

B C Hub

[A few notes of pleasant piano music are played. Then Employer Engagement Coordinator of MentorAbility Canada and Abilities at Work Podcast host Glen Walsh says the following introductory words]

Welcome to the Canadian Association for Supported Employment Abilities at Work Podcast. This series is dedicated to exploring the role that mentorship can play in promoting workplace inclusion. I'm your host, Glen Walsh, and throughout the series, we'll be engaging in conversation about the power of connection and the impact of creating accessible workplaces for everyone. This podcast is focused on MentorAbility Canada, a national initiative that links job seekers experiencing disabilities with employers throughout mentorship opportunities. Together we hear from communities and regional hubs across the country that are making a difference everyday.

Each episode of this series will explore stories of innovation, inclusion and collaboration, shining a light on how MentorAbility is transforming perspectives on disability and employment, one mentorship at a time. So whether you're an employer, a job seeker, or simply someone interested in building stronger, more inclusive community, you're in the right place. Let's get started!

Welcome! First start question I'd like to ask you is, can you tell me your names and where you're from?

[inclusion B C employee and MentorAbility Hub Coordinator Tina Dam introduces herself]

Alright, I'll start. Hi, my name is Tina Dam. I'm one of the hub coordinators for MentorAbility in British Columbia, and I work for inclusion B C.

[inclusion B C employee and MentorAbility Hub Coordinator Sheldon Kitzul gives an overview of himself]

And I am Sheldon Kitzul and I do the same job as Tina. And I'm located in Victoria, British Columbia.

[Glen asks a second question]

That's great. So, talking about MentorAbility and MentorAbility hubs - so in terms of communities between job seekers and employers, how does MentorAbility really support this connection?

[Sheldon answers]

Well - it supports the connection through taking what people are interested in. What we do as part of our typical - process is we find out what a mentee or a job seeker is looking for. What are they

interested in, what are they curious about? Maybe even, what are some of the skills that they already possess?

And once we have that information, we're able to go out and either look through a list of mentors that we already have or find somebody out in the community that is doing the work that is within that - sort of general interest area so that we're matching somebody with a mentor that's doing the kind of work that they are curious about.

And, it's not always gonna be exact. But it's goin- we want to kind of get somebody, to meet a person who's doing something, you know, within the realm of that kind of work that they're curious about.

[*Tina also gives an answer*]

I also really like using the job coach, vocational – person that is already working with the mentee because they will know them better than we know them.

So it's fantastic when they're part of that intake process that we do, they can give us a little bit more information - they can clarify the answer sometimes for us. Having that person involved is very helpful. Sometimes that person also is a parent or a friend that can also help answer some of those questions for us, right?

Sometimes we all need a little bit of help to shining lights on our skills and things like that.

[*Glen then asks 2 further questions*]

Yeah - so it's very interesting to me in terms of different provinces in the various labour markets that are in different provinces. So how do you find the labour market in B C right now and its connection to your mentees?

Do you find that there's a really great connection or the labour market is not necessarily matching a lot with the mentees that you see?

[*Tina answers*]

So - we're not exactly following the labour market exactly, because it is the mentees that's saying, I'm interested in work that is - making bath bombs. Right?

So there's no data on - in regards to bath bomb makers and things like that. So, it is - we haven't seen a shift. For sure, the unemployment rate has risen, in British Columbia. But we've also had immigration into our province from other parts of Canada and other parts of the world. So we don't see, yet, any changes in regards to employers saying no to us in regards to being a mentor.

We are - we're doing reach as far and wide, so it's, it's - those people that decide not to contact us back could be making that decision and we're unaware of that. But we haven't, nobody has ever said that to us. The only - piece that I'm hearing or witnessing is from the mentees or the facilitators talking about this because they're hearing about it.

So I refer back to what's happening in British Columbia. It makes them feel a little bit better, but there is worry from the job seekers or mentee side for sure.

[Sheldon also responds]

And it's really like our - the way that we work is really driven by what people are interested in. So, you know, that could be - there could be a shift in what people generally are interested in.

But it's - I mean, it's hard to know, because everybody is, people are so individual that, you know - it's - it - like, our array of interests from our - from the mentees on our lists are - is pretty broad.

[Glen asks further questions in order to expand further on what Tina and Sheldon has just talked about]

So talking about that a little bit more. I'm very interested - when you see mentees, how do they, in terms of - they're looking at potential jobs in the future, or careers as well. How do you find a lot of the mentees determine what - what to kind of do? Where - how do they become interested? Or do they find any interest? Do you think it's sometimes it's - following another program, your organization, or they've seen somebody do it and then they say, wow, I - I'd love to do some mentoring around that.

[Sheldon answers]

Yeah, it's - I think it's a little bit difficult to determine because, in our hub we don't work with - with our mentees very closely, right? They come to us as a referral from our partnering agencies. And so, we don't - we don't kind of have our finger on the pulse of where they came to these - these conclusions from, right?

[Tina interjects]

We might hear it sometimes.

[Sheldon acknowledges what Tina said]

Sometimes.

[Tina asks]

Right?

[*Sheldon answers*]

Yeah.

[*Tina elaborates further*]

A lot of it does just start with a general interest. Right? It's the fact they know that they're good at this. And so that's where it comes from. There's lots of influence from parents too. I hear it when the parent is part of the intake, there's some steering that happens and so then I end up stepping in and going, we can look at that. But I ask the mentee then. I love it when the mentee goes, no, my mom wants me to do that. I don't wanna do it. Right? Yeah. So that's the really great part. And then I think that helps our relationship.

Because now that mentee goes, ah, she's listening to me instead of my mom. And that's what they need. Right? That's what we all want.

[*Glen then refers to inclusion BC's community of practice*]

Yeah. No, exactly. And we were talking earlier before we started the podcast about the community of practice that you have.

[*Sheldon acknowledges it*]

Yeah. Yeah, we start -

[*Tina comments*]

We're proud of it.

[*Sheldon goes in-depth about the community of practice*]

Yeah. We started that, last fall.

I think our first one was at the end of September or something like that. And have done, 3 or 4 since. And they - yeah - I mean, it was - it was a little bit risky and scary at first cause we kind of started out with our list of people who had signed up as facilitators. And then, a - another huge list of just connections that we've - that we've made -

[*Tina interjects*]

part of our reiteration

[*Sheldon agrees*]

Yeah. Par -

[*Tina finishes her comment*]

that we have at inclusion B C.

[*Sheldon continues*]

Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

[*Glen briefly comments*]

Okay.

[*Sheldon elaborates further*]

And, yeah, it's just like, it's kind of grown and, it's obvious - like when we have a guest speaker or a topic that it - when we really nail it, I mean,

[*Tina interjects*]

Lots of people sign up.

[*Sheldon continues*]

Yeah. Lots of people sign up. I mean, they signed up, you know, in record numbers when we talked about having money to hand out.

And - and they also signed up in huge numbers when we talked about, education programs that CASE offers. Right? Yeah. And so. You can see those are like big time interests for folks, but yeah. And they've become more engaged each time as well. Yeah. Like they -

[*Tina comments*]

Very much so.

[*Sheldon elaborates further*]

Yeah, like at the end of - at the end of each, the last, 10 or 15 minutes of our - of our session, we, - there's always space for, hey - what are some announcements? What's going on for you guys? Have you got any input? Like any of that kind of stuff?

[*Tina then describes the event*]

And the first one.

[*Sheldon interjects*]

Nothing.

[*Tina elaborates further*]

Almost crickets. I think nobody had anything. We had some things in the can to put out, but there was nothing. So that part is also slowly growing.

[*Sheldon continues speaking*]

Yeah. And this last one there was at least 2 or 3 people that spoke up and said, oh, we've got this, or, you know -

[*Tina interjects*]

And the fact that they contacted us afterwards to sign up for the things that Richard talked about.

[*Sheldon agrees*]

Yeah.

[*Tina then talks*]

In regards to professional developments. And we've had several people contact us in regards to the activity fund and using that as a tool. We've only had one completed so far, but we've got a few coming up as well.

[*Sheldon interjects*]

Yeah, a couple more.

[*Tina speaks*]

We've got a couple more that are coming up.

[*Sheldon quickly agrees*]

Yeah.

[*Tina elaborates further*]

So. Um, yeah, it's lovely how it's grown. It's lovely how we've gotten comments from the people that are participating and wanting that information.

[*Glen then comments and asks another question*]

Yeah. I know in other provinces there are a community of practice where various organizations get together and have monthly discussions and come together like O DEN, for example, is one organization in Ontario that definitely does that.

So in terms of more about the MentorAbility program, what do you think employers gain by participating in the MentorAbility program?

[*Tina answers*]

I don't get to see the surveys, but I definitely end up getting comments back. I love when - I'll send out a survey to them and they'll email me writing back 'done' and then say something like, Tina, we wanna do this again. Right? So I love that, sort of feedback and I've got - 2 stories. One was - a mentee had actually given me a list of 3 companies that she was interested in working in.

I - no, 4, actually - 4 organizations that she was interested in working in. I went and looked at all 4 of their websites and all four of them had D E I - programs there, but only one of the mentioned disability, in it. In a fulsome way, one mentioned disability, the word, once, the other one actually talked about it more.

And it was that organization that got back to me within a couple of days to say, yes, we found a mentor for you already. Here's her contact information. Her and I ended up having a great conversation. And this particular mentee got great information from that mentorship, but she was hoping to speak to someone else.

So I did a re-reach out and I mentioned that they didn't end up having the - disability mentioned, in their D E I program. And one of them got back to me, an H R person, and we got another mentorship and she said that they were gonna be looking into changing it. I now need to go home and look to see if it's actually happened.

I don't know if it happened or not, so I'll have to go look that up. So those are the changes. We also had a situation where it was right at the beginning of my time with MentorAbility and an organization had had 3 mentorships. And I called them up to see if they would do another one with a particular role.

They're a big enough company where they'd have different roles there, and so the H R person had said, oh, I'll reach out, but she got back to me and she says, oh, nobody is available. But then she said can I tell you a little bit of an embarrassing story? It was the fact that after those 3 mentorships, one of their employees that had been there for multiple years finally disclosed her disability, and it was the fact that she was dyslexic and she was hoping that they could download a font onto her computer.

So the fact that she could read emails faster, she could write things faster, they absolutely said yes. But the H R person recognizing - they thought they were being really inclusive, but people were

not feeling safe enough to come forward and she couldn't download it herself, the IT wouldn't have allowed her to do that.

They had that and it allowed multiple users. So now HR ended up emailing out to saying, hey, you can – you can end up, are we capturing this here? All right. So, the fact that you could end up – they emailed it out to multiple employees at the organization to see if somebody else wanted to use it, and 2 other people said yes.

It could have been for other reasons. Maybe they thought the font looked cool, but the fact that 2 other people – and then I think that's another pebble in the pond for that company of going, yes, you can ask for an accommodation here, right? So, it's those little – it pointed out the fact that there was a barrier that they didn't even know was there and that ended up helping them.

[*Glen speaks*]

No. Yeah. That's – I think that shows you, it's understanding – what's in your own organization sometimes.

[*Tina agrees*]

Mm hm.

[*Glen elaborates further*]

And as an employer and – just getting understanding of the community that you service as well. So I think having the MentorAbility program definitely offers that, insight in many ways.

[*Sheldon speaks*]

Yeah, and I think – it's a – that's a great example – that having MentorAbility present in that organization, that business that Tina was talking about, made it feel okay and safe and real for that 1 individual to finally say, actually, yeah, I, have this thing going on too, and I need an accommodation.

Maybe she wouldn't have ever, maybe she wouldn't have ever –

[*Tina interjects*]

By the way, the accommodation costs less than 7 dollars a year.

[*Sheldon elaborates further*]

Yeah. And – but maybe that person would've never come forward had we not been able to bring that mentoring, experience into the – into that company, right? So yeah, I think that's such a great example of how just that one little act of somebody mentoring for a period of time opened it up.

[*Tina then speaks*]

And outside of the whole accessibility piece, is just for the individuals doing the mentorships, that soft skill in regards to leadership, right? The fact that you're sort of bumping that up a little bit, I think is also very important. I did a presentation a few weeks ago, asking people to end up looking at maybe parts of their organization where they felt maybe they were less inclusive, a particular department, and perhaps, a mentorship in that department would be helpful.

And 2 different companies walked up to me and said, we've got an idea. So the fact that they're recognizing it, and this could - what a simple thing, a 3 hour mentorship and it might shift the ideas of somebody within that. Of course, we need to think about the safety of the mentee that's going in there.

I think that's the facilitator's role. And I know that beforehand, then the facilitator myself and perhaps the H R person can end up having a conversation going, we know that this is not a particularly inclusive department, so just be aware. Right? Yeah.

[*Glen thanks Sheldon and Tina*]

No, thank you so much for both sharing a lot of the insights for inclusion B C and yeah, thank you. Yeah, it was great having you. Yeah.

[*Tina thanks Glen*]

Thanks for having us.

[*Sheldon thanks Glen*]

Thanks for having us. Yeah, it's great.

[*Tina comments*]

Let's talk again next year in Toronto.

[*The pleasant piano music from the beginning of the episode plays again as Glen says the following concluding words*]

Thank you for tuning in to the Abilities at Work Podcast, brought to you by the Canadian Association for Supported Employment. If you'd like to learn more about supported employment and how we're advancing workplace inclusion across Canada, visit supportedemployment.ca. We appreciate your time and hope that you join us again soon. I'm Glen Walsh. Until next time, take care and keep championing inclusion!

– Transcript of 17 minute 32 second M A Abilities at Work podcast episode titled “B C hub”

