

# We Belong Here: LCBO's Inclusive Hiring Journey

## About ODEN Business Case Studies

The Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN) is a professional network of employment service providers united to increase employment opportunities for people who have a disability. ODEN curates and develops case studies as real-life examples of success stories and positive employment outcomes.

Case studies are great knowledge resources for gleaning ideas and insights that people can apply in their own operations and with their teams. ODEN case studies are divided into five categories: **(i) Partnership & Collaboration, (ii) Program Model & Promising Practices, (iii) High Performing Employment Service Providers, (iv) Inclusive Business, and (v) Organizational Change Management.** Each category provides valuable insights for employment service providers and businesses to enhance their capacity to achieve inclusive hiring for people who have a disability.

This case study falls under the category of Inclusive Business.

## Executive Summary

This case study details the journey that the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) has embarked on toward disability workplace inclusion with the launch and implementation of their **We Belong Here** program. As one of Ontario's largest retail employers, LCBO recognized the opportunity to proactively dismantle barriers in its recruitment and onboarding systems to make employment more accessible for people who have a disability. The initiative was designed not only to improve representation but to create a welcoming, supportive, and equitable experience for all employees, especially those who historically have been underrepresented in the workforce.

Developed in alignment with LCBO's broader Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategy and Accessibility Plan, the program was implemented across a diverse network of retail locations with the support of local Employment Service Providers (ESPs). These partnerships played a critical role in shaping the program's design and delivery, ensuring it was responsive to the needs of applicants and candidates who have a disability.

The outcomes of the **We Belong Here** program speak to its impact. Participants reported a sense of belonging, increased confidence, and a desire to pursue ongoing employment with LCBO. Managers described the program as transformative, not only for the new hires but for their teams and leadership approach.

This case study captures the LCBO's journey: the motivations behind the program, its thoughtful design, the operational challenges and solutions, and the positive outcomes for employees and the business. It serves as a roadmap for other Ontario businesses seeking to embed accessibility into their workforce strategies and demonstrates that disability inclusion is not just the right thing to do; it's also a **strategic advantage**.

## Key Takeaways

- **Inclusion starts with intentional design.** The LCBO intentionally improved recruitment, onboarding, and training practices to remove barriers creating more equitable access to employment.
- **Local partnerships are critical to build talent pipelines.** Collaborating with local Employment Service Providers enabled the LCBO to further develop inclusive practices grounded in community insight.
- **Training managers to lead inclusively.** Leadership development and accessibility training has helped store managers build confidence and competence in supporting diverse teams.
- **Inclusive hiring enhances brand value.** LCBO's reputation as a corporate socially responsible and inclusive employer was strengthened among customers, employees, and the wider community.
- **Employee feedback drives continuous improvement.** Participant and manager feedback helped refine processes and uncover new opportunities for accessibility and disability inclusion.
- **Small changes yield big impacts.** Adjustments to job postings, interviews, and onboarding had meaningful effects on individual experiences and team culture.

## Introduction

ODEN was contracted in 2024 by the LCBO to do a review of their **We Belong Here** program, a hiring initiative to attract, hire and onboard candidates who have a disability. The findings of that internal review demonstrated that the LCBO's **We Belong Here** program has had very impactful outcomes, with lessons that other employers could benefit from knowing about. As a result, ODEN invited the LCBO to participate in this public case study.

Launched in 2023, the LCBO's **We Belong Here** program was a targeted, pilot hiring initiative aimed to hire people who have a disability for the summer fixed-term and winter fixed-term positions in Central and Eastern Ontario. With a hiring goal of 20 people for their summer fixed term period, the LCBO was able to hire 18 people the first summer and connect to 39 employment service providers. Since the pilot began, the LCBO has hired over 185 people in the program. It is evident that the program is reaching candidates and creating impact in communities across Ontario.

The program has also increased the representation of people who have disabilities in the workforce and set a benchmark for other organizations aiming to adopt similar inclusive practices. Its success is underscored by adaptability and a strong support network established through ongoing collaboration between the LCBO and ODEN, and other employment service providers.

## Inclusive Hiring - Making the Process Intentional

The **We Belong Here** program emerged from a deep organizational commitment by the LCBO to foster equitable employment opportunities for candidates who have disabilities. As one of Ontario's most prominent retailers, LCBO recognized its responsibility to lead by example and use its influence to create a more inclusive workforce. This initiative was a direct response to both the company's accessibility goals and a broader understanding that traditional hiring practices were unintentionally excluding some talented candidates.

Through this program, LCBO sought to increase the representation of people who have disabilities in its seasonal retail workforce. The focus was on removing barriers not just during the hiring process but throughout onboarding and day-to-day operations. Equally important was building internal capacity: training and equipping store managers to support employees who identify as having a disability. At the heart of the initiative was a desire to contribute to a culture of inclusion across all levels of the organization, reinforcing values such as respect, community, and social responsibility.

The **We Belong Here** program operationalizes the commitments outlined in [LCBO's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan](#), broader [diversity, equity, and inclusion \(DEI\)](#) strategy, and corporate values to be a safe place for all and to celebrate authenticity. By creating intentional hiring pathways and rethinking internal processes, the initiative:

- Translates DEI policy into action.
- Advances the inclusion of underrepresented groups.
- Reinforces LCBO's values of respect and community connection.
- Integrates accessibility into everyday practices.

Recently, the Globe and Mail in an article labelled "LCBO Embraces Diverse Backgrounds and Voices", an LCBO employee expressed how important this program is for them:

*"It's very close to my heart, because I have a sister with an intellectual disability, and I have an invisible disability," says Fraser. "We're very proud to play a small part in making people's workplace dreams happen.*

*[\(Globe and Mail, Canada Best Diversity Employers, February 25, 2025\)](#)"*

## Building A Talent Pipeline – Local Partnership with Employment Service Providers

From the outset, the program was designed in partnership with organizations that know well the disability employment sector, including [ODEN](#), [Ready Willing and Able](#) as well as community-based [Employment Service Providers \(ESPs\)](#). These partners played a critical role in redefining the LCBO's hiring initiative. They provided guidance and advised on how to craft inclusive job postings, improve outreach to disability employment networks, and supported the LCBO in ensuring the recruitment process was as accessible as possible from start to finish.

With the hiring pilot set to launch mid-April 2023, ODEN invited LCBO to present information to Employment Service Providers in the network who support job seekers who have a disability. ODEN marketed the program through online newsletters and targeted emails to provider partners. Service providers were invited to ODEN's one-hour, information online seminars, featuring LCBO talent acquisition and accessibility team members. During the online session, LCBO shared details about the program with service providers located near the pilot locations, as well as other regions that would meet the program's geographical expansion, ensuring wide reach and effective communication with potential candidates.

Between April 2023 and March 2024, ODEN hosted a total of three (3) information webinars. These sessions attracted a diverse group of attendees, including service provider partners, job seekers, and other stakeholders from various regions across Ontario where hiring was taking place. Service providers gathered information about the program to support candidates in applying for the roles.

The collaboration with ESPs extended beyond hiring. These partners provided valuable insights on accommodations and were often involved in providing job coaching and on-the-job support. Together, LCBO and its community partners ensured the program met the needs of job seekers who have disabilities and remained adaptable as it scaled across store locations.

Some examples that the LCBO used as an intentional approach to create a more inclusive hiring process included:

- Focusing on candidates' interest in customer service, availability, and willingness to learn.
- Outlining clearly the essential job duties, with flexibility to explore accommodations as needed.
- Avoiding the use of "rigid screening practices", the emphasis was placed on potential and fit for seasonal roles.
- Sharing widely inclusive job postings, including through disability employment networks.

## Onboarding and Workplace Integration

As with any large organization, rolling out any program can be filled with anticipation, and challenges. The roll out of the **We Belong Here** program across LCBO's large and diverse store network came with its own share of challenges. One of the biggest was ensuring consistency across locations, particularly when stores varied in their experience with accessibility and disability inclusion. Some store managers were more familiar with inclusive practices than others, so the program needed to support them all, wherever they were starting from in their journey to disability inclusion in the workplace.

To prepare managers and coworkers to welcome new hires, LCBO provided tailored accessibility briefings and onboarding materials that emphasized inclusive practices. Managers were encouraged to work closely with Employment Service Providers (ESPs) and to view inclusion as a shared team responsibility, not a task to be handled alone. Community partners such as ODEN supported this work for example, ODEN provided opportunities for ESPs to learn firsthand from LCBO more about the employment

opportunities. One of these opportunities for direct support from ESPs is described well in an article from the [Ottawa Business Journal](#), where Performance Plus Rehabilitation Care (PPRC), an Employment Service Provider in Ottawa, and LCBO describe their working relationship, working together so that candidates who have a disability were connected to the program.

The Accessibility Team and senior leaders played a key role in reinforcing the message of working together, helping create a culture where inclusion was seen as a collective value. In addition, these teams ensured that the onboarding experience itself was designed with flexibility in mind. Candidates had access to clear and accessible training materials, visual aids, and one-on-one coaching where needed. Regular check-ins between managers and new hires helped flag any issues early and create space for open dialogue.

The development of the program was also supported by internal partners, including the senior leaders and union representatives. All partners were engaged early in the progress to ensure the program aligned with workplace values and operational realities. During the pilot phase, onboarding experiences were remarkably positive with participants reporting they felt welcomed and supported. Building on this strong foundation, the LCBO continues to take a proactive approach to discuss accessibility needs during onboarding, reinforcing its commitment to continuous improvement and inclusion.

## Disability Inclusion – Impact and Feedback

The impact of **We Belong Here** has been wide-reaching. For candidates hired under the program, the most meaningful takeaway was a sense of belonging and acceptance. Many expressed that they felt genuinely welcomed as part of the LCBO team. Several participants shared that the flexibility of training and the clarity of communication helped them build confidence in their abilities. For some, it was their first paid work experience—one that now stands as a stepping stone to future employment.

While the experience was overwhelmingly positive, participant feedback also offered valuable insights to further strengthen the onboarding process. Some candidates expressed a desire for more clarity around role expectations and scheduling process. Tools like visual aids, job coaching, and simplified onboarding guides were especially effective. These insights are helping inform the LCBO's efforts to enhance consistency and build even more inclusive, confidence-building experiences across all locations.

Managers and supervisors also shared enthusiastic feedback. While some initially felt uncertain about how to ensure onboarding was inclusive, but these early hesitations

quickly gave way to pride and a deeper appreciation for diverse teams. Many managers noted that their leadership was strengthened by the experience and that their teams became more collaborative and cohesive.

The business outcomes were equally encouraging. Stores that participated in the program reported improved morale and a stronger sense of team purpose. Over 60% of We Belong Here hires have continued beyond the original term of employment – either through advanced offers for rehire in future fixed term roles or transition to casual roles – demonstrating strong retention and engagement outcomes.

Customers took notice too—offering positive feedback that affirmed LCBO’s reputation as an inclusive and socially responsible retailer. Customers have shared their appreciation sharing how impactful it was to have someone with a disability providing service and how it made them feel proud to shop at a company that truly embraces inclusion. These comments have been echoed across store locations and have served as meaningful reinforcement for the continued expansion of the program. By demonstrating its commitment to inclusion in a visible, action-oriented way, LCBO not only enhanced its internal culture but also reinforced its role as a leader in retail diversity and accessibility.

## **Lessons Learned– Inclusion is Transformational!**

Through the **We Belong Here** program, LCBO has shown that inclusive hiring is not just achievable—it’s transformational. The program highlights several core lessons that other businesses across Ontario can learn from:

- Inclusion begins with intention. Designing an inclusive program requires leadership commitment and a clear purpose.
- Community partnerships make the difference. Collaborating with ESPs brings expertise, credibility, and support to the process.
- Managers need the right tools and guidance. Inclusive leadership is built through training, trust, and the confidence to try.
- Feedback is fuel for growth. Creating space for honest input from both participants and staff helps improve the experience for all.

Overall, LCBO’s journey of disability inclusion has taught them the importance of communication, community partnerships, and local employment supports. As LCBO remains committed to continuously improving their practices to foster a truly inclusive workplace, ODEN will continue to work with LCBO to promote the success of disability inclusion.

If you have any questions regarding the information presented in this case study, please email us at [info@odenetwork.com](mailto:info@odenetwork.com).