performance information and encourage – through open data – accessibility performance assessment across multiple sectors.

The Council recognizes that measurement is critical to effective change. During the next phase of its work, the Council will propose specific goals for increasing the number of people with disabilities in the workforce and recommend the pertinent data to be collected on a regular basis in order to assess how well the province is doing in achieving them.

## **Work plan**

In its initial report the Partnership Council has identified primary issues in facing the challenges of engaging more Ontarians with disabilities in the workforce, and provided recommendations for government to foster change. The Council is currently reviewing many other areas that affect employment for people with disabilities and will report on these areas in the future when the work is complete.

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## Appendix 1

### Member biographies: Partnership Council on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities

**Bob Stark** (Chair) is an independent consultant and specializes in business strategy. Bob retired from the Ontario Public Service in 2012 as Deputy Minister and CEO of ServiceOntario. Prior to this, he worked in the private sector as an executive at Scotiabank and Rogers Communications. Bob joined the Ontario Public Service as CEO, ServiceOntario, where he led innovative changes through the centralization and modernization of fast and friendly government services, using integrated in-person, contact centres and online service channels. ServiceOntario has won a number of awards for its services and solutions and is internationally recognized as a leading, innovative public-service provider. At Scotiabank, Bob launched debit point-of-sale, telephone and internet banking among many other service innovations. At Rogers Communications, he managed the centralization and integration of contact centres, introducing telephone sales, bundled products and single billing statements. Bob is a leader dedicated to effective customer service and establishing workplace cultures that embrace people with disabilities.

**Caroline Arcand** has a Bachelor of Arts degree from the Université du Québec à Montréal, a Certificate in Communications from St. Paul University in Ottawa, and a certificate in Human Resources Management and Business Administration from the Université du Québec. She is currently enrolled in the Masters in Community Development program at the University of Victoria in British Columbia. She is one of the founders and Executive Director of Groupe Convex, a network of social enterprises employing mostly people with an intellectual disability. She has served as a director on the Eastern Ontario Training Board over the past ten years. She was awarded Economic Development Woman of the Year in 2008 and the 2011 Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award by Trico Foundation. Some of her initiatives have been profiled in university-based research projects, and others have been broadcast on Radio-Canada and other Canadian television stations. She is an environmentalist and shares her time with her husband and their two horses on their hobby farm in eastern Ontario.

**Jodi Butts** is the Executive Director of Rise Asset Development, a charity that provides small business loans, training and mentorship to individuals with a history of mental health issues or addiction challenges. She holds a Master's degree in Canadian History and an LLB from the University of Toronto. She was called to the Bar in 2000, after which she helped to found a boutique litigation firm, Brannan Meiklejohn Butts, LLP. Her practice primarily focused on assisting clients with health conditions that impacted their relationships with disability insurance carriers, employers and/or health care providers. Jodi left private practice to join Mount Sinai Hospital, where she served for eight years in progressively more senior roles, her final being Senior Vice-President of Corporate Affairs and Operations. In that role, Jodi had responsibility for the hospital's capital infrastructure, governance, legal and ethical affairs, as well as corporate and hospitality services. She is a member of the Board of Directors and serves as Chair of the Governance Committee of the Wellesley Institute, a research and policy institute established to advance urban health, with a special focus on the social determinants of health.

**Joseph Dale** has worked in the field of disability for over 35 years and spent much of that time addressing issues related to employment for people with disabilities. Currently, he is the owner and CEO of Vision Consulting, which assists businesses and not-for-profit organizations focused on helping people with disabilities get jobs. Joe is also the Executive Director of the Ontario Disability Employment Network, and the founder of the Rotary at Work initiative. He was a member of Ontario's Lieutenant Governor's accessibility team, and participates on several provincial consultation teams with a focus on policy and disability. Joe is a member of the Rotary Club of Whitby and received his Paul Harris Fellowship in 2009 as a result of his work with Rotary at Work. More recently, he received the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Award.

**Joe Dowdall** is the Vice President and Director of Apprenticeship for Local 793 of the International Union of Operating Engineers. He has served as a member of this union for 41 years and holds a certificate of qualification for Tower and Mobile cranes for the Province of Ontario. Joe also serves on the divisional board for construction at the Ontario College of Trades and has also served on many health and safety committees. He sustained a spinal cord injury in a construction accident in Toronto in 1987. After spending 14 months in rehabilitation, he decided to raise money for spinal cord research and served as Co-Chair of the Barbara Turnbull Golf Tournament for 20 years, raising approximately \$1.3 million for spinal cord research. Joe continues to volunteer at Spinal Cord Injury Ontario and served as a board director during the days when it was called the Canadian Paraplegic Association of Ontario. Joe lives in Oakville, Ontario, is married and has two children and four grandchildren.

**Lisa Foster** is an innovative and committed leader in working with people who experience disabilities. She has worked with people who live with intellectual disabilities for 25 years. She currently serves as executive director of Community Living Thunder Bay. In this role, she is committed to promoting full inclusion for everyone, and she is a dedicated and enthusiastic community developer. She brings a strong commitment to helping people with intellectual disabilities have their voice and vision front and centre in conversations.

**Shannon MacDonald** is a senior partner and business executive with Deloitte Canada. Shannon has spent most of her career at Deloitte. With over 24 years of audit and consulting experience, she has been the lead client service partner or advisory partner serving Deloitte's most important clients in Canada. Her professional uniqueness is rooted in a track record of combining deep vertical sector knowledge and functional expertise with a passion for teamwork and inclusion in order to successfully drive growth and client satisfaction. A diversity champion, Shannon was a founding member of Deloitte's diversity council and its talent and diversity council in Atlantic Canada. She is often honoured for her contributions to business and community leadership, and has twice been named one of Canada's most powerful women by the Women's Executive Network. Shannon has established a reputation as a thought leader and popular speaker on topics ranging from productivity and governance to the financial implications of forecasted spending on provincial government programs and health care systems. She was recently named one of the 50 most influential CEOs and leaders in Atlantic Canada for two years in a row. Shannon's community and philanthropic efforts include serving with the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council, the Board of Capital District Health Authority, the Canadian Cancer Society – Nova Scotia Division, and she sits on the board of the Women's College Hospital

in Toronto. Shannon is also the CEO's designate to the Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited board of directors.

**Deanna Matzanke** is a strategic human resources professional and lawyer. Most recently, she acted as a Director, Global Human Resources, at Scotiabank, where she was responsible for a wide range of employment strategies that included fostering and integrating the bank's global diversity and inclusion strategy and implementing the bank's global human resources policy and compliance framework. This framework addressed a large number of key areas such as privacy, occupational health and safety, human rights, flexible work, accommodation and accessibility. Deanna is an active committee member on the Workplace Action Team for Partners for Mental Health and the Episodic Disabilities Advisory Committee of the Canadian Working Group on HIV and Rehabilitation. She holds a BA (Honours) in Romance Languages from the University of Alberta, and common law and civil law degrees from McGill University. She is a recipient of the Nathan Cotler Human Rights Award. She is also a certified global professional in human resources through the Society for Human Resource Management, and a certified human capital strategist with the Human Capital Institute.

**Laura McKeen** is a litigation lawyer and a partner at Cohen Highley LLP in London, Ontario. Cohen Highley has been a leader in accessible employment for several decades and was the recipient of the first Ontario Leader in Accessible Employment Award from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

Laura practises in the area of administrative law, including condominium, residential tenancies, municipal, planning and zoning, and expropriations. Within her practice area, she often deals with risk management and regulatory compliance issues. Laura also serves as the law firm's accessibility officer, and provides advice to businesses and organizations in Ontario about the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*. Laura holds a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) and Juris Doctor from Queen's University. She also serves on a variety of committees and boards, including, the Board of Directors for Homes Unlimited (London) Inc. and a member of Community Living London's Night of Heroes Committee.

**Barry McMahon** has a long history of advocating for the dignity and inclusion of people with disabilities. He has served as advisor on several municipal, provincial and federal government councils and committees. Barry's main priority has been focused on encouraging systemic change so that government services and public policies include the needs and aspirations of all citizens, including those with disabilities. His career experience has been in the public and private corporate communications sectors. He has served as a senior contract manager with the federal government's Department of Public Works and Government Services for ten years. Prior to that, he served as co-owner and executive producer of a small business specializing in audio-visual production. He was extensively involved in the creation of the *Ontario Disabilities Act, 2001*, and the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*. Barry has served as a charter member of the Accessibility Advisory Council of Ontario (now called the Accessibility Standards Advisory Council) and served as a member of the Accessible Built Environment Standards Advisory Committee. Barry is from Ottawa, Ontario.

**Steve Sharpe** is CEO of Sharpe Foods Limited, operating as Sharpe's Food Market in Campbellford, Ontario. He was a member of the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario's accessibility team and is a member of the Ontario Disability Employment Network's

Champion's League. He is an inclusive employer with 90 employees who routinely promotes the Rotary at Work program, making a business case for hiring people with disabilities, both in his community and in industry. He has served as past president of the Campbellford Chamber of Commerce, Business Improvement Association and Rotary Club. Steve is a past chair of the Campbellford economic development committee, past director of the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers and past chair of Distribution Canada Inc., a national buying group. He is married to Doreen Sharpe, a registered physiotherapist who has actively promoted accessibility in the community for more than 35 years.

**Mark Wafer** is the owner of six Tim Hortons restaurants in Toronto. Over the past 20 years Mark has employed 115 people with disabilities in all aspects of the business including management, all in meaningful and competitively paid positions. Mark sees a clear business case for inclusion, and today 46 of his 225 employees have a disability. Mark is an internationally recognized speaker on inclusion, one of four members of the federal government's panel of marketplace opportunities for people with disabilities, co-founder of Canada's national strategy, Canadian Business SenseAbility, co-author of the report "Rethinking Disability in the Private Sector" and a member of the Ontario Lieutenant Governor's accessibility team. Mark is an advisor to governments in Canada and internationally in the area of inclusion and accessibility.

**Ian Howcroft** is the Vice President, Ontario Division of Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters (CME). He is responsible for all aspects of the CME Ontario Division, including membership, business development, policy and advocacy. Ian also currently serves on a variety of committees and boards including Chair, Skills Canada – Ontario; Member, National Board of Directors - Skills Canada; Member, Board of Directors, Ontario Exports Inc.; and Member, Industrial Accident Prevention Association Conference Advisory Board.