

S K 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!

[Glen asks the following introductory question]

So first, can we start by giving us your name and your - where you're working right now?

[MentorAbility Hub Coordinator at SaskAbilities, Carmen Donald, introduces herself]

Sure. My name is Carmen Donald and I work with SaskAbilities, in Regina, Saskatchewan.

[Glen then soon puts forward a second question]

Oh, thanks so much for joining us today. Yeah. So I have a few questions, just to ask you. Your experience with MentorAbility and - just get to know about the project a little bit more and your experiences. So first, how do MentorAbility Hubs support the connection between job seekers and employers?

[Carmen responds]

Yeah! So, what really I think of myself as, almost like a extension cord taking the job seeker who is looking for the knowledge - who is seeking knowledge - and connecting them with knowledge keepers - those in the business that are experienced and that have lots of information for the job seeker to - to draw on, a little bit about their - what they've been through, what their experience has been, things that they do, that they would do again, and perhaps things that they did that maybe just - they wouldn't do again.

[*Glen asks a third question*]

Oh, okay. Very interesting. So in Saskatchewan, what do you think in terms of the labour market and in terms of clients that are coming to you and looking for the mentoring program, do you find that there's a good connection or the labour market is quite different in terms of what mentoring you're looking for?

[*Carmen answers*]

Actually Saskatchewan is - a quite a wide range. And I find that, if you do the research, that that connection between mentors and mentees has been quite good for us.

[*Glen asks further about SaskAbilities clients*]

Okay. So what kind of requests are you getting lately in terms of your ment - mentees coming and asking you what they want to find?

[*Carmen responds*]

Yeah. So it's been really varied. We've had things, we've set up mentorships, at the Humane Society. We've set up mentorships with a pilot. We've set up mentorships with tattoo artists, bakers ...

[*Glen then soon asks about employers and MentorAbility program participation*]

No, that sounds great. So yeah, they're very interesting occupations and kind of, you can find them anywhere. So what can you see, or what kind of challenges are you finding or seeing with employers in terms of participating in the MentorAbility program?

[*Carmen elaborates*]

I think quite honestly, when I go out and I talk to the mentors, I think the immediate thought is why are you coming to me? I don't know that I can spend an hour sort of being on and talking about what I do, and I let those employers know, you know what? I have the job seekers that are coming to explore the - occupation that you represent. They're thirsty for knowledge. They are looking for - lots of questions to be answered.

They wanna see the environment. They wanna be in that environment. They wanna see it, they want to hear it. They wanna - in some cases, smell it. A bakery is a perfect place to have those set - all of those senses - kind of - yeah, just a full experience. And quite often, what has - happens is that employers start talking.

And again, this is the other thing is when I'm talking to them, I talk to them about, really this is an opportunity to talk to your younger self. What are some of those things that you would do? What are some of those things that you learned from, and how did you grow?

Things like, how has the industry changed from when you first entered this occupation to where you are now - and, just a little bit about themselves. And people -people get talking. It was, it's really interesting, because quite often people that say, oh, I don't know if I can fill an hour, quite often, it's 2 hours and they're still having a great conversation.

[*Glen asks a sixth question*]

Yeah. What I find is that when you approach people and you ask, okay, would you - how do you feel about being a mentor? I think the word mentor they - they feel - they feel like it's too much to ask. It's -

[*Carmen interjects*]

It's heavy or it's a big responsibility.

[*Glen talks further about the word mentoring*]

Yeah. And I think when you describe what the program is a little bit more in detail, it's not what they perceive as a me - mentoring. It's -

[*Carmen interjects*]

Right.

[*Glen continues speaking*]

It's kind of. It's like just talking about what - what they do. But, I - I think the word has a lot of attachment that - that it's not necessarily, not necessarily implied what you're doing - I, I think that mentoring and - it has this heavy history or something to do it.

[*Carmen responds*]

Right. Yeah. And I think people expect that it's going to be weeks and weeks and weeks. And so when we explain to them, no, no, this is just between 1 hour and 1 day long.

[*Glen agrees*]

Mm-hmm.

[*Carmen continues*]

It - it lightens that heaviness for them.

[*Glen concurs*]

Yeah.

[*Carmen elaborates further*]

And, and to know that, you know what? We've actually done our research about you. We know that you are someone important within the field, that this young mentee or, or older mentee is looking for.

They're - they're looking for someone to give them that sort of insider information. Really. And that opportunity to say, tell me, really, what is it in your job that you have to do in order to get to the good stuff? Tell me about that good stuff and what was your journey? How did - what was your journey getting to where you are now, that success?

[*Glen asks further about employers*]

Yeah, I - I think it's all about the approach and how you talk to the mentors. And - and so, what do you think employers gain from the mentoring program?

[*Carmen answers*]

So, honestly - I mean, in my experience, when I go back to talk to those mentors, kind of do that debrief, it's a - it's - it's, quite often they're very astonished and they're like, oh, I learned so much about - that maybe the thought I had in my mind was not the person that I - that you brought to me for a mentorship.

That these people, have skills and abilities that truly would be an asset to the business that they're in. It's also breaking down those barriers, again. It becomes a conversation and quite quickly there is that connection. Between people, people that - that share a common interest.

And so it becomes very much just a conversation between 2 people. So it breaks down those barriers, which is amazing.

[*Glen responds*]

Mm hm. No. Yeah, it - it definitely - I - I think they - they anticipate more than what it necessarily is, you know?

[*Carmen agrees*]

Yeah.

[*Glen elaborates further*]

It's - it's kind of like just kind of going for a coffee perhaps, and - and having a discussion about what - what you do in your job and, giving somebody else, more information about what you do, so it's not as taxing.

[*Carmen agrees and elaborates further*]

Right. Yeah. And I think too, you know what? They do get really into it, right? Because this, they - they think back of how far they've come and they think about, you know what, yeah, I really have become a - expert within my field. That's why these people have come to me, because they know that - that I am an industry leader.

And when you see people like that who have done - who have had lots of success. They don't always necessarily realize that until they start talking to someone who's thirsty for that knowledge.

[*Glen transitions to asking another question*]

Yeah - that - certainly. Yeah, I - I definitely find that as well. And in terms of other service providers, how - how do you reach out to them and - and I guess, introduce them to the MentorAbility program?

[*Carmen gives some final words*]

Yeah, for service providers, it's - it's - when we go out and we talk to them, it's really showing them the benefit for their - for the individuals that they serve. Of how this can help narrow some of those choices for people and to really - show them the path forward of the jobs or the careers that they're interested in. And those that they're not. When we talk about successful mentorships, we talk about how, you know what? Individuals come out of mentorships and it might not be the right fit for them. But that's success. Because we know then that they're like, okay I've - I've asked those questions. Maybe this isn't a fit for me. But what is? And they go on and do another mentorship.

[*Glen agrees and then asks a final question*]

No, that - that's great. And so I have one last question here. In terms of, how do you think the MentorAbility program has beginning - or has helped in terms of shifting the narrative between or around disabilities and employers?

[*Carmen answers*]

Yeah. I think when - when people come out of the - the mentorship, both the mentee and the mentor - there is a change, there is a shift. And I think that the employers learn a lot from mentees, as well as the mentees learning from the mentors. I think it opens their mind. It - it isn't an us and

them. It's - this is - about us and this is about our society and how we want our society to view disability.

And when it's us and them, it's a very - it's a negative experience. But with MentorAbility, it breaks down those barriers. It's not an us and them. It's - it begins that - you see individuals as the person they are - by their name, not their disability.

[*Glen responds*]

Mm hm. Yeah. I think it's definitely a - a perspective shift in terms of - it does change the narrative of how we see people with disabilities in terms of - there's so many hidden disabilities that we don't necessarily see.

No - and it - it was - thank you so much for joining us today and - and giving us great perspective and learning more about your program in terms of - Saskatchewan - I - I think it's great.

[*Carmen thanks Glen*]

Well, thank you, Glen. Thank you for your time.

[*Glen thanks Carmen again*]

Yep. Thank you so much.

[*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 13 minute M A Abilities at Work podcast episode titled "S K Hub"