

Hiring persons with disabilities: So much more than diversity in the workplace

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Finding a job is tough for anyone. A certificate helps, or a diploma or a degree. Then there is that great attitude, a winning smile, and the willingness to take on challenges: these all help to increase the odds of landing a great job. However, what if you have all of these qualities, and still find it next to impossible to be considered for a position? This was the reality for Rauchelle McDougall.

At one time she had a successful career in the Human Resources field.

However, a stroke in 2005 when she was 25 changed all that. The stroke left her with lasting damage to her speech, as well as to the right side of the body, which affected the use of her right arm and leg. Speech therapy helped to regain some use of her speech skills; months of physical therapy and hard work at the Wascana Rehab Centre helped her to walk again and taught her how to use her left arm to compensate for the loss of the functionality of the right. However, if one were to ask Rauchelle what she misses most, she would tell you it's the loss of

her speech skills and of the words that had once flowed so effortlessly. Perhaps the second greatest loss for her was being part of the working world and applying her training, skills and interests in the workplace.

When I first met Rauchelle in my job as an employment coordinator for the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW), I asked her what she would like us to do for her.

She asked for a writing pad and penned out the words *a chance*. "A chance?" I said. "You just want someone to give you a chance?" She nodded, her dark brown eyes smiling.

Through motions, halting speech and words scrawled on a writing pad, I learned that she just wanted employers to give her a chance so she could show them what she could do. I told her about how we could assist her in CCRW's Ready to Work Inclusion Program. We would work alongside her in finding a job that was relevant to her skill set, connect with a supportive employer, provide support to her on the job and help the employer to be aware of any accommodations required.

She was willing to give it a try. Rauchelle told me that one of

her main interests was working with children. She also had a passion for cooking. She searched for jobs and applied for a position for a cook at a daycare and was soon offered an appointment for an interview, for which she was both thrilled and anxious.

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Her worries for the interview were alleviated when CCRW staff suggested that she request the questions be given to her prior to the interview by email. She could then have her answers ready in printed form for the interview. In addition, she requested that the CCRW Employment Outreach Specialist accompany her to the interview.

As it turned out, he didn't have

to say much, as Rauchelle communicated well on her own, using her prepared answers.

Rauchelle has now been working at the Northwest Child Development Centre (NWCDC) for almost five months as a cook with the support of a wage subsidy. She ensures that the children and staff (nearly 50 people in all) have healthy delicious lunches and snacks, and that the kitchen is kept spotless.

She is learning to use a new Proloquo 2Go app on her phone for communication at work. When I ask her what's the best part of working there she holds her hand out to the height of a young child, smiles warmly and, "the kids".

I recently spoke to a member of the Board of Directors for Northwest Child Development Centre and asked her what difference Rauchelle had made to their workplace. She said, "she has brought diversity into the workplace."

However, as she talked, it was clear that diversity was just *one* thing that Rauchelle has brought to the centre. "Our world judges too much," she said. "We tend to judge people by their cover. Rauchelle does a beyond average job and shows everyone here: the kids, the staff and the parents, that

anything is possible. She doesn't let her limitations restrict her capabilities. Society may see a disability as a hindrance, but in observing her work skills, work ethic, motivation, dedication and ambition, she shows that she is both knowledgeable and a team player."

When speaking with Rauchelle, I can see clearly that this job means a lot to her. She has much to contribute both to the workplace and to the lives of others and I am so thankful that people have had a chance to discover that.

If you are a job-seeker with a disability and would appreciate support, please call us at 306-692-7452 to see if you qualify for our program. Employers who may have inquiries about our program, or who may be interested in accessing our supported six-month wage subsidy employment program, please call Robb Nesbitt at 306-692-7452. RWIP staff are available to provide presentations and information to employers to increase awareness in areas such as disability, accessibility and inclusion. RWIP is a program of the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work and is funded in part by the Government of Canada's Opportunities Fund.