



July 31, 2017

The Honourable Tracy McCharles
Minister Responsible for Accessibility
Mowat Block 6th Floor
900 Bay St.
Toronto, ON M7A 1L2

Dear Ms. McCharles

The Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) was happy to read about the Government of Ontario's new employment strategies for persons with disabilities, **Access Talent**. As you may know, LDAO and its community-based chapters represent the interests of persons with learning disabilities (LDs) throughout Ontario. In the more than fifty years since its formation, LDAO has expanded its activities and services to include youth and adults who have learning disabilities, in postsecondary and employment sectors, in addition to children and families.

Persons with learning disabilities, of all ages, represent the largest disability group in Ontario. Learning disabilities influence all areas of a person's life, including education, mental health, employment success, and in some cases contact with the justice system. However, with the right accommodations and supports, many persons with LDs can become among the most creative and productive members of society.

The announcements in **Access Talent: Ontario's Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities** show great promise in helping persons with learning disabilities find employment suitable to their needs. The following are some comments and suggestions on how the strategies could be most effective.

Start early – inspire and support youth and students with disabilities.

1. encouraging post-secondary education and future planning through enhanced career exploration at earlier ages

Most students with learning disabilities are able to go on to post-secondary education if they get needed supports and accommodations in secondary school. Career planning needs to be integrated with self-advocacy training to help students understand how their processing strengths and weaknesses, as outlined in their psychoeducational assessment, align with different career expectations.

2. piloting a person-centred case management approach in the **Ontario Disability Support Program** to help more young people with disabilities identify employment goals and actions

A person-centred case management approach in ODSP Employment Supports is vital for all ages, not just youth. Many individuals with LDs need help at the employment planning stage. Adults with LDs often have complex needs and life circumstances that make it hard for them to

navigate the ODSP system without a case management approach. Also, the ODSP funding system to employment support agencies does not provide incentive to work with clients who have complex needs.

Psychoeducational/psychovocational assessment is essential for individuals with diagnosed or undiagnosed LDs to understand their unique profile of processing strengths and weaknesses, and how this fits with career planning. Individuals with LDs are most successful when they pursue careers that align with their strengths, and where weak areas can be accommodated. The ODSP funding system to employment support agencies can discourage spending money for psychological assessments.

3. supporting the transition to workplaces, apprenticeships, college, or university before and after graduation from secondary school through stronger community partnerships and youth programming

Most colleges and universities provide some transition programs for students with disabilities, and these are vital to students with LDs so that they become familiar with accessing needed supports and accommodations, and connected early with the accessibility office. Now that postsecondary transition programs are no longer directly funded by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD), there is no financial incentive for postsecondary institutions to fund such transition programs, so it is important to promote them.

Transition to apprenticeship is an important issue for individuals with LDs. Very few students come with psychoeducational assessments from previous educational settings. Students are usually out of their college apprenticeship program before testing can be completed to identify appropriate supports and accommodations.

4. expanding community-connected experiential learning opportunities for students in kindergarten to grade 12 and adult learners

Students with LDs would benefit from these opportunities.

5. helping colleges and universities support students with disabilities throughout their studies, with an early focus on students with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Many of the supports for postsecondary studies being developed for students with ASD would also be important for students with LDs, especially students with nonverbal LDs who often have similar social issues to students with ASD. Programs developed for students with ASD should be open for students with LDs, if appropriate to their needs.

Integrate – create seamless, person-centred employment and training services.

1. Working with stakeholders to gradually integrate employment and training services for people with disabilities and introduce a new **Supported Employment** program in Employment Ontario. This new program will create high-quality, consistent services for job seekers with disabilities who require more intensive support and provide targeted services for employers.

As mentioned above, adults with LDs often have complex needs and life circumstances that make it hard for them to navigate employment and training programs without a case

management approach, so a Supported Employment program in Employment Ontario will be very welcome.

2. tracking best practices and testing innovative new approaches in education and employment support for people with disabilities, as well as developing performance measures to track program impact

LDAO has developed a program, Job-Fit, (www.ldao.ca/ldao-services/workshops-courses/job-fit/) based on research findings that individuals with LDs can be successful in the workplace when they prepare for and find employment that fits with their strengths, and when they understand what strategies and accommodations work for them.

Performance measures can be useful as long as programs are not bound to tight outcome requirements, as individuals with LDs who often take longer to complete programs.

3. improving how we serve people with disabilities through better training and new resources for staff at Employment Ontario Employment Service centres, which currently serve about 12,000 people with disabilities each year

LDAO's Job-Fit, combined with the free Facilitator's Guide, offers a comprehensive approach to assisting individuals with learning disabilities to find and retain suitable employment. Job-Fit would be an excellent resource for Employment Ontario staff.

4. promoting employment in the skilled trades through enhanced apprenticeship opportunities and vocational training programs

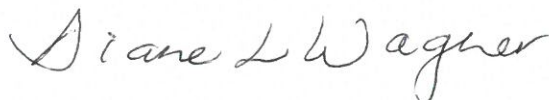
There is no time in the transition to apprenticeship to ensure that needed accessibility services are in place. It would be more efficient in this context to have a universal design approach, e.g. all students would have access to e-text formats and extra time if needed. This approach would benefit students who have unidentified disability-related accommodation needs, as well as other students who struggle in classroom settings or whose first language is not English or French.

5. encouraging entrepreneurship by increasing awareness of entrepreneurship programming.

Individuals with LDs can have excellent ideas for entrepreneurship, but often need help learning to deal with administrative aspects of self-employment.

We hope that our input will be constructive to the process and would be happy to provide any further assistance. We would be grateful if you could pass along these ideas to the appropriate people at the divisions of the Ministries involved.

Sincerely,



Public Policy & Education Consultant

c.c. Hon. Deb Matthews, Minister of Advanced Education & Skills Development

Hon. Helena Jaczek, Minister of Community & Social Services