



Transcript

Ep.25: Making The Journey — Marnie Cuthbert 32:33

Air Date: July 23, 2024

Dean Askin 00:03

You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D, the podcast that explores the power of inclusion and why disability is an important part of the workplace diversity, equity and inclusion conversation produced by the Ontario Disability Employment Network with your hosts, Jeannette Campbell and Dean Askin. Small businesses in Canada are a big thing. There are over 1.2 million employer businesses in this country, and almost 98% of them are small ones. And those employ about 5.7 million people. That's almost half the private sector labor force. But here's the thing. Surveys have shown that over half the small businesses in Canada have never hired someone who has a disability. ≈

Pawnaa Perinpanayagam 00:53

They've never made the disability inclusive hiring journey. So that's where we're going on this episode, and chat with a small business owner who is doing that. Hi, I'm Karina parent perniagaan sitting in for Jeanette Campbell, on this Episode of You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D.

Dean Askin 01:09

I absolutely did. I've been looking forward to this for a few weeks now. And hello there from me. I'm Dean Askin and this is episode 25. And this episode, a second installment of our occasional Making the Journey series, Pawrnaa, welcome as guest co-host. Now you're usually over on Oden's Ontario Corporate Training Center project team. And I think it took you about two milliseconds to say absolutely. When I said Jeannette is going to be away. So how'd you like to guest co-host this Making the Journey episode?

Pawrnaa Perinpanayagam 01:21

And now if you're a regular listener of the show, you'll remember we launched this Making the Journey series in October 2023 during National Disability Employment Awareness Month. It was episode 16. Have a listen.

Dean Askin 02:10

That's right Pawrnaa. For that inaugural segment of Making the Journey, I talked with Joe Hoffer, a business leader, a partner in a law firm, and an ODEN Business Champion who's been a disability-inclusive employer for over 35 years, and who forged a path for other businesses in Southwestern Ontario to follow.

Pawrnaa Perinpanayagam 02:14

This Making the Journey installment we're headed back to Southwestern Ontario. Only this time, we're talking with someone who's just starting their journey. In this series we want to hear the stories of employers across all stages of disability inclusive hiring journey.

Dean Askin 02:15

We do Pawrnaa because you know when a business leader or small business owner in this case, makes that conscious decision to become intentional about disability inclusion. I mean, while it really is a long term journey, with twists and turns and challenges, successes in lesson learned along the way.

02:47

Our guest for this installment is one of those small business statistics we mentioned at the top of the episode. Not only is Marni covered just starting out her disability inclusive hiring journey. She's doing it as a first time small business owner period. She left behind a 15 year career in healthcare administration to do something entirely different. She recently opened the Cafe Corner Tea Room in downtown Woodstock, Ontario.

Dean Askin 03:12

And her first two hires were people who have a disability. By the way, if you're listening from another part of Canada or the world, Woodstock, Ontario is about two hours southwest of Toronto down Highway 401, which happens to be the busiest highway in North America. Just had to get that little bit of trivia in.

Pawrnaa Perinpanayagam 03:31

I did hear you're a bit of a trivia encyclopedia Dean.

Dean Askin 03:36

More like I just got lots of trivia flotsam floating around in my head.

03:41

Speaking of that, I think it was one of my colleagues on the octc team who floated the idea of talking with Marnie for Making the Journey wasn't it?

Dean Askin 03:49

It was Pawrnaa, and a good story idea was I have to say, I remember talking with Marnie before the show, and I think listeners are in for a really engaging conversation over the next half hour or so I know she's been really excited about talking with us about her journey.

Pawrnaa Perinpanayagam 04:05

Well then let's get to hearing about my nice journey so far. Mighty Cuthbert, welcome to you can spell inclusion without a deal and this installment of making the journey and thanks so much for joining on the show.

Marnie Cuthbert 04:19

Thank you for having me. I'm quite a little bit nervous, but we'll we'll make it work.

04:24

You're gonna do just fine. We've Dean had mentioned how incredible your story was we so we can't just wait to get into it. All right. So many, you're just getting started on your disability inclusive hiring journey. You've taken the plunge. How would you describe the journey so far?

Marnie Cuthbert 04:43

I've got a lot to learn. I'm taking the education that's free with a disability inclusion awareness through octc. I'm learning with a little bit of open mindedness. I've found two excellent staff members to help me on my team Journey.

Dean Askin 05:02

Now, I want to pop in here. I mean, a lot of businesses aren't aware of the disability talent pool and how to access it. I mean, take me back for a minute to that day you were introduced to the idea of hiring talent with a disability. What was that? Like? I mean, what do you remember what was about your first reaction?

Marnie Cuthbert 05:20

It was at one of the chamber of commerce business events, they have after five, I 5pm. And I went to that, and I was there. And I was chit chatting with different people, and just promoting myself and my new business. And I happened to mention to someone that I was looking for some staff members, I needed to hire two part time people. And right away, they pulled me over to introduce me to Mike get job links. And we had a good chat. And I was like, yeah, and he said, you know, tell me about your, what you're looking for. And I told him what I was looking for and what I was doing and my ideas about

the tea room. And he said, I have two people off the top of my head right now that I'd love to introduce you to. And I, I was like, that's great. So I had no idea that being new to Woodstock, I only moved here a year ago. But being new to Woodstock, I didn't know what job links was, like, I just said, Yeah, great. Let's do it. It wasn't until Mike and I sat down and had a coffee in a local coffee shop. And we chit chatted. And that's when it occurred to me. Wait a minute, he's representing people with disabilities. And at that point, I was like, Hey, this is fantastic. I had no idea. very naive, that didn't even look into what job links was. Turns out, it's it's a place in Woodstock, where people with disabilities can go and have helped to find jobs and look for services. And just it's fantastic place. And once I met my, the two candidates that I hired, it was I was convinced that we would be a wonderful little team and we'd have we would be able to support each other. So yeah, it's good.

Pawrnaa Perinpanayagam 07:08

Wow, that's a power of one good conversation, right and have a good someone, it leads to something. And now you're on this journey, which is incredible. Now, it's nice to hear your story, how you started your journey, because there have been surveys that have shown that over half of small businesses in Canada have never hired someone who has a disability. And this as a small business owner as yourself, who's now making the journey. What do you think about that?

Marnie Cuthbert 07:38

I realized that a lot of people are afraid of the word disability, and don't actually know what it means. I was not afraid of the word disability having coming come from working in a rehabilitation hospital. I had dealt with people with disabilities all the time, but but a lot of people don't have an idea of what disability really means. I mean, it's not just a physical disability that you can see. I had it It never occurred to me to distinguish between physical disability and learning disabilities. I myself have a lot to learn, and I am educating myself.

Pawrnaa Perinpanayagam 08:22

So I love that. And I think that's something we often see in our conversations, too, is what does disability really mean? Right. And now that you've been tapping into the disability talent pool, it's a way for businesses to find stuff that they need when there's a labor shortage. And a lot of small businesses are short staffed. There's actually a survey by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business that found in 2022, Canadian small businesses missed out on 38 billion in revenue because they were understaffed and had to turn down contracts. As a small business owner, who's now hired people who have a disability. Are you looking at it pragmatically like that like that, like strictly as a labor and revenue solution? So you've got the stuff for you that you need for your cafe? Or do you think that from the perspective that disability inclusive hiring can do a lot for your business on so many levels?

Marnie Cuthbert 09:20

Definitely the latter. My daughter has a disability and I know she herself has struggled with jobs she had. She had a job. She was a pharmacy technician. She worked in a fantastic place and then she switched positions to somewhere else. It was a quite a big corporation that she was working with. And within two weeks, she basically said you look, I'm just wondering if there's any chance that I could just have a chair that once in a while I could sit down and the very next day they fired her. They said she didn't fit in there. So I know my that's one example of several that she in her particular life has faced.

And for me, it it warms my heart to know that I can employ people or two people. I mean, it's two people, but it we may grow, that I can hire those people and employ them. And I really enjoy chatting with these two employees that I've hired and getting to know them. During our interviews, I know they will have an opportunity to be successful in my place of business. My one employee told me in the interview, that he just wants someone to give him a chance to prove himself. And I'm going to do that I'm going to give him that chance. And I'm thrilled to have him work with me. Wow,

Dean Askin 10:50

is it is it? You know, things like that the, from what he said to you, and your own daughter's experiences? Is that what makes it so personally important to you to be making this? You're absolutely,

Marnie Cuthbert 11:03

absolutely. I mean, I've known for quite some time, my daughter is 29 and lives in BC, but I've known for quite some time that she has struggled with some jobs. Right now she's in a fabulous job, and they are so good to her. And it just, again, warms my heart that, that she's found somewhere where she fits in, and they have no issues, helping with anything that she needs. And it's just, it's wonderful. And I want to I want to be the same kind of employer.

Dean Askin 11:39

So you kind of bringing, like, you know, the human level to the DEI conversation, I mean, disabilities still so often gets left out of the diversity, equity and inclusion business conversation. I mean, you know, you got the lived experience, you know, with your daughter's experiences. And as someone who's not only become a disability inclusive employer, but has that lived experience, you know, when you read about companies touting their di D ei efforts, but disabilities left out or maybe you know, you overhear snippets of conversations a chamber events in, in in Woodstock, I mean, and there's no mention of disability. I mean, how does that make you feel? What's your reaction?

Marnie Cuthbert 12:28

I haven't come across this yet. But I have made my personal business, business disability inclusive in several ways. I have a ramp at my door, I have a full universal washroom. I have large print menus. I am working towards other ways to be disability inclusive, but I it's a slow process. It's you know, starting out a new business, there's a lot of other things that take priority at the moment, like buying groceries and hiring and training, all these things. But in the back of my mind, there are other ways that I know that as time progresses, I can implement different smaller things to help people. Absolutely, absolutely. Wow,

13:15

like to think that you've already had that kind of mindset when as you're building your business. And as you're getting ready. And we love that because that kind of leads us into my next question I actually had for you is accommodation. It's something that comes up often, in the conversation about disability inclusive hiring, you mentioned with your daughter, that conversation about accommodations was a bit of a sticky one. And it's actually a common myth that accommodations cost so much. But in reality series have shown that 56% of employers have said accommodations costs, almost nothing to them. So as a small business owner, where you introduce the idea of hiring someone who has a disability.

When you were introduced to the idea of hiring someone who has a disability, were you concerned about what accommodations may be needed to help that person be successful in the in their job?

Marnie Cuthbert 14:10

Actually, I was prepared to make any accommodation because of the way I'm already I myself am aware of the fact that people with a disability may require accommodation. So I went into the interviews fully prepared to make any accommodations. It turns out that an apron with Velcro, some larger printed instructions on the wall and a chair were all that was required for my employees and it didn't cost me a cent. Wow. It's simple changes, right? That's simple. So simple. People really assume that there's going to be huge costs and you're going to need this and you're going to need that I'm just not going to hire you but that's not the case. It just ask. Just ask it. Again. It starts with coming back to a conversation a question Right. Just ask what do you need to do your job successfully?

15:04

So well that and you've already shared a few things. But I would love to learn a little bit more about what have you learned along the way during this disability inclusive hiring journey that maybe you weren't expecting to?

Marnie Cuthbert 15:21

I'm realizing that I, myself am definitely more open minded, and I don't have any issues with working or hiring with anyone who has a disability who may have the disability. I'm also taking the disability awareness training, and I'm learning new terms I've never heard before. And I have a long way to go. People should educate themselves. And I have learned that recently, there is education out there, it's free. Yeah.

Dean Askin 15:51

You know, sometimes one of the barriers to disability because of his disability inclusive hiring is, is attitude. And it sounds like yes, you've wept well past that barrier and left it well behind.

Marnie Cuthbert 16:07

I think it has to do with me working in the rehab center, I really do. Well, you

Dean Askin 16:12

know, did you ever imagine that you'd be doing what you're doing right now and making this journey. And maybe in the process of setting a disability inclusion example, for other small businesses in Woodstock down there to follow.

Marnie Cuthbert 16:28

I have to admit, I never, it never occurred to me to go looking for people who have a disability to work in my tea room. But now that I am aware of the talent pool out there, and I'm mostly, I'm definitely planning to share my knowledge with other businesses. And have, I've already mentioned it to many people, many, many people, I've talked to lots of people out there in my journey towards opening my tea room. And about the people that I've hired and where I hired them from, and I can't wait to get started. I tell people, I can't wait for you to meet them. I can't wait for them to serve you I can't wait for

you know, I'm actually putting a sign in my front window that says we are an all inclusive workplace. So, you know, people will know that there's, there's a lot of different people in this place. I love that.

Pawrnaa Perinpanayagam 17:21

And it's important, because I think that's the key to making everyone feel welcomed in your place in your in your place of business. And you've mentioned how you weren't necessarily conscious of embarking on this journey. How do you feel when you talk with the Chamber of Commerce or with other business owners? What do you what's your sense? Do you think there's a disability inclusion awareness in the local business community? Are there a lot of businesses in Woodstock that are intentional about disability inclusive hiring? Or are you kind of leading the way Marnie?

Marnie Cuthbert 17:56

Well, I, I've only moved to this community recently. I haven't had a lot of a chance to work with other businesses yet, but I have to say that it was at the Chamber of Commerce event that I went to that I mentioned, I needed employees, and I was introduced right away to Mike from job links. So it seems to me that people here are aware that there is a place here that they can go to hire to stop to hire staff that are needed outside of the regular employment agencies. I am planning to attend tonight's Chamber of Commerce event where I am ready with my little spiel. to nail down the Mayor Jerry and our BIA Downtown Development Officer carry about the lighted up project. I'm currently the only business owner in Hamill sorry. I am currently the only business owner signed up to participate to light up my shop windows in purple and blue on October 17. And this needs to change. City Hall is one block down from me and the museum and the art gallery are both just down the street from me. I'm planning to push other businesses to light it up as well. It literally cost me \$26 For 15 feet of lights from my front window. That is so minimal. It there's really no excuse, but Woodstock was on the map.

Pawrnaa Perinpanayagam 19:26

Yes, more. Are you forgetting us? Woodstock's on the map. So I love that and I'm sure Dean is gonna be so excited to see all those businesses in Woodstock sign up, because that's a huge campaign that we always love to take part in. And I know it's so early in our journey right now Marnie, but from your perspective, what has been the best thing? Oh, what are the best things about being a disability inclusive business?

Marnie Cuthbert 19:56

I we actually we opened our doors on May 26. Next, and you haven't really had a lot of experience yet. But I already have a wonderful rapport with my staff. We feel like a little family. My retired mom will be working in the shop with us, here and there. She has an HR background. So I asked her to participate in the interviews, and she loved these people that I interviewed. And she was like, we're hiring them. So I'm like, I already know. But yeah, it's been wonderful. I'm and the four of us are like a little family, and we support each other. So like they're helping, my employees are kind of helping us learn. And we're sort of teaching them other things as well. So, you know, it's, it's working out really well. One of my employees, has told his entire group of friends, and all of their friends, that he will be working in my tea room, and they are so excited, and they can't wait to see him work. It's really rewarding for me to see so much happiness and excitement and a person who just wants an opportunity to prove himself.

Dean Askin 21:19

You know, you're so you're so full of passionate about what you're doing. And you've kind of already answered the question I was going to ask. I mean, you know, you're just getting into this journey. And you just jumped right out and said, I want to participate in this national event lighted up for ending. And I should let listeners know lighted up for a name is a national coordinated lighting event. That happens the third Thursday of every October during National Disability Employment Awareness Month. This year, it happens to be on Thursday, October 17. And it's an event where bridges and buildings and municipal signs and landmarks of all kinds illuminate purple and blue for one night across the country. And it's just, you know, it's an event that sparks conversation and raises awareness about disability. And so are you talking to me? You're talking up everywhere you go and Woodstock, are you not? Yep,

Marnie Cuthbert 22:13

yep. Yep. There's no excuse. I am taking the Ontario Disability Inclusive training. And there I learned about the OCT 17 event. I've never heard of it. I spent 20 years in Hamilton. I've never heard of it. So when I moved here, I started this journey. And so I went and checked out the NDM campaign website and I looked at Woodstock and not a single business here was lighting it up. And my first reaction is we can't have that. So I signed up right away, I figured I figured that I would figure out how to light up my shop later on, which I have since done. Now that at least Woodstock is on the list. We do have about 47,000 people during COVID, Woodstock grew about five to 7000 people. So we have about 47,000 people here now and I've made it my mission to educate people. And I'm starting with my family my mom has has is so excited. She has told me that she is she's gonna light up her balcony, she's on the top floor of a building that faces the 401 in the hospital and and she said I'm lighting up my balcony this year. So that I started with her. And of course tonight I'm speaking with the mayor and the business, the BIA officer about it. And hopefully we'll, you know, get things going and get other businesses involved, at least in the downtown area where, you know, City Hall and the museum and the wood and the art, the Woodstock art gallery in every of those big places. I attend a lot of networking events, so I plan to do a lot of chatting. Well,

Dean Askin 24:01

you know, as I full disclosure, I mean, I happened to be the national campaign coordinator of Light It Up! For NDEAM and that passion and that dedication and that gung ho and saying I'm gonna get as many people involved in this. I mean, that's music to my ears. And I think it's you know, it just helps raise the level of excitement so hopefully we will see a lot of places like purple and blue and Woodstock on October on October 17. I mean, you know, you've kind of touched on it but you know, why is it so important for you to just jump right in like that and participate in Light It Up! for NDEAM?

Marnie Cuthbert 24:39

I think I'm the kind of person where when I learned something I want everyone to know. I don't know why but I learned that the place I chose to live recently what stock hasn't yet participated in something this big, and I want to share it I want everyone and I want to give everyone else the opportunity to learn about it and get excited about it, and participate in it. And it's not just Ontario, it's all across Canada. And our little city should be involved. Really, there's no excuse not to. It's so inexpensive. And I

Dean Askin 25:15

guess for listeners, we should just mention here, you know, of the participation in Light It Up! For NDEAM if you're listening to this, and you won't find out more and how to participate, especially down there in Woodstock, Ontario. You can go to the ODEN website and odenetwork.com/initiatives. And there's an entire webpage about Light It Up! For NDEAM and where you can find out what it's all about. And there's even a link to how to use a submission form. And let us know that you're eliminating your business organization this year for which happens to be the fifth anniversary of Light It Up! For NDEAM.

Pawrnaa Perinpanayagam 25:43

And, you know, Marnie, when I hear you speak so passionately about Light It Up! For NDEAM and how you've embarked on this journey, and it reminds me of the quote, a rising tide lifts all boats, it's kind of what you're doing. As you're learning, you're spreading the knowledge and bringing everyone along and hoping to rise raise Woodstock to be that disability inclusive, and workplace environment city. And now, I want you to imagine if a small business owner who may be listening to this episode, that may have never thought about hiring someone who has a disability, what's one thing or a key takeaway that you would want them to know?

Marnie Cuthbert 25:53

I'd like everyone to know that there are so many people out there who are hardworking, and just want one employer to give them a chance to prove themselves. And those are the actual words from my new employee.

Pawrnaa Perinpanayagam 26:54

Short and sweet Ed summed up exactly what we needed. And now many, we've talked about how you started and the next steps in your business and how you continued to go. So what really is the next step for you on this disability inclusive hiring journey that you're on? And what are you looking forward to?

Marnie Cuthbert 27:17

I am looking forward to opening my tea room and having my staff serve the community. But more importantly, I am really looking forward to the community, seeing what excellent hardworking people who have a disability can do nothing can stop them. They're going to be amazing.

Pawrnaa Perinpanayagam 27:36

We cannot just wait to see. hear the stories of your opening and the many, many cuz like, I cannot just wait to hear about. Well, well,

Dean Askin 27:49

you've been you've been great. I mean, I know you were young when you know, when we were starting, you were saying you know, I'm feeling out of my element here. But you've been great. So many, you know, important points you've you've brought out in me. And we've talked about a lot. So just before we wrap things up, I mean, have we covered all the essential things do you think? I mean? Is there anything we haven't talked about that you think is important to mention? Before we go?

Marnie Cuthbert 28:13

Yes, I believe that the fact that there is free disability training at disability inclusive training out there for any business, and they can offer it to their staff. They can contact the Ontario Corporate Training Center that which I did, and speak with a disability awareness trainer and their website is Ontario training center.com Easy peasy.

Pawrnaa Perinpanayagam 28:37

Marnie. You made my job easy. I was about to go and explain it all, but you didn't forget. So I appreciate I

Marnie Cuthbert 28:45

think it's important. I think it's important people know that there is free training out there. It's in its short, little 2030 minute modules and you can you can take them one now one later, you take it all at once, whatever works for you. And it's very it's very educating. You think you know something, but there's more to learn. And I think that's what every journey is all about. Right? The continuous learning is continuously learning while

Pawrnaa Perinpanayagam 29:17

learning. I don't know if you're still feeling out of your comfort zone like you were right before we hopped on to this show. But this has been an absolutely great conversation. I can't thank you enough and for coming on and sharing the start of your disability inclusive hiring journey.

Marnie Cuthbert 29:35

Thank you for having me.

Dean Askin 29:37

Pawrnaa. I remember in my initial conversation with Marnie, while we were talking on the phone a while back, I told her to think of this as just a conversation between me You and her with the rest of the world listening in. I mean, that's how I once heard or Morning Show Host put it to someone about what it's like being interviewed on radio and hey, this is just like radio, Marnie. Thanks for me as well for coming on and sharing your story and insights for this installment of our making the journey series, you brought up some really important points. And hopefully, there are other small business owners listening to this right now who will be inspired and motivated by your making the journey to start it themselves.

Pawrnaa Perinpanayagam 30:17

Because once again, as we mentioned at the top of the episode, over half the small businesses in Canada have never hired someone who has a disability. And hopefully that will change in the small business sector, especially when there are almost 645,000 Canadians who have a disability who can and want to work. Well, that wraps up this second installment of our making the journey series and this episode of You can't spell inclusion without a D. I'm trying to pimp Anagha and Dean, I had an absolutely great time posting this episode with you. I definitely want to do this again. Well,

Dean Askin 30:54

I'm glad to hear that Pawrnaa. It's been great having you at the other mic. Thanks again for sitting in for Jeannette, who by the way, will be back for the next episode. We'll talk with a person who's out to

change the world and the narrative around disability representation and advertising and marketing campaigns across North America. That's episode 26. Coming next month on August 15. I'm Dean Askin. Thanks again for listening, wherever, whenever and on whatever podcast app you're listening from. Join us each episode as we have insightful conversations like this one with Marnie Cuthbert and explore disability inclusion in business and in our communities from all the angles. You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D is produced in Toronto, Canada by the Ontario Disability Employment Network. All rights reserved. Our podcast production team, executive producer and host Jeannette Campbell, producer Sue Dafoe Associate Producer and host Dean Askin audio editing and production by Dean Askin. Our podcast team is last summer by Ikksen. If you have feedback or comments about an episode, contact us at info@odnetwork.com. That's info@odnetwork.com. Join us each episode for insights from expert guests as we explore the power of inclusion, the business benefits of inclusive hiring and why disability is an important part of the Diversity Equity and Inclusion conversation. Listen to You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D on Podbean or wherever you find your favourite podcasts.