



NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2024



CELEBRATING FIFTY YEARS

2024 is a momentous year for EmployAbilities - it's our fiftieth year of connecting ability to opportunity! We've come a long way since our humble beginning in February, 1974 when "Employment Services for the Physically Disabled" (as EmployAbilities was then known) was first registered as a charity. Back then, we were part of a trio agencies under the umbrella of the Edmonton Social Services for the Disabled, which was formed to address issues of employment, transportation, and housing.

Today, EmployAbilities is active in the Edmonton region, Grande Prairie, and in a number of North-central Alberta communities, providing employment services to people with disabilities and/or barriers to employment. Between July 2022 and June 2023 over 500 clients were accepted into job placement services, and almost 400 found jobs.

We're planning a number of activities to mark our 50th year including events and celebrations in the communities we serve. We also plan to use this anniversary as an opportunity to showcase the organization to potential participants and employers, and highlight our amazing, life-changing work.



Our 50th logo, designed by an EmployAbilities staff member!

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MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I am humbled as I write this article for EmployAbilities newsletter. EmployAbilities is celebrating our 50th anniversary in 2024. From a small beginning of two staff and a need to support individuals with disabilities in the 1970s to a provincial organization that now has 12 programs and over 70 staff and supports hundreds of clients each year with disabilities and barriers, to employment. Thank you to our funders the provincial and federal government that fund EmployAbilities programs year after year.

I was recently impressed with a small message written on the wall by one of EmployAbilities clients that said "I want to matter and live up to expectations of my family." For so many of the clients that EmployAbilities supports employment is not just a goal to achieve it is a personal accomplishment and to know that they matter. To all the employers out there that support Albertans with disabilities and barriers to become employed, you are changing lives. Thank you to the board of directors and staff for making a difference every day.

Jason Loeuer

SUCCESS STORIES

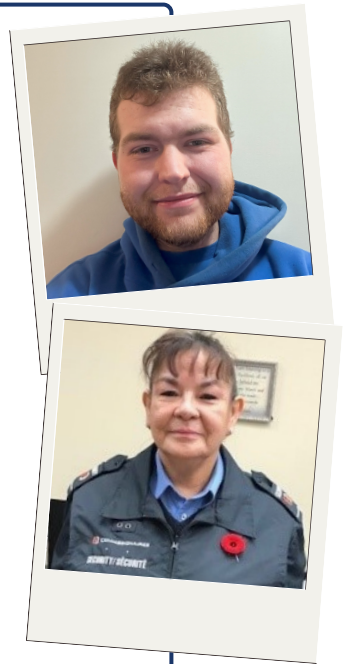
At EmployAbilities, we change lives every day by connecting people with disabilities and barriers to employment with jobs and opportunities. Every so often, we hear back from some of the people that we've helped. These success stories keep us motivated to continue the work. We're inspired by the transformational efforts our clients are making to re-engage in the working world and excited to keep offering them services and supports that enable them to better their lives. Here are two such success stories:

Before I joined the Strive 4 Work program I didn't know how to make a resume or how to manage my budgeting. Randy and the S4W team were extremely helpful and professional. I have been at my job for over a year now and I am still enjoying the position and great benefits! I believe if you have disabilities, mental health barriers, or medical conditions Strive 4 work is the best option out there.

-E.P.

"I am 110% satisfied with the impeccable service I received from day one when I came to Career Evolution North... I confidently recommend them to anyone who is willing to apply themselves. Thank you so very much!"

-Cindy



DONATE

At EmployAbilities, all of our services are provided free of charge for both participants and employers.

You can support our mission by visiting employabilities.ab.ca and clicking on "**DONATE**". Donors will receive a tax receipt and the satisfaction that they are contributing to a more inclusive workforce in Alberta!

EMPLOYER PROFILE

When you come to The Canadian Brewhouse, you'll feel like you're right at home, because our house is your house! We believe in offering more than just a place to grab a drink or a bite to eat; we strive to provide an unmatched experience. With a wide selection of drinks, dishes, and events, you'll never want to leave.

We have created a culture of wellness and team work, that allows us to better serve our guests and the communities we are a part of. Through partnerships with local charities and organizations, we strive to make a positive impact beyond our doors. With the dedication and hard work of our outstanding team, we have grown from our humble beginnings to proudly operate 45 locations across Canada, each one embodying our commitment to excellence and community involvement.


The Canadian Brewhouse is proud to partner with EmployAbilities. Together, we strive to create opportunities for ready, willing and able to work individuals and foster a community that celebrates diversity and inclusion.




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PROGRAM UPDATE AND CLIENT TESTIMONIAL - LEARN 2 EARN

"The Learn 2 Earn (L2E) program has taught me many lessons - I have learned how technology and the job market have changed, tactics to help my coworkers and their clients, and the customer service workshop taught me of the different ways people speak depending on their personality or what they expect from a conversation."

-Emily

February saw the conclusion of in-person training for the 23rd intake since the program began in June, 2020, which is the last one under the current contract. Today, the L2E participants are completing 10 weeks of work experience /employment, which will conclude in April.

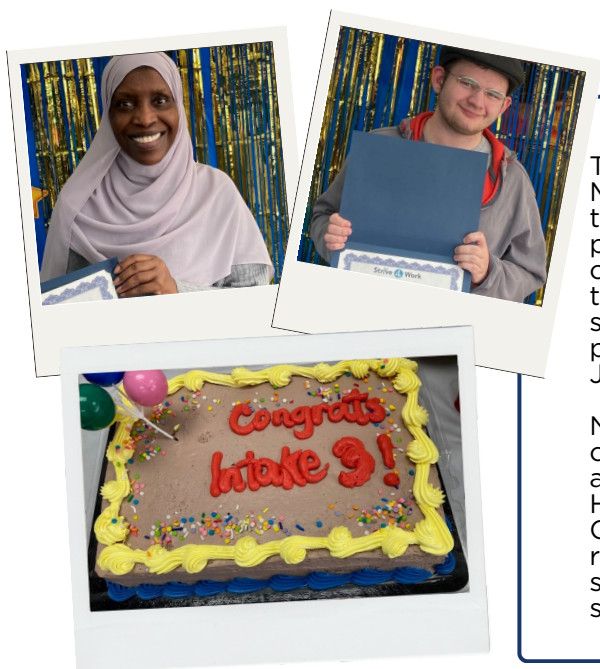
We thank everyone who has made Learn 2 Earn - a program that empowers Edmonton-area youth aged 18 to 30 with job readiness training, certifications, and support - possible. We hope that this program can continue to offer support and training to youth facing employment barriers.



PROGRAM UPDATE - STRIVE FOR WORK

The latest initiative of the Strive 4 Work program commenced in May 2023 at its newly established south Edmonton location in the Millbourne Market Mall. With an anticipated reach of 150 participants spread across 10 intake cohorts, the three-year contract, generously funded by the federal government through the Opportunities Fund for Individuals with Disabilities, has shown promising early results. The most recent intake cohort participants successfully concluded their skills training on January 26,

Notably, four participants have already secured and embarked on their work experience placements with renowned companies and organizations, such as Desjardins Insurance, Earl's, Hopscotch Early Learning and Childcare, and The Mustard Seed. Currently, the program is actively engaged in conducting work readiness assessments and selection processes to fill available spots for the upcoming intake cohort, scheduled to commence skills training on February 26.



PROGRAM UPDATE & CLIENT TESTIMONIAL - STEPS 2 EMPLOYMENT

"Hello! I wanted to give you an update since you helped me a ton with getting this job, I'm loving it so far, some days are a little harder than others due to my health but that'll sort itself out over time, everyone there is super kind and understanding, also they have been super helpful with getting me into the swing of things, I'm even being trusted with prep work recently. Having a job has also helped a ton with my mental health (Not using job as a coping mechanism) it's good to be working in such a positive work environment and I can't wait to gain more experience and make my way up through the positions at the restaurant no matter how long it'll take."

-Armand

The Steps 2 Employment program has been transformative for participants like Armand, providing essential support and guidance to overcome barriers to employment. Armand's update reflects the program's success in facilitating meaningful job placements and fostering a positive work environment conducive to professional growth and improved mental health.

EmployAbilities' comprehensive approach includes personalized assessments, tailored employment plans, and extensive training sessions covering essential skills and life skills. This structured support has empowered individuals to navigate the job market with confidence and secure positions where they can thrive. Armand's journey exemplifies the program's impact in empowering individuals with disabilities to achieve their career aspirations and contribute meaningfully to their workplaces.

As the program nears its conclusion in April 2024, Armand's testimonial serves as a powerful testament to the enduring benefits of the Steps 2 Employment program at EmployAbilities.

PROGRAM UPDATE - INCLUSIVE CAREER CONNECTIONS



"ICC continues to offer both in-person and virtual services and works with clients to help them find employment. The ICC team members are also engaging with allied agencies to get the word out about the program and build connections. Recently, ICC staff presented program information to Pathways to Housing, showcased a booth at the Mature Worker Job Fair, and provided a disability awareness presentation to the City of Edmonton workforce.

Since October 2020, 322 were accepted into the ICC program, and 302 have secured employment - a 94% success rate! Over 28,000 people have accessed our services, including phone calls, web inquiries, and drop-ins. The ICC team have made literally thousands of connections to assist those who've inquired, working across departments and with other social service agencies.

One of the unique (and we think especially helpful) elements of ICC is that all participants are offered five hours or five sessions (whichever comes first) of mental health supports through Momentum Counselling. As mental health challenges impact job success, this resource is particularly appreciated by ICC clients.

As the program continues to move forward, we're focused on meeting the needs of the clients and continuing to be a resource for job-seekers in the Edmonton capital region.

PROGRAM UPDATE - EMPLOYABILITIES FOR NEWCOMERS

January was a very busy (and at times very cold!) month for the EmployAbilities for Newcomers program. We have been busy with applying for future funding and expanded supports for Newcomers with Disabilities from our funder Immigration Refugee's & Citizenship Canada. With over 50 newcomers with disabilities provided training since the beginning of last April and two months left in our fiscal year, we are hard at work getting everything in-place and ready for the start of another great year for the program starting this April 1st. I'm certain that with referrals and supports from our settlement partner organizations such as the New Canadians Health Centre, Action for Healthy Communities, Catholic Social Services, and many others, we will continue our program's trend of getting busier and busier month after month helping Newcomers with Disabilities in Edmonton.

EMPLOYABILITIES THROUGH THE YEARS

PROGRAM UPDATE - RESTART YOUR CAREER

As of the middle of February, the 23 Restart Your Career participants have just completed in-person training and are now on to the 140 hours of work practicum component. During the in-person training participants learned employment skills, like resume and cover letter writing, workplace training and preparation, and tutorials in Microsoft Office designed to build off their existing skills and acquire new ones to re-enter the workforce. Since starting in September, participants have developed their self-esteem through team-building exercises, gotten a better idea of their job and career goals, and been inspired by guest speakers to take the next step on their employment journey.

One characteristic of this intake that has stood out is how supportive they've been of one another - one participant recently commented that "it seems like a family". We love it when we hear stories like that!

The next Restart Your Career intake begins on March 11 - if you (or someone you know) would be a good fit for this program, please let us know!



2023




2004




2018




2008

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PROGRAM UPDATE - GROUNDWORKS

In 2022, EmployAbilities successfully secured a grant to implement a comprehensive training program based on the "Skills for Success" framework. The initiative aimed to cover the expansive North Zone, spanning from High Level down to Vegreville and from Grande Prairie to Cold Lake, encompassing a total of 19 communities. GroundWorks, the chosen training provider, delivered skill development sessions for two intakes, each lasting 16 weeks, throughout the year. The curriculum encompassed a wide range of essential skills, including digital literacy, reading, writing, adaptability, collaboration, problem-solving, numeracy, creativity, communication, and pre-employment skills.

Remarkably, this unique EmployAbilities program did not set direct employment as its immediate goal but focused on bringing individuals closer to being job-ready. Despite the number of participants falling below initial expectations, those who completed the program expressed its immense value. The positive impact on participants' confidence and self-esteem has been truly uplifting to witness.

Encouraged by the initial success, GroundWorks submitted another proposal and received approval for an extension, allowing the program to continue for an additional year. However, with its impending conclusion on March 31, 2024, the positive outcomes achieved during its tenure underscore the importance of such initiatives in fostering personal and professional growth.

PROGRAM UPDATE - CAREER EVOLUTION NORTH

Career Evolution North is a unique contract in that we mainly work with Albertans who have applied for Employment Insurance but serve "other" Albertans as well. We are extremely proud of the ability to work with those folks looking for their "Dream Job" and not just a survival job! We encourage people to stretch and try new things, look for their strengths, and think outside the box. We have had many successes this year despite it being a low-intake time. Our clients consistently say that they are more than satisfied with our services.

We recently welcomed Nola to the team and are grateful for her ability to get up to speed quickly and provide the best services available!

PROGRAM UPDATE - EMPLOYABILITIES GRANDE PRAIRIE

EmployAbilities Grande Prairie (EAGP) has added a couple new staff members to our fantastic team. Colleen is our new Employment Facilitator and Brittany is our new Resource Centre Facilitator. Picture L-R (Colleen, Kristen (job developer), Brittany, and Rondi (Program Supervisor).

EAGP will be busy over the next couple months. EAGP will be a part of the City of Grande Prairie Youth Discovery Career Expo. EAGP will be providing resume services and employment skill supports to individuals under 30 years old at this expo. The EAGP team is looking forward to this!

Since November, the EAGP team has supported 27 individuals with accessing our services, ranging from resume supports, exposure courses, interview preparation, conflict management at work, and much more.



TRIBUTE TO IRIS SAUNDERS



Iris Saunders served as the Executive Director of EmployAbilities from May 1986 until her unexpected passing in April 2014. She worked diligently to ensure all people with a disability or barrier to employment had the support and guidance to explore their abilities and develop a career path that would enable them to fully participate in the workforce.

Iris was a leader in the community, highlighting and promoting the value persons with disabilities bring to the workforce. She was also involved in numerous volunteer activities, including the Edmonton Glenora Rotary Club, the Alberta School for the Deaf, the Alberta Congress Board Workplace Conference, and served on the Alberta Premiers Council. Iris was the recipient of countless awards, notably YMCA's Women of Distinction Award, Global's Woman of Vision Award, and the Lumina Award from Learning Link.

She was honoured posthumously for her work supporting Indigenous Albertans with disabilities with the Indigenous name "Queen White Eagle Woman" (Okinaskwes waspiski-kihew-skwew) at a naming ceremony at the Poundmaker's Lodge Pow Wow in August 2014.

Iris's legacy lives on through the Iris M. Saunders Memorial Bursary that assists persons with disabilities in pursuing further education and employment.

EmployAbilities secured a grant to launch a two-year training and employment services initiative aimed at assisting mature workers to enhance their skills for re-entering the workforce. The program, known as 45+ Works, commenced in April of 2022, and was concentrated within the North Zone of Alberta; Athabasca, Barrhead, Westlock, Bonnyville, Cold Lake, Lac La Biche, Vegreville, and St. Paul.

The 45+ Works Program was implemented with a three-stage program plan: Stage 1 involved recruitment and assessment, Stage 2 encompassed digital learning, life skills, and employment skills training, and Stage 3 focused on work exposure and/or work maintenance. The program targeted individuals over 45 years old, delivering four separate cohorts to motivated clients seeking to enhance their circumstances. Despite falling short on the number of contracted work subsidy agreements with employers, the program surpassed its goals in supporting Clients to re-enter the workforce. A noteworthy 68% achieved success by securing jobs or advancing to further education, positioning them for improved opportunities.

The impact of the program extended beyond employment outcomes. The training and positive social aspect of the program significantly influenced clients' motivation to overcome their barriers. Beyond securing employment, the program played a crucial role in fostering positive mental health improvements amongst clients, instilling a sense of societal value and facilitating lasting positive changes.

PROGRAM UPDATE - LAKELAND EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Lakeland Employment Services (LES) has been busy serving job seekers and employers in Bonnyville, Cold Lake, Lac La Biche, St. Paul, and Vegreville. We continue to offer weekly in-person and virtual workshops every Wednesday in each of the five centres and basic and intermediate Excel courses every Thursday at our Vegreville location. We're promoting LES in a variety of places and making connections in the community with agencies, schools, and allied organizations.

In January, LES received 42 referrals. The majority of the referrals were for Albertans seeking job-related supports. We're seeing a large number of clients with mental health challenges and people who have barriers to employment due to lack of childcare options. The recent warm weather has also created difficulties for some seasonal workers, particularly in oil and gas, as many northern roads are impassable, which is causing job start delays.

PROGRAM UPDATE - EMPLOYABILITIES NORTH

We're excited to share the latest developments from EmployAbilities North, which has been supporting Albertans with disabilities and barriers to employment in the rural northern region since 2005. Despite our last contract concluding on December 30, 2023, and the discontinuation of services in three communities, we're proud to highlight a significant achievement: assisting 156 individuals to secure meaningful employment during the last contract period.

As we step into a new contract that commenced on January 1, 2024, EmployAbilities North is buzzing with excitement as we roll out an array of exciting services tailored to the needs of our rural communities:


- **Short Training/Exposure Courses:** We now offer support for individuals seeking to enhance their skills through short training/exposure courses, empowering them with workplace skills for success.
- **Work-Related Employment Support:** We understand that the right gear can set the stage for success. That's why we're removing the barrier of access to work clothes, boots, and vital work-related equipment, which paves the way for confidence and readiness in a new job.
- **Wage Subsidy for Employers:** In an effort to foster a more inclusive workplace, we're introducing a wage subsidy for employers. This initiative is designed to ease the integration of talented individuals into their new roles, celebrating diversity and potential in every hire.
- **Mobile Resource Services:** This innovative service will bring job placement support directly to surrounding settlements and hamlets. This service includes access to laptops with internet access, wireless printers, and office supplies, ensuring that job seekers in rural areas have convenient access to essential resources without the need for transportation.


At EmployAbilities North, we're not just breaking down barriers; we're building bridges to a more inclusive, vibrant community where everyone has the opportunity to shine. We're invigorated to continue our collaboration with the communities, employers, and partners to build a brighter, more inclusive future for Albertans with a disability.

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