

# 21<sup>st</sup> Annual National Supported Employment Conference

## Moving the Needle: Collective Impact Summary



## Overview

**The Canadian Association for Supported Employment (CASE)** is a national association of community-based service providers and stakeholders working towards the employment inclusion of people with disabilities. CASE organizes and hosts an annual national conference that brings leadership, resources as well as opportunities for dialogue, engagement and learning to the sector.

In 2015, the CASE Board identified 'Collective Impact' as the theme for the 2016 National Supported Employment Conference. The National Supported Employment Conference, held in Edmonton, Alberta in June, 2016 was intended to inform stakeholders about Collective Impact and, it was hoped, serve as a catalyst for regional and / or national Collective Impact Initiatives to address (and increase) the employment inclusion of people with disabilities.

**Collective Impact** is defined as the commitment of a group of actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem, using a structured form of collaboration. The concept of collective impact hinges on the idea that complex social problems are beyond the capacity of any one sector, working alone, to effectively address them. In order to create lasting solutions to such social problems on a large-scale, a coordinated effort is needed across multiple sectors willing to work together towards a clearly defined goal. Collective impact is placed in contrast to the "isolated impact" organizations achieve when they work alone to solve social problems.

### The 'Target' Issue: Defining the Problem

Available data suggests that, overall, people with disabilities are almost twice as likely to be unemployed. It should further be noted that unemployment rates increase for certain types of disabilities and that people with intellectual or developmental disabilities have employment participation rates as low as 25% in Canada and the U.S.

People with disabilities experience disproportionate rates of unemployment and poverty. The World Health Organization has declared poverty to be the single largest determinant of health and quality of life. The Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues has noted that people who are unemployed are twice as likely to experience psychological problems and that unemployment contributes to the social, economic and political exclusion of individuals and communities.

### Collective Impact Labs

All delegates were asked to participate in this large general session of Impact Labs in order to capture their thoughts on strategies and policy changes which might help 'move the needle' of employment participation. Facilitators reviewed the Concepts of Collective Impact and Human-Centered Design with conference delegates as well as session goals:

- To **illuminate the issues** facing people with barriers to employment from a diversity of perspectives
- To **identify opportunities** for **high impact** systems change

Facilitators helped the delegation reframe 'priorities' as design challenges so that the collective wisdom of the group could be capitalized upon. Delegates were encouraged to consider the potential for Collective Impact to serve as a 'Disruptive Innovation' and to share their ideas and thoughts in a non-judgmental, non-critical fashion in order to generate a large quantity of ideas.

**The Goal - To Build a Common Agenda by:**

- ***Collective Seeing***
- ***Collective Learning***
- ***Collective Framing***

**Priority Areas Identified at #CASE2016**

There were six clear priority areas identified by delegates of this event. From a (primarily service provider) perspective these are areas where continued dialogue within a Collective Impact Framework improvement is perceived to have the potential to leverage greater outcomes.

**Priority Area 1: Youth, Family, Schools**

**Priority Area 2: Improving Research & Measurement**

**Priority Area 3: Funding et al.**

**Priority Area 4: Collaboration Across the Country**

**Priority Area 5: Engaging Employers & Increasing Understanding**

**Priority Area 6: Meaningful Engagement, Training & Employment**

**Conclusion and Next Steps:**

Strategies to get to systems change:

- **Policy** – advocating for policy change at local or provincial levels to improve the systems
- **Enhancing Services** – Bring in previously unnoticed practice, movement or resources to enhance existing local services
- **Learning Through Prototyping** – Start small with willing partners, learn from the experience and then expand
- **Increasing Coordination** – Re-aligning existing programs and stakeholders to maximize system efficacy

The goal of this conference was to promote Collective Impact and Human-Centered Design as frameworks for collaboration to be applied to the complex issue of increasing employment inclusion for Canadians with disabilities. While CASE, the conference hosts and the enlisted facilitators were acutely aware that it would not be possible to create lasting change within this conference context, it was our mutual intent to initiate and ignite change with the dedicated stakeholders at the event and have them take the seeds of this change back to their respective communities.

Collective Impact begins with the generation of ideas and dialogue in order to **Build a Common Agenda**. Identifying champions, initiating action and organizing for impact are the next steps to move this initiative forward. Very clearly, some resources (beyond a voluntary working board) are required to facilitate an ongoing Collective Impact Initiative.

Patience, persistence, aligning policy makers and working towards the legitimization of this collaborative work are key considerations. A longer term commitment is required by a number of cross-sector individuals and organizations. CASE is committed to continue this work, within our capacity, and serve as a communication conduit / backbone organization within a Collective Impact Framework.

### **CASE Recommendations: Challenge to Employment Inclusion Stakeholders in Canada**

Whereas;

1. One in every six Canadians has a disability - the world's fastest growing minority;
2. The cost of poverty and unemployment in Canada exceeds \$30 billion dollars a year;
3. The overall employment participation rates of people with disabilities in Canada has not shown significant improvement over the last 20 years: and,
4. Working in relative isolation, neither the Service Provider, Business Sector, nor the Policy Sector (government) have been able to develop nor implement strategies which substantially increase the employment participation and inclusion of Canadians with disabilities,

CASE (representing the Service Provider Sector) is seeking core collaborators from the Canadian business and policy sectors to co-develop and implement a Collective Impact Initiative to address this complex and untenable issue.

As per the precepts of Collective Impact, we believe that significant change is required on a community wide metric and that cross-sector engagement and long-term investment are required. CASE would put forth the recommendation for cross sectoral agreement on a Common Agenda, and would propose that this Common Agenda be:

**Canada will increase the rate of employment of Canadians with disabilities from the current approximate rate of 50% - to 60% employment within the next three years.**

This proposed Common Agenda challenges policy makers, service providers, employers and self-advocates to work together collaboratively to 'move the needle' of employment inclusion. CASE believes this is a reasonable goal and a simple metric that is long overdue.

For more information or to get involved, please contact the Canadian Association for Supported Employment at [info@supportedemployment.ca](mailto:info@supportedemployment.ca)

**Read the full Collective Impact Report at:**

<http://www.supportedemployment.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/2016-NSEC-Collective-Impact-Report.pdf>