

Literature Review Fact Sheet - Decent Work for Graduates with Disabilities Strategies for Success and Areas for Improvement

At a Glance

Meaningful employment can provide people with disabilities (PWD) with a sense of purpose and meaning, the ability to gain financial independence, and make connections with their peers (Lindstrom et al., 2011; Wagner et al., 2017). While there are many advantages to obtaining decent work, people with disabilities who graduate from PSE face many issues gaining employment (Chatoor, 2021; Schur et al., 2017). Graduates with disabilities (GWD) are more likely to be underemployed, work in precarious and/or part-time employment (often without health benefits) and have difficulty finding employment in their chosen fields of study (Chatoor, 2021).

Areas for Improvement

- *Issues with Accommodations* – PWD may experience issues accessing accommodations in their workplace. Statistics Canada (2021) reports that 18.2% of employees with disabilities over the age of 25 experience issues in their current place of employment due to difficulty in obtaining accommodations. Fear of discrimination can also stop PWD from telling their employer about their disability (Margin et al., 2019).
- *Discrimination* - Due to societal barriers that PWD often encounter, many job seekers believe that they will encounter infrastructural or attitudinal barriers, experience biased treatment from others, and even be paid less at their jobs than other employees without disabilities (Lindsay et al., 2021). This can be discouraging and can lead to PWD working harder to appear as “not disabled” just to get hired (Cunnah, 2015).
- *Precarious Work* – GWD are more likely to work in precarious and/or part-time employment (Chatoor, 2021). This not only affects wages and access to benefits, it also reduces opportunities to make stable connections with their peers, natural supports, or their employers. (Margin et al., 2019; EARN, 2020; Zammitti et al., 2020).
- *Workplace Barriers* - Several authors suggest that employment disparities for PWD in job retention, wage, hours of work, and access to benefits are primarily attributed to barriers put in place by employers (Domin et al., 2020; EARN, 2020). These barriers show up in many ways, but commonly include a lack of equitable and inclusive recruitment and hiring strategies, ableist assumptions held by both employers and coworkers, and an ignorance toward appropriate accommodations and disability knowledge (Schur et al., 2017; Vornholt et al., 2018).

Strategies for Success

- *Strong Social Service Supports* – Ensuring PWD have their basic needs met is critical to improving access to decent work. This includes access to public transportation (Lindsay et al., 2021; Sima et al., 2015), help with obtaining assistive technologies and mental health supports (Lee & Carter, 2012), and assistance with referrals to income-based supports such as food and housing when needed (McCormick et al., 2021).
- *Collaboration* – Many services available for PWD who are trying to obtain decent work are “siloes” or work completely independently. Collaboration between program administrators, employers, and students with disabilities (SWD) is imperative to success finding decent work after graduation (Domin et al., 2020).
- *Training for Employers and Workplaces:* To develop the capacity for collaboration, employers and administrators may need to access local resources and other professional trainings for themselves

and their staff so they can better understand how accessibility and inclusion may be enhanced in the workplace (McCormick et al., 2021).

- *Ongoing Career Support* – Providing PWD with sustainable and ongoing career support that suits their individual needs can greatly improve access to decent work. Helpful aids for GWD include career exploration supports such as vocational interest assessments, tours of workplaces, networking opportunities, and job shadowing (Kolne & Lindsay, 2020; Lindsay et al., 2019; Zammit et al., 2020).
- *Early Work Opportunities*: Career support while in school can be especially beneficial for GWD. Multiple studies concluded that SWD had a better chance of obtaining competitive employment after graduation if they had positive work experiences while in school (Grigal et al., 2019; Lindstrom et al., 2011; Sutton, 2020).

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Our partners for this project include:



Manitoba Head Office:
330 St. Mary Avenue, Suite 300
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3C 3Z5

Bureau principal au Manitoba:
330 avenue St. Mary, bureau 300
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3C 3Z5

Ottawa Office:
343 Preston Street, 11th Floor
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1S 1N4

Bureau d'Ottawa:
343 rue Preston, 11^e étage
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1S 1N4

Tel/Tél: (204) 809-5954
info@eviance.ca

[eviance.ca](https://www.eviance.ca)

