



Ontario Disability Employment Network

Annual Report

2014-15

The Year in Review – 2014-15

2014/15 was an incredibly busy and exciting year for the Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN). We've seen employment for people who have a disability emerge to become a key focus of the Provincial Government across the board.

From participation in the Ministry of Economic Development (MEDEI), Employment and Infrastructure's *Partnership Council on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities* to the ODSP Employment Services' *Service Providers Group*, the Network has continued to be the 'go-to' organization when it comes to consultation and input on policy and program design issues.

The launch of the Centre for Excellence in Employment Services in the spring of 2015 validated the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) confidence in the Network's ability to provide value to the sector.

As the Network continues to evolve and grow, the Board has taken steps to ensure its viability and stability. Early into the 2015/16 year the Board participated in governance training and the creation of a work plan to guide its activities and to ensure all responsibilities and obligations are met.

Employer Engagement

The Network continued to work with its Champion's League to engage new business operators and build awareness about the benefits of including people who have a disability in the workforce. A few highlights from the 2014/15 year include:

Mark Wafer and Joe Dale gave a keynote presentation to over 700 members of the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers at their annual conference in Toronto in the fall of 2014, thanks to connections made by Champion's League member, Steve Sharpe.

With the support of the Federal Opportunities Fund, 10 presentations were made to businesses across the province. These were hosted by Chambers of Commerce, Rotary Clubs and Human Resource Professionals chapters. Additional Employer Breakfast sessions were hosted by local employment agencies, generally in partnership with their Chambers and/or BIAs. Local ODSP offices often provided the financial support for these sessions.

In 2014, the Ontario Disability Employment Network became the official partner of Rotary in the delivery of the Rotary at Work initiative. This initiative works through Rotary Clubs to promote the business case for inclusive workplaces and leverages businesses owned and/or operated by Rotarians to



help deliver the key message that hiring people who have a disability is 'good for business'.

Thanks to the support of MCSS, MEDEI and a number of other sponsors, the Network hosted its first *Rethinking Disabilities Conference* in February of 2015. This was a very successful conference, featuring 23 speakers all from the business sector, that attracted over 155 delegates. Follow up after the conference was exceptional and included significant media coverage including spots on CHFI FM, Lou Schizas business radio and a two-page cover spread in the business section of the *Globe and Mail*. This continues to reinforce our message about the business advantages of hiring people who have a disability.

Sector Training & Engagement

In 2014, the Network presented the Job Developer's Roadmap training, hosted at the Bob Rumball Centre for the Deaf. Additionally, a number of training sessions were delivered to groups of local employment agencies and customised training for individual agencies.

The Network also had its first foray into delivering training at the Community College level, delivering two training sessions for Loyalist College's DSW Program.

A number of consultations were also provided to individual agencies to assist them to develop and improve upon their employment service practices.

Government Relations

As noted, the Network has continued to be the 'go-to' organization for the Provincial Government. With that, both

workload and expectations have grown and, where a few years ago, our involvement was predominantly with MCSS today, we're engaged with multiple Provincial Ministries and the Federal Government. The following are the highlights of that involvement.

Ministry of Community and Social Services

Work on the MCSS Minister's *General Advisory Council on Social Assistance Reform* continued into 2014/15. This Advisory Council was addressing issues related to equalizing Income Supports for both ODSP and Ontario Works (OW) recipients and the merging of all employment benefits into one work-related benefit program.

Both ODEN's Executive Director and Board Chair, along with several of our members, participated in the *ODSP Service Provider Group*. This group has been looking at funding models and improvements to the delivery of ODSP Employment Supports. Work on this portfolio continues.

The Network has had on-going dialogue with the Developmental Services Branch (DS) covering issues ranging from the Human Rights case around the sheltered workshops and pay rates to obstacles to employment created by Developmental Services Ontario (DSO).

Further, our Executive Director has had a number of meetings regarding issues of volunteering in the private sector, creating a definition of competitive employment and the interface between DS and ODSP Employment Programs.

Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (TCU)

TCU oversees the Employment Ontario strategy and programs including the 40 Ontario EAS services, commonly referred to as the 'on hold' agencies. Our Government Relations Committee has continued to meet to ensure specialised services are available to meet the needs of people who have a disability in Ontario. While direct interface with representatives of TCU have been limited to 3 or 4 meetings, the committee has been diligent in ensuring its message about the need for specialised services has been heard.

A separate, but related issue is the Canada Jobs Grant strategy that is also managed by TCU. This initiative is a result of the re-signing of the Federal – Provincial/Territorial Labour Market Agreement. The concern for us is that while the language of the agreement speaks to services for those 'furthest from the labour market' most programs appear to serve those with the fewest barriers to the labour market. In fact, the majority of the funding is going toward upgrading and training for those already in the workforce. The added challenge to TCU (and potentially to our sector) is that TCU has to 'find' an additional \$120 million in fiscal savings.

Ministry of Economic Development Employment and Infrastructure (MEDEI)

The Partnership Council on Employment Opportunities presented its Interim Report to Minister Duguid in June of 2015. The Council, which included 3 members of the Network's Champion's League and its' Executive Director, made seven very specific recommendations to the Provincial Government.

- 1. Create Strong Strategic Leadership** by appointing a Cabinet Minister and dedicated Deputy Minister with responsibility to develop a pan-ministry strategic plan for people with disabilities.
- 2. Government as a Role Model** leading by example through employment of people with disabilities in the Ontario Public Service (OPS) and the broader public sector.
- 3. Engage Youth with Disabilities** through enhanced strategies to ensure youth with disabilities gain labour market attachment at an early age.
- 4. Work to Effecting Cultural Change**, heightening business awareness of the value of employing those with disabilities.
- 5. Proactively Involve Employers in Planning**, engaging employers directly in addressing barriers and challenges they face in hiring candidates with disabilities.
- 6. Eliminate Barriers** by reviewing the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) to ensure funding of employment



services is connected to performance in meeting labour market demand.

- 7. Set Goals and Ensure Accountability,** Monitor the performance of public and private sectors in increasing the number of employed with disabilities.

The Partnership Council continues its work with a final report due in May of 2016.

Ministry of Finance

Each year the Network is invited to participate in the Ministry of Finances pre-budget consultations and to attend the budget lock-up sessions each year at Queen's Park. The Network creates its positions on the financial needs of the employment sector each year, in keeping with our overall sector strategies developed by our Government Relations Committee and Board of Directors.

Ministry of Labour (MOL)

This year the Network responded to the MOL's review of the Employment Standards Act. The review focussed on what MOL referred to as 'vulnerable workers', including people who have a disability. The Network made its position clear. In ODEN's letter to Minister Flynn, we wrote:

*"I would like to advise you of our one, guiding principle: **That workers who have a disability be afforded the same rights, responsibilities and protections, under the Employment Standards Act, as would any other worker.** Nothing more, nor less would be acceptable to our constituents."*



Federal Opportunities Fund

The Network has become increasingly concerned about lengthy service gaps between contract renewals for agencies funded under the Federal Opportunities Fund. Further, the way this fund is administered in Ontario is a challenge. Between the requirement for agencies to have mandatory wage subsidy components, irrespective of their service offering and the drive toward serving only those individuals who are 'job ready' or 'light touch' creates a challenge for those individuals who have more significant barriers or who would be considered 'furthest from the labour market'.

Having discussed these issues with our Government Relations Committee, the Network began meetings with Service Canada early in the 2015/16 year.

Centre for Excellence

One of the Network's big accomplishments this year was launching the Centre for Excellence in Employment Services.

With the generous support of MCSS, the Centre for Excellence was established with a mandate to: **'Ensure Ontario builds and maintains the best possible employment service delivery network. A delivery network that is responsive to the employment needs of people who have a disability and that achieves the best possible outcomes by fostering and promoting the highest standards of practice for employment service providers across the province'.**

We will accomplish this by:

- Providing advanced training and development opportunities for those who work in the sector;
- Creating marketing and employer engagement programs;
- Promoting innovation and best practices across the province; and,
- Supporting local and regional community networks.

The Centre has created a dynamic team to accomplish its work and to move the employment agenda forward led by ODEN's Executive Director, Joe Dale. The team is rounded out with Sue Dafoe – Administrator, Lisa Kelly – Employer Liaison, and Bob Vansickle – Training Coordinator.

The Centre held an official launch in the spring of 2015 with MCSS Minister Helena Jaczek holding a press conference and formal announcement at Vos' Independent Grocers in Port Perry, Ontario.

Since launching, the Centre has been busy providing staff training across the province, from Pembroke to Fort Frances, Windsor to North Bay, Toronto to Ottawa and many locations



in between. Training has ranged from collaborative multi-agency events to specialized single agency training and from one-day events to three-day events.

While not anticipated, a number of agencies have also invited the Centre to offer educational and awareness sessions for families and family networks. In looking to the future and issues related to youth employment, this has proven to be an important audience to engage in the thinking and dialogue about employment.

Several organizations have taken advantage of the Centre's consulting capacity, helping those agencies plan for change; create effective marketing initiatives; improve their employment services; and, in some cases, build new employment services from the ground up.

If we've learned one thing in the last 6 years, it's that reaching new heights of successful employment outcomes requires a strategic engagement of business and employers. Working with ODEN's Champion's League, the Centre has hosted numerous employer engagement sessions across the province. While not yet a daily occurrence, it's not uncommon for businesses to reach out to the Centre, looking for assistance to hire people who have a disability. Our approach is to continue building awareness about the business benefits of creating an inclusive workforce, then to match the willing businesses to one of our members who can supply the candidates and supports needed to ensure success.

As part of our mandate of promoting best practices and pursuing innovation the Centre has partnered with Community Living Sarnia Lambton to promote and train in the use of their *Summer Jobs Toolkit and jobStart Employment Preparation Toolkit*.

In 2015, the Centre also began working with Jan Van der Hoof of Fit First Technologies. Jan and his team have been working on predictive software that has two discreet applications. One is to help you with your hiring of employees that are most suited to work in the employment field and the second is to help you in career planning for your clientele. If you're interested in testing this software, contact Joe Dale or Bob Vansickle for more information.

The Centre is currently working with other partners on a variety of innovative tools that we hope to launch in 2016.

Partnerships

Contributing to ODEN's success has been the forging of strong partnerships and allies – other organizations and groups that share our vision of removing barriers to employment for people who have a disability. The Network is pleased to continue its relationship with the ODSP Action Coalition, Income Security Advisory Committee (ISAC), the Ontario Centre for Workforce Innovation, Community Living Ontario, Local and Regional Employment Networks, the Champion's League, Rotary International and the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

The Network is committed to engaging with all others who share in our values and beliefs –

That all people who have a disability in Ontario have access to the labour force and the ability to achieve meaningful employment.

Change Is All Around Us The Challenge Ahead

Change is all around us and change, in and of itself, will play a prominent role over the next few years.

More and more employers are reaching out to us, looking to engage new employees who have a disability. We need to ensure our members are ready to step up and meet that demand, providing good candidates and great customer service to these businesses.

Early into our 2015/16 year, the Government made a critical move when Minister of Community and Social Services Minister Helena Jaczek announced there would be no new admissions to sheltered workshops in Ontario. While we applaud the Minister's courage and vision in making this announcement we need to be ready to offer people better options and alternatives, paying particular attention to how we can support as many of these people as possible in the pursuit of employment opportunities.

Work continues within MCSS and their need to rationalize services and coordinate programs and relationships between DS & ODSP. At the same time TCU continues to lead the work on the Employment Training and Service Integration (ETSI) initiative and, ultimately, this too will need to be rationalized with MCSS employment programs and potentially those funded by Ministry of Health and Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure.

The Network continues to advocate for the continuation of specialized services for people who have a disability, both within MCSS and the Ontario EAS programs administered by TCU.

Even these processes face the challenge of change. In February of 2016, Charles Sousa, Minister of Finance announced the creation of a 'made in Ontario' Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities.

Over the next year, the government will develop a provincial employment strategy for people with disabilities that will:

- **Establish a cohesive made-in-Ontario vision with goals, priorities and desired outcomes to ensure Ontarians have access to a continuum of employment and training services;**
- **Provide a better service experience through streamlined access to employment and training services that recognize the varied needs and employment goals of individual clients; and**
- **Engage employers as active partners in breaking down employment barriers for people with disabilities and promoting inclusive workplaces.**

While the Network has been invited to join in the Working Group to create this employment strategy we don't know, at this stage, what impact this may have on work already in progress with both MCSS and MTCU.

Further to this, we are also aware that the MCSS is also convening a working group to review and modernize Ontario's Income Support program. This too is to unfold in 2016/17.

We face a number of challenges in the sector and it's never been as important as it is now to have a strong, cohesive and prominent voice. We need your support, your participation and your allegiance through membership. Together we can influence positive change, individually we will struggle.

Respectfully,

Nancy Lewis

Chair
Ontario Disability
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Joe Dale

Executive Director
Ontario Disability
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