

Social Enterprises and the Ontario Disability Support Program: A Policy Perspective on Employing Persons with Disabilities

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Project Summary

The purpose of the research is to identify areas for policy improvement related to social enterprises that employ persons receiving assistance under the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).

Goals

- To expand the knowledge of policy challenges facing social enterprises that employ ODSP recipients
- To strengthen models of employment and training service delivery to recipients of ODSP
- To facilitate peer learning of social enterprise practitioners, and ODSP employment service delivery agents
- To improve income security programs across Canada through conducting high-quality research on services and programs delivered to low-income people with disabilities living in the Province of Ontario

Findings

- Neo-liberal policy environment has created a “culture of fear,” which restricts access by ODSP recipients, by creating fear of loss of benefits
- Processes of separating employment services from employers does not reflect the reality of employment obstacles for ODSP recipients
- Social co-operatives appear to be a valid employment solution for ODSP recipients
- Successful social enterprises employing recipients of ODSP do exist, including Out of This World Café and Sistering’s artisan co-operative

Policy Recommendations

- Governments should create a culture that supports the employment of persons with disabilities
- ODSP should be amended to be more supportive of recipients and also of collective/group employment opportunities for persons with disabilities
- Policies should acknowledge the expertise, funding, and support required to make appropriate workplace accommodation
- There should be increased funding to organizations that provide support services to social enterprises
- Government should take a proactive role in the development of new social enterprises, including social co-ops and worker co-ops, which show promise for employment opportunities for persons with disabilities
- Procurement policies should identify social enterprises as preferred service providers
- There should be recognition of social enterprises as stakeholders in communities and in policy making, and public education about the role social enterprises play in building a cohesive and inclusive society

Community Partner: Canadian Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNet)

Status of Project: Complete

