

Life  
After  
School



Employer Toolkit  
College



## **About Canadian Business SenseAbility**

Canadian Business SenseAbility is Canada's only national, bilingual business network dedicated to helping private and public sector organizations become more accessible and inclusive of people with disabilities. We provide the context around why it is important to your business, what you need to know, and how to develop and implement a plan that works best for you. We connect you to the resources, tools and expertise you need, making it easier for you to welcome people with disabilities as customers, employees and investors.

## **Why this program is important**

Life After School is a program created to meet the needs of employers who understand the value of of, and are seeking a pathway to hire, youth with a disability. Life After School is a customized job-matching platform and work-integrated learning opportunity where students demonstrate that they have the skills you need. This ensures that every candidate you interview has the ability to do the job. It's your very own talent pipeline for youth with a disability.

“

It always seems impossible, until it's done.”

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Nelson Mandela

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# Why work-integrated learning (WIL) works for students... and business

## Learn by doing

Work-integrated learning (WIL) has been called the “Future of Learning” for good reason. Learners apply their skills and knowledge in a workplace, accelerating learning while bridging the gap between theory and practice. It builds soft skill development like communication, analytical and problem-solving skills and offers practical experience in a chosen field.

We live in an era of unprecedented change and technological innovation. Lifelong learning and adrenalized adaptability are constants in this turbocharged environment. How then to prepare today’s students to be tomorrow’s employees, producers and citizens? You are looking for college students and graduates that have the skills needed to succeed in the workplace.

Work-integrated learning changes everyone’s perceptions and attitudes about what youth with disability are able to do. This is critical in building a diverse workforce, especially when working with groups that have not typically been included in the labour market, such as people with disabilities. Life After School is a unique online platform and work-integrated learning placement that delivers a diverse talent pipeline from school to your business while building your company’s ability to work with, and manage, diverse candidates.

## Employer benefits:

- Inexpensive channel to develop a diverse pipeline of future employees
- Low risk way to train and evaluate prospective employees (“a working interview”)
- Build current employees’ comfort and capacity to work with a diverse range of individuals
- Raise visibility as an inclusive employer and foster community relationships

## Work-integrated learning is not:

- Free labour
- Intended to replace existing employees
- More than 20% “busy work”

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90% of people with disabilities rated average or better on job performance.



# Who's involved?

Close to 1 in 5 Canadians have a disability. They are customers, employees, suppliers and investors and make up a population segment much too large to ignore. They are a great source of talent, but face barriers to employment. Life After School is designed to overcome these barriers.

## **Canadian Business SenseAbility™**

SenseAbility is Canada's only national, bilingual business network dedicated to helping private and public sector organizations become more accessible and inclusive of people with disabilities. SenseAbility advances business through disability inclusion.

## **The Life After School portal**

A customized job matching technology that matches students based on skills and abilities to inclusive employers. This is a striking departure from the 'résumé-first' and experience-based approaches used in recruiting. The portal incorporates job descriptions based on actual outputs, skills challenges, and visual career pathways (so that students can see their future with you).

## **Employers**

That's you. And you are critical to the success of this project. You have agreed to participate in this pilot, offering the next generation of workers the opportunity to gain skills and knowledge in an inclusive environment. Opportunities like these contribute to the future of Canada's economy.

## **Colleges and students**

The students participating in this pilot come from Durham, Humber and Seneca Colleges. In every case, the student has self-identified as having some kind of disability. It may be a visible or invisible disability. All students have completed their work-integrated learning preparation classes or instruction and have agreed to participate in the pilot. The students are prepared for their WIL placements and have a good understanding of what to expect.



# An overview

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## College WIL preparation

- Students develop skills necessary to pursue job placements
  - Students learn research, job search and interviewing skills
  - Students learn workplace expectations and WIL parameters
- 

## Employer

- Meet with SenseAbility to review the program
  - Identify WIL opportunities within your organization
  - Approve the skills needed for the WIL
- 

## Life After School

- Post WIL opportunities on the platform
  - Job postings look for skills matches, not experience
  - Students complete skill challenges to 'earn' an interview
  - Platform shows job seekers career paths within your organization
- 

## Training

- Employers and employees participate in disability training
  - Students complete company training
  - College staff support student onboarding and training as needed
- 

## Support

- Colleges offer on-the-job support to students as needed
  - SenseAbility offers employers support as needed
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## Work-integrated learning

- Cost effective and simple way to build disability confidence and develop a diverse talent pipeline
- Students acquire work skills and experience
- Employers build relationships within the community
- Pilot is evaluated by you

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20% of Canadians have a disability. That's Canada's largest minority group.



# Life After School

## A roadmap for employers

SenseAbility will work with all participating employers to support a successful WIL. The steps below represent the contribution of all the partners in the WIL process. At every stage you will receive the support and assistance of SenseAbility and/or college staff.

Here's how it works:

### STEP 1 / Preparation

Identify placement opportunities within your organization

- Align the WIL placements with the college program and coordinate timing

Book an appointment to review the WIL opportunity and get an introduction to the program with [Deirdre.Millin@senseability.ca](mailto:Deirdre.Millin@senseability.ca) or [Marlene.Etherington@senseability.ca](mailto:Marlene.Etherington@senseability.ca)

### STEP 2 / Working with the Life After School portal

Sign into the Life After School portal

Answer the job posting questions to identify competency-based requirements of the position

Approve the online job posting that matches your needs to the existing skill challenges

Students complete skill challenges to 'earn' an interview

Interview a maximum of five candidates

If you find a match, extend an offer and complete the college paperwork provided to you

### STEP 3 / Building a disability confident team

Identify the manager and employers that will be working with the WIL student (i.e., store number or department)

SenseAbility will provide a 1-hour training session on disability and the workplace (conducted on location or virtually)

- Learn about disabilities and the workplace
- What can I say? What should I not say?
- Providing accommodations
- How to manage diverse employees
- Who to contact for support

**STEP 4 / The work-integrated learning placement**

Field Placement Officer will complete or assist you to complete the necessary paperwork associated with the pilot

Onboard and train the student

- Review the WIL goals with the Field Placement Officer and student
- Provide any training needed for the job – the Field Placement Officer is there to assist

Provide any accommodations to the student

Supervise the student and review his/her progress

Contact SenseAbility for support; contact the Field Placement Officer for student support

Evaluate the following:

- the student's performance
- the Life After School WIL pilot

## What you need to know

The Life After School program is a new experience for many employers, as well as the students you hire. It's reasonable to expect there will be a learning curve as everyone becomes comfortable with the process.

**You will be participating in:**

- A new program
- New ways of thinking
- A new job-matching technology
- New hires

Not surprisingly, issues may arise.

SenseAbility is your partner in this process. Our team is available to help you address and resolve any issues you may encounter.

Here are some frequently asked questions:

**Am I allowed to ask a person what their disability is?**

By law, you cannot ask this. You can, however, ask the applicant if they have any accommodation needs. Students will be coached on how to ask for whatever accommodations they require. Schools are well versed in how to support students to achieve their goals.

**I'm not sure what accommodations they need. What if I can't provide what they ask for?**

Students understand the importance of asking for what they need. If necessary the student's college or SenseAbility may be able to offer suggestions. In many cases

accommodations are simple, like frequent but shorter breaks or calendars to remind the student of tasks to be completed.

Only offer a position if a candidate has the knowledge and ability to do the job.

**I'm very worried about what language I should or should not use regarding disabilities. I'd rather avoid the topic altogether. Do you have advice?**

If you don't know the right words, ask the person or SenseAbility. We'll help you get it right. As a rule of thumb, it is best practice to use "people first" language. A person with a disability... a person with autism... a person with cerebral palsy. Avoid negative language such as handicapped, limitations or euphemisms such as special needs.

**Are there any special considerations at the interview stage?**

You may have to provide an accommodation for the interview. Ask the student what they need when scheduling the interview.

Life After School will be screening candidates for you based on the demonstrated skills the students have. They will be encouraged to bring a formal résumé to the interview. The completed skills challenges demonstrate that the student has the primary skills to do the job required. We encourage you to focus on the skills challenges, not on the quality of the résumé. Think outside the box.

We encourage you to review the inclusive interview tips on how to structure an interview to reduce unconscious bias and target skills and abilities (not experience or education).

Be aware that some candidates rely on accessible transportation that requires 24 hours to book. As a result, they need to know how long the interview will be to arrange return transportation.

**How do I tell someone who has a disability that they are not doing well?**

Just like you would a person without a disability. It helps to begin by saying one thing the student is doing well, then sharing what could be better. End again, by emphasizing a positive. Make sure your directions for future actions are clear and concrete.

**My team has expressed concerns that we are hiring someone who can't do the job or is just going to be a lot of extra work. How do I deal with this?**

Reassure your staff that the candidates you see have already demonstrated, via Life After School, that they have the necessary skills for the job. Like any new hire, it will take the student time to learn the role. If necessary, the college (or SenseAbility) can provide support.

**There are so many disabilities. I am not an expert. How can I know if I am acting in an appropriate manner?**

Use common sense and always ask the person for advice if you are unsure. They are experts on themselves and their disability. Don't make assumptions – let the person decide what they can do. Always ask "how can I help?" before you act.

Don't touch people's assistive devices or aides such as canes, wheelchairs, and service animals without asking first. These items are considered an extension of the person themselves. Speak directly to the person with a disability, not any companions or aides. Contact SenseAbility – we are here to help.

If you have additional questions, SenseAbility is on call to help you. Contact us at [Marlene.Etherington@senseability.ca](mailto:Marlene.Etherington@senseability.ca) or [Deirdre.Millin@senseability.ca](mailto:Deirdre.Millin@senseability.ca)

# Accommodation requests

Some of the students hired through the Life After School program will likely require on-the-job accommodations. For many of them, this may be their first job, so it's not surprising that they may not know in advance exactly what they will require to be the most effective employee. To some extent, identifying necessary accommodations will be a collaborative and evolving exercise between employer and employee – one that requires communication and flexibility from both parties.

It's important to be aware that in most cases, employers will not have to significantly modify the work space. At its most fundamental, an accommodation simply addresses a mismatch between an employee's abilities, societal attitudes, and the work environment.

People with disabilities work more safely and stay on the job longer than people without disabilities.



## Common accommodations for employees with disabilities are:

- Modified tasks
- Flexible scheduling
- Clear instructions
- Task lists or checklists
- Shorter, more frequent breaks
- Assistance with training
- Assistive technologies
- Ergonomic equipment

## Your partners in the accommodation process:

### Field placement officer or college WIL coordinator

- Job coaching (if needed)
- Identifying student strengths
- Accommodation suggestions/options
- When challenges arise

### SenseAbility

- Disability confidence training for frontline staff
- Accommodation guidance
- Workplace inclusion strategies

“Adjustments happen every day in the workplace. It's called good people management.”

.....  
Lisa Kelly, SenseAbility

# How to conduct an inclusive interview

The main purpose of your recruitment process is to find out whether an applicant has the skills to perform the essential requirements of the job.

Most employers would agree that the interview is an imperfect screening tool at best. For many people interviews are not the best way to demonstrate their skills. Here are simple guidelines you can adopt to conduct more inclusive interviews that don't eliminate qualified candidates.

## Before the Interview

- Ask all applicants, not just those who disclose they have disability, whether they require any adjustments or assistance to participate in the interview
- Schedule interviews in accessible locations: accessible parking/ restrooms, step-free entrance, well-lit offices, fragrance-free, etc.
- Provide an estimated time of duration of the interview so that applicants who have specific transportation needs can make necessary arrangements
- Make sure any paper work to be completed is available in alternative, accessible formats
- Be prepared that the interview process may require additional time and flexibility

## During the Interview

- Focus on the person you are interviewing, not the disability
- Don't make assumptions – be aware that many disabilities are invisible
- Ask competency-based questions related to the requirements of the position, rather than general past job experiences
- Be willing to consider alternative ways essential job functions may be performed or marginal functions can be reassigned



# Rethinking how to evaluate candidates and their résumés

## **A new experience for students... and employers**

The Life After School portal initiates a process that is different than the 'résumé-first' experience-based recruitment approaches currently in use. The emphasis during the job matching segment is on skills, competencies and outputs. Life After School is a new sort of experience for students... and will also likely be a new experience for many employers. However, it is an experience that will be extremely valuable for all the parties involved.

## **Not your average candidate**

The candidates you invite for interviews may be different than previous candidates you have evaluated. They may have physical disabilities that affect mobility, communication, or appearance. They may be neuro-diverse or have intellectual or developmental disabilities that may require you to provide extra clarification, respond to more questions, or allow for additional time. As discussed on the previous page, you may have to adjust your expectations of how candidates present themselves, their reactions, the way you communicate with each other, and the way their skills can be applied to the job.

## **A different-looking résumé**

In this process, a student's résumé is first presented to the employer during the interview. It is important to understand that the résumé of a student with disabilities will likely look different than the average résumé an employer sees. As outlined, some students with disability face unique challenges in the job market, and for

many of them, WIL may be their first work experience. So they may not have had any previous jobs to describe and detail. This lack of work experience perpetuates the barriers they face, and Life After School has been designed to address this very obstacle. We ask that you look beyond the résumé as a measure of competence and experience.

## **Simple fixes are easy to make**

When assessing candidates, do your best to differentiate between fundamental incompatibilities, and issues that are easy to fix. For example, a candidate who has the skills to do the job but has little interest in your organization may not be the best hire. On the other hand, a candidate who is not dressed professionally likely doesn't have enough professional experience to know how to dress. This is a simple fix, easily solved by discussing the company dress code.

To take advantage of the talent pool that people with disabilities represent, and to open up your organization to greater diversity, we ask you to be open to rethinking the way you have done things in the past: from the way an interview is typically conducted, to the way you interact with a candidate, to the unconscious impressions you automatically form. You are offering an important opportunity to students with disabilities... and we believe the opportunities for your organization are just as significant.

# Onboarding success

The onboarding of Life After School students should be similar to that of any other new employee. In fact, providing a different pathway could undermine efforts to provide a respectful welcome.

- Have high expectations for success
- Work with the Field Placement Officer or College WIL Coordinator to develop and review goals and timelines
- Be creative and flexible in approaching accommodations for the individual
- Ask SenseAbility, the Field Placement Officer or College WIL Coordinator for resources and information related to a disability
- Establish a regular time to provide feedback to the student

**The three most important elements to a successful onboarding are:**

1. Staff members have completed SenseAbility's Rethinking Disability training

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2. Accommodations are in place on the first day of work

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3. An onboarding plan is available with company training and paperwork ready to be completed

# The role of parents

Consider the phenomenon of helicopter parenting... then think about how much harder it is to let go when you have a child with disabilities.

The parents of the Life After School students are by necessity involved, devoted, committed and passionate. They have been life-long advocates for their children who are now young adults. It may be difficult for parents to see their children start to make their own decisions.

The Life After School pilot may be the first completely independent step that many of these students embark on. It is as much a learning experience for parents as it is for the students.

We expect the Life After School Program to demonstrate to the parents of participating students that their children have become young adults who have the knowledge and skills as well as persistence, self-discipline and resilience to be successful employees.

# Work-integrated learning responsibilities

## **Employer provides:**

- Work-integrated learning opportunities with proper supervision and guidance
- A safe workplace and training to students
- An orientation of the office, and introductions to staff members for the student
- Required accommodations
- Guidance, direction, and constructive feedback for the student
- Evaluations of the student's performance and of the overall program

## **Student will:**

- Follow employer rules and regulations
- Ask for needed accommodations
- Perform duties and tasks as per the job description
- Ask the identified supervisor questions or for clarification on issues that arise during the course of work

## **SenseAbility will:**

- Prepare employers to participate in Life After School pilot and WIL program
- Provide training in disability-related areas
- Provide information/strategies regarding workplace accommodations
- Support employer regarding ongoing issues

## Questions?

Giving students with a disability the opportunity of a WIL experience is something we are all committed to. The success of the pilot depends on everyone reaching out with their questions or concerns when they arise. If you have any questions that we have not addressed, please feel free to contact us directly.

**Contact** [Marlene.Etherington@senseability.ca](mailto:Marlene.Etherington@senseability.ca) or [Deirdre.Millin@senseability.ca](mailto:Deirdre.Millin@senseability.ca)

# Thank you to our Advisory Committee

Life After School is a pilot program created through the collaboration of Canadian Business SenseAbility, its college and employer partners and is funded through the Career Ready Fund Stream 2 of the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, Government of Ontario.

Life After School would like to thank the following professionals for participating in the College Advisory Committee:

**Kristi Barnes**

Human Resources Director of  
Performance Culture,  
Maple Lodge Farms

**Sheila Bruce**

Work-Integrated Learning Coordinator,  
Seneca College

**Elizabeth Campbell**

Placement Officer (BITM),  
Durham College

**Loretta Chang**

Work Placement Advisor,  
School of Media Studies & Information  
Technology, Humber College

**Antoniette DiMacro**

Manager, The Placement Centre,  
The Business School, Humber College

**Joy Dimayuga**

Human Resources Administrator,  
Recruitment, Maple Lodge Farms

**Chantal Dugas**

General Manager, Linguistic Affairs &  
Diversity, Air Canada

**Elaine Fenner**

Manager, Work-Integrated Learning,  
Seneca College

**Tristan Matheson**

Diversity & Development Specialist,  
Air Canada

**Amanda McNulty**

Senior Human Resources Advisor -  
Recruitment, Telus

**Evelyn Papoutsakis**

Human Resources Director,  
Norton Rose Fulbright

**Liz Reynolds**

Senior Advisor, People & Culture  
Diversity & Inclusion, Telus

**Normand St. Gelais**

Director of Diversity & Inclusion  
for Canada, Sodexo

**Shari Walsh**

Manager, Transition & Leadership  
Programs, Student Success &  
Engagement, Humber College

**Produced and distributed by:** Canadian Business SenseAbility  
**Director of Learning Programs:** Lisa Kelly  
**Program Coordinator:** Deirdre Millin  
**Writer:** Margaret Godec  
**Design:** Touchwood Design Inc.

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Canadian Business **SenseAbility**  
P.O. Box 61518, Richmond Hill, Ontario L4C 0C9  
info@senseability.ca | [senseability.ca](http://senseability.ca)