

Munch Podcast v.1 - Final Cut

[Upbeat music plays briefly. Then Abilities at Work podcast interviewer Glen Walsh begins speaking. He introduces Munch Cafe and Catering Executive Director Rick Morrell]

Hello, and welcome to Abilities at Work, a podcast hosted by the Canadian Association for Supported Employment. Now we're going to hear from Rick Morrell at Munch.

Okay, so first question is, could you please introduce yourself for the podcast, including your name, your position, and your organization?

[Rick introduces himself]

My name is Rick Morrell. I'm the Executive Director of Munch Cafe and Catering in Regina.

[Glen proceeds to the next question]

Could you tell us how your company approaches the implementation of diversity and inclusion initiatives?

[Rick answers]

Munch is basically a catering social enterprise, we're a non profit, we have charitable status. But we operate as a catering company, and our mission is to employ people that are cognitively different. So we have, for one reason or another, cognitively different and having some challenges to secure employment because of it.

Often it's their first job, sometimes some of our people are more mature, but yeah, so they work in the catering industry, so we employ them in our, in the business to make food and deliver the food and sometimes serve the food. Over time, people gain skills, they just learn what it takes to be a good employee.

And like anybody, when they first start working, it's going to have some things they have to learn to be a good employee and some attitudes that have to become more realistic about, what it takes to be a good teammate and a good coworker. And when people have been with us for long enough to establish themselves and become comfortable and confident and competent.

And when they're ready, then we have a job developer who works with me to figure out what career path they want and know what would be their ideal next job on their path. And then the job developer helps them to get that job – resumé production and application process. And then once they secure that next job, then the job developer also helps them to maintain the job.

So just checking in to make sure that both the employer and the employee – everything's working and communication's been good and any accommodations required have been established. And so that's our approach. So we actually train people, employ people, and then help them on their way before we hire the next person.

[*Glen proceeds to ask another question*]

How has CASE or other supportive employment services providers assisted you with getting more inclusive?

[*Rick answers*]

I would say that, Munch was founded in order to be inclusive. So it was founded with people that were working in other organizations – I don't think either of them had worked in with SARC or CASE. But so Munch was actually founded, that's what we do, that's who we are.

But having said that, certainly both CASE and SARC have training modules online that have been instrumental in helping our job developers learn how to do their jobs. And myself too, when I took my job, like I was new to the industry and CASE's Supporting Employment Essentials module was really useful for me and interacting with other people in the field taught me a lot about what it means to have an inclusive space and how to promote inclusion in society.

And yeah, so the kinds of events that CASE holds and the kinds of training that they do, it's cutting edge, like it's, it helps you see where things have been and what the best in the business are doing and that's what we want to be.

So yeah, both CASE and SARC, the training modules were useful. The programming has been useful. And then, again, so CASE gave us some money through the Innovation Lab for a project last year, which is ongoing, which there was a lot of learning.

So our project was to take our cooking classes and our job development processes and take them into high schools as a transition planning process in the high schools to help students with cognitive differences to figure out what they wanted to do after school to make sure that they didn't end up just stuck on their couch so that they would have physical activity going on, they would have socialization opportunities. They would have an employment path to provide structure in their life.

So they, you can't just not have that stuff. And not saying that people would automatically not have that without support, but some people do end up in that way. So to try and make sure that every child in the Regina area had support to figure out what they wanted to do, we started this project which CASE supported.

And some of the things I'm most excited about with that project, working with the students gives you just an amazing feeling of, you just feel like you're so grateful to have them be part of your life and share with you and see them growing.

It's just so amazing to see people growing. Another thing that I really liked about that program is that because of the CASE principles that we've learned and this – tried to establish them within our own organization. We went into these schools and in most cases, the teachers didn't have a strong framework for how to do this kind of stuff. And they've been told they should be doing transition planning. They've never been told what that is.

[*Glen agrees*]

Yes.

[*Rick continues speaking*]

And so there's a work experience component that anybody fits in and there's a quota, a certain number of hours each student's supposed to have. But how that's delivered.

So we went in and we really advocated job tasting, like MentorAbility approach which is again CASE. And so we're pushing to have the students experience many different things, not just one thing many times, so instead of just putting them in a grocery store for all the hours of their work experience.

We've been able to show a lot of teachers now that each time a student experiences a new occupation – so they go, they pump gas at the gas station for a couple hours. Now that is an alternative. They know whether they like it or not. They stock some shelves, they ran the till, and so it's opened up their minds about what they're capable of or what options are there for them. So now we'll go to greenhouse. Oh, I like that. Or I didn't like that. It's too hot or whatever, right?

And if we can do eight two hour field trips or job tastings, instead of one 16 hour work experience, you open up so many more possibilities and then more likely discover things that they like. Another thing that we got from CASE was start with the strengths, don't focus on what they can't do this and they can't do that.

So someone says, I want to be a vet. You don't say no. You say, okay let's go meet a vet.

[*Glen acknowledges Rick's points*]

Yeah. Yeah.

[*Rick continues talking*]

Let's go see what a vet does. Let's go see what the vet had to do to become a vet and decide if you want to go through all that and the student will figure out that I don't really want to be a vet, it's not for them.

[*Glen agrees*]

Yeah.

[*Rick elaborates further*]

But I love animals is the key information here. So what other jobs go on in that veterinary office, if none of those jobs appeal to you, let's go over to an animal boarding place and see if you like just hanging out with the dogs and cats, let's go to grooming, like pet shop. I love animals is key information.

[*Glen acknowledges Rick's points*]

Yeah.

[*Rick continues speaking*]

Okay. And whether or not the person is going to be able to make it through vet college, don't even make that assumption. Just start with the strength, just, I love animals and build on it. And if they end up being a vet, then wow. And if they end up being an animal groomer, that's good too, as long as everyone's happy.

[*Glen agrees and provides a similar example*]

Yeah, it's like becoming a chef. There's many different types of chefs. There's a private chef, there's a sous chef, there's chefs that just specialize in desserts, so it's figuring out what type of chef do you want to be.

That's something along the career – when you go, you can certainly enter a field and from there expand on what it is you want to do in that field.

[*Rick agrees*]

Yeah.

[*Glen quickly concludes*]

And that's what you're doing at Munch.

[*Rick resumes speaking and elaborates further*]

And yeah, exactly. At Munch, we don't ask the diagnosis. Often people will share that with us at some point and it can be useful in terms of understanding how to accommodate or

work with people, but we just start cooking, and you find out what people like and you find out what people are good at and skills that need to be developed.

You work on it and, it's a process of learning how to work with that person, but some are going to end up potentially running their own kitchen, some of them will be more comfortable being the person assembling the sandwiches at Subway, everybody will end up having something that they want to be doing that they're good at anyway.

So this idea that some things we learned from CASE and it was new, some things we were already doing, and we learned how to talk about it. And yeah, no I think CASE's just absolutely fantastic.

[*Glen proceeds to ask another question*]

So what advice would you give to businesses and employers looking to recruit or hire people experiencing disabilities?

[*Rick responds*]

I think the most important thing is to ask the person what they need for support in order to be successful and, there may be support workers involved too, who can help to answer those kinds of questions. So take advantage of those supports if they're available.

But the biggest thing, yeah, just be aware that anybody that you hire and I've employed probably 300 people in my life in different businesses – and absolutely anybody I've ever employed, neurotypical, neurodivergent, anybody, they've got things they like and things they're good at, things they don't like, and things they're not good at, and to make your team be successful.

You know your people and you give everybody roles that they are going to succeed at and you give them the training they need to be able to do that role properly and it's no different. So you just need to understand what the learning process is for this person, give them that support that they need, and in my experience, we have employees that show up.

For all their shifts, unless they're like, they literally, we have to send people home because they're too sick. If someone's really sick, obviously you don't want them to come to work. These guys, they're not going to call in sick because they feel like playing video games.

They're going to come to work. They're smiling, they're pleasant, they're glad to be there. And they're going to stay, they might decide they want to move on someday. But the retention times are a lot longer than for most of the staff that are out there these days. If you want a staff person that's going to have a good attitude, do a really good job. Once

they're trained, they're going to do as good a job as anybody. They're going to stay. They're going to show up all the time. That's what you want. So this is what we're talking about.

I would say too there's some situations where some employees don't want to work large numbers of hours. Some of our guys, they prefer having a three or four hour shift.

And often, let's see, you've got a business where you're paying most of your core employees \$60 bucks an hour. Okay. If there is part of that job, maybe 25 percent of that job that could be done by someone that doesn't have that specialized training or whatever, why are you paying that \$60 an hour if you can carve off part of that role and get one of our guys to do it?

Then you're going to pay, \$17, \$18, \$20 an hour, whatever, I don't know, minimum wage, wherever you are, I don't know but something fair above that, and they'll do a great job of that 25 percent. And your \$60 person can do 100 percent of their time on \$60 tasks. So the advice I would give is build your team in a way that people's skills are best utilized, and that'll be the most functioning team you have.

And our guys can be a very positive, supportive, competent part of the team.

[*Glen asks a final question*]

So I wonder if some are unexpected or positive outcomes or challenges that you encountered, in your inclusive hiring journey?

[*Rick answers*]

I think it's just watching people grow and – yeah, I don't know if this is unexpected or not, but when I took over Munch, we'd always had a neurotypical catering manager and a neurotypical assistant catering – at least when I got there, there were two. And I came to the conclusion that some of our neurodivergent guys were stronger than our neurotypical guys.

And so when we hired the new catering manager, I said to him you could probably just let that go because we were having, there were some issues and she was thinking about leaving, he was scared of losing that support.

It's okay, I'm not sure – because I had run the kitchen myself for a couple of months when somebody was on holidays and I didn't have the neurotypical support. We were fine. When it came the other guy's turn and neurotypical people came back and I didn't need it. I think you'll probably be okay without it.

And so he let that person leave when it was time, when they chose to leave, and instead of hiring another neurotypical person, he elevated one of the others into that role and a

couple weeks later, he said to me, he said, you know what, she's faster, she makes less mistakes, we're way better off.

I don't know if that was a challenge or a surprise, but it was, – I'm very excited that we have given that role to somebody from our team structure, right? Another position we had, the high school position also went to somebody who had a number of different cognitive differences, and she did fine.

It wasn't always easy for her, but she grew into it. The students had a good experience, and she did great. So when I started, I didn't know what people would be capable of. And everyone's different, and you just have to give people a chance. My brain always said there are probably people that can fill these roles that come from our constituency, and that's been true.

So it's, I guess it's not a – it's what I hoped and it is true. Now finding one to take my job? Someday.

[Glen concludes the interview and thanks Rick]

Yeah, no. So thank you so much for the interview and yeah, it was great having you Rick, and going into your role and with Munch and all the opportunities that you're giving people.

Thank you so much.

[Rick responds]

You're welcome.

[Glen finishes the podcast episode by mentioning the following information. The upbeat music at the start of the episode plays again]

If you like this podcast, be sure to subscribe and share. For more resources and to learn about supporting people experiencing disabilities, visit supportedemployment.org

- Transcript of 14 minute and 17 second Podcast Season 4 audio file titled “Munch Podcast v.1 - Final Cut”