

When it comes to the Federal Employment Strategy Group (FESG) and the LiveWorkPlay employment supports team, it's all about groundbreaking work in securing authentic work and career advancement for people with Intellectual disabilities and autistic people in the federal public service. While we are not getting into the details of this tonight, it is worth noting that over the past 10 years we have supported 221 people to work within the federal public service- 47 of whom are now permanent employees. We want to honour and celebrate this evening some of the people who have been instrumental in making this happen.

There are hundreds of people involved but we are celebrating a few key players who over the years have shown tremendous dedication, were responsible for multiple hires, were involved in the early stages of developing our model, have developed and shared best practices, and have advocated for additional hires in their department or across other departments.

We are happy to share there are a few representatives in the room that have been and continue to be instrumental in championing employment in partnership with LiveWorkPlay and would like them to join me at the front to be recognized.

Jen Soucy, former Director of Employment at LiveWorkPlay is someone you don't easily forget. If you have met her, and you originally said no, chances are, she came back to you again until she got the answer she wanted. For many years, she alone was the employment team at LiveWorkPlay, and she made strong relationships and alongside Mary Gusella, was responsible for the LiveWorkPlay Employment Supports Model.

Danny Spagnolo was a founding member of the original LiveWorkPlay Employment Task force and brought tremendous energy to creating a new and additional group that could focus entirely on securing opportunities in the Federal Public Service; hence the Federal Employment Task Force (FESG) was born.

Melissa Struthers, Director at the Canadian Human Rights Commission, has been involved since the beginning when she was the Champion of Persons with Disabilities at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Of most significance, Melissa was one of the first to take an enterprise approach to the partnership between LiveWorkPlay and CFIA and took it all the way up to senior management to have a framework put in place.

Dan Carleton, Chief of Staff at Indigenous Services Canada has also been involved since the initiative started and in addition to hiring multiple people in a variety of departments, he is a connector and advocate to the core. From dozens of presentations that he and his team have done, to introductions that result in hires, to letters of support to funding opportunities, Dan is someone we have on speed dial!

Michelle Kovacevic, Assistant Deputy Minister at Indigenous Services Canada has been instrumental in setting the groundwork for lasting hires at Finance Canada, adding passion, surprises and humour at our Federal Employment Strategy Group meetings, and being a true champion of the work that we do by communicating the impact of inclusive hiring in videos and presentations where others are inspired to hire.

Doug McConnachie, Assistant Deputy Minister at ISED is someone who we knew immediately understood the value and the impact of our work. He has been one of the main reasons ISED embraced the LiveWorkPlay model at all levels of the department and has become the leading department for not only the number of hires, but also the number of indeterminate hires.

Mike Andrews, National Manager at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is the kind of Manager most people either a. dream of having or b. want to be. He is clear, kind, honest and an incredible relationship builder. He has been involved in multiple hires over the past 8 years, has helped establish a mentorship system and the impact he has had on not only the employees who get to work with him, but also our staff, is lasting and powerful.

Geoff McDiarmid, Product Portfolio Manager at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is a fierce advocate and someone who had brought his dynamic and contagious energy to the inclusive employment initiative since he first became involved in 2017. From helping to set up a “trusted source” system at CFIA, to being a tremendous advocate both within and outside his department, to recently approaching us with an idea and connections that could lead to some significant job opportunities in the years to come – Geoff lives out our mission in his work.

Rachel Boutin, Manager, Special Projects in Accessibility at Statistic Canada is a long-term advocate and ally to LiveWorkPlay. No matter her role in a variety of departments, she was responsible for the 150th hire within the federal public service and worked with us to make this a special announcement, has had us speak at events such as National Accessibility Week, and is a consistent and active member of the Federal Employment Strategy Group.

Mary Gusella: finally, it is impossible to think about this work without picturing Mary Gusella. She has not only been volunteering with LiveWorkPlay since 2013 but has been instrumental in the development and success of our work with the federal public service. From the early stages of helping us connect to federal government employees in our research, to ongoing strategic discussions, and a founder and the ongoing volunteer Chair of the Federal Employment Strategy Group, Mary has been the backbone behind our federal work, and we are incredibly thankful for her commitment, advocacy and overall brilliance.