

THE LESSONS LEARNED VIA THE READY, WILLING & ABLE PROGRAM AND THE FACTORS THAT SUPPORT INCLUSIVE HIRING



READY

WILLING

& ABLE

PRÊTS

DISPONIBLES

& CAPABLES

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Guide

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THIS GUIDE, AS WELL AS THE RESEARCH PROJECT, WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE GENEROUS CONTRIBUTION OF READY, WILLING AND ABLE.

FOREWORD

Autistic individuals and people who have an intellectual disability face many daily challenges, particularly when it comes to finding a job that meets their needs and aspirations. Despite these difficulties, several initiatives, including the Ready, Willing and Able (RWA) program, have increased employment rates for these job candidates. After receiving project funding from RWA, Giant Steps and the Quebec Intellectual Disability Society (SQDI) put out a call for proposals and a study was conducted to identify the lessons learned via the RWA program and the factors that support inclusive hiring.

You can find the report here: <https://readywillingable.ca/>.

This guide was co-produced by the research team and RWA to promote inclusive hiring with data-based results and recommendations. We have included a list of resources at the end of this guide to provide additional information and supports.

Happy reading!

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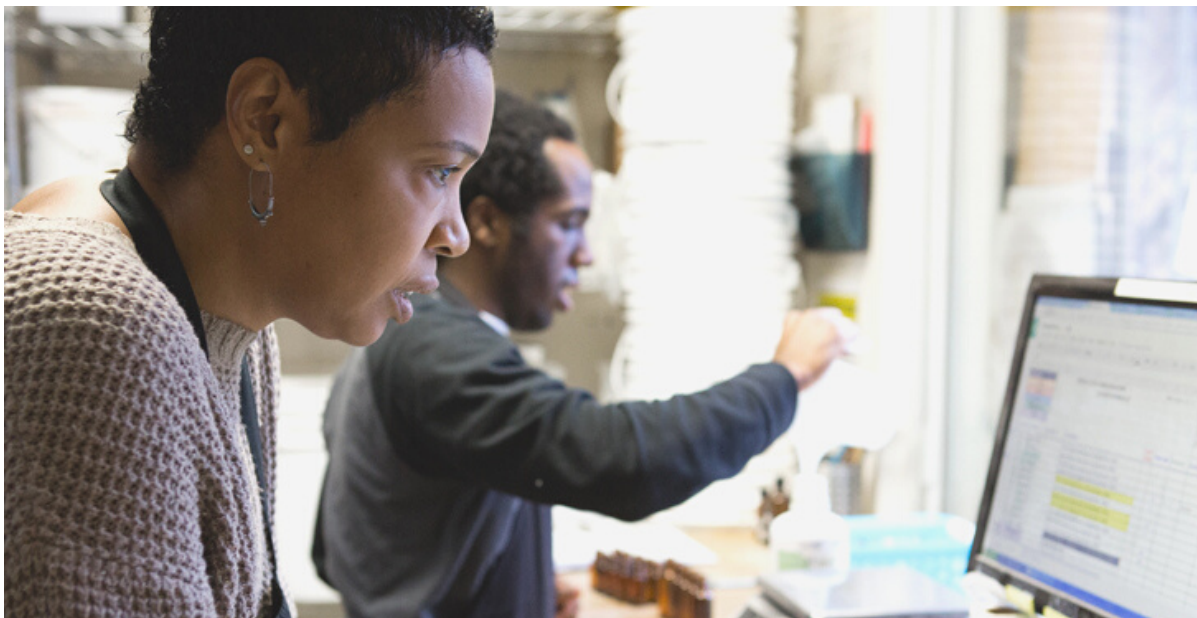
Martine Asselin, RWA provincial coordinator, Société québécoise de la déficience intellectuelle (SQDI)

In this guide, the term “autistic” is used in accordance with the preferences autistic people have expressed. As suggested by the Quebec Intellectual Disability Society, the term “people with intellectual disabilities” (ID) will also be used. For the sake of simplicity, the gender neutral term “they” is used throughout this guide.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

People who are autistic or who have an ID are under-represented in the labour market, despite significant employee shortages (Holwerda et al., 2013). This has been documented in numerous studies and observed in several countries (Holwerda et al., 2013; Luecking, 2011). Data presented in 2017 by the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec (OPHQ) shows that a 22.3% employment rate for adults with neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism or a syndrome associated with an intellectual disability is the lowest of all adults with disabilities (Statistics Canada, 2017). Although disparities in data collection strategies make it difficult to precisely pinpoint employment rates for people with autism or an ID, combined research findings indicate that this population is widely under-represented in the workforce compared to workers without disabilities. Furthermore, 77.8% of people with Autism have had a negative work experience in relation to a lack of workplace accommodations and support for companies that need to provide these accommodations (O’Sullivan and Kearney, 2018).

However, studies have shown that this doesn’t need to be the case and that targeted initiatives can increase employment rates for people with autism or an ID. Letscher et al. (2016, 2017, 2019) and Potvin and his team (2018) have identified a set of strategies that support the integration or inclusion of these populations in work environments. They emphasize both the importance of supporting these individuals’ acquisition of skills, but also supporting key stakeholders within the organisation to promote a culture of mutual support and accommodation. In other words, to foster the increased participation of those who are Autistic or have an ID in the labour market, we also need to support their employers.



The RWA program, which promotes skills development for people with autism or an ID and helps employers hire them, is aligned with these findings.

Rolled out across Canada in 2014, Ready, Willing and Able (RWA) aims to create inclusive workplaces by facilitating the hiring of people with autism or an ID. This program is funded by the federal government through the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities. To increase the participation of people with autism and/or an ID in the labour market, RWA provides supports for both employers and job seekers. Thanks to RWA, this group of job seekers can enter the labour market or remain in the competitive workforce while providing employers with a source of previously overlooked talent. A job in an inclusive context is a job that offers a competitive salary without a wage subsidy along with the same benefits as other employees. In addition to reaching out to employers, RWA offers a range of services for businesses (e.g., disability awareness, candidate referrals, a resource centre, online training and courses, guidance for job interviews etc.).

The expertise developed by RWA and its partners targets factors that support inclusive hiring while considering the points of view of new hires and employers alike.

READY

WILLING

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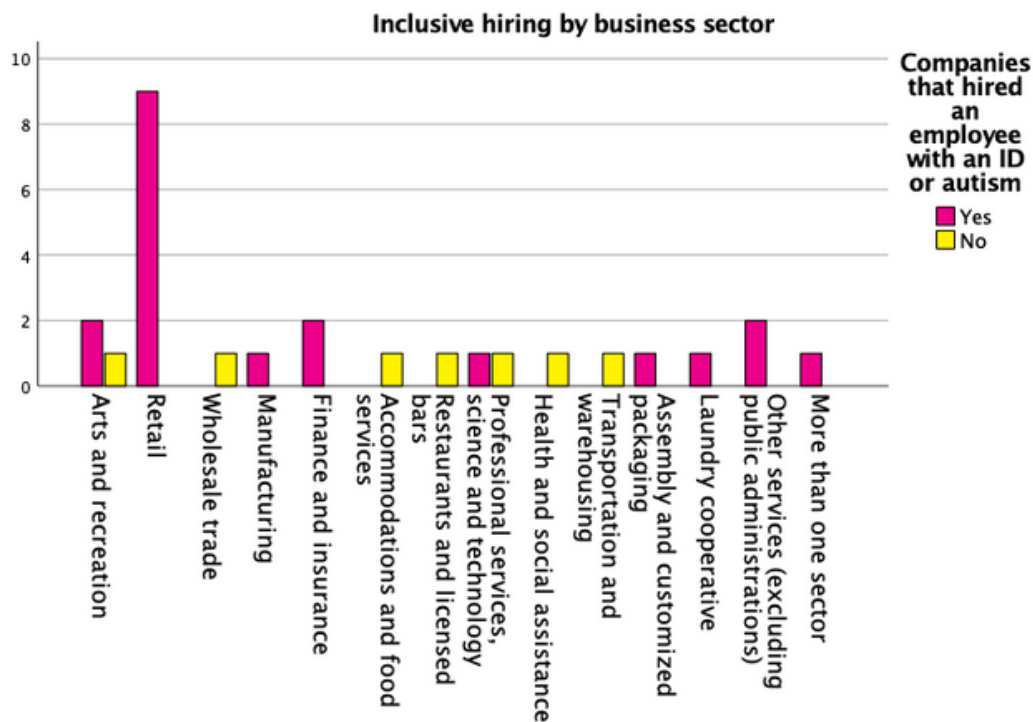
PRÊTS

DISPONIBLES

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WHICH COMPANIES HIRE EMPLOYEES WITH AUTISM OR AN ID THROUGH RWA?

Among the companies that took part in the study, those working in retail were more likely to have hired inclusively. However, other sectors can benefit from hiring a person with autism or an ID.

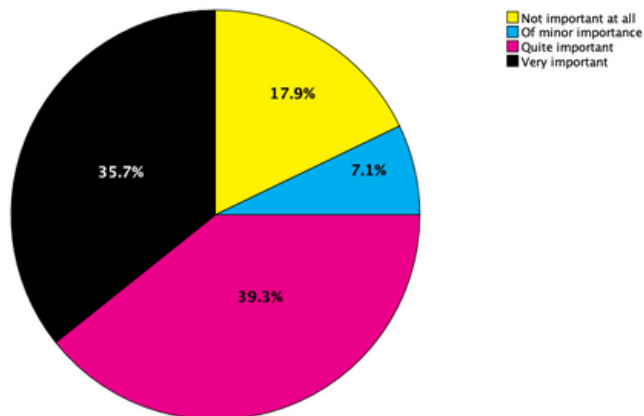


Inclusive hiring among companies according to their sector of activity

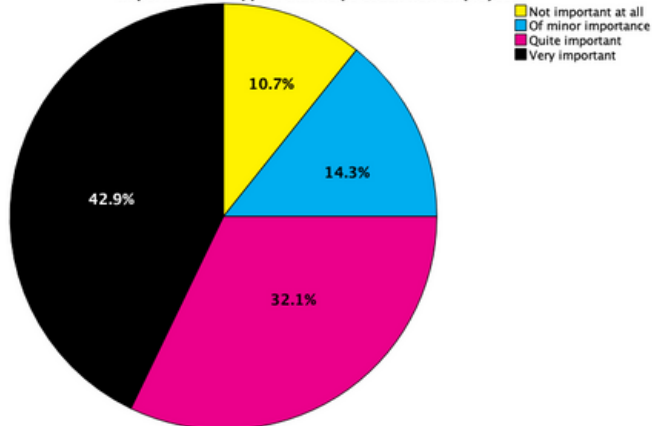
WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT DO EMPLOYERS APPRECIATE?

Companies that participated in the study indicated that the support RWA offered to them and employment organizations has played a significant role in their inclusive hiring. In fact, most of these companies find that support that helps them understand employees' needs, coach new employees, and integrate them in their workplace is either quite important or very important.

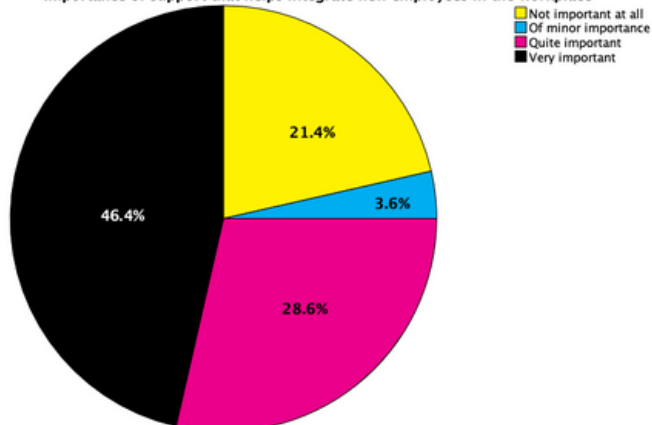
Importance of support that helps understand employee's needs, according to surveyed companies



Importance of support that helps coach new employees



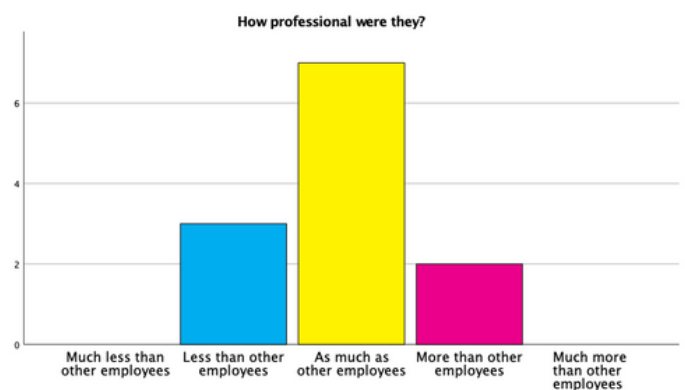
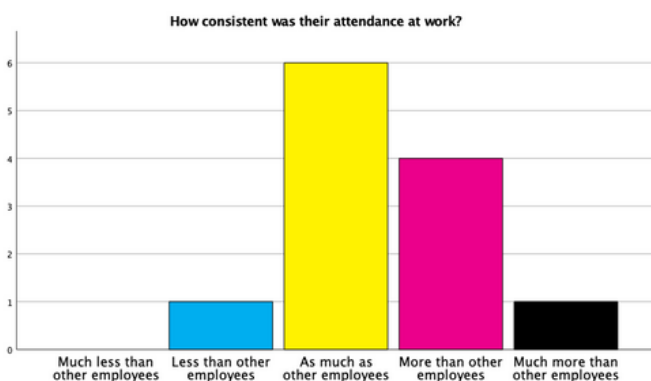
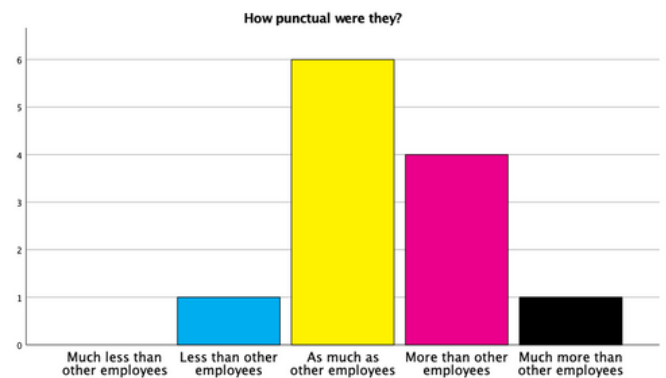
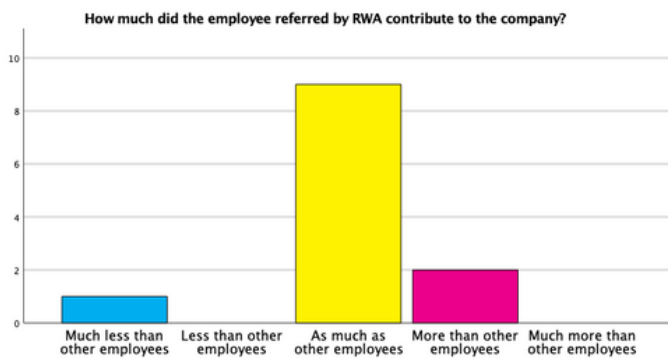
Importance of support that helps integrate new employees in the workplace

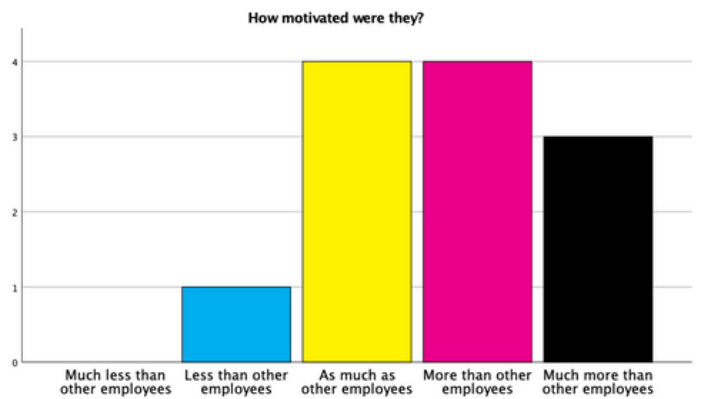
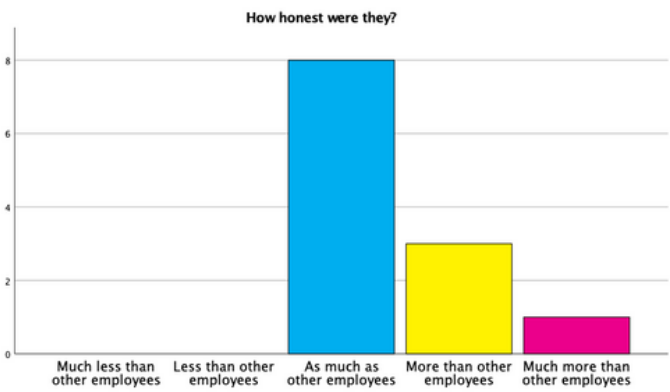
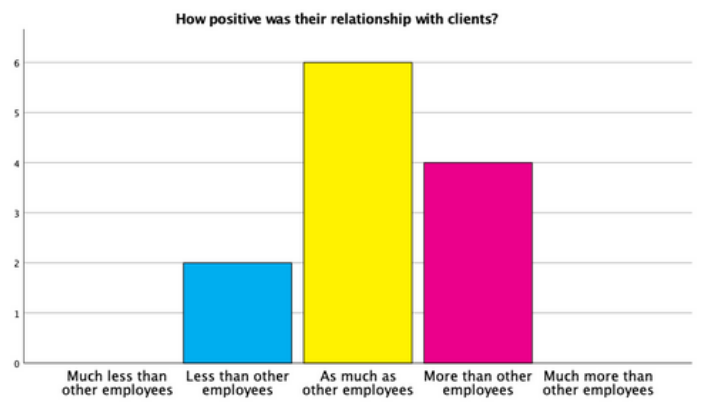
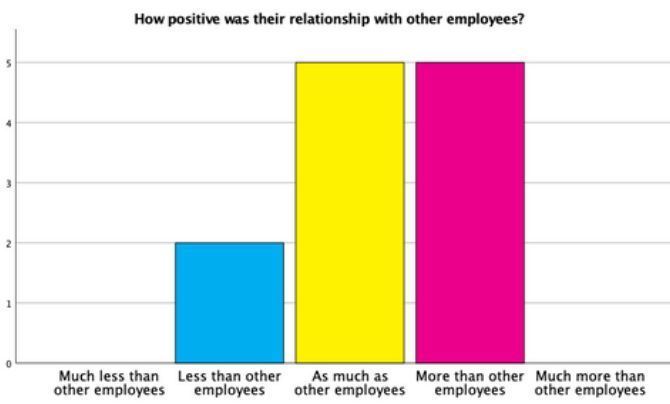
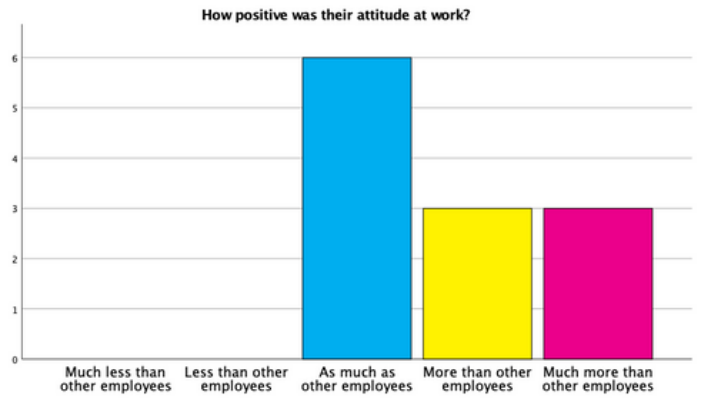
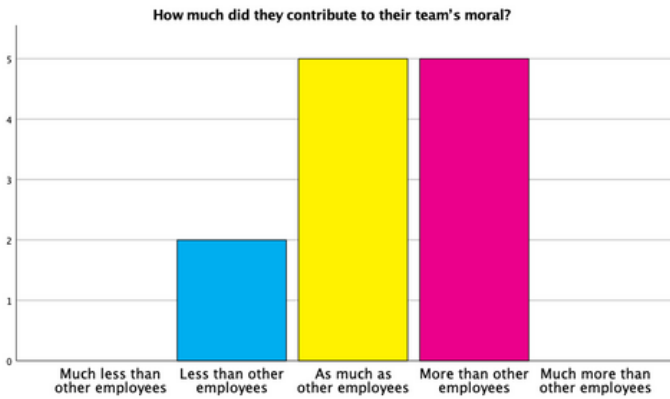


The significance of inclusive hiring support for companies

HOW DID COMPANIES EVALUATE THE ABILITIES AND QUALITIES OF EMPLOYEES REFERRED BY RWA AND ITS PARTNERS COMPARED TO EMPLOYEES WITHOUT AUTISM OR AN ID?

A positive attitude, reliability, tenacity, adaptability, and good communication skills are the first things employers are looking for, before more job-specific technical skills (Scheef et al. 2019). In line with the findings of Scheef and his collaborators (2019), the employers surveyed for the study particularly appreciate the positive attitude and reliability of employees with autism or an ID, as shown in the next 10 figures.



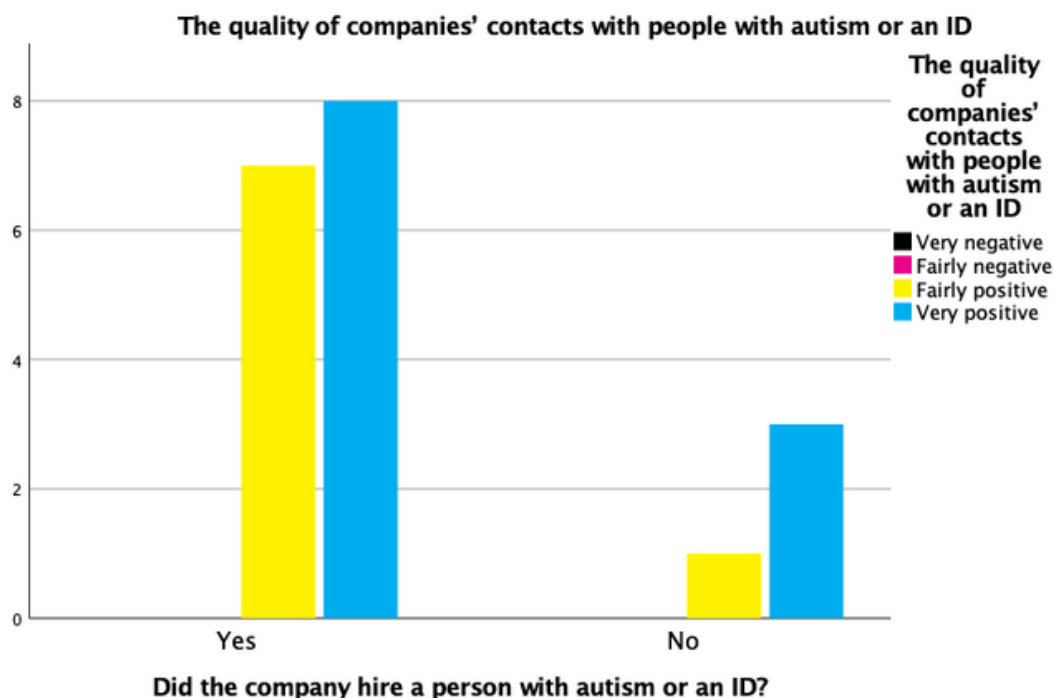


Qualities and abilities of employees referred by RWA and its partners compared to other employees

HOW CAN WE HELP EMPLOYERS DEVELOP A FACT-BASED UNDERSTANDING OF PEOPLE WITH AUTISM OR AN ID?

During the study, the companies surveyed were invited to evaluate the experiences they'd had with people with autism or an ID. This data was cross-referenced with their inclusive hiring practices, as shown in the following figure. Most respondents had hired through the RWA program and rated these experiences as somewhat or very positive. Thus, we can see that positive experiences encourage a realistic view of people who are autistic or have an ID that enables employers to envision using inclusive hiring practices.

**LET'S CREATE
MORE
OPPORTUNITIES
FOR PEOPLE TO
CONNECT!**



Companies that hired people with autism or an ID in relation to the quality of experiences they'd had with this population

AND NOW... LET'S GET TO WORK!

Recommendations

Use job coaching to support inclusive hiring

Personalized job coaching uses intensive follow-ups to help individuals obtain and keep a job. It is an interesting option for both employers and job seekers. Ready, Willing and Able and their many partners can support your inclusive hiring process. Reach out to them!

Give it a try and you won't look back!

Give inclusive hiring a try! You could find yourself with a trust-worthy, reliable new employee who will make a difference to your business. Considering candidates with autism or an ID is an opportunity to expand your talent pool and meet your company's staffing needs.

Job seekers, reach out to different companies and try out different jobs with them! You will get to know what kinds of jobs suit you while you develop new abilities. You have everything to gain, all along the way!

Recognize the value of people with Autism or an ID or in your community

All too often, this population is seen as vulnerable. In fact, this image is not always representative of their abilities. Share their achievements with your community and help change preconceptions about them! Everyone stands to benefit from a more inclusive society.





The keys to preparing for a great hire!

Allow the person with autism or an ID to select a work environment that meets their personal characteristics, preferences, and aspirations.

This may seem obvious, but individuals must be closely involved in any decisions about their job and work environment. Instead of focusing solely on a future employee's abilities and challenges, take their interests and professional goals into consideration too.

Future employees, talk to your employers about your needs and interests. This will make it easier to settle into your new job!

Employers, encourage future employees along with their employment organizations to visit your workplace. Let them get to know you!

Future immediate supervisors, ask lots of questions! Find out about the interests, aspirations, and needs of potential candidates. Learn about the conditions and strategies that will help them integrate into your workplace.

Demystify any prejudices and preconceived ideas your teams may have about people with Autism or an ID

Use training and awareness-raising to help your teams better understand the reality of people with autism or an ID. Ask organizations like RWA and its partners for help with your company's awareness building activities and training.

When possible, identify colleagues who are interested in getting involved and have had positive experiences with a person with autism or an ID to act as a guide for your new employee.

These colleagues can be tasked with helping your new employee integrate into your workplace.

Move from hypotheticals to an action plan!

Company needs and the realities involved in hiring a person with autism or an ID must be considered. This hiring will require a period of adaptation for both the company and the employee. From the outset, establish how you will communicate so that you can discuss issues as they arise (e.g., supervision, employee-employer communication, constructive feedback, etc.).

Simplify the job postings for the positions you want to fill via inclusive hiring. Make sure the job requirements you list are essential to the tasks your new employee will carry out.



Along the same lines, creating a job description that is accessible and specific to your prospective employees will better inform them about what will be expected of them at work. Consider making illustrations of their tasks, if necessary, and use plain language.

Do not hesitate to call employment organizations like RWA and its partners for support. They can help you identify tasks that can be performed by a person with autism an ID. They can even refer potential candidates to you!

With onboarding, a little goes a long way

Take all the time you need!

Encourage your team to mentor your new employee. An employee you designate as a mentor can share their work experience with them. Set aside time to support your new employee as they integrate into your company and allow a mentoring relationship to develop.

Set things up in a way that allows your new employee to settle into your work environment while respecting everyone's work rhythm. Be flexible, be open-minded, and listen. Be open to arrangements team members and the new employee propose. Dare to try out new ways of doing things!

Be sure to use the agreed-upon means of communication with your new employee!

Offer them opportunities to communicate their needs, following the approaches everyone concerned has agreed upon (daily or weekly discussions, feedback, etc.). Listen up!

With the new employee and their immediate superior, come up with methods of communication that are adapted to their needs. This could include a scheduling table, visual reminders in strategic places, lists of daily tasks, or emails or text messages rather than phone calls. Running out of ideas? Don't hesitate to call RWA and its partners for support!

Use a personalized approach!

There is no perfect way to onboard a person with autism or an ID... everyone is different! A personalized approach based on the needs of each individual works best. This approach will let you make workplace adaptations for new employees. For example, one new employee could be offered a quiet, calm space to work in, while another could benefit from support that mitigates their challenges as they develop new skills. RWA and its partners can support you with this important step. All you have to do is ask!

Throughout the onboarding process, make adjustments as you go. Honest communication between all key players will allow for clarifications and quick adjustments.

Join forces!

Encourage your team and the employment organization you're working with to share the responsibility of mentoring and supporting new employees. By collaborating and promoting the value of inclusive hiring with your team, your company will benefit from everyone's expertise.

Job retention and career advancement

Regularly reassess the needs and aspirations of employees with Autism or an ID

Observe how things are going and ask questions! Are the supports put in place during the onboarding period still needed? If the employee has got a handle on the first tasks they took on, are they ready to learn to do new tasks? Is the work environment at your company still positive for all involved? Everyone, including people with autism or an ID, can take on new challenges at work. If the situation allows, would your employee like to try out a new position with new responsibilities? If so...

...Ask for more support if you need it!

Learning new tasks may require a period of adjustment and adaptation. Feel free to reconnect with employment organizations for more support!



For employment organizations

The employers and employees who took part in the Caouette et al. study (2021) highlighted a few things that facilitated their inclusive hiring process and job retention for people with autism or an ID:

- To match employees and employers effectively, be realistic about the needs of the workplace environment and the job seeker's abilities.
- Provide an accurate assessment of the strengths, interests, and specific needs of job seekers.
- Focus on the job seeker's interests and support their independence.
- Support businesses at the right time, according to their needs (e.g., during recruiting and the hiring processes, and to support job retention).
- Make sure that your new employee is integrated into the workplace gradually while receiving personalized support, as needed by everyone involved.
- Identify managers who have already shown that they value diversity and openness.
- Create opportunities for companies and people with autism or an ID to meet.
- Clearly define your role in relation to the roles of other partners.
- Help companies share their experiences with other companies who want to hire a person with autism or an ID.



CONCLUSION

The guide you have just read shares lessons learned from the Ready, Willing and Able initiative in Quebec. You can read the full report here: [link](#). The full report includes information about companies that are likely to engage in inclusive hiring, as well as the benefits of employing this type of talent. The research team and the project promoters have made a series of recommendations for every step in the inclusive hiring process. While political strategies that might encourage employers to engage in inclusive hiring policies may be helpful, every one of us can make jobs more accessible to people with autism or an ID. What will you do to make your professional environment more inclusive?

Remember, you are not alone! Consult our Resources and References page and don't hesitate to contact RWA and its partners!

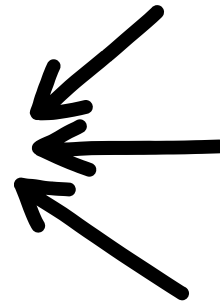


Resources and References

<https://readywillingable.ca/>

<https://www.theinclusiveworkplace.ca/en/home>

[https://www.sqdi.ca/en/
info@sqdi.ca](https://www.sqdi.ca/en/info@sqdi.ca)



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