ODEN®

ANNUAL REPORT 2025-26

Business Engagement

ODEN continued to collaborate with businesses across Ontario, focusing on **inclusive employment** through events, training, and consulting.

This year, ODEN co-hosted **4 Business Engagement Events** that brought together **145 organizations** from across Ontario, creating space for dialogue, collaboration, and action.

ODEN provided a platform for businesses to promote their company, workplace culture and hiring processes with Employment Service Providers across the country through the ODEN Biz Connect Leaders Series. This year, we hosted **2 businesses** and drew **67 attendees** from employment services, businesses, and stakeholder organizations.

ODEN recorded and shared its first Biz Connect Leaders Series session on YouTube, expanding access to employer-led disability inclusion insights beyond the live event. With **861 views**, the recording enhanced regional engagement and provided an accessible resource that could be viewed and shared across Ontario.

ODEN delivered **7 business education and awareness sessions**. Represented sectors included government, insurance, tourism, HR, and professional services. Participants explored the business benefits of disability inclusion and learned how Employment Service Providers can support successful hiring, onboarding, and retention of employees who have a disability.

We shared **267 job referrals** to **161 ESPs**. These referrals created real pathways to connect people who have disabilities with meaningful work.

ODEN Disability Awareness and Confidence Training (DACT) reached **94 business professionals**.

ODEN also provided over 100 hours of consulting services to 26 businesses. The consulting focused on improving disability inclusion through accessibility reviews, inclusive hiring and onboarding, training, partnerships, and organizational program development.

> **"By fostering inclusive employment, we're building a resilient workforce and a stronger community. It's proof that inclusion is about more than the environment; it's about creating opportunities that last."**
>
> – Michael Nigro, Director, Accessibility, VP, Human Resources, LCBO

The Ontario Corporate Training Centre (OCTC) is a province wide project running from 2023 and extended to March 31, 2027, supported by the Ontario Disability Employment Network and funded by the Government of Canada. The project aims to **empower businesses** with the tools, knowledge and resources needed to **embrace diversity and disability inclusive hiring practices**.

In its third year, **19 businesses** and **158 people** received in-person training, and **1,107 online training modules** were completed. Businesses reported hiring **38 job seekers** who have a disability, **5 businesses** promoted an employee who has a disability, and **3 employers** created work from home or hybrid opportunities. **15 Employment Service Providers** were connected to businesses, providing long-term access to local supports and inclusive hiring resources.

The OCTC team co-hosted **7 virtual information sessions** with over **168 participants** and planned **6 in-person events** in Mississauga, Ottawa, Brantford, Thornbury, Windsor and Kitchener engaging more than **124 participants**.



Olivia Mitchell (SOAR), Katy Grummett (SOAR), Kiersten Smith (ODEN), Liz Gosse (ODEN), Kristen Lowe (Charcuterie Etc.), Jan Vilaca (Tasty Road Trips)

> **"Embracing disability inclusive hiring practices supported by OCTC resources enables us to welcome diverse talent, foster innovation, enhance team awareness, all while ensuring every employee can thrive in our workplace."**
>
> – Calli McEachen,
> D.M. Wills Associated Ltd.

The progress we've made this year reflects the strength of our collective efforts. Together, businesses, Employment Service Providers, and communities are helping **create workplaces where disability inclusion is recognized**, valued, and put into practice.

Capacity Building & Program Improvements

ODEN delivered **17 various training sessions** for Employment Service Providers (ESPs), reaching over **197 staff across** Ontario. These sessions sparked new ideas and reinforced the value of Employment Service Provider roles.

ODEN supported **5 ESPs** with nearly **20 hours** of consulting services. **36 ESPs** were provided with coaching and mentoring sessions that amounted to more than **40 hours** of support to the network, responding to requests for guidance and support.

12 ODEN Connection events were hosted throughout the year, resulting in **264 people** increasing their knowledge and sharing experiences with other organizations in the employment service sector.

ODEN amplified its mission at **16 speaking events**, engaging **1,420 people** in conversations about disability inclusion and employment.

"One of our biggest challenges has been building partnerships with businesses and organizations, and this training really helped us focus on that area."

– Advanced Job Development Training Participant



In March, ODEN launched ***From Disclosure to Opportunity: Disclosure and Accommodation in the Workplace***, a new online learning module for businesses and HR professionals. A complementary disclosure and accommodation training for Employment Service Providers was also developed.

ODEN also partnered with businesses to develop:

- Inclusive summer student internship programs
- Onboarding checklists
- Evaluation practices to advance disability inclusion in the workplace

ODEN's Disability Employment Inclusion Specialists provided **responsive coaching and guidance** on complex job development challenges. This accessibility to both businesses and Employment Service Providers remains at the heart of ODEN's work, helping remove barriers and expand opportunities for people who have a disability.

RDC 25

12 sponsors

284 attendees

96 organizations

12 exhibitors

Innovation & Promising Practices

Each year, ODEN identifies and promotes promising practices, program models and resources that **support successful employment outcomes** for people who have a disability and those entering or engaging in the workforce.

This year, ODEN highlighted two inclusive hiring programs through case studies: the LCBO "We Belong Here" program and a supported employment model at a grocery retailer in Norfolk County, creating employment opportunities for people who have intellectual disabilities.

ODEN also identified four promising practices: the "DCIDE Tool" from the Institute for Work & Health; "TECHNATION Career Finder & Skill Passport"; "YESNet" by Youth Employment Services; and "NEADS Building Employment Pathways".

MentorAbility Ontario

Since 2019, ODEN and March of Dimes Canada have operated the Ontario Hub for MentorAbility, a national initiative supported by the Canadian Association for Supported Employment and funded by the Government of Canada. This program connects job seekers who have a disability with short-term mentoring experiences to explore careers and expand networks. This year, **99 mentor matches** were made with support of **40 mentor/ employer partners**. MentorAbility facilitated **30 networking events** throughout the year.

Disability Employment Service Awards

At ODEN's Rethinking Disability Conference on November 4, three leaders in disability inclusive employment were recognized:



Carolyn McDougall, Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, received the Outstanding Employment Service Professional Award;



Xplore Employment, Community Living Oakville received the Promising Practice and Innovation Award; and



Career Compass, Community Living Essex County received the Outstanding Employment Service Provider Award.

KTT KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION AND TRANSFER

Hosted on REAL Xchange



KTT Networking Event March 2026 - Barrie, Ontario.

ODEN continued supporting the KTT Hub/Network hosted by the REAL Xchange, developing two learning modules focused on trauma-informed employment services and disability inclusive entrepreneurship. By year end, the network had grown to more than **3,600 members**, with **824 service providers** accessing KTT resources.

ODEN's WEB PRESENCE

102,997 impressions

107,416 impressions

95,000 website views

3:01 min. average visit

Membership & Advocacy

Government Relations Advisory Committee (GRAC)

This year, ODEN introduced the **Government Relations Advisory Committee (GRAC)** to strengthen our approach to government relations and ensure the experiences of our members help inform our advocacy efforts. The committee brings together ODEN members from across Ontario to provide insight, recommendations and expertise on issues affecting employment service delivery and employment supports for people who have a disability.

GRAC will help strengthen ODEN's collective voice with government and policymakers, ensuring our advocacy is informed by the realities facing service providers, employers and job seekers in communities across the province. Through diverse regional representation and collaboration with ODEN's Board and leadership, the committee will identify emerging issues, inform government engagement, and contribute to meaningful policy discussions.

The introduction of GRAC reflects ODEN's commitment to listening to our members, strengthening sector collaboration and advancing systemic change that creates greater opportunities for people who have a disability to participate fully in Ontario's workforce.



118
member organizations



6
corporate members

Other Initiatives

NDEAM 2025

ODEN's 2025 NDEAM campaign, Inclusive Employment Across Canada: **Building a Workforce Without Barriers**, continued to grow! The campaign boasted **200,000+ social media impressions**, demonstrating the power inclusion has to drive innovation, growth and belonging across Canada.

And the sixth anniversary of Light It Up! For NDEAM™ on Thursday, October 16 continued to set new benchmarks! Over **840 locations** in more than **150 communities** lit purple and blue.

NDEAM and Sustainable Development Goals

In 2025, ODEN launched a 2-year national initiative connecting National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) with Canada's commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through practical toolkits, templates and stories, the project supports communities in promoting disability inclusive employment and connects local activities to a broader national movement. It demonstrates how inclusive employment contributes to stronger, more equitable communities and advances goals.

This was year 1, with a focus on creating relationships with collaborators to bring awareness to the project. Co-presentations with MentorAbility and auticon were delivered. Next year, the focus will be on the creation and promotion of resources across the country.

Jobs Ability Canada continued to grow and make improvements through the advancement of artificial intelligence technology. This platform was built by and for people who have a disability. In the 2025-2026 year, **765 new job seekers** were added to the platform. The team also referred **11 job seekers** to Employment Service Providers for services.

The Jobs Ability Canada team hosted **8 information sessions** across the country for Employment Service Providers and Job Seekers with **157 people** participating in the sessions. The team also hosted **8 virtual and in-person sessions** for businesses with **175 business participants** attending the sessions.

6 new businesses joined Jobs Ability Canada including Erie Shores Healthcare, City of Hamilton, Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, Unisync, Grand Theatre and Evolve and Resolve.

Project | SEARCH® Canada

Realizing Employment Potential

Through a five-year partnership with Holland Bloorview, funded by the Slaight Family Foundation, ODEN is strengthening and expanding Project SEARCH across Ontario. The initiative grows employer networks and opportunities for graduates, uses data to align training with labour market needs, and provides employers with disability confidence training, recruitment support, and onboarding coaching. The goal is to create sustainable employment pathways for youth who have a disability while strengthening employers' capacity to recruit and retain talent.

PROJECT SEARCH 2025-26

580+
collaborators reached

105
people participated
in 4 Employer Events

Over the past year, the employment landscape across Ontario has continued to evolve, presenting both challenges and opportunities for Employment Service Providers, employers, and job seekers. Amid economic uncertainty and shifting labour market demands, ODEN and our partners have remained focused on a common purpose: ensuring that all people who have a disability have access to meaningful, inclusive, and sustainable employment. Our collective achievements this year reflect the strength of collaboration and the unwavering commitment of the ODEN team, Board of Directors, Employment Service Provider Network, employers, and stakeholders across the province. Through innovation, advocacy, and partnership, we have continued to advance disability inclusive employment and create pathways to success for people who have a disability, businesses, and communities. Together, we are building a future where inclusion is not an aspiration, but an expectation embedded in workplaces across Ontario.

- Amy Widdows, *Chief Executive Officer*

ODEN®

Ontario Disability Employment Network

odenetwork.com | 866-280-6336

Staff

Amy Widdows
CEO

Ingrid Muschta
Director of Special Projects & Innovation

Sue Cervoni
Director of Business & Financial Services

Jenny Hope
Director of Development & Capacity Building

Liz Gosse
Director of Corporate Engagement & Training

Lila Jorgenson
Administrative & Membership Coordinator

Pawrnaa Perinpanayagam
Communications Strategist

Kimberly Chan
Accounting & HR Assistant

Sarah Birch
Disability Employment Inclusion Specialist

Jennifer Ridley
Disability Employment Inclusion Specialist

Kiersten Smith
Disability Employment Inclusion Specialist & MentorAbility Ontario Hub Coordinator

Asha Jeejeebhoy-Swalwell
Content Development Support – Intern

Cristin O'Sullivan
Disability Awareness Trainer

Gena Dafoe
Data Entry Clerk

Ofelia Dugal
Workforce Engagement Strategist – Project SEARCH

Board of Directors

Michael Dawthorne
Chair/Past Chair
London

Chris Guillemette
Vice-Chair, North Bay

Linda Simpson
Secretary, Ottawa

Derek Roy
Treasurer, Amherstburg

Ann Szabo
Director, Toronto

Johanne Strome
Director, Picton

Ashley Sweeney
Director, Minden

Anna Nelson
Director, Thunder Bay

Terry Cloutier
Director, Windsor

Rachel Hunt
Director, London

Morgan Foran
Director, Belleville