



**THE MAYOR'S CHALLENGE –**  
**HIRE A PERSON WITH DISABILITIES**  
A TOOL KIT FOR THE MUNICIPAL SECTOR

## **INTRODUCTION:**

It has been five years since Mike Bradley, Mayor of Sarnia, issued a challenge to his fellow mayors across Ontario to hire people with disabilities for municipal jobs.

While there was already a healthy track record for such hirings at Sarnia's City Hall, at least 60 more individuals with disabilities have found meaningful employment with the City of Sarnia since the Challenge went out in 2010. These jobs include general maintenance positions, clerks, data entry, a ticket taker and arena attendant.

Wide ranges of departments are involved such as Finance, Human Resources, Fire, Properties, and Parks and Recreation.

A long-established culture at Sarnia City Hall that promotes inclusive hiring practices has created opportunity that benefits the employees, the municipality and the community.

It's commonplace to see job coaches within the corporation working alongside people with mental or physical disabilities. The effort to make all positions open and accessible to every person who applies is a win-win for both employee and employer.

"We're giving people a chance to fulfill their potential," says Mayor Mike Bradley. "At the same time, it's very positive for the workplace."

Ultimately it's about finding the right person for the right job and keeping that person in the job long term. Employee turnover is expensive and time consuming from a human resources perspective. Evidence shows that employees with disabilities work hard, are punctual and have long tenure.

Do the right thing, Bradley urged Ontario municipalities in 2010 when he issued the Mayor's Challenge. It's important the municipal sector demonstrates inclusive hiring practices and leads the way so other employers in the community are inspired.

Just how has Sarnia created an inclusive culture that encourages people with disabilities to apply for advertised positions within the City?

We respectfully offer this insight with the hope that other municipalities and employers will also reap the benefits.

## **DEVELOP A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SERVICE PROVIDERS IN YOUR COMMUNITY**

Service providers like Community Living are the best resource for those involved in hiring people with disabilities.

The service provider matches their client with a job, then follows up with training and job coaching support when it's needed. If issues arise, the service provider supports both the employee and the employer to resolve the problem and ensure success.

"It's easy," says Sarnia's Human Resources Manager. "We had one individual that was placed in a position. We found after a few days that it wasn't a good match.

"We expressed our concern to the service provider and they came in and matched the person with another job and filled the existing position within the day. There was very little time spent by our Human Resources on the matter.

"That saves us time and money."

**Communication** with the service provider is key. An initial meeting is recommended to discuss expectations, requirements, and to answer important questions if there continues to be reluctance to hire people with disabilities. Communication continues to be critical throughout the hiring cycle. If an issue occurs, be sure to contact the service provider to explain the situation and what change is needed. The service provider will intervene and work with the employee and the municipality until the issue is resolved and confidence is restored.

**Trust** is at the centre of the relationship. Rely on the service provider's expertise. During the initial interview, ask for success stories, for testimonials, and why hiring people with disabilities will be good for the municipality. As time goes on, the more successful hirings that occur, the stronger the trust will be between the municipality and the service provider.

## **IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED...TRY AGAIN**

As with every hiring, sometimes it just does not work out. Don't be discouraged. Try again to find the right fit. The key is to ensure the service provider knows exactly the skill set you require.

## **ALLIES ARE NECESSARY**

Hiring people with disabilities necessitates buy-in by decision makers within the municipality. The budget-related benefits are well-documented ([www.odenetwork.com](http://www.odenetwork.com)), however, it may be difficult at first to convince people of how it makes good business sense. The service provider can supply written, statistical material to support the business case.

It's especially important to receive buy-in from your City Manager and/or CAO, Human Resources Manager and other managers. Set up a meeting with these key players and present the business case and its positive impact on the budget. Of course, it is worth revisiting the non-monetary benefits too, such as strong work ethic and improved morale in an equal opportunity work environment.

## **CULTURE CHANGE**

At Sarnia's City Hall, the first hires were within the Parks and Recreation Department. As time went on, more managers in Parks and Rec noticed the benefits of hiring people with disabilities and grew more open to hiring within their own areas. In turn, their success was noticed by managers in other departments and they became more willing to hire people with disabilities too.

This change occurred slowly until it became commonplace to see job coaches within the corporation. The culture change began to influence other employers by dispelling myths and stereotypes about hiring people with disabilities.

## **THE BENEFITS – A GOOD NEWS STORY**

Like many employers across Ontario, the City of Sarnia has taken advantage of the strong business case of hiring people with disabilities.

- Results in hardworking and dedicated employees;
- Results in reduced absenteeism and turnover;
- Results in increased productivity;
- Taps into an underutilized talent pool.
- Nurtures an inclusive workplace where all employees are treated with dignity, respect and equality.

To learn more about the benefits related to fiscal management, please visit the Ontario Disabilities Employment Network at [www.odenetwork.com](http://www.odenetwork.com).

## **WHY THE MUNICIPAL SECTOR NEEDS TO TAKE ACTION**

The benefits are obvious to those who have done the research, yet the number of unemployed people with disabilities remains shockingly high.

There are 1.8 million people in Ontario with disabilities. About 50%, who are of working age, are unemployed. This number is set to increase as the population ages. To put that number into perspective, 30% of the population in Canada was unemployed during The Great Depression.

Municipalities are community leaders. Hiring people with disabilities and pointing to success stories encourages others to do the same.

## **CREATING EQUAL OPPORTUNITY - LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELD**

The City of Sarnia makes a conscious effort to ensure that all positions are open and accessible to every person who applies. Human resource practices are established so that people with disabilities are not unintentionally excluded from applying or getting hired.

To this end, the City has adopted the Sarnia Employment Accommodation Policy ([www.sarnia.ca](http://www.sarnia.ca)), which incorporates the philosophies of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) Employment Standard.

In particular, the policy ensures the workplace will accommodate any person who applies and provide assistance so people with disabilities can obtain and keep a job through all stages of employment.

In short, the Sarnia Employment Accommodation Policy ensures people with disabilities have the opportunity to apply and that the best candidate for the job is hired. Your city's human resources practices should be analyzed to ensure every position is open and accessible to every person who applies.

For more information on how to build your own Employment Accommodation Policy, visit the Conference Board of Canada at <https://www.tiaontario.ca/uploads/Employer%20Toolkit.pdf>.

## **SUMMARY**

Sarnia's City Council and staff believe we have moved beyond the call to "Do the right thing," and now have a well-established culture at City Hall that embraces diversity.

The City benefits from the original social goal of improving the lives of people with disabilities, building a stronger community, and a healthy workplace. But we are also realizing the financial benefits of less employee turnover, less Human Resources involvement, less sick time, and so on.

By working with service providers, hiring people with disabilities is not more time consuming than any other recruitment.

It's a win for both employees and the employer. That is why the City of Sarnia has seen a culture change with more managers and more departments jumping on board. By changing hiring practices to accommodate all applicants, the City is not only creating opportunities for

people with disabilities, it's also creating the opportunity for the City to hire the right person for the job.

The City is truly opening the door for all applicants to apply and, in turn, allowing the City to interview and hire the ideal candidate.

Hiring those with disabilities is not just good for the individual and the community. It's good for the Corporation.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The City of Sarnia would like to thank the following people and organizations for their participation in the Mayor's Challenge:

- The Honorable David Onley who advocates for the Mayor's Challenge at the provincial level;
- Bob Vansickle and staff at Community Living Sarnia Lambton;
- City of Sarnia employees;
- Members of the Ontario Employment Disability Network

Completed By: Dale Mosley, Accessibility Coordinator, City of Sarnia

Edited By: Cathy Dobson