

Advancing Equal Access for People with Intellectual
Disabilities in the Workplace Project: Research Report
Plain Language Summary

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Prepared by the



in partnership with



for



Background

Many people with intellectual disabilities want to work. Having a job helps them in many ways. They feel better about themselves. They connect with other people. Their health can improve. Their life can be better overall.

A person with an intellectual disability who has a job will earn money. This is good for them. They can support themselves. They might not need help from the government.

It is good for employers when people with intellectual disabilities can work. They have more people to work for them.

In Canada it is not easy for people with intellectual disabilities to work. Less than one out of every four people with intellectual disabilities have jobs. The jobs they have do not pay much money. The jobs are often part-time. They often work only a few hours every week.

It is important to help people with intellectual disabilities find good jobs that pay well. Many people and groups in Canada are working on this problem.

We did this project to learn about people with intellectual disabilities and their jobs. We wanted to see how employers and other people helped people with intellectual disabilities get jobs and work. We wanted to learn what stopped people from working. We wanted to learn what helped them.

Equal Access at Work

This project looked at equal access at work for people with intellectual disabilities. 'Equal Access' means everyone can look for jobs and work equally. Employers treat people with intellectual disabilities the same as everyone else. People with intellectual disabilities get the help they need to find jobs and work. They get help when something stops them from working.

'Inclusive Employment' is when people with intellectual disabilities work at jobs with other people. They do not work in special jobs. They do not work at places that are only for them. They work at different jobs doing different things with different people. They are paid the same as everyone who does the same job. They are treated the same at work. Employers can help with equal access and inclusive employment. There are rules called 'Accessible Employment Standards' that tell them how. These are rules about what employers do to help people with disabilities work. There are standards for how people find work and get

hired. There are standards for how they are included where they work. There are standards for talking to them about what they are doing well and what they can do better.

Funding and Partners

Inclusion Canada and People First Canada worked on this project together. The Canadian Institute for Inclusion and Citizenship did the research. They are part of the University of British Columbia.

The Canadian Accessibility Standards Development Organization paid for the project. They are part of the Government of Canada.

Who We Talked to

For this project we talked to people with intellectual disabilities who had jobs. We talked to employers who had people with intellectual disabilities working for them. We also talked to people who provide employment support. We talked to people who had experience or interest in employment for people with intellectual disabilities. Everyone we talked to was 18 years old or older.

We talked to 209 people from the following groups.

- 89 people were experts in employment and work for people with intellectual disabilities.
- 85 people were people with intellectual disabilities. In this report, they are called 'self advocates.'
- 21 people were employers. They all had people with intellectual disabilities working for them.
- 9 people were national advisors.
- 5 people were friends and family members of people with intellectual disabilities.

Everyone we talked to was from Canada. Most of them were from British Columbia and Ontario. Most of the people we talked to spoke English. People who spoke French could get translation services to take part in the project.

What We Did

This project had seven parts.

1. We read about other research on work and employment standards for people with intellectual disabilities. We wrote a report about what we read.
2. We looked at employment standards in Canada and other countries. We wrote a report about these standards.
3. We did an online survey for self advocates, employers, and experts. They told us what it was like to look for work and to work as a person with an intellectual disability. They told us what it was like to hire a person with an intellectual disability.
4. We also did interviews with self advocates, employers, and experts. They told us what it was like to look for work and to work as a person with an intellectual disability. They told us what it was like to hire a person with an intellectual disability.
5. We did an online meeting with self advocates and other experts. We told them what we had learned. They told us what they thought about what we had learned.
6. We held focus groups with self advocates, employers, experts, and family and friends. We told them what we had learned. They told us what they thought about what we had learned. They suggested ways to fix the problems we had heard about. They told us what the most important things were for them.
7. We had another online meeting with self advocates and other experts. We told them everything we learned in the project. They told us what they thought about what we had learned.

What We Learned

There is not much research about work and employment standards for people with intellectual disability. Most countries do not have any employment standards for this group. Canada does not have any.

Some countries have programs to support people with disabilities at work. These help them find jobs and work. They do not seem to help people with intellectual disabilities find jobs and work.

Many employers have rules and information about how to include people with disabilities. These talk about all disabilities. They do not focus on people with an intellectual disability. In places that have government rules about accessibility, the statements have more details.

Self advocates told us what it was like to be a person with an intellectual disability who worked. Employers talked about what it was like to employ a person with an intellectual disability. They told us about problems they had. They told us about things that helped. Experts talked about what they knew about people with intellectual disabilities at work. We heard about six kinds of things that made the most difference. We called these 'themes.'

1. Attitudes and Beliefs

These are things people believe. Employers and coworkers have ideas about people with intellectual disabilities. They have ideas about the cost of hiring people and about the benefits. These ideas are not always right.

This is what self advocates said about this theme.

- *"See my ability, that I am hard working and that I learn things fast."*
- *"Fear and prejudice keeps us from being hired."*

2. Knowledge and Awareness

This is what employers and coworkers know about working with people with intellectual disabilities. It is what they know about inclusive employment. It is what they know about the benefits of inclusive hiring. It is what they know about people with intellectual disabilities who work for them and with them. It is about knowing what they are good at and where they may need help. It is about knowing where to get resources and support.

This is what an employment specialist said about this theme.

- *“Employers are usually convinced once they have seen a person with an intellectual or developmental disability working and doing a great job.”*

This is what self advocates said about this theme.

- *“Having an employer that would take the time to understand how you learn and what your disability is.”*
- *“My disability not being taken seriously by coworkers or understood very well.”*

3. Accessible Processes

This is about how people are hired and how they are treated at their jobs. It includes how well this matches what people with intellectual disabilities need. It includes how employers change the way they do things to be more inclusive.

This is what a self advocate said about this theme.

- *“The workplace being accommodating and flexible and just adapting to your needs...like slightly modified hours.”*

This is what an employment specialist said about this theme.

- *“The typical interview format can be intimidating and difficult for employers to see the positives.”*

4. Accommodations

These are changes that employers make to help people with intellectual disabilities who work for them. This includes what employers know about how and when to make changes.

This is what an employment specialist said about this theme.

- *“People have the idea that accommodation means like, huge, huge, huge things. Often it's making visuals out of manuals, things like that...Which helps the person who is the natural support or whoever is around them, as well as the person's roles and other employees, right?”*

5. Workplace Relationships

This is how people work together and connect with each other. It includes how they connect on the job and on a personal level. It includes people with intellectual disability and employers. It includes their co-workers. It includes employment specialists.

This is what self advocates said about this theme.

- *“Seeing me as just part of the team and paid [the] same as everyone else. That we all get tips if they come in.”*

This is what employment specialists said about this theme.

- *“Having employees work closely with the person with and intellectual or developmental disability to be able to get to know them personally, then they see them as a person not a label.”*
- *“An employer not making them part of the work culture (including in staff meetings, staff parties, staff benefits, etc.).”*
- *“Segregation of staff in their roles and isolation of staff ‘behind the scenes.’”*
- *“Employers and co-workers being afraid to speak or interact with people with intellectual or developmental disabilities, so not including them in general conversations and such.”*

6. Supports and Resources

These are things that help people with an intellectual disability and employers. An expert who helps employers and people with an intellectual disability is a support. Money to pay for changes to help people get a job is a support.

This is what a self advocate said about this theme.

- *“I wouldn’t have been successful at my jobs without the support of my job coach (helps me communicate with my boss).”*

This is what an employment specialist said about this theme.

- *“The lack of family supports, the lack of expectations to work, and people with intellectual and developmental disabilities not choosing or wanting to work hours to their full potential are barriers and beliefs that limit opportunities.”*

We asked the people we talked to about their top issues from these themes. All self advocates said that workplace relationships were most important. Family and friends ranked this theme as third on their list. No other group said it was a top priority.

Everybody said that knowledge and awareness was in the top three priorities.

Two groups said supports and resources were most important. This was said by employment specialists and friends and family groups. One self advocate group agreed. But it was not in the top three for any other self advocate group.

What Actions Can Help

We asked everybody how we can act on these themes. People said there were three areas of action that could support inclusive employment at all parts of the job cycle. These are education, communication, and resources.

1. Education

This is about teaching people. Employers, other workers, and groups need to learn about disability and intellectual disability. They need to learn about inclusive employment and how to help people at work. They need to know about success stories. They need to learn how people with intellectual disabilities have succeeded in their jobs. They need to see how problems have been solved.

One example of education is a document that tells people different ways to be a good co-worker to a person with intellectual disability. A self advocate said, *“An explanation sheet sharing best practices to being a good colleague to a person with a disability.”*

Self advocates told us they should lead the way in talking about who they are and what they need. This will help show how things really are for them. A self advocate said, *“Whatever [learning] is provided is run and led by the people we are talking about.”*

Experts told us it was hard to find information that would help employers. It was in a lot of different places. There should be one place people can go to get information and learn how to help. This place should be the same for self advocate, employers, and other people. An employment specialist said, *“It would be great to have a one-stop place or website with all the information employers need. There is a lot out there and sometimes it can be hard to navigate.”*

2. Communication

This is about how people talk to each other and share information. All the themes talked about this. Communication needs to be better for everyone. It needs to be more accessible.

Information should be shared in different ways for people who learn in different ways. Some people need to read things. Some need to be told things. Some learn better from pictures. Some learn better by doing things.

People should connect in person to learn and communicate in the best way for them. People with intellectual disabilities can show others what they can do and how they do it.

Everyone told us it was important for people with intellectual disabilities to connect with each other. People with intellectual disabilities who have jobs can help others who want to work. They can support each other. They can share ideas about how to solve problems. A self advocate said, *“Peer support group - people with disabilities can get together to share ideas for how to handle issues.”*

People with intellectual disabilities can look at documents to make sure they are in plain language. This will make communication better in meetings and at work. A self advocate said, *“If we are included in meetings, we should be able to go over materials beforehand and make sure everything is in plain language.”*

People with intellectual disabilities need to speak for themselves. They can tell their employer what works for them. An employment specialist said, *“You have to allow the individual to tell you what’s needed. Let them speak for themselves and tell the employer what works for them.”*

3. Resources

This is about things to help people with intellectual disabilities and employers. Information is a resource. Money is a resource. Experts who can help people with an intellectual disability and employers are also a resource.

In all the themes we heard that there are not enough resources. Many people said that more accessible resources would help solve problems.

Experts who help people with intellectual disabilities do not have enough time to help everyone who needs them. They need more time for each person they help.

Friends and family told us there are not enough supports. A friend (or family member) said, *“There isn’t enough of the people that are there to help. Sometimes you can have support for a year and then lose it and that doesn’t work.”*

An employer said, *“Not all employers have access to support.”* Employers need resources to help them learn about inclusive employment. They do not all have what they need. More resources can help them understand how to hire and support people with an intellectual disability. Self advocates can be a resource for this. They are experts about people with intellectual disabilities and what they need.

More money is needed in all areas. Employers need money to help them pay their workers better wages. They need money to change their workplaces. They need money to do training.

People with intellectual disabilities need money for things like transportation so they can get to work. One self advocate said, *“Transportation is a big issue.”*

They need money if they want to work for themselves. One self advocate said, *“More funding is needed including self-employment funding options.”*

What Needs to Be Done

This project showed us that many things affect what happens when people with intellectual disabilities look for jobs and work. Some things are helpful. Other things create problems and barriers.

Many things have to be done at the same time for people with intellectual disabilities to have equal access at work. It is not up to just one person or group to change.

Employers need to change things to make jobs inclusive. So do other workers. So do groups and people who help employers and people with intellectual disabilities. So do governments. It will not be enough if only one thing changes.

Here are some actions that can be taken.

1. Make sure that statements and tools include people with intellectual disabilities. This includes statements about disability inclusion. It includes tools like Gender-Based Analysis+.
2. Deliver training for all stakeholders. The training must use information that is about intellectual disabilities. It must cover all parts of the job cycle. The training must be given by self advocates. For example, [The Inclusive Workplace](#) has resources for all stakeholders. There are resources for people who are looking for a job or are working. There are resources for employers and employment agencies.
3. Provide funding for education. This should go to different regions to educate stakeholders. The education should be about the false beliefs people have about intellectual disability. It should look at the negative attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities. It should show the positive benefits of hiring people with intellectual disabilities.

4. Encourage all provinces and territories to also provide funding for education. This could be done through transfer funds. This should include funding for employer to employer education. It should also include self advocate led education.
5. Make sure certain groups get training on attitudes, beliefs and discrimination. This should be required for public service workers that do the hiring. It should be required by federal contractors. They should also be trained about the benefits of inclusive hiring.
6. Make a 'best practice' guide about access for people with intellectual disabilities at work. The guide should cover all parts of work. It should talk about people with intellectual disabilities who are looking for work and those who are working. People with intellectual disabilities should help make this guide.
7. Review all rules and laws about employment. Make sure these rules have information about the unique needs of people with intellectual disabilities. Put in new guidelines about people with intellectual disabilities and employment if required.
8. Provide funding to make employment programs better for people with intellectual disabilities. This includes pre-employment and employment support programs. This could be done through transfers or other ways. Programs must not include any kind of sheltered work setting. Programs should focus on regular jobs in the workforce. Programs should also cover on-the-job training and support. Programs should have a timeline. There should be outcomes attached to the program such as getting a job or keeping a job or advancing in a career.
9. Consider a tax credit to support transportation to and from workplaces. This could be a federal refundable tax credit. It would support people with intellectual disabilities to get a way to work and back home.

Here are the changes in law that we recommend.

1. Make rules or guidelines about accessibility for people with intellectual disabilities in all parts of employment. This can include using many different ways to advertise a job. It can include different ways to do interviews. It can include different ways to do job evaluations.
2. Make rules that require employers to have accommodation and inclusion plans. The plans must be made with the employee with intellectual disabilities. The plans should

cover many different accommodations. It should include accessible communication. It should cover job changes and the use of a support person. It should cover how supervision and evaluation will be done. It should cover flexible work hours.

3. Make rules or guidelines about support persons. These rules would allow support persons to be present at all parts of the job process. The person with an intellectual disability would decide if and when the support person was needed. This should be done with the employer. An employment support person can also be involved if the employee requests it. This information should be included in the accommodation and inclusion plan.

This project was a good start. It made sure people with intellectual disabilities were heard. They told us about their own lives and things that had happened to them. People with intellectual disabilities have to be involved in every step of the process to create equal access at work.