

12 Employment and Education

Foreword

After a spinal cord injury, many of us have to refocus our careers due to the physical limitations of our injury. This may mean going back to school in search of a new career, which can be a daunting task. We are fortunate that organization such as the Canadian Paraplegic Association of Ontario and the Ontario March of Dimes offer vocational and employment support programs. These programs are specific to our type of injury and are there to help us get back on track and aid us in redesigning our future vocation and ourselves.

The information provided in this section and the local directory was made possible with the help of the Ontario March of Dimes and the Canadian Paraplegic Association of Ontario. I would urge anybody who is looking at pursuing a new career or potential employment training to first contact their representatives at either organization that can help them.

Employment

Securing employment isn't just about getting a job. It's about matching abilities with opportunities, finding a flexible employer and having the latest information and assistance to compete in a changing work environment. This challenge can be divided into two components: the inside challenge, which is how you view your abilities; and the outside challenge, which is how you deal with fear, ignorance and possible discrimination. You may have to educate potential employers and fellow employees so they see you for your abilities.

"I didn't know where to begin. I was told that I could only have a career in computers. As it turned out, I ended up going back to my old place of employment and obtained an administrative position that I probably would have sought anyway."

Tom

Employment Starts with Developing a Job Strategy

A job strategy simply defines what you want and provides a way to get it within your means. First, start by defining what success means for you. The next step is to set goals to reach your success. To be effective, goals need to be "SMART":

S pecific
M easurable
A chievable
R ealistic
T imely

A short-term goal can get you a job. However, one, three and five-year goals will be required to attain a successful career. Before you write down your employment goals, make sure you take into consideration your skills, qualifications, contacts, interests and any barriers you face. A skills assessment will answer the following questions:

1. What are your skills and strengths?
2. What does your chosen career require?
3. What skills do you still need?

Besides the skills required for a specific career, employers need to be convinced that you have the attitude and behaviours to make a valuable contribution to their company. Now that you have some background knowledge of the employment process and facts to support your employment, you may be looking for services that help ease this transition or offer skill-building courses.

ONTARIO DISABILITY SUPPORT PROGRAM (ODSP)

What are ODSP Employment Supports?

ODSP Employment Supports is a voluntary program that assists persons with disabilities overcome barriers to employment.

Do I qualify?

You may be eligible for ODSP Employment Supports if you have a physical or mental disability that is expected to last a year or more and makes it hard for you to find or keep a job.

You must also be:

- Willing and able to work;
- Living in Ontario;
- Eligible to work in Canada;
- Over 16 years old;
- Or, if you are already working but have difficulty keeping your job because of your disability, you may also qualify for ODSP Employment Supports.

You do not have to be receiving ODSP Income Support to be eligible for Employment Supports. If you are eligible for or receiving disability or rehabilitation benefits from other public or private sources, you may not be eligible for ODSP Employment Supports. People on Ontario Works are not eligible for ODSP Employment Supports since they can receive employment assistance from Ontario Works.

What type of help can I receive?

ODSP Employment Supports can help you with things you need to get a job, such as:

- Planning and preparing for a job – this could also include training;
- Technical aids ranging from mobility devices and reading aids to adapted computers – and the training to use them;
- Interpreter, reader, note takers, and intervenor services;
- Job coaching and help with job searches;
- Transportation assistance while you are training for a job.

How do I apply?

- You can print out an application package to complete on your own by visiting <http://www.gov.on.ca/CSS/page/services/ODSP/odspforms.html>

- You can call your local ODSP office (refer to local directory) and ask about Employment Supports
- If you currently receive ODSP income supports, staff there can provide you with an Employment Supports application package.

CANADA PENSION PLAN

The person receiving CPP disability benefits will continue to receive CPP benefits for three months after finding employment. If they are able to work on a full time basis without any problems during this three-month work trial period, their CPP disability benefits will be discontinued at the end of the three-month period. If additional time to achieve their work goal is required, this can be discussed as the three-month work trial period is coming to an end. Continuation of benefits for an additional period of time is a possibility.

EMPLOYABILITY ASSISTANCE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES (EAPD)

The former name of EAPD is the Vocational Rehabilitation for Disabled Persons (VRDP) Program. The new objectives of the program reflect an increased focus on employability. The goal is to help people with disabilities prepare for, find, and keep jobs. EAPD is a cost sharing arrangement between the federal and provincial/territorial governments.

EADP interventions are intended to cover a broad range of programming including such things as pre-employment support, short-term assistance and on-going active employment support.

Post-secondary education support is eligible under the Multilateral Framework as well. Funds may be used to cover things like tuition, books, assistive devices and other items. The provinces have a great deal of flexibility to design their own programs and services under EAPD. For further information or for copies of the Multilateral Framework document in Ontario, you can contact:

Telephone: (416) 325-5666 or (888) 784-4199 (toll free)

or by mail, write to:

Client Information & Support Services
Ministry of Community and Social Services
15th Floor, MacDonald Block, Room 56
900 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1E9

Canadian Paraplegic Association Ontario

"I was unsure what to expect when I started looking for a job so I contacted the CPA's Employment Program. They helped me to gain confidence before I started my job interviews."

Sarah

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

The Canadian Paraplegic Association Ontario (CPA Ontario) is dedicated to helping people with spinal cord injuries and other physical disabilities achieve independence, self reliance and full community participation. One of the ways they do this is through their employment services. CPA Ontario offers a full range of employment services to persons with disabilities and their prospective employers.

Employment Resource Centre

Funded by Human Resources Development Canada, CPA Ontario has a fully operational Employment Resource Center (ERC) that provides a full range of services to people with disabilities. Our ERC is located out of the Toronto Rehabilitation Institute, Lyndhurst Centre and we provide services to individuals in Toronto and the surrounding area. Services are offered free of charge to clients.

- Access to a full range of employment and educational resources to assist in your job search.
- Up to date job postings.
- One-to-one assistance in job search techniques, resume writing, interviewing skills etc.
- Access to computer, fax, internet, photocopier for your job search needs.
- Monthly workshops on a variety of topics including starting your own business, accessing the hidden job market, job search techniques, etc.

Career Exploration/Counselling

- Assessment of transferable skills, aptitudes, interests, and academic achievement to determine a suitable career goal
- Co-ordination of training and education required to achieve employment goal.
- Co-ordination of any necessary supports to address disability barriers to employment (i.e. transportation, funding, attendant services etc.).

Employment Mentoring

- One-to-one matches with a peer who has a similar disability and has successfully re-entered the workforce or participated in retraining or schooling.
- Ask questions and share experiences with someone who has “been there and done that.”

Job Placement and Job Maintenance

- One-to-one job placement assistance and follow up support.
- Competitive placements in a variety of industries and sectors.
- Assistance addressing work related disability and accommodation issues.

Assistive Technology Assessment and Training

- Assessment of assistive technology for computer and telephone access.
- Training and support on recommended devices.

ODSP Employment Supports

Funded by the Ministry of Community and Family Services, CPA Ontario provides a full range of services under ODSP, Employment Supports. Services include; employment planning, supports co-ordination, work adjustment, on-the-job training, job placement and job maintenance.

For more information on any of the employment services contact:
(416) 422-5644.

Ontario March of Dimes

“A great way to ease your way back into 'work mode' is to do some volunteer work. It's something you can do at your own pace, likely without a significant commitment.”

Ryan

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Ontario March of Dimes offers a full range of Employment Services to assist you in developing a manageable return-to-work program.

Assessment Services

This program provides you with an assessment report that will address a variety of issues including:

- Range of abilities and limitations
- Potential for improvement
- Potential for modifications
- Recommendations for further goals
- Employment or return to activities of daily living

Return to Work Services

Returning to work after an injury can be a challenging task that requires a dynamic, goal-oriented plan of action. Ontario March of Dimes' Work Preparation programs and services help you prepare for the work environment by focusing on real work demands and the pace of a regular workday. These programs are individualised to meet your needs and address all aspects of the return to work process.

Placement and Supported Employment Programs

Ontario March of Dimes' Placement and Supported Employment programs assist individuals in securing and maintaining employment through job search programs, one-on-one placement assistance and other professional services geared towards facilitating employment. These programs focus on job interests, motivation to work, and adaptations that integrate the individual into the workplace. They also provide a supportive environment that encourages individuals to take charge of their employment search.

Diskovery Job Skills Training

Ontario March of Dimes recognises that in today's technology-driven workplace, job seekers must be equipped with the kinds of specialised skills employers need to run their business. Diskovery Job Skills Training is designed to give individuals these skills.

For information on how to access these services, please refer to the local directory.

Self Employment

Ontario Works

This agency helps those who wish to be self-employed. It provides general support with job search skills, upgrading basic education, and referral to job placement agencies. For more information please call 416-392-8623.

Social and Enterprise Development Innovations (SEDI)

This company provides a workbook and self-help guide that is intended to lead prospective small business entrepreneurs through the stages involved in assessing their potential for self-employment as a career option. The package includes a list of business

development and disability organizations in Ontario. For more information you can contact:

SEDI
1110 Finch Avenue West,
Suite 406
North York, Ontario, Canada
M3J 2T2

Tel: 416-665-2828

Fax: 416-665-1661

Web site: <http://www.sedi.org/html/splash/splash.html>

Email: info@sedi.org

Workplace Accommodation

As you re-enter the work field, or look for a job for the first time, you might be concerned that employers won't be willing or able to accommodate your disability. However, you should know that the Ontario Human Rights Commission states that "employment decisions should be based on the applicant's ability to do the job and not on factors that are unrelated to the job."

Subsection 17 (2) of the Ontario Human Rights Code states if you can perform the essential duties of the job, employers have a duty to accommodate your needs unless it causes them undue hardship. Undue hardship exists when the cost of accommodating your disability creates a financial hardship or a health and safety hazard for the company. Business inconvenience, resentment or hostility from other co-workers, operation of collective agreements and customer "preferences" are not considered in the accommodation process.

The duty to provide accommodation extends to all aspects of the employment process including hiring, employment testing, on-the-job training, work conditions, transfers and promotions. You are responsible for communicating your needs to your employer, cooperating in obtaining necessary information and participating in any consultations that help your employer better accommodate you. For more information, you can visit the Ontario Human Rights Commission's web site:

<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/english/code/index.shtml>

Operating in conjunction with the Ontario Human Rights Code is the Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA). This act was passed on December 14, 2001 and is designed to improve the identification, removal and prevention of barriers facing people with disabilities. There are several aspects of the ODA that will help make the private sector more accessible to persons with disabilities. For example, the ODA gives municipalities the power to require that businesses be accessible to people with disabilities as a condition on obtaining, continuing to hold or renewing a license.

The Accessibility Advisory Council of Ontario and the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario, which were established by the ODA, will also work with the private sector to facilitate the development of accessibility standards and encourage the removal of barriers on a sector-by-sector basis. This process will involve the active participation and input of sector representatives and people with disabilities. The ODA gives the government regulation-making authority to enshrine sector-specific standards in law once consultation has taken place.

Beyond the Ontario Human Rights Code and the ODA there is also the Ontario Building Code and the Canadian Standards Association Guidelines for Barrier-Free Design that employers must consider when setting up a business or hiring a person with an SCI.

EDUCATING YOUR EMPLOYER

Employers should understand that most of the time there is no need for any major adjustments to accommodate a person with a spinal cord injury. Most persons with paraplegia or who are ambulatory are very self-sufficient and are able to empty their leg bag (if they use one), take off their coat, eat their lunch or use the fax machine or photocopier.

An individual with quadriplegia may need someone to accompany them to the washroom to empty their leg bag. The individual may also need assistance with their coat, and/or taking out their lunch. If they have difficulty using the photocopier or fax machine, perhaps another employee could do these tasks for them. This is not only an opportunity for the company to implement a buddy/mentor system for the new employee, but can also help in company team building.

Time management is an important factor in the life of a person with a SCI. Their time may have to be arranged around the availability of an attendant, a special transit system or their own daily routines.

Flexibility by an employer may be a great accommodation for an individual with a SCI.

The Canadian Paraplegic Association recommends the following process when considering the hiring of an individual with a disability:

Step 1

Decide if the employee with a disability is qualified to perform the essential functions of the job with or without an accommodation.

Step 2

Identify the employee's workplace accommodation needs by:

- Involving the employee who has the disability in every step of the process.
- Employing confidentiality principles while exploring ways to provide workplace accommodations.
- Consulting with rehabilitation professionals, if needed
- Using job descriptions and job analyses to detail essential functions of the job
- Identifying the employee's functional limitations and potential accommodations

Step 3

Select and provide the accommodation that is most appropriate for the employee and employer. Remember:

- Costs should not be an undue hardship.
- Accommodations selected should be effective, reliable, easy to use and readily available for the employee needing the accommodation.
- An employee should try the product or piece of equipment prior to purchase.

Step 4

Check the results by:

- Monitoring the accommodation(s) to see if the adaptation enables the employee to complete the necessary work task(s).
- Periodically evaluating the accommodation(s) to ensure effectiveness.

Step 5

Provide follow-up, if needed, by:

- Modifying the accommodation if necessary.
- Repeating these steps if appropriate.

Another helpful resource on accommodation is Human Resource Development Canada's Working Together: An Employer's Resource for Workplace Accommodation. For copies of this publication, contact HRDC at 416-954-8423.

Employers might also want to refer to the publication: Tapping the Talents of Persons with Disabilities: Employer's Guide. Copies can be ordered from the Conference Board of Canada through its website: <http://www.confere-nceboard.ca/> or by calling 613-526-3090, ext. 263.

It is important to remember that that if the company is not able to fund workplace equipment, tools or machinery that may be required, they might receive funding assistance through Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), Workplace Safety & Insurance Board (WSIB), or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). In addition, if the cost of an accommodation is too large to carry out all at once, it may be possible to phase it in over time, or to create a reserve fund.

Workplace Accessibility Tax Incentive

The Workplace Accessibility Tax Incentive (the "WATI") is available to businesses that incur qualifying expenditures after July 1, 1998 to accommodate newly hired employees with disabilities. The business must operate out of a permanent establishment in Ontario and be subject to tax on its income, i.e., non-profit businesses and other tax-exempt businesses do not qualify. For further information please contact:

Ministry of Finance
Corporations Tax Branch
Tax Advisory
33 King Street West
Oshawa, Ontario
L1H 8H5

Tel: 905-433-6513
Fax: 905-433-6747

Education

Skills building or education can occur at the post secondary level and through other social service groups. Please see the directory for a listing of social service groups that offer such services in Ontario. The Ontario March of Dimes and the Canadian Paraplegic Association both provide counselling services on this topic. Please see the local directory for their contact information.

To learn more about a post-secondary institution's accommodation for a person with a SCI, please contact CSRO at 1-800-361-4004 for a complete list of Ontario college and university disability services offices. You should look into the accessibility of the campus and a trip to the institution is always recommended. Mature students applying for post secondary education should also obtain more information about criteria and eligibility standards for mature students as this can fluctuate with each institution.

Funding for Post Secondary Education

Ontario Student Loans Program (OSAP)

OSAP's objective is to help students from lower income families to meet the cost of post-secondary education. OSAP is intended to promote equality of opportunity for post-secondary studies by providing direct financial assistance for educational costs (such as tuition fees, books, and supplies) and basic living expenses. For more information you can contact::

Ontario, Student Support Branch
Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities
189 Red River Road, 4th Floor
P.O. Box 4500
Thunder Bay, Ontario
P7B 6G9

Tel: 807-343-7260
1-900-565-6727
<http://osap.gov.on.ca/>

Bursary for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities in Ontario may be eligible for a Special Opportunity Grant (Canada Study Grant) through the Canada Student Loans Program and the OSAP Bursary for Students with Disabilities. Applications for this bursary are available through disability services offices and student awards offices in the province. Costs covered under the bursary program may include, but are not limited to, items or services such as note takers, tutors, special transportation, technical aids/equipment, computers, special chairs and splints.

Canada Student Loans

The Canada Student Loan Program (CSLP) was launched in 1964. It provides financial assistance to students to supplement their own savings and earnings and those of their family's. The funding consists of both a full-time and part-time loans program, which assists students with financial needs to pursue post-secondary education. It is operated in conjunction with OSAP.

The most significant feature of the CSLP is the in-school interest subsidy. This program pays the interest on a CSLP while you are enrolled in full time studies at a post-secondary institution so that you are not required to pay interest on your loan or make any payments towards the principal during that time.

The part time study program is built around the assumption that most part time students are already working and have their living expenses covered. It is designed to supplement other sources of income, and can provide up to \$4,000 in assistance for each year of study.

Disability Specific Programming:

1. The CSLP recognizes that the challenges of a physical disability may mean that it takes longer to complete a program of study. To compensate for this, the CSLP offers students with a disability relaxed eligibility criteria for full time student status. Under the general conditions when you apply for a Canada Student Loan you have to be enrolled in 60% of a full course load to qualify as a full time student. However, a student with a permanent disability need only register for 40% of a full course load. Correspondingly, the part time requirements are also reduced.

2. The program also recognizes that a permanent disability may mean that disabled students can never repay a loan, because they are unable to seek or obtain a full time job that would enable repayment of the CSLP. In these cases the program offers a permanent disability benefit, which may allow for an application to have a loan forgiven.
3. The program also recognizes that students with disabilities often have extra costs when pursuing their higher education and to deal with these costs Canada Study Grants (formerly referred to as Special Opportunities) are available. These grants are available for up to \$5,000 a year and are designed to offset exceptional disability related costs, such as note takers, tutors, readers, interpreters, attendant care during studies, as well as specialized transportation to and from an educational institution. The grant can also cover exceptional equipment costs like special computers, brailers and/or the production of materials in alternate formats.

Repayment of the CSLP

1. Borrowers having difficulty repaying their loan due to low income can apply for the interest relief plan. Eligible borrowers are approved for interest relief for six month periods, during which the Government of Canada pays the interest on their loan in the same fashion as the in school interest subsidy.
2. The other significant modification was to raise the income eligibility thresholds for interest relief from \$20,000 to \$22,000.
3. Borrowers that remain in financial difficulty over an extended period can apply to have their principal reduced by as much as \$10,000, or 50%, whichever is greater.

Canada Study Grants for Persons with Permanent Disabilities

These grants have a value of up to \$5,000 per academic year. To qualify for the grants you must meet the following criteria:

- Have applied for a part-time or full-time Canada Student Loan and established need.
- Have a disability of a permanent nature that limits your ability to perform the daily activities necessary to participate fully in post-secondary studies or in the labour force.
- Be able to provide proof of your disability, describing its type and indicating that it is expected to be permanent.
- Have your full-time or part-time Canada Student Loan in good standing.

Costs of the following education-related services are eligible: These include note taker, tutor, reader, interpreter (oral, sign), attendant care for studies and specialised transportation (to and from your educational institution).

Costs of certain education-related equipment are also eligible, including technical aids (e.g. a computer or a braille) or alternate formats (e.g. large print or Braille).

The grant will not cover capital costs (e.g. vehicle modifications, alterations for educational institutions or residences).

Application Process

Applications should be made to your province of residence for a part-time or full time Canada Student Loan to establish need. An application for a Canada Study Grant for Students with Disabilities, along with the required documentation can be included. It is important that both forms are submitted at the same time.

Grants/Scholarships/Awards

There are several grants, loans, scholarships and awards available to help fund post-secondary school. Some are specific to people with a disability. The following is a sample of some Internet sites you may find valuable and details of some specific funding aids that are available. Never be afraid to ask for financial assistance.

<http://www.neads.ca/>

This is the web site for the National Educational Association of Disabled Students; it lists scholarships specifically for students with disabilities. It also provides information on services and programs for students with disabilities.

<http://www.canlearn.ca/>

CanLearn Interactive is supported by Human Resources Development Canada and is designed to give Canadians easy access to information they need to make informed decisions in the selection and financing of learning.

<http://www.studentawards.com/>

This is a service that helps people obtain information on scholarships, bursaries, grants and other forms of financial assistance for education.

<http://www.scholarshipscanada.com/>

This site offers a similar service as www.studentawards.com.

<http://www.schoolfinder.com/>

This site provides school, scholarship and career information.

<http://www.heath-resource-center.org>

The HEATH Resource Center of the American Council on Education provides information about educational support services policies, procedures, adaptations and opportunities at American campuses, vocational-technical schools and other post-secondary training entities for individuals with disabilities.

<http://www.graduateaid.com/>

GraduateAid.com is one of Canada's largest free scholarship databases containing over 9,000 scholarships, worth over \$57 million dollars.

It is also a good idea to contact the specific institution you will be attending or your current place of employment (if applicable) to see what kind of awards that they might offer.

SUMMARY

This section provides information on who to contact for help in finding a job, how to become self-employed and how to go back to school. Also included is beneficial information on funding available to the disabled for continuing your education at a post-secondary level. Although all this information is pertinent to someone in your position, be sure to consult the local directory for addition information and specific contact information on employment and education.

RESOURCES

CPA Ontario's Employment Services

<http://www.canparaplegic.org/on/level2.tpl?var1=story&var2=20020122121422>

10 Essentials to Get That Job; an Employment Guide for Persons with Disabilities

http://www.wwtab.com/library/search/library_259.html

Human Resource Development Canada.
10 Essentials to Get That Job: An Employment Guide for Persons with Disabilities,
2000.

Human Resources Development Canada – Office for disability issues.
<http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/sdd-dds/odi/content/employer.shtml>

Information on scholarships, bursaries, grants and other forms of financial assistance.
<http://www.studentawards.com/>
School, scholarship and career information.
<http://www.schoolfinder.com/>

National Educational Association of Disabled Students
<http://www.neads.ca/english/norc/funding/page46.html>

Social and Enterprise Development Innovations - Exploring Self Employment
Opportunities for People with Disabilities
[http://www.equalopportunity.on.ca/eng_t/subject/index.asp?action=search_7&page_id=
&file_id=24067](http://www.equalopportunity.on.ca/eng_t/subject/index.asp?action=search_7&page_id=&file_id=24067)

Information for clients - ODSP Employment Supports
<http://www.gov.on.ca/CSS/page/services/ODSP/odspcfs.html>

Ontario March of Dimes' Employment Pamphlets

Canadian Paraplegic Association Ontario
“Working to Create a Diverse Workforce.”
“Non-Technical Factors in Workplace Accommodation.”

<http://www.gov.on.ca/FIN/english/tb99-1e.htm>
Workplace Accessibility Tax Incentive (WATI)

The University of Alabama at Birmingham
<http://www.spinalcord.uab.edu/show.asp?durke=32084>

Office for Disabilities Issues - Human Resources Development Canada Handbook –
“Working Together, An Employer’s Resource For Workplace Accommodation 2000”
<http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/sdd-dds/odi/content/employer.shtml>

Canadian Standards Association Guideline for Barrier Free Design
<http://www.unescap.org/decade/publications/z15009gl/z1500907.htm>

The Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work

<http://www.ccrw.org/>

Equipment provider and tutoring in voice recognition, adaptive and assistive technologies.

<http://www.worklink.net/>

Ontarians with Disabilities Act

<http://www.odacommittee.net/factsheet.html>

Accessibility Ontario – Ontarians with Disability Act

<http://www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility/english/faq.htm>

Ontario Ministry of Citizenship

<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/english/code/index.shtml>

Conference Board of Canada

<http://www.conferenceboard.ca/>

Terms Encountered in this Section

Canada Student Loan Program (CLSP) – A federal government run financial assistance program for students of full- or part-time post secondary school studies; runs in conjunction with the Ontario Student Loans Program.

CPP – Canada Pension Plan

Employability Assistance for People with Disabilities (EAPD) – The former name of EAPD is the Vocational Rehabilitation for Disabled Persons (VRDP) Program.

ODSP – Ontario Disability Support Program

Ontario Student Loans Program (OSAP) – A financial funding program run by the Ontario government for financial assistance to full-time students who reside permanently in Ontario; runs in conjunction with the Canada Student Loans Program.

Ontario Works – This is an Ontario government run program that helps people prepare for employment through practical training and work experience to job placement.

SMART – Specific-Measurable-Achievable-Realistic-Timely

Special Opportunity Grant – (Canada Study Grant) through the Canada Student Loans Program and the OSAP Bursary for Students with Disabilities.