Introduction

Making Progress is part of our commitment to share information on collaborations, innovations and projects across the province that support the approach outlined in the Alberta Employment First Strategy (AEFS).

The success of Employment First depends on governments, municipalities, service providers, employers, educators, associations, families and persons with disabilities working together to make our workplaces and communities inclusive for all Albertans. We hope everyone involved is encouraged and energized by the work underway to help more Albertans with disabilities find meaningful employment.

Making Progress aligns with the outcomes in the Strategy, providing a few examples of projects that are either underway or in the works. Our hope is to shine a light on the partners who are embracing the Employment First spirit and trying to do things a little differently.

At the very heart of our approach is a commitment to continuous learning and shared responsibility. We want to hear what you think, we want to learn what works best and we want to work with you every step along the way. I’m looking forward to seeing what we can accomplish together.
The Alberta Employment First Strategy

The Alberta Employment First Strategy is part of a broad movement to improve employment outcomes for persons with disabilities. Across Canada, governments are considering new initiatives, forming innovative partnerships that reach into the traditional disability communities and beyond, and focusing on how best to help persons with disabilities find meaningful employment.

Alberta Human Services recognizes that the only way to overcome the challenge of lower workforce participation rates for persons with disabilities is through collaboration and partnership with all stakeholders. The Alberta Employment First Strategy sets the stage for a new pan-disability approach to help more persons with disabilities enter the workforce and realize their full potential through meaningful employment.

By tapping into an underutilized group, and supporting welcoming and inclusive workplaces, the Strategy will help persons with disabilities build lives with purpose and quality and it will help Alberta employers find the workers they need.

www.humanservices.alberta.ca/employmentfirst

More employment for Albertans with disabilities will reduce poverty, create more inclusive communities and support Alberta’s Social Policy Framework vision of everyone having opportunities to fulfill their potential and benefit from our thriving social, economic and cultural life. The Alberta Employment First Strategy also supports the Building Alberta Plan by adding to Alberta’s workforce so more employers can find the staff they need now and in the future.
Employment First: What’s Happening Around the Province

A number of projects are taking shape in support of the three outcomes identified in the Alberta Employment First Strategy.

**AEFS promotes meaningful employment for persons with disabilities**
Across the province, partners are working on initiatives to help persons with disabilities with:
- Education, skills training and work experience to prepare for employment.
- Supports to help persons with disabilities find jobs that match their passion and skills.
- Life skills and supports to keep a job.
- Long-term career growth.

**Examples include:**

**YOUTH TRANSITION SUPPORT**
Alberta Human Services recognizes that all children/youth and their families go through changes, and that for children with disabilities and their families, transitions may be more complex or require more proactive planning. The government programs for persons with disabilities work with youth and their families to plan for the transition to adulthood and adult services.

[www.humanservices.alberta.ca/disability-services/15864.html](http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/disability-services/15864.html)

**CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT APPROACHES**
Customized employment approaches are being developed in Alberta Human Services’ northeast region office to help persons with disabilities identify their passions, talents and skills before working with employers to find the right kind of work to allow the person to shine.

**VOCATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMS**
With new funding to be provided by the Government of Canada over the next four years, the Sinneave Family Foundation and Autism Speaks Canada will be expanding their network of vocational training programs across Canada. Pilot sites in Edmonton and Calgary will help to create employment opportunities for Alberta youth with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

**JOB FAIRS**
Job Fairs are held throughout the year to connect employers and potential employees. Some are focused on specific industries or groups of people; others provide an opportunity for a large number of employers and workers to interact. Some examples include:
- Job fairs held as part of Alberta Works Week, April 28 to May 2, 2014

[www.alis.alberta.ca/aww](http://www.alis.alberta.ca/aww)

Job fairs, career and employment workshops and more are posted on ALIS – the Alberta Learning Information Service at [www.alis.alberta.ca/ce/cp/cs/careerevents.html](http://www.alis.alberta.ca/ce/cp/cs/careerevents.html)
This statistic has remained largely unchanged for many years. New strategies are needed to increase employment and labour force participation for this group of persons with disabilities.¹

¹Source: Alberta Human Services

2 AEFS promotes workplaces that are inclusive

Diverse and inclusive workplaces welcome employees with a wide range of abilities, individual characteristics, backgrounds and experiences. The AEFS is focused on helping create more inclusive workplaces since experience shows that:

- Increased diversity improves creativity and problem-solving.
- Persons with disabilities have the skills and ‘can-do’ attitude that employers need.
- Inclusive workplaces are good for employees and good for business.
Examples include:

**LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE**

To learn from employers in both the public and private sectors who are working towards creating inclusive workplaces, the Government of Alberta established two Employer Advisory Councils and asked them to:

- Identify the barriers they face in hiring persons with disabilities.
- Consider the types of incentives that need to be in place to create inclusive workplaces.
- Identify collaborative solutions and provide recommendations that would improve meaningful employment and career development options for Albertans with disabilities.

The Employer Advisory Councils have been meeting regularly and will issue a joint report to the Government of Alberta this summer.

The councils consist of the following leaders:

**Private Sector Employer Advisory Council**

- **Alberta Human Services**
  - Naresh Bhardwaj, Council Chair
  - Associate Minister of Services for Persons with Disabilities

- **AgriTeam Canada Consulting Ltd.**
  - Geeta Tucker, Chief Financial Officer

- **ATB Financial**
  - David Mowat, President and Chief Executive Officer

- **Champion Feed Services Ltd.**
  - Gary Golby, General Manager

- **Cineplex Entertainment LP**
  - Angela McGovern, Executive Director

- **City Lumber and Millwork**
  - Robert Rosen, President and Chief Executive Officer

- **EPCOR Utilities Inc.**
  - Amanda Rosychuk, Senior Vice President

- **Home Depot Canada**
  - Bill Lennie, President

- **IBM Canada Ltd.**
  - David Preston, Canadian Lead, Social Services

- **McDonald’s Restaurant – Peace River**
  - Paul Guenard, Owner

- **Shaw Communications**
  - Deanna Hunter, Human Resources Director

- **Stantec**
  - Keith Shillington, Vice President

- **Tim Hortons – Calgary**
  - Caroline Barham, Owner

- **Tony Roma’s – Red Deer**
  - David Murphy, Managing Partner

- **West Jet Airlines**
  - Brigid Pelino, Executive Vice President
Public Sector Employer Advisory Council

Alberta Human Services
Naresh Bhardwaj, Council Chair
Associate Minister of Services for Persons with Disabilities

Alberta Corporate Human Resources
Dwight Dibben, Public Service Commissioner
Dave Prince, Assistant Commissioner

Alberta Health Services
Connie Shea, Director HR Client Services

Alberta Human Services
Rick Nisbet, Executive Director, Human Resources

Calgary Board of Education
Elizabeth Gouthro, Director with Learning Services

Catholic Social Services
Sheri Rioux, Director of Human Resources

Champions Career Centre
Lisa Moon, Executive Director

City of Edmonton
Jeff MacPhearson, Human Resources Officer

City of Grande Prairie
Greg Scerbak, City Manager
Jeannine Duffenas, Human Resources

City of Medicine Hat
Janine van der Sloot, Manager of Employment

Community Futures Treaty 7
Johnathon Red Gun, Disabilities Employment Coordinator

Edmonton Police Service
Darren Eastcott, Superintendent, Human Resources

Fort McMurray Public School District
Shannon Noble, Director of Student Services

Gateway Association
Cindy de Bruijn, Executive Director

Grande Prairie Regional College
Susan Bansgrove, Vice President, Academics and Research

Municipality of Jasper
Peter Waterworth, Chief Administrative Officer

Prospect Human Services
Melanie Mitra, Chief Executive Officer

Red Deer College
Lesley Kendall, Vice President, Human Resources
Mara-Lee Moroz, Director, Human Resources

SAIT Polytechnic
Dr. David Ross, President and Chief Executive Officer
Gregg Michaud, Dean, Centre for Academic Learning Services

Transitions – Building New Tomorrows
Paul Fujishige, Executive Director
Heather Richards, Community Living Manager

Workers Compensation Board
Mary Kykosz, Team Leader, Human Resources

University of Alberta
Teddi Doupe, Associate Director, Specialized Support and Disability Services
Catherine Anley, Employment and Equity Advisor
ALBERTA HUMAN SERVICES INTERNSHIP PROGRAM
The Employment First Internship Program for Persons with Disabilities is a new initiative under the AEFS. This program will provide persons with disabilities with public service work experience, professional development and networks to support them in their future career growth.

The program will be open to persons with disabilities who:
• Demonstrate key competencies identified in job postings.
• Are recent high school graduates, enrolled in a post-secondary program, or have a post-secondary credential.

Positions will be offered in a wide range of areas including: administration, finance, human resources, program delivery, project management, research and policy analysis. The internships will run for six months with the possibility of extension depending on the position. Alberta Human Services expects to hire 20 interns in the pilot year and 25 interns in year two.

Interested applicants can view internship opportunities and apply on the Alberta Jobs website by searching using the term ‘Intern’. www.jobs.alberta.ca

“...The connections made in Calgary should serve us well in Red Deer. We look forward to our continuing partnership as we meet new service providers, create new relationships and fulfil our mandate on a broader scale.”
Tarina Dueck, Manager, Viable – www.breakbarriers.ca

READY, WILLING & ABLE
The Ready, Willing & Able initiative, spearheaded by the Canadian Association for Community Living and the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance, is based on a peer-to-peer model in which employers champion hiring persons with developmental disabilities. With support from the federal government over the next three years, this initiative will continue to work with employers, service clubs, professional associations and other partners to support new jobs for persons with developmental disabilities. In Alberta, the AACL Rotary Employment Partnership is a Ready, Willing and Able success story.

ROTARY PARTNERSHIPS
The Rotary Employment Partnership, designed to create employment opportunities for persons with developmental disabilities, started in Edmonton in the year 2000. The Alberta Association for Community Living (AACL) worked with the Mayfield Rotary Club to develop the partnership which has since expanded throughout Alberta. There are currently more than 30 Rotary Clubs involved, resulting in the creation of over 200 jobs for adults with developmental disabilities.

VIABLE CALGARY
Created by Prospect Human Services, Viable Calgary helps employers diversify their hiring practices by dispelling myths and persuading organizations that people with disabilities are valuable employees, worth attracting and retaining. Based on its success with employers in Calgary, Viable is exploring an expansion to Red Deer.
CoMMUNITY FUTURES TREATY SEVEN
Treaty Seven has been working with employers through their 4x4 model and on May 7 and 8, 2014 held their 7th Annual Disability Employment Symposium and Job Fair in Calgary around the theme: “Let’s get the job done!”.

The mission of the Treaty Seven 4x4 Business Leadership Model is to enable as many Alberta companies as possible to be effective at employing the talents of First Nations people with disabilities. The model depends on continually increasing the number of companies involved and the ability to share ideas, expertise and experience. www.t7edc.com

EMPLOYABILITIES EDMONTON
EmployAbilities Edmonton hosted its 2nd Annual Employer Awards of Distinction to honour and recognize forward-thinking businesses that provide employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. Six employers were honoured and EmployAbilities developed a video profiling businesses that helps tell the story of how positive practices can make a difference for employers and persons with disabilities. www.employabilities.ab.ca

Collaboration, integration and continuous learning
Achieving the promise of the Alberta Employment First Strategy depends on services that are integrated, partners that collaborate, and a commitment from everyone involved to continuous learning.

The Alberta Employment First Strategy will make what is good today, even better tomorrow.

Examples include:

2ND ANNUAL LEARNING SYMPOSIUM
On May 22-23, 2014, about 500 people are expected to gather in person, with several thousand more online, for Innovations at Work: A Learning Symposium on Employment and Persons with Disabilities. The symposium includes an address by Premier Dave Hancock and many opportunities for panelists, presenters, employers, individuals, service agencies and others to discuss thought-provoking ideas and solutions to create meaningful employment opportunities and inclusive workplaces for persons with disabilities.

The symposium is sponsored by three Alberta government ministries: Alberta Human Services; Alberta Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour; and Alberta Innovation and Advanced Education. This event is a follow-up to the 2013 symposium and builds on Alberta’s Employment First Strategy. Presentations and videos from the symposium will be posted on the AEFS website at: www.humanservices.alberta.ca/employmentfirst
CROSS-MINISTRY COLLABORATION
The Government of Alberta’s Disability Innovations Employment Working Group is made up of officials from four Ministries: Alberta Human Services; Alberta Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour; Alberta Innovation and Advanced Education; and Alberta Education. The Working Group was instrumental in developing the AEFS and is continuing to work on implementation within their Ministries and with their stakeholders.

WEBCASTS
Alberta Human Services is sponsoring a series of webcasts on topics designed to support the direction of the AEFS. Five webcasts have been recorded and posted on the Employment First website so far and more are planned for the coming months:
- Creative Partnerships – showcasing the City of Edmonton’s Abilities@Work program, March 2014.
- Accommodations in the workplace, February 2014.
- What do you want to do when you grow up? January 2014.
- Busting Myths in the Workplace, December 2013.
- Building a Culture of Employment First, October 2013.

To view the webcasts visit www.humanservices.alberta.ca/employmentfirst

COLLABORATIVE WORKSHOPS AND CONFERENCES
Across the province, workshops and conferences are being held which incorporate Employment First related sessions. Examples include:
- Alberta Human Services regional workshops that promote integrated, collaborative approaches to support the AEFS such as the Medicine Hat Customized Employment workshop with Michael Callahan in October 2013. A total of 189 people attended and reported increased awareness of effective practices to support employment for persons with disabilities. Similar workshops are being planned for this year in the central, northwest and northeast regions.
- Chrysalis, the Edmonton Workforce Council and the Alberta Council of Disability Services (ACDS) workshop May 13, 2014 with Michael Callahan – How is customized employment planning different than what we are currently doing?
- AAACL 2013 Family Conference session on customized employment with Cary Griffin.
- AAACL 2014 Family Conference workshop on universally designed learning with Dr. Jacqueline Thousand from California State School of Education, plus sessions on the role of families in creating and sustaining employment; Early Childhood Development; and transforming services from group based to individualized supports.

NETWORKS
To increase employment outcomes for persons with disabilities, each region within Alberta Human Services is exploring ways to work jointly across programs and with community stakeholders.
A Focus on Innovation

Employment First is an approach as opposed to a program. It’s a new way of thinking that builds on what has been done by encouraging everyone involved to think differently and work collaboratively.

Innovation will be a cornerstone as Employment First evolves from group-based supports to much more individualized approaches. It could be something that starts as a prototype then is tested and replicated before being implemented on a large scale. For example:

**YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PARTNERSHIP**
Alberta Human Services is working with AACL to help youth with developmental disabilities between the ages of 15-19 find employment after school and on weekends. A unique feature of this partnership is that non-disabled peers will provide the initial on-the-job support instead of adult job coaches.

The first Youth Employment Supported Project is underway in Edmonton to provide peer support to youth with disabilities. A program partnership was established with two schools in Edmonton, Jasper Place High School and the Victoria School of Arts. Since January 2014, four youth with disabilities have been matched with a mentor of similar age in order to provide on-the-job peer supports. Preliminary conversations have begun with eight potential employers to establish additional positions for youth with disabilities. The target is for these youth to be employed a minimum of four hours a week at minimum wage or above.

While employers will hire and pay the youth with developmental disabilities, the partnership is responsible for the employment and wages of the youth who provide peer support and mentorship. Based on results from the Edmonton project, this prototype may expand to other communities.

**INNOVATION FUND**
The Government of Alberta has established a $2 million Employment First Innovation Fund to spur promising new ideas and innovative approaches. A call for proposals has been posted on the Alberta Purchasing Connection website at www.purchasingconnection.ca

“Employment provides us all with the opportunity to earn more money, learn new skills, build new relationships and feel more connected to our communities. The Employment First Innovation Fund is just one of the ways the Alberta Government is working to improve the lives of Albertans with disabilities and make our communities more inclusive and welcoming to all Albertans.”

Hon. Naresh Bhardwaj,
Associate Minister of Services for Persons with Disabilities
Now it’s your turn...

The Alberta Employment First Strategy challenges partners to take what works today and make it better. This will be a learning process for everyone involved and our commitment is to keep the lines of communication open.

We want to hear from you! Send us your ideas, new approaches that you are working on, success stories or anything else you would like to share.