

# Accessible workplaces are beneficial for all employees

## *Local businesses can take simple steps to build inclusive workplaces*

A common misconception exists that employing a person with a disability places stress on employers who must go out of their way to accommodate their new hire. But as many Ottawa companies are discovering, tapping into this often-overlooked talent pool can lead to improved workplace culture and higher employee retention rates.

Employee accommodations can be as simple as rearranging desks, offering flexible hours or adjusting the lighting. And a growing number of businesses and organizations are realizing how seamless it can be to integrate employees with disabilities into their workforce through these low-impact, high results practices.

With the assistance and collaboration of organizations like the David C. Onley Initiative (DCOI) and United Way Ottawa's EARN

(Employment Accessibility Resource Network), local employers have access to the tools and advice they need to make their businesses more accessible.

"Accommodations are actually beneficial for all employees, not just those with disabilities," says Julie Caldwell, assistant director of the DCOI. "More inclusive workplaces allow all staff members to perform at their personal best."

### FIRST STEPS

Incorporating accessibility into your business can start as early as the recruitment process, such as creating inclusive job postings that describe the work environment. For example, mention if your office is open concept – for those that might not be able to work in busy, distracting environments – or scattered with cubicles – for those with physical disabilities and mobility aids.

"Employers will say they aren't seeing people with disabilities applying for jobs – but it is important to consider that many disabilities are non-visible," says Caldwell. "Being inclusive is about taking everyone into consideration."

Some people live with neurological disabilities, or painful conditions such as fibromyalgia, which can require a certain level of accommodation. Offering flexible work hours, ergonomic chairs and desks, or different assistive software can shape a workplace that benefits all staff.

### MAKING CHANGES

Once a business has hired a person with a disability, several practices can be instituted to make the office more navigable. But it starts with having an open dialogue with employees.

"It's important to remember that the needs of each person are different – there isn't a one-size-fits-all solution," asserts Caldwell.

Sean MacGinnis, co-founder and president of the



accessibility contracting company BuildAble, agrees.

"It may sound obvious, but the best person to help you become more inclusive is someone living with (a disability)," says MacGinnis.

One of the biggest mistakes MacGinnis sees when it comes to outfitting a workplace for accessibility is not consulting someone with a disability. "When you actually have an accessibility plan, have someone try it out to make sure it actually works," he says.

According to the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability Reports by Statistics Canada, the most commonly required types of workplace accommodations are flexible work arrangements, workstation modifications, and human or technical supports.

"The average cost of accommodating an employee with a visible or non-visible disability is under \$500," offers Caldwell. "That's a very small price to pay to attract and retain top talent for your business."

## #ABLETO TAKE THE PLEDGE

Join the DCOI's movement and make a social media pledge about how you're #AbleTo help employees and colleagues with visible and non-visible disabilities in the workplace. Learn more at [AbleTo.ca](http://AbleTo.ca).



### THE NEW ACCESSIBILITY IDENTIFIER

For businesses looking to showcase their commitment to inclusive workplaces, the DCOI has launched a new symbol that raises awareness among current and prospective employees, associates and community members.

The identifier, part of the DCOI's #AbleTo campaign, is a symbol that means "accessibility for all." If you would like to highlight your business's commitment to inclusivity, contact the DCOI to request a free identifier decal to display in your office or storefront. Email [info@onleyinitiative.ca](mailto:info@onleyinitiative.ca) for more information.