

Project Description: Work Based Learning Consortium and Spero Careers Canada training and employment program for the ASD Community

There is an 85% unemployment rate for the members of the autism community who are willing and able to work. While the stereotypical roles for autistic individuals includes IT roles and data entry, we believe the advanced manufacturing sector (AMS) could benefit from accessing this talent pool. With an employment gap which has been growing for the past 20 or more years due to lack of investment in training and retention, the AMS needs to keep businesses running. For the purpose of this pilot project, we're focusing on Mold Maintenance Technicians and CNC operators though when proven successful, we'll be exploring other roles such as Aerospace Sealer or CMM Operator.

The ultimate objective of this project is to create a well-tested approach to helping a segment of the ASD community to secure employment in the advanced manufacturing sector. The ASD community has been identified as a potential pool of candidates to fulfill the growing gap of talent for the advanced manufacturing industry. Why? Many members of the ASD community possess certain characteristics which would make them prime candidates for the AMS such as:

- Attention to detail
- Ability to work with little supervision
- Good with repetitive aspects of work
- Desire to deliver high quality service
- Honesty, loyalty and appreciation for structure
- Low absenteeism
- Successful within roles requiring physical exertion

Our approach is based on the experience that the Work Based Learning Consortium has collected over the past few years in selecting job candidates for that sector by assessing their non-technical competencies, and then providing the training and certification needed, followed by placement in a job.

People on the spectrum often cannot easily access jobs, partly because of common myths and misconceptions about ASD and partly because recruiters and many workplaces are not well positioned to evaluate such job candidates' skills. In this context, we propose to pre-select candidates who are on the spectrum, but who also show important personal competencies and interest levels that would position them as good candidates who can perform well at such jobs.

Spero Careers Canada will be piloting the use of the Enneagram and the Career Personality Profiler to facilitate the pre-selection. The pool of candidates will initially be gathered through our existing network including the Autism Job Club in Burlington and through our connections with ODEN (Ontario Disability and Employment Network), CASE (Canadian Association for Supported Employment) and CASDA (Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance). Once this system is proven, we'll be opening the application process to a broader audience.

TAPPING INTO A SKILLED TALENT POOL

In a labour market seeing increased competition for qualified workers, people with disabilities are a potential talent pool that Ontario businesses need to engage. Despite the recent recession—which delayed the retirement plans of many baby boomers—the impending retirement plans of this demographic group will eventually materialize. This, combined with fewer workforce entrants and a recovering economy, will lead to labour and skills shortages.¹⁰

Conference Board of Canada, Antunes and Macdonald, "Recession only Delayed the Inevitable Workforce Shortages," 42–46.

The Training Program

The WBLC Training Program consists of a blended combination of e-Learning, classroom and 'on-the-job' learning. This is one of the most optimal learning methods to achieve the best outcome for learners. Throughout the training program, WBLC and Spero Careers Canada will regularly assess a candidates progress, determine in an objective fashion how well a candidate is doing, and provide guidance and support so they can be successful. After they complete each e-Learning module, there will be a short test to let a candidate know how they are doing and identify areas they need to review. A candidate must pass each test to proceed to the next e-Learning module. A transcript of results will form part of their permanent record and will count towards their certification in the program.

WBLC ran a project from early 2014 to early 2019, where dozens of Ontario advanced manufacturing companies hired/nominated over 550 young people to be trained to be CNC Machinists, CNC Setup, CNC Operators, CMM Operators and Structural Airframe Assemblers. **Over 92%** of Trainees who completed their training achieved OMLC Certification – a remarkably high rate considering that these were young people (18-29) – many having only their high school diploma or less and most having never worked in manufacturing. We believe that with the correct interviewing process for candidate selection, program coaching and employer education, we can repeat that success for the ASD community.

People With Disabilities: An Underutilized Talent Pool

According to research by The Conference Board of Canada, job vacancies in Ontario could reach 190,000 in 2020, and rise to 364,000 by 2025 and 564,000 by 2030.¹ In addition, Ontario is losing out on as much as \$24.3 billion in economic activity and \$3.7 billion in provincial tax revenues annually because employers cannot find people with the skills they need to innovate and grow in today's economy.² There is a wealth of skilled and talented people who are not effectively engaged in the Canadian workforce: people with disabilities. Representing 15.4 per cent of population in Ontario,³ people with disabilities are ready, willing, and able to fill the gap. "There is a war for talent. If you restrict your search for talent in any way, you will be giving your competitors the edge they need to put you out of business."⁴

Sources: Munro and Stuckey, *The Need to Make Skills Work*, 2; Statistics Canada, *Canadian Survey on Disability, 2012*; Canadian Business SenseAbility, "Acting on Findings."

Conclusion

The evaluation process, interview and training will require little to no modification in order to work for the ASD community. We want to make sure that candidates are truly a good fit for the role and will provide the value we know they are capable of. We'll help reduce the unemployment rate and dependency on government programs and help solve the AMS labour gap.



Future talent shortages The talent market is shrinking – workers are getting older and there are fewer skilled people in the current labour pool to fill jobs as they become available. The Canadian Employee Relocation Council states that more than 62% of Canadian CEOs say that the talent shortage is already affecting business growth⁶. The 2006 Census showed an upcoming labour shortage as our population ages. To find the people needed to fill these positions, businesses and governments must look for talent in every corner in the community and be more open about whom they will hire. People with disabilities are part of an untapped market – people with a variety of skills at a variety of levels. Deloitte *The Road to Inclusion* pg. 3

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