

HELP WANTED

ENDING SHELTERED WORK IN CANADA

PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY REPORT ON RESEARCH

Introduction

This is a report on the research carried out as part of a People First of Canada (PFC) project. This PFC project is called *Help Wanted - Sheltered Workshops and the Steps to Ending Employment Segregation in Canada*. This is a plain language summary of the research published by the Institute for Research and Development on Inclusion and Society (IRIS).

The project has several goals, as below:

- ✓ Build awareness about the reality of sheltered work in Canada
- ✓ Create choices and options instead of sheltered work
- ✓ Build capacity to move away from sheltered work and towards inclusive employment

The purpose of the research was to do the following:

- ✓ Find out about sheltered work in Canada
- ✓ Find good practices to get people from sheltered workshops to inclusive jobs
- ✓ Find policies and programs that support moving from sheltered workshops to inclusive jobs

The research included looking at the information about this issue, interviewing people, looking at case studies, and doing a survey on sheltered work.

Transitioning to Inclusive Employment for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Acknowledgements:

This plain language summary report is based on the research report "*Help Wanted - Ending Sheltered Work in Canada - Transitioning to inclusive employment for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities*". The report is produced by the Institute for Research and Development on Inclusion and Society or IRIS. (© 2021).

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You can find more information about IRIS on their website: <https://irisinstitute.ca> or by writing them an email at contact@irisinstitute.ca.

What are sheltered work programs?

What is inclusive employment?

Why does it matter?



What is a sheltered work program?

Sheltered work programs usually do the following things:

- ✓ It is a program where people with disabilities are doing work. They make products or provide services.
- ✓ It is a program that receives money from the service provider or other partners.
- ✓ It is a program where the work would be paid if people without disabilities were doing it.
- ✓ It is a program that pays workers less than minimum wage or doesn't pay them at all.
- ✓ It is a program that does not give workers benefits like vacation days or other paid leave.
- ✓ It is a program that does not follow the usual employment laws.

...➤ **What is the situation of sheltered work in Canada?**

There are some provinces and territories that allow sheltered work. In this research, we reviewed the laws and policies of five provinces and territories. We reviewed Ontario, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Quebec, and the North West Territories. We found that they all allow sheltered work programs. This is because they have exemptions or loopholes in their employment laws. This includes paying people less than minimum wage or not paying them at all.

Some provinces and territories are trying to stop this kind of work and move towards more inclusive employment programs. Some are not. But there is not an overall plan or policy to help make this happen.

A national survey was done to find out more about these programs. There were 51 programs surveyed.

This is what the results show.

- Sheltered work still exists in Canada. Some organizations have both sheltered work and inclusive employment programs.
- Funds for sheltered work programs mostly come from provincial governments.
- Almost 50% of those surveyed are thinking about changing their day services to inclusive employment programs.
- Most people with intellectual or developmental disabilities still do not get equal treatment when it comes to work.
- A lot of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities stay in sheltered work programs for a long time. Most stayed for at least 2 years. Some stayed for more than 20 years.

Why do some organizations want to keep sheltered work programs?

Some people want to keep sheltered work programs.

These are some of the reasons they give.

- ▶ Some people think these programs are good for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. They say people get to belong and be social with others. They say it also provides families with some care giving support.
- ▶ Some people say sheltered work programs give people security, stability and safety. They say it protects disability benefits that could be lost in the regular job market.
- ▶ Employers don't know about the potential of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Employers need more sensitivity training.
- ▶ Employers think workers with disabilities will not do very well and might cost them money.
- ▶ These programs provide money to organizations. They may not be able to get other funding.

▶ Key concerns with sheltered work models

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities have one of the highest rates of unemployment of any group. There is no proof that sheltered work programs help people to get real jobs. There is no proof that they help people to be financially secure.

Some of the major concerns with sheltered work programs are as follows.

- ▶ These programs discriminate against people.
- ▶ These programs do not follow basic employment rules.
- ▶ The people in these programs do not value the experience, and some reject it.
- ▶ These programs keep people with intellectual and developmental disabilities isolated and away from regular jobs.
- ▶ These programs continue to keep the negative view about people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their ability to work.
- ▶ These programs keep people in poverty.
- ▶ These programs do not fit with the mission of the agencies that run them.



➤ Why Canada needs to move away from sheltered work models

There has been a lot of effort made to move away from sheltered work programs. There has been a lot of effort to get people real jobs. Yet the sheltered workshop model is still in use in most provinces and territories.

Research shows that it is necessary to move away from sheltered work models.

- This will increase the number of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the labour force.
- This will help to address poverty and isolation. It will help make sure people are not taken advantage of.
- By giving more funds to inclusive employment, there will be less interest and funds for sheltered work programs.
- This will respond to the growing demand for more real work from people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. This will allow people to be more independent. It will allow them to be more engaged and included in the community.
- This will allow Canada to say it is following Article 27 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This article says that people with disabilities need to be included in the regular workforce on an equal basis with other people.

What is inclusive employment?

- ✓ “Inclusive employment” means everybody is included in work.
- ✓ People with disabilities work with people without disabilities in the regular job market.
- ✓ No person is left out or kept away from job opportunities because of their disability.
- ✓ People with disabilities have access to the same work, accommodations and benefits as workers without disabilities.

➤ Best Practices to Move from Sheltered Work to Inclusive Employment

There are different steps that need to be taken to move from sheltered work to inclusive employment. Many different people and groups need to be involved. This includes individuals, families, communities, agencies and staff, and also employers.

Best practices for individuals, families & communities

- Make sure that individuals are at the centre of the decisions being made.
- Families need to be involved and included. They can be the key to a successful outcome and help raise awareness.
- Finally, there is a broad need to raise awareness in most communities about people's rights and abilities.

Agencies, staff & organizational leadership

- Agencies, staff, and their leadership need training, information and resources to support inclusive employment programs. This support should include training on how to develop programs and how to manage them.
- Governments and non-profit organizations should work together to create toolkits and guides. These resources would help support the shift towards inclusive employment.
- There needs to be awareness raising about the new programs. This will help agencies figure out their goals and values for the new programs.
- Agencies need time to redesign their programs and find new funding options.
- Agencies should get support from the community for this shift in programs. This has been a key factor for some agencies that have moved to inclusive employment programs.

Employers

- Both the research and survey showed that there needs to be more awareness among employers. They need to be made aware of the potential of individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities.
- Employers also need to get more support when they decide to hire a person with a disability. There have been several good projects made to help employers with support.

Policy Directions

The research showed six main things that governments can do. These will help to move from sheltered work programs to inclusive jobs.

1. Make sure human rights laws and employment laws equally protect people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Make sure employment laws do not allow sheltered work programs.
2. Make a commitment that sheltered work programs will not be funded by governments.
3. Change from sheltered work programs to inclusive employment in steps so organizations can prepare for the change.
4. Have a plan for social assistance programs. Make sure people with disabilities do not live in poverty just because of their disability.
5. Provide support for people in all areas and look at the individual needs of each one.
6. Help people make the shift from school to work.

➤ Next Steps

Sheltered work programs have existed for more than 70 years. Some people have stayed in these programs for their whole working age and adult lives. These programs still exist even though there has been decades of talk about shutting them down. These programs are still funded by provincial and territorial governments. There is not a full plan to stop this and move to inclusive employment.

There are many key parts to making the successful move to inclusive employment. They are as follows.

- Person-centered
- Supported by families and community
- Backed up with a policy, or guideline
- Led by agencies and governments
- All stakeholders are represented and engaged

Across the country, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have been asking for an end to sheltered work programs. They want an end to this kind of discrimination. They want to be included in the process. This is a ‘Nothing about us without us’ issue.

They are not the only ones. Disability organizations have been calling for a more inclusive society and work force. Other community organizations agree. Even governments have been making some commitments.

Now may finally be the time to deliver on the promise of inclusive employment and end sheltered work forever. People with intellectual and developmental disabilities should not have to wait any longer for their rightful place in the workforce.

