

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 “siloe” 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).

References

- Chambers, T., Sukai, M., & Bolton, M. (2011). Assessment of Debt Load and Financial Barriers Affecting Students with Disabilities in Canadian Postsecondary Education – Ontario Report. Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. <https://heqco.ca/pub/assessment-of-debt-load-and-financial-barriers-affecting-students-with-disabilities-in-canadian-postsecondary-education-ontario-report/>
- Chatoor, K. (2021). Post-secondary credential attainment and labour market outcomes for Ontario students with disabilities. *Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario*, 1–40
- Cunnah, W. (2015). Disabled students: identity, inclusion and work-based placements. *Disability & Society*. 30(2), 213–226.
- Dammeyer, J., Crowe, K., Marschark, M. & Rosica, M. (2019). Work and employment characteristics of deaf and hard-of-hearing adults. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*. 24(4), 386–395.
- Domin, D., Taylor, A. B., Haines, K. A., Papay, C. K. & Grigal, M. (2020). “It’s not just about a pay cheque”: Perspectives on employment preparation of students with intellectual disability in federally funded higher education programs. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 58(4), 328–347.
- EARN (Employment Accessibility Resource Network) (2020). Improving Employment Outcomes for Post-Secondary Graduates with Disabilities: Summary Report, *EARN and United Way East Ontario*.
- Grigal, M., Papay, C., Smith, F., Hart, D. & Verbeck, R. (2019). Experiences that predict employment for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities in federally funded higher education programs. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*. 42(1), 17–28.
- Kolne, K. and Lindsay, S. (2020). A systematic review of programs and interventions for increasing the interest and participation of children and youth with disabilities in STEM education or careers. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 27(4), 525–546
- Lee, G. K. & Carter, E. W. (2012). Preparing transition-age students with high-functioning autism spectrum disorders for meaningful work. *Psychology in the Schools*. 49(10), 988-1000.
- Lindsay, S., Varahra, A., Ahmed, H., Abrahamson, S., Pulver, S., Primucci, M. & Wong, K. (2021). Exploring the relationships between race, ethnicity, and school and work outcomes among youth and young adults with disabilities: a scoping review. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 1–20.
- Lindstrom, L. Doren, B. & Miesch, J. (2011). Waging a Living: Career Development and Long-Term Employment Outcomes for Young. *Adults With Disabilities, Exceptional Children*. 77(4), 423–434.
- Margin, M. E., Marini, E. & Nicolotti, M. (2019). Employability of disabled graduates: Resources for a sustainable employment. *Sustainability*. 11 (1542), 1–17.
- McCormick, S. T., Kurth, N. K., Chambless, C. E., Ipsen, C. & Hall, J.P. (2021). Case management strategies to promote employment for transition-age youth with disabilities. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 44(2), 120–131.
- Schur, L. S., Han, K., Kim, A., Ameri, M., Blanck, P. & Kruse, D. (2017). Disability at work: A look back and forward. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*. 27, 482–497.
- Sima, A.P., Wehman, P., Chan, F., West, M. D. & Leucking, R. G. (2015). An Evaluation of Risk Factors Related to Employment Outcomes for Youth with Disabilities. *Hammill Institute on Disabilities*, 38(2), 89–100.

Statistics Canada. (2021). Accessibility findings from the Canadian survey on disability, 2017. *Government of Canada*. Ottawa, Canada.

Sutton, H. (2020). Student loan borrowers with disabilities missing out on debt relief. *Disability Compliance for Higher Education*, 25(7),1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1002/dhe.30790>.

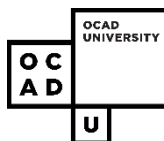
Vornholt, K., Villotti, P., Muschalla, B., Bauer, J., Colella, A., Zijlstra, F., Van Ruitenbeek, G., Uitdewilligen, S. & Corbière, M. (2018). *Disability and employment—overview and highlights*. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*. 27(1), 40–55.

Wagner, M. M., Newman, L.A. & Javitz, H. S. (2017). Vocational education course taking and post-high school employment of youth with emotional disturbances. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 40(3), 132–143.

Zammiti, A., Magnano, P. & Santisi, G. (2020). “Work and surroundings”: A training to enhance career curiosity, self-efficacy, and the perception of work and decent work in adolescents, *Sustainability*. 12(16).



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)

