

Employment Supports: A Modern Approach

What We Have Learned From The Systemic Failures Of The Past

Historically (and ongoing in some cases) the approach to supporting people with intellectual/developmental disabilities and/or autism in employment was to congregate them and organize them in different programs, as determined by disability-related assessment tools.

“Pre-employment training” was provided with a focus on “reducing deficits” (as compared to other workers in the labour market) as the path to “employment readiness.” These readiness programs, known as sheltered workshops, day programs, or social enterprises, have been proven ineffective as a path to authentic paid employment, as evidenced by the reality that program participants tend to stay for years or even decades; they function as “instead-of-employment” and effectively create groups of the “unemployable.”

Being formally or informally labelled unemployable is a significant issue for people who need more support than the average person. Unemployment rates for people with intellectual disabilities and/or autism is 70% or higher (precise statistics are unavailable as much of the population is not captured by labour market data) and it is critical we find new and creative ways to help this population contribute to their communities through authentic work.

What We Know Now

- Individuals can and want to work
- The only qualification for access to employment supports should be “I want to work”
- People don’t have to “get ready for work” spending weeks/months/years in a program
- Everyone has a right to the support they need to be a contributor to society
- Having a job is directly correlated to higher quality of life
- There is no assessment to determine when a person is “ready for work”
- Employers will accept and have success with a broad range of employees
- Individuals learn and grow through experience in authentic paid employment
- The learning of employment skills happens where the skills are authentically utilized
- Providing coaching to employers and workplaces stabilizes employment success
- Job matching of employee interests and employer needs correlates to long-term success
- Employers and employees often exceed expectations; what we think a person can do or the ways an employer can benefit from a particular worker is never fully pre-determined

What We Do Now

Like other successful modernized employment supports providers, LiveWorkPlay uses an individualized approach to creating opportunities that will be mutually beneficial for both employers and employees. We take time to get to know both job seekers and employers and match the needs of employers with talents, skills and interests of the job seeker. We do not use what may be considered “traditional job search approaches” (such as searching job ads or submitting job applications) as we know this is highly ineffective.

We use a “social capital approach” which involves developing employment networks that include employment champions, volunteers, staff, family members, and job seekers in order to develop relationships potential employers and develop employment positions for job seekers.