



Position Statement on Employment for Individuals with Disabilities

Definitions:

Employment: Real pay for real work. Real pay is pay at industry standard.

Background:

Historically, persons with developmental disabilities have been placed in leisure programs, sheltered workshops, or activity centres offering limited wages and little job choice. Such settings were intended to support people to increase job readiness; however the progression to employment did not usually occur.

Since the late 1980's there has been an increase in the demand for work by young people with disabilities who, like their peers, were looking towards employment as the next step after secondary school. This resulted in a number of frameworks being developed, which were designed to facilitate competitive and supported employment, including community-based employment services and supported employment programs.

Supported employment programs are intended to provide people with increased earnings, and facilitate self sufficiency and community inclusion. People agree that this approach to employment is effective. People want to work, however insufficient funding and capacity to provide employment supports have left many unemployed.

Our strong British Columbia economy, low unemployment, shortage of skilled workers and an aging workforce is creating a high demand for workers. Now is a great time to include all people in the workforce. The investment in resources for disability supports for employment makes good business sense.

Issue:

People with developmental disabilities who are served by the Burnaby Association for Community Inclusion want to work. They are significantly under-represented in today's workforce in the Burnaby community and surrounding areas. Appropriate supports – for the individuals, BACI staff, potential employers and co-workers – are needed to help people to enter and stay in the workforce.

The education system has promoted inclusion for over two decades. However, neither the value nor understanding of the value of inclusion seems to have translated into greater inclusion in the workforce. Too often, people with disabilities are not expected to work, nor are they provided with the education and training opportunities that their peers have access to. This greatly limits their ability to enter the workforce.

The issue of employment is a priority for people with developmental disabilities and therefore has been identified as a priority for the Burnaby Association for Community Inclusion in the 2005/2010 Strategic Plan. People with disabilities often live in poverty. Employment will improve their economic situation.

There are many factors that contribute to the low representation of people with disabilities in the workforce. Key barriers include:

- Lack of provincial and federal leadership on the issue
- Lack of income and disability assistance policies and practices that encourage people to work and reduce the disruption to benefits when work is seasonal or short term.
- Lack of supports and services to enable people to enter the workforce.
- Lack of supports and services to enable people to maintain a job and advance in the workforce.
- Lack of supports and services available to employers to effectively employ someone in the work force.
- Lack of knowledge around social enterprise, business development, co-op development, micro-business, etc.

Families are often very involved in planning for their children as they grow towards adulthood. Families need access to relevant labour market information and employment options to assist with meaningful career planning.

Socially, we need to change our beliefs and expectations about the abilities of people with developmental disabilities participating in the workplace. Without full systemic change – from grassroots to government – people will be left behind and the workplace will lose a valuable resource.

Purpose:

To increase employment opportunities in the broader community, of youth and adults with disabilities served by the Burnaby Association for Community Inclusion, and to ensure that people receive the necessary education, training and support to achieve and maintain employment.

Guiding Principles:

1. People with disabilities want to work.
2. People with disabilities make valuable contributions to the workplace.
3. People with disabilities have the ability to learn and advance in their jobs.
4. Community workplaces should reflect the diversity of the broader community.
5. With appropriate supports, employers make reasonable efforts to accommodate the individual needs of their employees.

Our Commitment:

The Burnaby Association for Community Inclusion will dedicate resources to find creative ways to facilitate entrepreneurial and employment opportunities for folks living in Burnaby and surrounding municipalities – specifically those with disabilities.

Position Statements:

1. Every person with a disability supported by the Burnaby Association should be engaged in meaningful and person-centred employment planning and preparation, if that is their goal.
2. People should have access to real employment working for community employers, doing real jobs with the individualized supports needed to be successful over the long term.
3. Educational, financial and personal supports must be available to enable people with disabilities to participate and advance in the workforce.
4. People should receive the industry standard wages and benefits associated with their position.
5. Income assistance policies and practices should support the move to employment, and not be seen as a financial disincentive or barrier to employment.