

Spring 2023
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Canada's
Down Syndrome
Magazine

**“WHAT DO YOU
WANT TO DO?”**

*Starting the Employment
Conversation with
Your Child*

The Road to Employment

*Behind the Scenes with
an Inclusive Employer:
The Making of Chicken*

**Preparing Your Child for
Future Employment**

Plus: Let's Get to Work: A Self-Advocate Employment Q&A



The average person spends one third of their life at work. It's the first question everyone asks, just after what's your name?

Your job tells the world a bit about who you are and what's important to you. It becomes part of your identity, your social life, and your purpose. It seems funny that we encourage such an important life decision to be made at a young age, but the career path you follow can shape the person you become.

Without a doubt, it's a lot of pressure to put on a young adult. People with Down syndrome are especially prone to that post-graduation void, when busy schedules seem to become time at home alone.

Within this issue, we are sharing the information and exercises parents and caregivers need to start the employment conversation with their child and encourage them to think about employment as a possibility after their time at school is over.

Here, you will find resources and tips for job hunting, as well as an in-depth look at the inclusive accommodations that were made on a Canadian film set. You'll also hear from

people with Down syndrome in our community who are currently employed and how their jobs have helped them become more independent.

From self-discovery conversations to self-advocate employment stories, there is a lot to cover, so let's dive in!

Courtney Cassel

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Canadian Down Syndrome Society

Glen Hoos

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Down Syndrome Resource Foundation

Do you have an employment story to share? Send us an email at 321DSMagazine@gmail.com, we'd love to hear from you!



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4 14 23

4 How to Prepare Your Child
for Future Employment

8 "What Do You Want To Do?"
*Starting the Employment
Conversation with Your Child*

14 The Road to Employment:
Finding Your First Job

20 Let's Get to Work:
Self-Advocate Q&A

23 Behind the Scenes with an Inclusive
Employer: *The Making of Chicken*

28 DSRF Corner

30 CDSS Spotlight



HOW TO PREPARE YOUR CHILD FOR FUTURE EMPLOYMENT

By Courtney Cassel featuring Dr. Jennifer Crowson

WHEN PARENTS DREAM OF THEIR CHILD'S FUTURE, NO ONE PICTURES A DIFFICULT PATH.

Every parent hopes to see their child go to school, make friends, get a job, move out, have relationships, and gain independence. But the struggle to find paid employment for those with intellectual disabilities is very real.

We often hear, "by the time my child reaches employment age, I hope there will be lots of job opportunities for them," but the current reality of Down syndrome employment in Canada is much different from this vision. Over 50% of people with Down syndrome can't find paid work,¹ even with the current labour shortage.

While some people with Down syndrome choose not to work, they should be given every opportunity to develop a career and experience the advantages of employment, like independence, financial stability, a social life.

In an interview on "NOW with Dave Brown,"² Dr. Jennifer Crowson, a Diversity and Inclusion Specialist, gave some very powerful insights for families drawn from her workshop, Employment as a Goal: Engaging with Families.

"Building skills at home early on can be key for employment later in life. We are told really early on that your child will probably not achieve. We are told not to have high expectations for our children who have disabilities. And so one of the messages I give in the workshop is we need to try to reverse the narrative." - Dr. Jennifer Crowson, Ph.D.

Work expectations are critical to future employment success.³ You can demonstrate the expectations you have for your child in a healthy way by asking questions like:

1. Why do you think I have a job?
2. What is important to you? (Helping people, mastering a task or skill, having fun, teamwork, being independent)
3. What kind of jobs interest you most?
4. What kind of skills do you want to improve?
5. Think about a time you did your best work. What made you try hard?
6. Think about your proudest moment. What do you think you did well?

¹ The National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability, Employment in Adults with Down Syndrome, 2018

² Now with Dave Brown: Dr. Jennifer Crowson, August 2022

³ Family Support Network for Employment, Employment Action Cards



“It starts not just with the attitudes that parents and caregivers have in terms of what their child's future looks like, but also about what they are going to encourage their child to do at home. So I'm talking chores, I'm talking all these things that we talk about and we know. But sometimes children with disabilities, particularly with developmental disabilities, get left out of those conversations and left out of those expectations. And we need to change that way of thinking.” - Dr. Jennifer Crowson, Ph.D.

Small, consistent actions each day will help to build the foundations your child needs for employment.⁴ Which types of everyday tasks can your child do at home to instil accountability and responsibility?

- Complete chores such as mowing the lawn, shovelling the snow, washing dishes, dusting, vacuuming
- Learn to take public transit or taxis independently
- Manage a weekly allowance to develop money skills
- Open a savings account and discuss responsible spending
- Babysit younger siblings
- Help grandparents around the house
- Take care of a flower bed or garden
- Help to prepare meals
- Reply to an email on their own
- Write their own note or message
- Answer the telephone

“Things have changed in the past 10 to 20 years, but the dominant narrative that surrounds the lives of people with disabilities still needs to shift. That dominant narrative is really informing how parents are told about their child, and how they are told to think about their child's future, how it is embedded in the education system. It doesn't allow for our young people with developmental disabilities to have the same experiences as their peers, and that connects to employment.”

“In education in particular for example, we expect all high school students in Ontario to complete 40 hours of volunteer service in order to get their high school diploma. We don't expect that of people with developmental disabilities because we don't expect them to get their high school diploma. We need to rethink that.” “We know from volunteer experience you learn communication skills, you learn responsibility, you learn community involvement. So we need our young people all to have that experience. We know that young people with developmental disabilities are not given the same access to COOP and to paid summer jobs. Those things that you probably had as a young person and it helps you get a job as an adult. Young people with disabilities need the same.”

Motivation, skills, access to the job market, and credibility are the four essentials your child needs before they can apply for their first job. Gaining practical experience can help to check all of those boxes and it is great preparation for building a resume.

Help your child look for opportunities such as:

- A part-time job during school
- Working a summer job like camp counsellor
- Volunteering with a local charity of interest
- Volunteering with activities at school (yearbook, student council, social planning)
- Exploring creative interests (musicals, theatre, dance, guitar, painting, modelling)
- Trying your hobbies with you (photography, hiking, pottery, camping)
- Trying hobbies or sports with friends or relatives (swimming at the beach, playing baseball, attending a concert)
- Finding a mentor in their industry of interest
- Arranging conversations with various professionals in different industries to learn more about different jobs
- Participating in an Internship or COOP program
- Trying various courses, classes, and certifications (first-aid training, workplace safety, cooking classes, leadership events and workshops)

“It's going to take hard work, it's going to take a community effort, it's going to take a village. So we need to think differently about how we talk to parents when they first learn their child has a disability. It starts there, then when they go to elementary school, are we making sure that the elementary school is fully inclusive? Then when they go to secondary school, are we making sure they are being invited to participate in the academic curriculum and not asked to sit over in the corner? Then, when they leave school in summer, are they going to have the same opportunities to have jobs? Are we then going to have employers who recognize

the benefit of being an inclusive hirer? There are so many elements to this future that is being created.” - Dr. Jennifer Crowson, Ph.D.

It is going to take hard work.

Hard work that has already begun, with hundreds of people coast-to-coast listening to shared experiences, learning from lessons of the past, and advocating for critical pieces that will help to build an inclusive future. We still have a long way to go, but together we can rewrite this narrative for future generations.

“People with disabilities deserve a place in employment.” - Dr. Jennifer Crowson

As you support your child throughout their employment journey, there are several resources to assist you. We recommend the CDSS Employment Planning Workbook, the CDSS Employment Planning Hub, The Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN), The Family Support Network for Employment, and your local Employment Service Agency or Down Syndrome Group. Also, check out DSRF's Employment Support Program.

RESOURCES:

<https://cdss.ca/resources/cdss-publications/>
<https://cdss.ca/resources/employment/>
<https://www.odennetwork.com/>
<https://fsne.ca/resources/>



About Dr. Jennifer Crowson

Jennifer holds a Bachelor and Master of Social Work from McMaster University and a Ph.D. from the University of Edinburgh. She is a registered Social Worker with over twenty-five years of work professional work experience in child welfare, policy, and research. She has had several key management positions with both non-government and government agencies in Canada and Scotland. Her work has mainly focused on children and young people. She is a part time faculty member with the School of Social Work at McMaster University, where she teaches as a sessional instructor.

⁴ CDSS Employability Skills Tracker, 2021

“WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO?”



Starting the Employment Conversation with Your Child



One of the major changes in any young adult's life is going from the routine and structure of high school into the unknown of life after graduation. There are so many paths to follow and changes to navigate - it's a new decision-making period.

This is no different for people with Down syndrome. In fact, the transition is probably more challenging because of the hands-on nature of education for people with Down syndrome and the fact that their social life tends to be tied to school during those years.

Starting the employment conversation with your child early is a great way to help them prepare for this daunting yet very important transition.

Having a job can help your child to develop a daily routine, make social connections, motivate them, give them a sense of belonging, and independence by making their own money.

It's important to note that some individuals with Down syndrome choose not to work for many different reasons, like family preference or health issues. The goal of these conversations is to make sure your child

understands the benefits of employment and comes to a decision about the possibility of employment on their own.

We recommend starting with these four conversations below. Begin the conversation quite early in the secondary school years and repeat it regularly. That way planning can begin early and learning can focus on skills needed for a specific job.

Use the conversation starters to open a dialogue with your child and encourage them to think about their passions, practical skills, and potential employment possibilities. This will help prepare them for the transition ahead by getting them to consider some long-term goals.

The conversations should spark curiosity and career exploration. We encourage you to follow these three rules for a constructive dialogue:

1. **Keep it simple.**
2. **Keep it positive.**
3. **Encourage questions.**



**Conservation #1:
WHY GET A JOB?**

Start at the beginning with why a person might want to get a job in the first place. This is a great time to set personal goals using a microboard to map out how a job might be connected to their post-graduation goals, like living on their own.

Other examples of benefits of employment you can discuss are:

- **Independence** (Living life, decision making, doing things on your own)
- **Building Routines** (Help build good habits and be comfortable knowing what to expect)
- **Making Money** (Saving for something special, paying rent, saving in your bank account)
- **Part of Your Identity** (Your job can tell people who you are and what's important to you)
- **Teamwork** (Meeting new and different types of people, learning to work well with others)
- **Skill Building** (Improving skills you already have and learning new ones)
- **Having a Full Life** (Stay busy, expand your social circle, helps to prevent being lonely or bored or inactive)

Try not to lead the conversation, but instead simply get the wheels turning by using the prompt questions below.

Conversation Starters:

- Do you want to learn valuable work skills?
- Do you want to earn your own money?
- Do you want to keep busy and try something new?
- Do you want to meet new people?
- Do you feel like you need to find a job because I want you to?
- Do you feel you should get a job just to put on your resume?
- Do you want to get a job to help keep your mind active and sharp?
- Do you feel nervous about working at a job?
- Do you feel excited to get a job?

The goal of this exercise is to discover your child's own motivation for finding a job. Some motivations will lead to better, longer lasting and more valuable work experiences than others.¹

**Conversation #2:
What do you love to do?**

Does your child have any hobbies like gardening or special skills like drawing that could be the starting block for future employment? Often in self discovery, learning what you don't like to do is just as important as narrowing in on what you do like to do. Take some time to reflect together: what makes your child feel their best? Which tasks frustrate them?

Conversation Starters:

1. What is important to you? (Being creative, helping others)
2. What do you like to learn about? (Drama, science, cooking, fixing things, fashion)
3. What are you good at? (Taking care of animals, drawing, making people laugh)
4. What are your hobbies? (Building things, reading, playing sports, video games)
5. What do you like to do in your spare time? (Gardening, cooking, helping the community)
6. What are some things you don't like to do? (Counting things, cleaning, working alone)

7. What makes you feel good about yourself? (Being unique, helping people)
8. What are some of your successes? (Learning how to type on a keyboard)
9. What are some of your challenges? (Learning something new, understanding directions)
10. What are some things you DO NOT want to do at a job? (Working alone, sitting down all day, pouring coffee, taking the bus to get to work, wearing a uniform)

**Conversation #3:
What are you good at doing?**

Uncovering employability skills is an essential part of finding that sweet spot between what you love to do, what you're good at doing, and what people will pay for you to do.

Have a discussion with your child about what they are good at doing, what they would like to be better at, and what they definitely do not want to do. Then pair them up with potential job ideas - big or small, this is a brainstorming conversation to create excitement!

¹ CDSS Employment Planning Workbook



We encourage you to make a list like the ones below.

What are you good at?	Some ideas of where you can work:
Helping in the garden	Landscaping, floral shop, garden centre
Playing video games	Gaming store, streamer
Building things	Tool shop, hardware store, self-employment
Cooking / baking	Local restaurant, hotel, bakery, cooking classes
Taking pictures	Event photographer, content creator
Dancing	Dance studio assistant, dance studio receptionist

What are you interested in?	Some ideas of where you can work:
Mountain biking	Bike park, bike store, fitness club or gym
Reading books	Library, book store
Being around animals	Pet sitter, pet store, farm, shelter

What do you NOT like?	Some places where you should not work:
Working outdoors	Landscaping
Loud, busy places	Restaurant
Being around kids	Daycare

Conversation #4:
What kind of jobs are out there?

Don't be afraid to dream big or explore a career where there is a lack of Down syndrome representation.

This is a great time to discuss your own work experiences, too. Explain what you do in a day, how you chose your career path, and what you had to do to get there. You could also introduce your child to other people you know with jobs that interest them, like a teacher, photographer, fitness instructor, or fashion model.

Conversation Starters:

- Do you like to be outdoors or do you prefer being indoors?
- Do you like sitting or walking around? Mix of both?
- Do you like busy places like restaurants and malls?
- Do you like quiet places where you can focus and take your time?
- Think of places you enjoy - movie theatre, favorite restaurant, amusement park, concert venue - do you think you would like working there?
- Do you like working with other people or by yourself?
- What are some places you do not like going to?
- Do you like working with people, like customers or clients?
- Do you like to work in-person at an office, or from home?

You can also pair these conversations with the practical Employment Planning Workbook. Your child can work through the exercises to help develop their future employment goals and career path. Download your workbook at [CDSS.ca/cdss-publications](https://cdss.ca/cdss-publications).

Don't forget to share these conversations with your child's school team, too! They can help to prepare them for their specific employment goals.



THE CONNECTION

The CONNECTION is a passionate, generous group, invested in creating a better future for Canadians with Down syndrome.

Your monthly donation is a catalyst for change by helping to create inclusive employment initiatives, updating life-changing resources, and giving us the ability and security to plan for the future.

This is how a monthly gift supports the Canadian Down syndrome community:

\$25/month

Provides an evidence-based literacy program, created specifically for new readers with Down syndrome.

\$50/month

Allows families to connect with our Resource Coordinator to provide life-changing resources.

\$100/month

Gives access to employment readiness resources and supports, for those entering the workforce.

The Road to Employment: Finding Your First Job

By Aja Masters with Glen Hoos

So, your loved one with Down syndrome is ready to roll up their sleeves and get to work. Good for them! Let's do this!

But... umm... errr... *scratches head*



What now?

The road to meaningful employment is not well marked out. People with Down syndrome and other developmental disabilities are, sadly, one of Canada's most chronically underemployed populations. It can be hard to even know where to begin.

As an employment specialist with the Down Syndrome Resource Foundation, I've helped many families navigate this path and find their way to a rewarding destination. Let's explore it together – one step at a time.

STEP 1 Pre-Employment Skill Development

Preparation for employment begins long before a person reaches the age of employability. Every skill we develop

and every lesson we learn throughout life adds to the toolbox that we'll have at our disposal in future employment situations.

The skills that are necessary to find and thrive in a job are also beneficial in other aspects of daily life, so whether or not employment is the ultimate goal, helping your child, teen, or adult build these abilities will benefit them regardless of the path they choose.

Hard skills like reading, math, and speech are invaluable of course, and proficiency in these areas will widen the pool of job opportunities available to the individual. Most families work hard to develop these abilities, and it's also a major focus of the school system. That said, there are many jobs that are well suited to those with other strengths.

What we think of as "soft skills" can be just as, if not more important. The ability to cooperate with others as part of a team is essential to most jobs, and this is an area of great strength for many people with Down syndrome. Likewise, the ability to listen and follow directions, a willingness to ask for help when needed, and the initiative to be a self-starter are all marks of a good employee.

Personal qualities including flexibility, punctuality, time management, and good hygiene are valued by employers, and people with Down syndrome may need support in these areas. Likewise, social communication – appropriate workplace conversation topics, for example – is a vital skill to work on.

STEP 2 The Job Search

A persuasive resume is an essential tool of every job seeker, and people with Down syndrome are no exception. However, depending on the individual, the contents of the resume might be a little different from what one might normally expect.

Some people struggle with not having a lot of education or work experience to list. That's okay! Focus on the skills that can bring value to an employer and highlight those. Any employer will tell you that they can teach job-related tasks, but they cannot teach character and personality. Show them why you are the kind of person they want on their team.

Before sending your loved one with Down syndrome out into the streets with resume in hand, take some time to help them think about their interests and skills, and what kind of jobs and employers would be a good fit. Where do they want to work, and why? What are they hoping to accomplish?

Finding suitable job opportunities can be difficult; expect it to take some time. Thankfully, increasing numbers of employers are instituting inclusive hiring practices, recognizing the incredible value that people with disabilities bring to their organization.

Start by reaching out within your own circles. Finding a job is often about who you know, and those who know us best know exactly what we have to offer. Personal networking is your friend: the person seeking employment, and their family and friends, should make it known within their circles that they are in the market for a job.

Consider reconnecting to prior work experience placements. If the individual has already had a positive experience with a particular employer, it is worth checking in with them to see if a permanent position might be available.

When it comes to cold calling, keep an eye out for companies that specifically say they hire inclusively, and watch for places where you see other people with disabilities working (especially chain businesses like grocery stores and restaurants). These businesses already have inclusive employment embedded in their culture.

That said, don't look specifically for job postings for people with disabilities. Don't close doors on yourself! Some employers may never have thought of hiring a person with a disability until you ask.

I recommend visiting employers in person and asking if they are hiring, rather than just sending an e-mail or submitting your resume online. It's too easy for them to ignore a message, while visiting in person demonstrates the kind of initiative that employers are looking for.



STEP 3 Interviewing

Once you've got your foot in the door with a potential employer, the next step is acing the interview. To do so, preparation and practice are essential.

To create a sense of comfort, spend some time watching YouTube videos that show what to expect in an interview. Google the top ten interview questions and practice answering them together. Help them prepare to talk about themselves, their skills, their experiences, and why they want the job.

Find a friend or family member to roleplay the interview. In addition to answering the questions, practice eye contact, confidence, listening carefully to the question, and staying on topic.

In some cases, it may be appropriate to ask the employer if there is an alternative to a traditional sit-down interview. Some employers find a working interview useful, as it gives the candidate the opportunity to demonstrate that they can take instruction and learn the required tasks. Seeing is believing!

STEP 4 Starting Work

Landing a job is a major milestone – but now the work really begins. What happens in those first few days and weeks can make all the difference in establishing a mutually beneficial long-term working relationship.

It is crucial to be clear up front about what is needed for the employee to be successful, such as visual schedules, written lists, special equipment, timers, etc. These accommodations should be in place from day one.

Start slowly, with short shifts and limited days. A new work environment and routine can be overwhelming, and it is best to allow time for adjustment. As the comfort level increases, working hours can be extended.

The employee should be encouraged to follow the example of other staff members. If possible, job shadowing is an ideal way for people with Down syndrome to learn the ropes and master the tasks they are expected to complete. They should also know that they are welcome to ask for help when they need it and be given access to a trusted adult they can talk to about their experiences at work.



Supporting Your Loved One on the Road to Employment

The role of a parent, sibling, or caregiver can vary based on what stage of the employment journey the individual is at, and the level of support they require.

I encourage parents to start talking about employment young, just as you might with a child who doesn't have Down syndrome. Don't wait until they're graduating high school; throughout childhood and the teen years, talk about different kinds of work they might be interested in when they grow up. Highlight the things they're good at and how those strengths can translate to a job.

Be their biggest cheerleader and boost their confidence at every opportunity. Encourage them to dream big – there are enough people in the world who will try to hold them back.

Think outside the box. We once had a student who had his heart set on being a doctor. As we dug a little deeper, it turned out that what he really wanted was to wear a white coat. He ended up getting a job cleaning test tubes in a science lab, where he got a white coat of his very own. Dream achieved!

When it's time to find and apply for jobs, encourage your loved one to do as much as they can on their own, with your support. As much as possible, allow them to be the one to speak with prospective employers, even if you are by their side to assist. This gives them the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities while gaining valuable experience.

You might also consider connecting with an employment specialist who can not only help with the job search process, but also serve as a bridge between the employer and the employee/family. Employment specialists help employers set up suitable accommodations, ensuring a smooth transition, and can also serve as a middleman for communication between boss and employee. My office door is open, and I would love to help you on your way!

Expand Your Network with Inployable!

Having trouble finding a job within your network? Join Inployable, the first-of-its-kind Down syndrome employment initiative on LinkedIn. It's a dedicated space where people with Down syndrome can connect with actively hiring employers in Canada and browse available job postings.

It's 100% free to join - all you need is an email and a LinkedIn account. For help setting up your LinkedIn profile or joining Inployable, visit [Inployable.com](https://inployable.com) to book a one-on-one session with a LinkedIn Coach.



presents...

THE 2023 DOWN SYNDROME FILM FESTIVAL

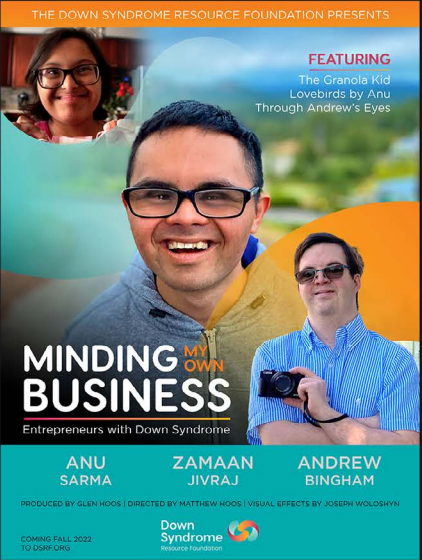
Celebrating World Down Syndrome Day

March 18, 2023
1:30 pm

James Cowan Theatre
6450 Deer Lake Ave
Burnaby BC

Featuring the Burnaby premiere of the new NFB feature documentary Lay Down Your Heart, plus the short films Raising Ava Rose and Minding My Own Business: Entrepreneurs with Down Syndrome

Plus: An audience Q&A with the stars and creators, and an exclusive sneak peek at the new short film *Chicken!*



Tickets:
DSRF.org/FilmFest

LET'S GET TO WORK: A Self Advocate Q&A

Jessica Rotolo

Toronto, Ontario

Path Forward Classroom Assistant, Centennial Infant and Child Centre

Why did you decide to get a job?

I wanted to get a job for a couple of reasons. I want to make money because I have been saving up for a trip to Las Vegas with my girlfriends and my friend Matt. I also want to move into my own apartment close to my work and my drama classes which I take at DramaWay, which are held at The York High School.

What is the best thing about having a job?

The best thing about having a job is I know a lot of people at my work and I like working with them. I don't like being at home doing nothing. I also like meeting new students at Centennial, they are so much fun.

What is the most challenging thing about having a job?

The most challenging thing about having my job is there are a lot of stairs I need to walk on.

What helps you to succeed at work?

What helps me to succeed at Centennial is I have a To Do List. When I first started, one of my co-workers trained me on how to do my job. Sue, Maddy, and Rachel - the teachers I work with - help me when I need help. Sometimes the other volunteers also help me, too.

What are your future employment goals?

I love working at Centennial, it is a part-time and seasonal job. I also love modeling and acting, so I go to many auditions trying to get jobs in that industry.



Matthew MacNeil

Tillsonburg, Ontario

Host

Why did you decide to get a job?

I decided to get a job because I think it is more respectful to work.

Describe your job.

My host responsibilities include greeting guests and escorting customers to their table. I also assist the servers with clearing tables and the bartender with filling up ice for drinks.

What is the best thing about having a job?

The best thing about having a job is that it keeps me motivated each day to work hard and show my employer that I can be trusted to do that job.

What is the most challenging thing about having a job?

The most challenging thing is time management when I'm finding seating for the customers and problem solving on the spot about where to seat them when the room is full. Having customers get upset with me about where they sit is hard, too.

What helps you to succeed at work?

What helps me to succeed is when my co-workers and the servers assist me when I need some help and advice on where to sit customers. And they help keep me motivated when I am working. My parents and sisters also help me when I ask for advice about work.

What are your future employment goals?

My employment goal is to keep up the hard work!



Lindsey Chalmers

Etobicoke, Ontario

Starbucks Barista

Why did you decide to get a job?

I decided to get a job to be more independent and be more active. I like to be busy and have lots of things to do. I also like money and tips! My favorite thing about any job is chatting with people.

Describe your job.

I have been working at Starbucks at Sick Kids Hospital for the last five years. I love my job. My job is handing out the drinks, emptying the garbage, sweeping the floor, and organizing the fridge. Of course, I greet and chat with the customers too!

What is the most challenging thing about having a job?

The most challenging thing about my job at Starbucks is memorizing all the recipes to make customers' drinks. Another thing is reading the customers' names on their drinks. It is so difficult to pronounce some names out loud.

What helps you to succeed at work?

My co-workers help me succeed at my job. Many are taller than me and can reach high things! My manager trains me slowly and they have a lot of patience. She takes me through the tasks step-by-step which really helps me. My co-workers are my team and are like my other family. I have hardly ever missed a day of work and I am always early. That helps me succeed too because I don't have to get stressed about being late.

What are your future employment goals?

Actually, I have just been offered a new full-time job working as a receptionist! I got the job offer through my involvement with CDSS and their fall employment campaign with LinkedIn called Inployable. They reached out to me through Inployable and I had a "get to know you" interview. It was easy at first and then it got harder but I did it! They were really good at breaking down the questions so I could understand. I start in January but I know what my duties will be. I have to organize the packages and mail, fill up water glasses for their meetings and clean the rooms afterwards, welcome visitors and lead them to their meeting room, sign people in and keep track of their ID cards. I bet there is more to do but I will see when I start. I am so excited to begin this new adventure! I can take a bus there independently and I will need to pack a lunch every day. I also need to buy new business clothes!



Andrew Bingham

Vancouver, BC
Assistant Server at Mon Pitou

Why did you decide to get a job?

I was looking for more work. The owners of Mon Pitou, a French style café and bistro, approached DSRF and I applied for the position.

Describe your job.

I help customers by taking orders to their tables and I give out their coffee orders. I assist the staff by clearing and cleaning tables, laying tables, serving water, doing general housekeeping, preparing the boxes for take-out by folding and stamping them.

What is the best thing about having a job?

The interaction with customers and the friendly staff.

What is the most challenging thing about having a job?

Gaining independence to work alone and learn new skills.

What helps you to succeed at work?

Support of co-workers and gratitude from customers. The training I receive from the staff to take on new skills.

What are your future employment goals?

To continue working at Mon Pitou. To become a valuable member of the team.

What is your dream job?

To be a professional photographer and to have my own shows.



Jodi Klukas

Vancouver, BC
Dishwasher, White Spot

Why did you decide to get a job?

To get paid!

Describe your job.

I run the dishes through the dishwasher and then put them away.

What is the best thing about having a job?

I like getting a discount at the restaurant, and earning spending money.

What is the most challenging thing about having a job?

Everything is very fast paced.

What helps you to succeed at work?

When one of my coworkers tells me I'm doing a really good job.

What are your future employment goals?

To work with food of different kinds.

What is your dream job?

To work in an office and to help feed the hungry.



BEHIND THE SCENES WITH AN INCLUSIVE EMPLOYER: The Making of *Chicken*

By Glen Hoos

Credit for all photos: Noah Asanias

In a society that is becoming increasingly inclusive, people with Down syndrome are breaking barriers in virtually every sphere. That includes the world of television and film, where we've seen a slew of recent programs and movies featuring performers with Down syndrome in prominent roles, such as the feature film *Peanut Butter Falcon*, network television show *Stumptown*, Hallmark movie *Color My World with Love*, and many others.

While the finished artistic products are on screen for all to see, rarely do we get a glimpse behind the scenes to see how producers and crews work with their actors to bring the best out of them. As with any other employer who wants to help their staff succeed, filmmakers must set the stage for their cast to shine.

Two creators who have done a particularly good job of this are Lucy McNulty and Emma Pollard, co-Directors of the new short film, *Chicken*. Lucy is also the writer, producer, and one of the lead actors in the film, which recently won two awards (Jury's Choice and the DEAL award for Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Inclusion) at the Thomas Edison Film Festival.

Chicken tells the story of a down-on-her-luck, recently single 30-something who reconnects with her brother, who has Down syndrome, after being forced to move back into her childhood home. Aaron Waddingham plays the role of the young adult brother, while several other actors with Down syndrome also feature prominently in the film.

Drawing on McNulty's previous experiences working with performers with Down syndrome through Vancouver's Newworld Theatre and their inclusive troupe the LEAD ensemble (Learning Ensemble Across Difference), McNulty and Pollard took a thoughtful, intentional approach to creating an inclusive set that played to the strengths of their diverse cast. The lessons they learned along the way are instructive for all employers, regardless of what type of business they're in.

The film industry is notorious for long, grueling days on set. Twelve-hour days are typical – but not ideal for actors with Down syndrome. Knowing this may be an issue, the directors addressed it up front.

"We spoke with Aaron and his folks about the length of the shooting day," says McNulty. "We determined that 12



hours was too long for him. And, really, 12 hours is too long for anybody! We should not be working ourselves to the bone like that. So, we respected Aaron's schedule."

That meant getting the rest of the production team on board, because this is not the way a professional crew is accustomed to operating. From the beginning, McNulty and Pollard clearly communicated with the crew about how things were going to run. While they would, of course, be as efficient and productive as possible, they would also be flexible and responsive to the needs of the actors.

This required everyone to adapt. At times, it meant not finishing all the scenes planned for a day. Other times, they found creative ways to get it done.

"Sometimes we would film Aaron's coverage (shots where the camera is on him), and then he would leave and we would turn around and film the same scene from the opposite perspective, focusing on his scene partner – usually, me," explains McNulty. "It was challenging from an acting perspective because I would need to finish the scene with somebody reading his lines. But that's just going with the flow and making it work."

The crew responded well. "It was a healthy environment for everyone working on that set," says Pollard. "We were open to hearing how everyone was feeling and being sensitive to the needs of the people on set. And that is just a good work environment for people to be in. It was counterintuitive at first, because it's the job of the crew members to get us through the day on time, and sometimes we were making them slow down. But the set was so positive, so happy. Aaron led the way with his energy, and it really seemed to radiate throughout the entire set."

McNulty agrees. "We really wanted it to be inclusive for everybody, not just for the actors with Down syndrome. We wanted it to be a safe, fun space. And everybody came together and had a really good time. A couple people said that they felt like they were at a party, not at work. There was just a lot of love."

Their flexible approach extended to what ultimately made it on screen. Improvisation was not only allowed but encouraged – and built-in to the script that McNulty wrote.

"As I wrote, I took into consideration into who would be playing these parts. We gave them the text as a guide and said, 'Learn it if you can, but we're also going to work with you.' We needed something on the page, of course, but it was written with the idea that there were going to be some changes on the day. We wanted people to bring themselves to the work and be able to improvise."



Creating an Inclusive Employee Experience

The inclusive practices demonstrated by the producers of *Chicken* are readily transferable to other employment settings. Here are 13 additional tips for creating inclusive experiences for all, compiled by Texthelp and Disability:IN.

1. Choose accessible platforms to advertise with. To make sure you choose vendors that are accessible, it can be helpful to have an accessible procurement process in place. Or if the application is online via your own website, consider adding assistive technology to the page. This could increase text size, provide visual alternatives to text and have the option for dual color highlighting.
2. Consider alternative interview approaches. For example, assigning a real-life task vs. a question and answer interview session. Where questions are asked, review how they are phrased. Remove complicated language and hypothetical questions.
3. Ask what you can do to improve the experience. Rather than asking for candidates to 'disclose' or 'declare' a disability, simply ask if there are any supports or adjustments they need to help make the process a more positive experience.
4. Showcase what you're doing to support neurodivergent employees. By sharing stories from your people, neurodivergent applicants will feel more comfortable to reveal their neurodivergent strengths. In recent research by Texthelp, 56% of neurodivergent employees revealed they opened up about their neurodivergence because their organization advertises as being an inclusive employer.

Which is not to say it was a free-for-all. The directors set clear expectations for all the cast and crew, and taught the actors what it means to be part of a real film production.

When some of the actors made it abundantly clear that they didn't enjoy repeating scenes over and over, McNulty and Pollard saw a teachable moment. "We were like, okay, well, film is all about repeating things until everybody gets it right. It can be very frustrating and very annoying, but it's part of the job."

"That kind of open communication really set us up for success, because when we actually got to filming, they were incredible," says McNulty.

What impressed the pair was the professionalism of the actors with Down syndrome, and their determination to get the job done right. As much as they tried to keep the days short, things inevitably went over time. Aaron and his castmates were ready to go the extra mile. "We kept checking in with him, and he was so game," recalls McNulty. "Honestly, he probably had the best attitude of anyone on set. We weren't sure what might happen when somebody reached their limit, and it was always the neurotypical people that were poorly behaved!"

That great attitude was also reflected in the actors' response to feedback. "When you're working with any actor, you want to be sensitive when giving notes because you might be stepping on

someone's decision about how they want to portray the character," explains McNulty.

"I would approach Aaron as sensitively as I could because I hadn't worked with him, and I didn't know how he was going to react," says Pollard. "And he responded so much better than most actors. He was always up for another take and another approach. He was like, let's go, let's roll. It was the most shocking, amazing attitude for an actor to take constructive suggestions like that."

The directors came up with some unique inspirational techniques. "Lucy and Emma are the directors, so you have to listen to them," says Aaron. "One time in the car scene, I had to have more rage, so Lucy and I listened to AC/DC's 'Thunderstruck' really loud to hype me up with anger."

Thinking back, McNulty reflects, "We had to unlearn some traditional film practices; things we all sort of just do with no questions asked. We challenged our crew to question how we traditionally do things, and to make room for something more inclusive. People might have worried that we wouldn't get to the finish line, but we did. We got our film, and we all had an amazing time doing it."



Months later, Pollard calls her time on *Chicken* "a truly fantastic, profound experience. Going in, I really didn't know what to expect. All of us who work in film know that people get exhausted and frustrated, and you've got to manage personalities. But it was just the most positive experience. It was amazing."

Asked what she would tell other employers about working with people with Down syndrome, she says, "I think society puts expectations on all of us, and certainly on people with disabilities. Unless you have a personal connection, you are probably underestimating someone with Down syndrome. That's just my guess."

"I think they will exceed your expectations. I don't think I went into this project underestimating them, but I was just blown away at the creativity, the professionalism, the amazing energy and happiness that was brought to set. Our actors made our project great. We're so proud of it."

Throughout 2023, Chicken will be screening at festivals around the world. After doing the festival circuit, there will be opportunities for local screenings. Follow @chickentheshortfilm on Instagram to find out when and where to see the film.



5. Ensure that the HR department is educated on neurodiversity and acting as an advocate for neurodiverse employees. Take advantage of the many resources available to support employers in attracting and supporting diverse talent.
6. Ask each employee what you can do to support them. Find out what tools and support they need to work more efficiently.
7. Offer inclusive technology software. Demonstrate inclusivity by giving all staff tools that allow them to choose how they work — without them having to ask.
8. Keep language simple in workplace communications. Use short, clear, succinct sentences. Clear communication and checking for understanding is important. This can be supported by using a mix of verbal, visual and written formats.
9. Allow flexibility with working hours and/or working virtually.
10. Consider varying needs when designing office space, or desk/workstation placement, such as creating spaces for quiet contemplation with fewer distractions.
11. Conduct neurodiversity awareness training with all employees. This can help to remove any preconceptions around neurodivergent individuals.
12. Amplify employee voices with Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). ERGs create a community space for neurodivergent staff to share their stories and experiences. They help employees to feel heard and secure in the workplace. They also empower neurodivergent employees to influence positive change.
13. Celebrate neurodiversity with storytelling. Share real experiences of neurodivergent people and celebrate their talents.

DSRF CORNER

Celebrate Artistic Achievement at the Down Syndrome Film Festival

DSRF will kick off our 2023 World Down Syndrome Day celebrations with a first-of-its-kind event in Vancouver: The Down Syndrome Film Festival.

The DSFF will be highlighted by the Burnaby premiere of the new National Film Board of Canada feature documentary *Lay Down Your Heart*, preceded by the short films *Raising Ava Rose* and *Minding My Own Business: Entrepreneurs with Down Syndrome*. The event will also include an audience Q&A with the stars and creators of all three films, as well as an exclusive sneak peek at the new short film, *Chicken*.

Lay Down Your Heart, directed by Marie Clements and written

by Niall McNeil and Marie Clements, is the winner of the Audience Award at the 2022 Vancouver International Film Festival. An accomplished artist, a lifelong performer and a person with Down syndrome, Niall McNeil has built a unique family tree of blood and chosen relations made up of his closest friends and collaborators. In *Lay Down Your Heart*, Niall introduces his “family members,” his multiple “children” (some twice his age!), his renowned “ex-wife” and director of the film Marie Clements, and more. Bonded together by shared creative passion and their relationships with Niall, his family includes some of Canada’s most outstanding theatrical and artistic talent. By exploring his unconventional family histories—sometimes factual, sometimes infused with fantasy, but always deeply felt—Niall’s limitless imagination drives him toward the heart of human connection.

Raising Ava Rose, a short film directed by Jordan Macken, centres around the experiences of a DSRF family. Raising a child with Down syndrome presents unique uncertainty for the Plourde family, but with Ava’s endearing spirit and increasing independence, they look hopefully toward the future.

Minding My Own Business: Entrepreneurs with Down Syndrome, produced by DSRF’s Glen Hoos and directed by Matthew Hoos, takes viewers inside three small businesses owned and operated by entrepreneurs with Down syndrome: The Granola Kid, Lovebirds by Anu, and Through Andrew’s Eyes.

The Down Syndrome Film Festival takes place on March 18, 2023 at the James Cowan Theatre in Burnaby, BC. Tickets are on sale now at [DSRF.org/FilmFest](https://www.dsrfofbc.org/FilmFest).



With Us Not For Us: World Down Syndrome Day 2023

On March 21, the worldwide Down syndrome community will join together to celebrate World Down Syndrome Day and proclaim the message, “With Us Not For Us.” It’s a call to all who work on behalf of people with Down syndrome to do so in partnership with them, empowering them to make decisions and supporting them in having their voices heard.

These are values we hold dear at DSRF, which we foster through our Ambassador program, our advocacy class Speaking Out, and in every aspect of our organization.

For World Down Syndrome Day, we invite all Canadians with Down syndrome to participate in a special collaborative video project that we’ll release on March 21st. We are also hosting a live, interactive virtual recording of The LowDOWN: A Down Syndrome Podcast, raising funds to support education for students with Down syndrome through our annual 3-2-1 Campaign, and rocking our stylish World Down Syndrome Day socks. Details on all these World Down Syndrome Day activities and more can be found at [DSRF.org/WDSO](https://www.dsrfofbc.org/WDSO).

FRIENDS OF DSRF

A huge thank you to our generous supporters who donated over \$56,000 in December to help children with Down syndrome thrive in school and Flourish for Life - our most successful year-end donations campaign ever!

Thank you to the sponsors of DSRF’s Magical Morning, our first in-person holiday breakfast since 2019: CTV, LiUNA Local 1611, Phillips, Hager & North, Woodhouse & Associates, GardenWorks, the BC Maritime Employers Association, Borden Ladner Gervais LLP, CIBC, and the Neil Squire Society. It was wonderful to celebrate the magic of the holiday season together.

Social Venture Partners Vancouver has renewed their support of DSRF’s Kinder Kick-off school readiness program with a grant of \$26,000. Kinder Kick-off helps children with Down syndrome ages 3-5 and their parents/caregivers prepare for the transition into kindergarten. Thank you SVP!

The City of Burnaby has invested \$12,000 in DSRF’s one to one reading and math programs for children with Down syndrome. DSRF is so grateful to be located in Burnaby, where we continue to work together to build a community that is truly inclusive of all people.

Thank you very much to long-time supporter the Hamber Foundation for granting \$2,000 in support of health services and educational programs for youth with Down syndrome.

UPCOMING AT DSRF

Down Syndrome Film Festival – March 18, 2023

World Down Syndrome Day – March 21, 2023

Run Up for Down Syndrome – June 4, 2023

FIND US / TAG US

@DSRFCanada on all our platforms



[DSRF.org](https://www.dsrfofbc.org)

Down Syndrome Resource Foundation presents...

THE 2023 DOWN SYNDROME FILM FESTIVAL

Celebrating World Down Syndrome Day

Featuring the Burnaby premiere of the new NFB feature documentary *Lay Down Your Heart*, preceded by the short films *Raising Ava Rose* and *Minding My Own Business: Entrepreneurs with Down Syndrome*.

March 18, 2023
1:30 pm

James Cowan Theatre
6450 Deer Lake Ave
Burnaby BC

[DSRF.org/FilmFest](https://www.dsrfofbc.org/FilmFest)

Down Syndrome
Resource Foundation



CDSS SPOTLIGHT

World Down Syndrome Day 2023

Last year, over 100,000 people viewed Love Means, a photo essay that confronted misconceptions about relationships, love, and people with Down syndrome. It took a community to showcase this project, and the response was nothing short of powerful.



In honour of World Down Syndrome Day 2023, we are very pleased to announce a second photo essay in our series produced by award-winning photographer Hilary Camilleri of One for the Wall. This second release in our series will focus on bringing further visibility to the aging members of our community and their lives.

People with Down syndrome are living longer than ever before. Programs and support are needed for future decades and we need to plan for that now. Aging caregivers, dementia housing, and financial support are just a few of the complex challenges aging Canadians with Down Syndrome face.

Join us on social media this World Down Syndrome Day, March 21st, and help us share their story and bring much-needed attention to these important members of our community.



Save The Date: Down Syndrome Walk Saturday June 17th 2023

Assemble your Team and mark your calendar, the annual Down Syndrome Walk is happening on Saturday, June 17th, 2023! Last year you helped us raise almost \$30,000 for Down syndrome awareness - let's see how big an impact we can make this year!

It's not too early to register - head to <https://cdss.ca/down-syndrome-walk/> to learn more about how you can participate. If you are interested in sponsorship opportunities, please contact Pamela at PamelaM@CDSS.ca.



Important 2023 Dates

World Down Syndrome Day
Tuesday March 21st

Down Syndrome Walk
Saturday, June 17th

Canadian Down Syndrome Week
October 22nd - 28th



You Made a Difference in 2022

- 12,900 people made a gift to CDSS
- 120 families and professionals learned unique literacy skills
- Over 400 people coast-to-coast supported the CDSS Walk for Awareness
- Over 100,000 people learned more about relationships and what "Love Means"
- 11,500 people learned and found support through digital resources
- Over 5.45 million people discovered Inemployable, a first-of-its-kind initiative to connect jobseekers with Down syndrome to employers on LinkedIn
- Over 28,000 people in the Down syndrome community and beyond connected through social media

Every Gift Makes a Difference. Thank You.

Join Our Board of Directors

We are seeking candidates for the CDSS Board of Directors. If you reside in Canada and you have a strong desire to use your skills and experience to help chart a better future for individuals with Down syndrome, we want to hear from you.

We encourage applications from all eligible candidates and will provide appropriate accommodation for individuals with disabilities or accessibility needs. Please visit [CDSS.ca/About/Board-of-Directors](https://cdss.ca/About/Board-of-Directors) to apply. All applications are due by March 21st, 2023.



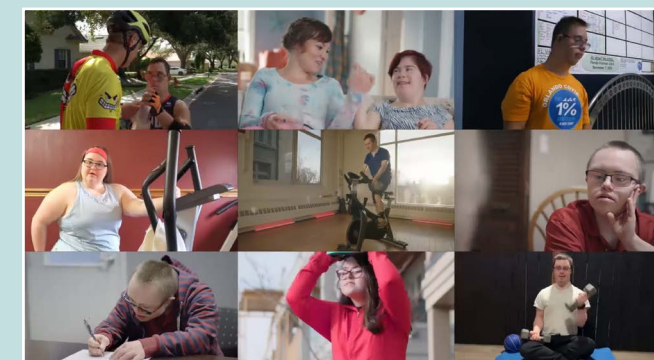
Canadian
Down Syndrome
Society

Société
canadienne de la
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SNEAK PEEK AT MINDSETS: THE RESULTS ARE IN!



Almost two years ago, we set out on a first-of-its-kind scientific research study with Dr. Dan Gordon of Anglia Ruskin University to examine the link between exercise and cognition in the lives of those with Down syndrome. We are pleased to say that we will be releasing the conclusive results of the Mindsets study next month! Stay tuned for this promising next step in health and wellness for the Down syndrome community.



JOIN OUR COMMUNITY

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CDSS.ca

RUN UP



For Down Syndrome

Presented by:



Supporting:



BC's BIGGEST
Annual Down
Syndrome Event!

June 4, 2023

Swangard Stadium
Burnaby, BC

DSRF.org/RunUp

Sponsored By:

