

Life
After
School

Canadian
Business
SenseAbility

Employer Toolkit
High School



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 and are seeking a pathway to hire youth with a disability. Life After School is a job-matching technology and experiential learning pilot 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.

“

Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.”

Thomas A. Edison

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Why experiential learning (EL) works for students... and business

What is experiential learning?

Experiential learning (EL) has been called the “Future of Learning” for good reason. Learners apply their current 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. In short, students apply their knowledge and skills learned in the classroom to a work environment.

For business this is great news. As an employer, you are looking for high school students and graduates who have the skills needed to succeed in the workplace. Employers report that when working with youth who have a disability, staff engagement levels are higher, resulting in a win/win for everyone.

Experiential learning changes perceptions and attitudes of all those involved. This is critical in building a diverse workforce. Life After School is a unique online platform 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”)
- Builds current employees' comfort and capacity in working with a diverse range of individuals
- Raises visibility as an inclusive employer and foster community relationships

Experiential Learning is not:

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

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



Who's involved in the Life After School pilot?

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

Who's involved?

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.

Abilities Centre

The Abilities Centre is an internationally renowned, innovative community hub where people of all ages and abilities enrich their lives by engaging in social, health and cultural programs.

The Life After School portal

A customized job matching technology that will match students based on skills and abilities to inclusive employers. This is a striking departure from the 'résumé-first' approach used in recruiting. The portal incorporates job descriptions based on actual outputs, skills challenges (also called badges), 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 needed to contribute to the future of Canada's economy.

High schools and students

The high schools and students participating in this pilot come from: Durham, London, Ottawa and Toronto. In every case, the student has self-identified as having a disability. It may be a visible or invisible disability. Working through Special Education high school classes, and with the full participation of their families, students have agreed to participate in the pilot. They are prepared for their EL placements and have a good understanding of what to expect. Skills training has taken place in the classroom, led by qualified specialists, prior to working with you. Students can come from any grade of high school and are not necessarily in their final year of grade 12.

Life After School's components

Therapeutic Recreation (TR)

- TR and High School staff deliver training to students
 - Students learn skills through cross-disciplinary approach
 - Students build self-confidence and resilience
-

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

Employer

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



Life After School

- Post EL opportunities on the platform
 - Job postings identify skills matches, not experience
 - Students complete skills badges to 'earn' an interview
 - Platform shows job seekers career paths within your organization
-

Training

- Employers and employees participate in disability training
 - TR and/or High School staff support student onboarding and training
-

Support

- TR specialists and/or High Schools offer on-the-job support to students as needed
 - SenseAbility offers employers support as needed
-

Experiential Learning (EL)

- Build disability confidence and develop a diverse talent pipeline
- Students acquire work skills and experience during 3-5 hours a week over 6 weeks
- Employers build relationships within the community
- Pilot is evaluated by you

A roadmap for employers

SenseAbility will work with all participating employers to ensure a successful EL. The steps below look more extensive than they truly are. You will have the assistance of TR or High School staff to assist you with the components.

Here's how it works:

STEP 1 / Preparation

Identify placement opportunities within your organization

- Ongoing work you would like to expand
- Projects you would like to initiate or complete

Book an appointment with Deirdre.Millin@senseability.ca or Marlene.Etherington@senseability.ca to review the EL opportunity and get an introduction to the program

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

Write a job posting (we can help you with that!)

Students complete skills badges to 'earn' an interview

SenseAbility will pre-screen all applicants

Interview a maximum of five candidates

If you find a match, extend an offer for an EL experience and complete the high school paperwork provided to you

STEP 3 / Building a disability confident team

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

SenseAbility will provide a 1-hour training session on disability, workplace etiquette and disability in the workplace

- 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 Life After School placement

TR staff, Educational Assistant or High School (HS) Coordinator will complete or assist you to complete the necessary paperwork

Onboard and train the student

- Review the EL goals with the TR specialist, the student and the High School coordinator
- Provide any training needed for the job—the TR and High School coordinators are there to assist

Provide accommodations if needed

Supervise the student and review his/her progress

Contact SenseAbility for support; contact the TR and High School coordinators for student support

With the templates SenseAbility will provide, evaluate the following:

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

What you need to know

The Life After School program may be a new experience for you, 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
- New 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 any 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 Therapeutic Recreation specialist, or High School is able to offer suggestions.

In many cases accommodations are simple, like frequent but shorter breaks or checklists to remind the student of tasks to be completed. Only offer a position to qualified candidates that can do the job.

I'm very worried about what language I should use regarding disabilities. I'd rather avoid this altogether. Do you have advice?

If you don't know the right words, ask the person, SenseAbility or the TR specialist. 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?

Yes. You may have to provide an accommodation for the interview. Ask SenseAbility or the TR specialist for assistance.

Life After School will be screening candidates for you based on the demonstrated skills the students have, so there is no need for a formal résumé. You will know that the student has the skills to do the job required, because you identified the skills needed for the role when the job posting was created.

We encourage you to review our 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. Be clear and concrete.

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

Reassure your staff that the candidates 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 student's TR specialist can provide extra 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.

If you have additional questions, contact Marlene.Etherington@senseability.ca or Deirdre.Millin@senseability.ca

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 to help you conduct better interviews.

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, fragrance-free, etc.
- Provide an estimated interview end time, so that applicants who have specific transportation needs can make necessary arrangements
- Make sure that any paper work that needs to be completed is available in alternative, accessible formats
- Be prepared that the interview process may require additional time and patience

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 how marginal functions can be reassigned

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 will be their first job, so it's not surprising that some 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.

57% of employers spend nothing on workplace accommodations. The average one-time cost for an accommodation is \$500 or less.



Common accommodations for employees with disabilities are:

- modified tasks
- flexible scheduling
- clear instructions
- task lists or checklists
- shorter, more frequent breaks
- assistance with training (longer training period will be guided by TR specialist)
- assistive technologies
- ergonomic equipment

Your partners in the accommodation process:

TR specialist and High School Special Education Officer

- job coaching
- identifying student strengths
- accommodation suggestions/options
- when challenges arise

SenseAbility

- disability confidence training for frontline staff
- accommodation guidance
- workplace inclusion strategies

Onboarding success

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

- Have high expectations for success
- Work with the TR Specialist and the High Schools to develop communication strategies, identify accommodations and review goals and timelines
- Be creative and flexible in approaching accommodations
- Ask SenseAbility, the TR Specialist and the High School 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:

- Staff members have completed SenseAbility's Rethinking Disability training
- Accommodations are in place on the first day of work
- An onboarding plan is available with company training and paperwork ready to be completed



Parental input

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 adolescents, and soon-to-be 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 the potential to grow into adults who have learned persistence, self-discipline and resilience. We thank you for being partners in this endeavor, and hope that you will respond to any "helicoptering" with patience and good humour. SenseAbility, the TR Specialist and the High School can assist with parent interactions.

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



“

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

.....
Lisa Kelly, SenseAbility

Experiential learning responsibilities

Employer will provide:

- Experiential learning opportunities with proper supervision and guidance
- A safe workplace and training to students on relevant equipment
- An orientation of the work space, and introductions to staff members for the student
- Suitable accommodations
- Guidance, direction, and constructive feedback for the student
- Evaluations of the student's performance and of the overall program

Students will:

- Follow the employer's rules and regulations
- 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

TR specialists will:

- Liaise with the employer regarding the program
- Provide information regarding student hires/strengths/ accommodations
- Support employer on ongoing issues
- Provide job coaching and on-the-job support (if needed) for the student

SenseAbility will:

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

Questions?

Giving students with a disability the opportunity of an EL experience is something we are all committed to. The success of the pilot depends on everyone reaching out with questions or when concerns arise. Please feel free to reach out to us directly.

Contact Deirdre Millin, Program Coordinator
Deirdre.Millin@senseability.ca

Thank you to our Advisory Committee

Life After School is a pilot program created through the collaboration of the Abilities Centre and Canadian Business SenseAbility and is funded through the Skills Catalyst Fund of the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, Government of Ontario.

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Life After School is a pilot program created through the collaboration of:



Funded in part by:



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