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Increasing employment through inclusive workplaces

Interim report

JULY 2022



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For more information on SRDC, contact

Social Research and Demonstration Corporation
55 Murray Street, Suite 400
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 5M3
613-237-4311 | 1-866-896-7732
info@srdc.org | www.srdc.org

Vancouver Office
890 West Pender Street, Suite 440
Vancouver, British Columbia V6C 1J9
604-601-4070

Remote offices:
Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick,
Nova Scotia, Ontario, Quebec, and Saskatchewan
1-866-896-7732

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INTRODUCTION

BC Partners in Workforce Innovation (BC WiN) is a pilot project that is testing an employer-focused recruitment model to support BC-based employers seeking to diversify their workplace and meet their workforce needs. An initial pilot was launched in 2013 by the Employment Action Committee – a group of disability-serving agencies in the Lower Mainland of BC working together to coordinate their employer engagement activities. The pilot was conceived as a three-year research initiative aimed to create a more coordinated and employer-focused approach to meeting the workforce needs of key sectors in BC facing labour shortages at that time. Based on its successful outcomes involving a small group of Lower Mainland employer partners in its first phase of operations, the model has continued to grow and adapt to a changing labour market, as well as respond to the increasing demand among employers who are looking for support in achieving their diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) objectives.

The BC WiN model is unique in that it is centred around an Inclusive Workforce Consultant (IWC) team of experienced HR professionals whose primary client is the employer partner. When an employer partners with BC WiN, the IWC team works closely with the employer to ensure that they are well-positioned to recruit and onboard candidates with disabilities. When the employer partner has an available job opening, the IWC team recruits on the employer's behalf, sourcing qualified candidates through BC WiN's network of service agency partners that are located throughout the province. The IWC team pre-screens candidates to ensure that they are qualified, committed, and prepared for the position prior to referring them to the employer's recruitment process.

The team is well-positioned to support the entire hiring process to ensure a successful outcome for both the employer and the candidate, including the identification of additional supports or adjustments that may be required as part of the recruitment or onboarding process. These supports can include assistive technology, consultation, training, or workplace adjustments that are sourced through the project's service partner network. Through this intermediary role focused on the employer's DEI priorities and workforce needs, the BC WiN model represents a collaborative approach involving employers, service agencies, researchers, and human resources professionals to support more inclusive recruitment and retention practices on the part of employers to generate career-oriented employment opportunities for job seekers with disabilities in BC.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The current project, *Increasing Employment Through Inclusive Workplaces*, is funded in part by the Government of Canada's Opportunities Fund Program to build on the efforts of the initial pilot by providing employer partners with enhanced supports to develop and implement comprehensive DEI strategies, transform their recruitment and workplace practices, and engage in the process of developing talent pipelines that facilitate the recruitment and integration of job seekers with disabilities. The objective of this approximately three-year project is to work with 15 (or more) employer partners primarily located in the Greater Vancouver region, while exploring opportunities to expand to other regions in BC. The project also aims to increase the proportion of small and medium-size enterprise (SME) representation.¹ As this iteration of the BC WiN model explores and tests a more comprehensive suite of supports and services with project partners, the project will also examine how such an initiative can be sustained and expanded as more employers and other stakeholders realize the benefits of the approach.

The primary objective of the project is to work with committed employer partners to develop their capacity for hiring and retaining people with disabilities to facilitate the recruitment for 175 work placements that lead to permanent employment within their organizations. These positions will be targeted throughout the organizations, offering a range of opportunities involving a range of skill sets and experience, with a target of 125 participants employed with the same employer, six months from recruitment.²

Impact of COVID-19

The global COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on employers globally and in British Columbia, resulting in a disruption of many aspects of the project as employers put their recruitment activities on hold during various waves of the pandemic and changed business practices in accordance with public health restrictions and guidelines. The pandemic has also intensified and added new barriers experienced by people with disabilities, who are often in a more vulnerable position with respect to their physical and/or mental health, and more likely to experience less overall job quality, including lower access to benefits, job flexibility, and more likely to be precariously and/or under-employed.

¹ Small and medium enterprises are defined in the Opportunities Fund employer indicators reporting as between 1-499 employees.

² Due to the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the original timelines and targets of this project were amended. The revised timelines and targets are to serve at least 225 job seekers with disabilities by March 2023 that will result in the successful job matching of a minimum of 175 BC WiN participants, with the goal of 125 participants remaining employed with the employer partner after six months.

After the BC economy was placed in shutdown by the provincial health authority in March 2020, service providers were reporting to the IWC team that they were observing high levels of disengagement from the labour market among their clients with disabilities. As employers began to start rehiring for specific opportunities into the spring and summer of 2020, the team faced the challenge of sourcing available talent to fill these positions. More specifically, the team was concerned that it did not have the information it needed to effectively engage and support people with disabilities during the recruitment process to address the new and augmented barriers they were experiencing due to the pandemic, such as increased risk of health complications due to COVID-19 exposure.

Through a targeted scan of available data sources, the SRDC evaluation team concluded that there was a lack real-time information on the situation facing people with disabilities in terms of their ability or willingness to engage in employment during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the BC WiN team created a survey that would be targeted at service providers and social enterprises in BC to learn more about their experiences working with clients or employees with disabilities during the early waves of the COVID-19 pandemic to assess its impact on job seekers with disabilities' ability and readiness to engage in employment. Since the team was not able to engage job seekers directly, the purpose of this survey was to gather and share timely information and insights from front-line staff to understand the particular employment-related challenges that the job seekers may be experiencing as a result of the pandemic. Survey findings presented in our March 2021 Interim Report (and summarized in Appendix A) demonstrated that most service providers indicated that their clients with disabilities were disengaging from the labour market and not wanting to accept or return to available employment opportunities and/or not seeking employment.

The combined impacts of the significant decline of available candidates through BC WiN's service network, as well as the rapidly changing workforce needs of employer partners throughout subsequent pandemic waves not only impacted overall project outcomes with respect to job matching targets but has necessitated changes in a range of project activities, including evaluation. As we describe throughout this report, the project team adapted and adjusted planned activities with employers, expanded recruitment and outreach activities to reach job seekers beyond its service network, and modified activities to meet evaluation goals while being responsive to arising information needs.

EVALUATION APPROACH

SRDC and its partners continue to conduct a process and outcomes evaluation of the BC WiN model, as project activities are ongoing to March 31, 2023. The project's interim report in March 2021 presented results of a formative evaluation that provided a comprehensive understanding of the implementation successes and challenges of the BC WiN project, including the impact of COVID-19 on people with disabilities, as well as results of SRDC's survey with service providers and social enterprises working with clients or employees with disabilities. Throughout the planning, launch, and operationalization of BC WiN activities, the SRDC team has also served as developmental evaluators, which allows for real-time research and evaluation activities and feedback and is well-suited to innovation contexts characterized by a high degree of complexity, change, and need for continuous adaptation (Patton, 2016).

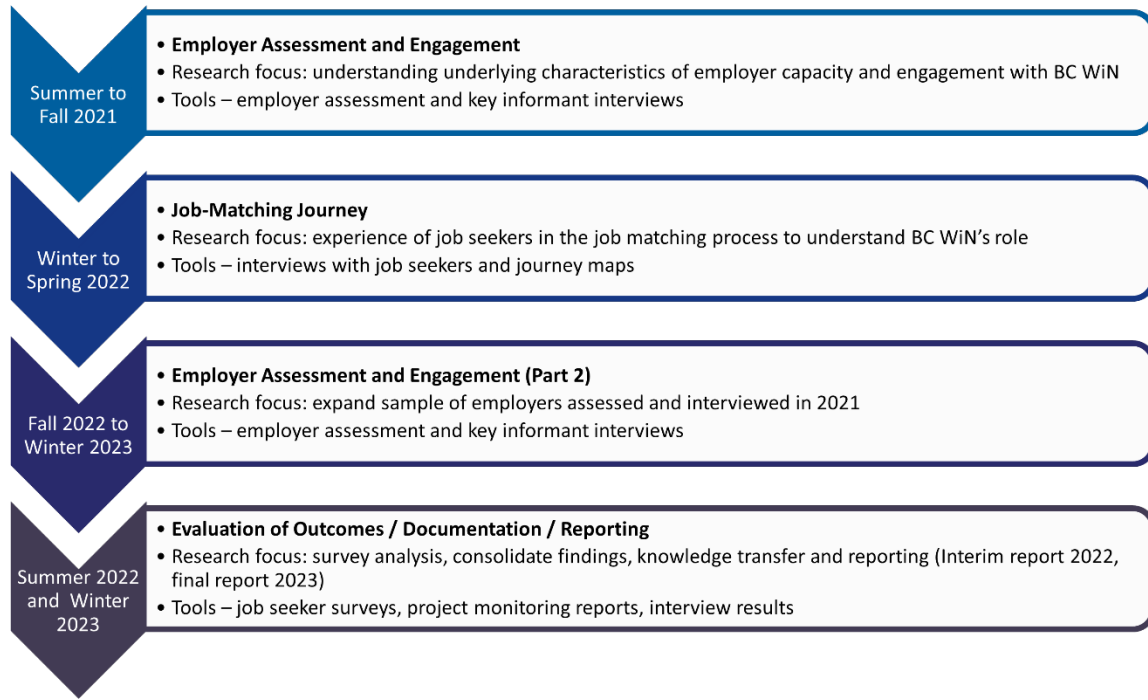
Evaluation overview

The outcomes evaluation, which is the focus of this report, captures the interim results of the BC WiN model to June 30, 2022, in terms of its ability to address two key research questions:

- How does this integrated demand-led approach support employer partners in developing and implementing inclusive recruitment and retention strategies?
- What is the effectiveness of providing job-matching services through a specialized team of Inclusive Workplace Consultants in terms of meeting employer workforce needs and connecting job seekers with disabilities to sustainable and rewarding career opportunities?

The overview of evaluation activities presented in Figure 1 outlines the key phases of the evaluation undertaken between April 2021 and June 2022 and those planned for the final phases of the project.

Figure 1 Evaluation phases



Theory of Change

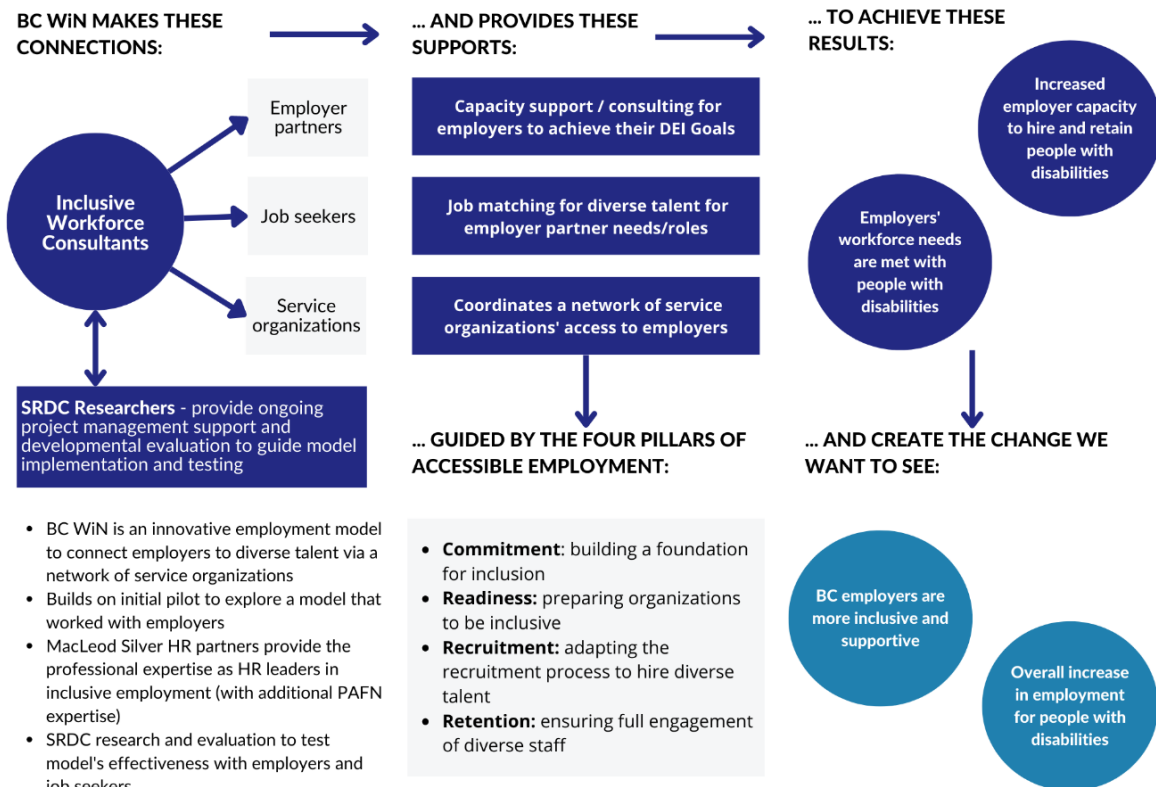
The purpose of the evaluation is to gather evidence and insights into how BC WiN achieves its objectives and contributes to positive outcomes for employers and for job seekers with disabilities. The program theory of change in Figure 2 outlines “how” and “why” the BC WiN model works, outlining key inputs, activities, and assumptions about achieving the project outcomes, while linking to overall context of the initiative.

A key condition of creating change in the BC WiN model is that the IWC team partners with employers that have already made a strong commitment to becoming inclusive and accessible, where they have the intention to work with BC WiN to build their capacity internally so that their recruitment and retention of people with disabilities is successful. As well, by working at the intersection between employers and service organizations, the BC WiN model focuses on employer organizational and workforce needs, working with job seekers to find an appropriate fit in the job matching process for available roles from the employer. In this model, it is assumed that the service organizations that job seekers are already connected with provides them with the necessary pre-employment and employment supports, works with them to secure accommodations, and provides any other ongoing supports that they might need on the job (e.g., job coach, wrap around supports, etc.).

Figure 2 BC WiN Theory of Change

CONTEXT FOR CHANGE:

A demand-led model is needed to have more coordinated access to a large, diverse talent pool of people with disabilities



- BC WiN is an innovative employment model to connect employers to diverse talent via a network of service organizations
- Builds on initial pilot to explore a model that worked with employers
- MacLeod Silver HR partners provide the professional expertise as HR leaders in inclusive employment (with additional PAFN expertise)
- SRDC research and evaluation to test model's effectiveness with employers and job seekers

Assumptions:

- BC WiN works with employers that already evidence commitment to advancing their DEI capacity and hiring people with disabilities
- A large and untapped pool of talent can be accessed through a network of BC service organizations that provide employment supports for people with disabilities
- Employers must commit the resources required to advance DEI goals and create necessary conditions for inclusive employment, while BC WiN provides supports and recruitment services

Methods

The evaluation uses a mixed methods design that combines both quantitative and qualitative data to address the evaluation questions, with a combined analysis and description of the results. Data (descriptive and comparative) was collected from multiple sources, which include the following:

- **Administrative data:** The project uses human resources data collected by the IWC team to track employer progress and results, as well as participant outcomes. The system tracks

workplace experiences offered by employers, number of candidate referrals to available opportunities, what services and/or accommodations were required to place the individual, length of the placement, and longer-term employment outcomes within the organization. It also documents any further interventions on the part of the IWC team to support the employee and/or employer post-placement, including usage of project participant supports.

- **Surveys:** The evaluation team designed surveys for job seeker participants to track their participation and longer-term employment outcomes. In their first meeting with a member of the IWC team, job seekers were asked to complete an informed consent to participate in the research project as well as an intake survey. The initial survey captures participants' demographic information, education and skills, labour market history and expectations for employment. Participants were asked to complete a follow up survey six months later, and again at 12 months. Follow-up surveys track participants' labour market outcomes and capture their satisfaction with the recruitment and job matching process as well its impact on their longer-term employment prospects and careers.
- **Job seeker interviews (Journey Maps):** The evaluation team conducted interviews with job seekers to better understand their experiences with the project, as well as their satisfaction with their new employment and impact it has had on their personal circumstances and career trajectories. Evaluators worked with the IWC team to determine the most appropriate format for capturing participants' experiences, and it was determined that individual interviews were most suitable, and appropriate accommodations were made. The team invited participants from various employment backgrounds who had found employment with a variety of employers to ensure the evaluation captures a wide range of experiences. The interview protocol was designed with a Journey Map in mind. That is, the questions were developed with the view to better understand job seekers' journey from their initial contact with BC WiN to their current employment, and all the touchpoints with BC WiN along the way. The responses from each interview were then used to plot out this experience into a Journey Map—a descriptive representation of the process each job seeker experienced.
- **Employer partner assessment and interviews:** The project team conducted assessments with the IWC team to establish how employers' DEI capacity changed as a result of their involvement in the project. The evaluators worked with the IWC team to design and deliver standardized assessments for employer partners to capture their commitment to inclusive hiring practices, the extent to which people with disabilities are included within their recruitment and retention strategies, and the extent to which their organizations engage in inclusive training and supports for both management and employees. The assessments were structured according to the project model's established four pillars of diversity, equity, and inclusion (Commitment, Readiness, Recruitment and Retention) to determine the employers' current needs for training and supports as well as their readiness to begin recruitment through the project.

The team aimed to complete assessments with all employers, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its resulting labour market challenges, not all employers had the capacity to participate, thus only a selection of engaged employers was assessed. To supplement the employer assessments, the evaluation team also interviewed employers to gain better insight into how the BC WiN approach supported their inclusive recruitment and retention strategies, and how effective this specialized job matching service was from the employer perspective. Initial interviews were conducted in late summer of 2021 and a second round of interviews is planned to capture additional employer experiences in late 2022/early 2023.

- **Other data sources:** As developmental evaluators, the evaluation team also draws from other methods and data sources to support the ongoing evolution of the BC WiN model, as well as contribute to model adaptations and decision-making necessary to respond to the many new challenges required within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. These have included targeted scans and review of the evidence to better understand and respond to the needs of job seekers with disabilities, and a focus group with people with lived experience in summer of 2021 to inform expanded recruitment and outreach activities.

Analysis

To review interim outcomes as of June 30, 2022, quantitative data analysis was performed on survey data files (consistent with SRDC's Code of Practice, personal identifiers are removed from our reports). Analysis of survey data includes descriptive statistics to understand participant characteristics and outcomes, as well as thematic analysis of qualitative (open-ended text) responses. Qualitative data from the job seeker and employer partner interviews was analyzed thematically, using NVivo software. Members of the evaluation team worked collaboratively with the IWC team to identify, document, and report on key themes and lessons from these data sources. SRDC also reviewed findings against the research literature to increase confidence that emerging themes are meaningful and accurate when they recurred, and that they are consistent across multiple lines of inquiry.

The current report

The current report presents an overview of activities and results achieved with a focus on April 2021 to June 2022.

- **Project activities:** presents a summary of project activities to date, highlighting the innovative ways in which the project team has responded to COVID-19 challenges, and key project milestones achieved.

- **Participant results:** presents results with respect to number of people with disabilities served, job matching activities, and outcomes. This section also highlights findings from the job seeker surveys and journey mapping exercise.
- **Employer partner results:** presents results with respect to engagement with employer partners, highlighting findings from interviews with partners on their experiences with BC WiN and progress with respect to advancing their DEI priorities.
- **Summary and lessons learned:** presents a synthesis and discussion of the findings to date, highlighting key themes and lessons learned in the BC WiN model.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

PROJECT START-UP, DEVELOPMENT, AND PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

The initial activities of the project included all aspects of project start-up, creating project partnerships and evaluation instruments. SRDC established partnership agreements with MacLeod Silver HR Business Partners and the Pacific Autism Family Network (PAFN),³ creating the Inclusive Workforce Consulting team to engage employer partners in the BC WiN initiative, lead the development of employer training and supports, and deliver the job matching process to connect job seekers with disabilities to the available employment opportunities with employer partners. The evaluation team also developed the research instruments, including informed consent, surveys, interview protocols, and monitoring tools for both the formative and outcomes components of the study. The tools were developed to capture shifts in employer partners' DEI capacity, approaches, and policies over the course of the project, as well as capture participant outcomes related to the job matching process. A baseline and follow-up survey were developed to capture job seekers' perspectives on the nature of, and their satisfaction with, the employment opportunities offered through BC WiN's job matching process. These surveys are meant to complement the job matching reporting that the team completes for the Opportunities Fund as part of its overall project reporting responsibilities.

PROJECT OPERATIONALIZATION AND EARLY COVID-19 IMPACT

While initial activities also included establishing employer partnership agreements, these and other project activities were significantly impacted by the global COVID-19 pandemic. With the unanticipated shutdown that occurred in March 2020, many employer partners were forced to temporarily suspend business operations, redeploy staff, shift employees to remote work, and/or layoff staff, which in some cases were permanent layoffs. Hiring was put on hold and several employer partners in the hospitality and tourism sector suspended hiring activities indefinitely. This impacted the number of BC WiN activities that were related to employer capacity development, including accessibility audits, internships, and employee training, as well as the in-person launch of the Untapped Talent B2B Guide on Inclusive Hiring and Retention, which was

³ In this iteration of the BC WiN initiative, PAFN has been engaged as a project partner to take the lead in supporting employers recruit people with autism spectrum disorder as part of the IWC team.

re-developed as an e-learning series to accommodate the new remote and hybrid working environments of many employer partners.

As outlined in detail in the project's March 2021 Interim Report, the IWC team shifted focus to supporting employers through the disruptions associated with the first waves of the COVID-19 pandemic and working with employers on forward-facing strategies to continue to enhance and not abandon their DEI strategies and recruitment and retention practices. The IWC team also shifted practices with respect to supporting jobseekers with disabilities, including shifting meetings and interviews to phone or Zoom, and incorporating health and safety related questions and screenings.

During this time, service providers were also reporting that they were observing high levels of disengagement from the labour market among their clients with disabilities. Due to the lack of real-time data to provide better insights into the current situation facing this population, SRDC and the IWC team developed an ad hoc survey to engage service providers in BC to capture their perspectives on the challenges facing this population in terms of being ready and willing to work at that time. We presented the results of the survey in our March 2021 Interim Report (summarized in Appendix A).

In fall 2020, the BC WiN team was provided an additional amount of limited-time funding through the Opportunities Fund's National Workplace Accessibility Stream (NWAS) to expand its activities to address the workplace challenges of employers and job seekers with disabilities who have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. These activities built on BC WiN's current partnerships to support employers in their efforts to create inclusive workplaces, whether virtual or physical, for people with disabilities during the pandemic, to expand online training, and to develop training for in-demand jobs for workers who had been displaced by the pandemic and/or who were looking for new employment. These measures included working with BC WiN employer partners to develop and implement accessible and effective work-from-home measures to connect people with disabilities to employment (for those able to work remotely). The funding supported these activities until March 2021, with the intention of generating new approaches and opportunities for further training and recruitment that would be sustained until the end of the project. Project milestones completed under NWAS stream of funding are included in Appendix B.

ONGOING DELIVERY AND PROJECT MONITORING

Ongoing project delivery and project monitoring was also impacted by subsequent waves of the COVID-19 pandemic over the course of April 2021 to June 2022. While many employer partners were able to eventually resume recruitment and hiring activities, the project was impacted by the significant withdrawal of people with disabilities from the labour market. In addition to the

survey conducted with service organizations to document this withdrawal, the research team has also identified emerging evidence that further supports these findings, where people with disabilities may have disengaged from the labour market due to the fact that various barriers experienced pre-pandemic have compounded to discourage potential candidates from being exposed to further physical and mental health risks. As noted in the literature and through the Canadian Survey on Disability, people with disabilities experience higher exposure to precarious and non-unionized work, often face lack of workplace accommodations, and experience fear of losing benefits that supplement earnings if they are to find full-time employment (Maroto et al., 2021; Statistics Canada, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic may have exacerbated reasons for not seeking employment, which include medical and/or functional limitations, previous negative workplace experiences, limitations or interactions between income and disability benefits, or other caretaking responsibilities (Fyffe et al., 2021). Emerging evidence also suggests that some people with disabilities cannot find suitable work that has flexible or part-time hours to accommodate additional caretaking responsibilities, and that they may have stopped looking for work in favour of enrolling in higher education during the pandemic (Maroto et al., 2021). Finally, people with disabilities may not seek employment because of the challenges they may experience in adhering to protective health measures necessary to participate in the workforce (Maroto et al., 2021).

As a result of these circumstances, the BC WiN project also expanded its recruitment efforts beyond its initial model of working solely through its service organization network for referrals. The BC WiN team initiated a number of direct recruitment and marketing activities to engage a broader pool of job seekers with disabilities, while also working with a variety of stakeholders to promote employment campaigns to people with disabilities.

Activities in this phase of the project also include documenting the development and enhancement of employer DEI supports, and partnerships with employers, service providers and training institutions to create more effective pathways to employment for job seekers, particularly those who are at a great distance from the labour market. The evaluation team has played an active role in capturing challenges, gaps, and opportunities to report back to the team in support of the iterative development process. The evaluation team also engaged in primary data collection, including participant surveys and interviews, employer assessments and interviews, and monitoring project administrative and participant data, the results of which are presented below.

BC WiN SUSTAINABILITY

Between April and June 2022, the project team began activities aimed at the long-term sustainability of the BC WiN initiative, which will continue into the final months of the project. The initial activities in this phase focused on identifying future opportunities to sustain and scale

the initiative, including outreach and conversations with employer partners to explore opportunities for a fee-for-service model. The project team will also consult with members of the Employment Action Committee – the original group of disability-serving agencies in the Lower Mainland of BC working together to coordinate their employer engagement activities – to explore other opportunities for longer-term partnership and sustainability. As the evaluation team completes its ongoing monitoring of BC WiN results into the remaining months of the project, the team is also planning to host a Learning Summit for employer partners to share experiences and lessons learned from the project’s recruitment activities among current and prospective employer partners in British Columbia.

PARTICIPANT RESULTS

JOB MATCHING RESULTS

Project timelines and targets were modified as a response to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The expected participant results, adjusted to the deadline of March 2023, are as follows:

- 225 people with disabilities served;
- 175 people with disabilities successfully matched with an employer; and
- 125 people with disabilities employed by the same employer with whom they were matched (six months post-intervention).

Although the pandemic had a major impact on job seeker engagement and availability of jobs, the project team continually adapted their strategy to meet candidates where they were comfortable, through a wide range of approaches. Table 1 presents the total numbers against targets for the project, up until June 30, 2022.

Table 1 Participant results

	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	Totals	(Targets)
People with disabilities served	67	263	290	53	673	225
People with disabilities successfully matched with employer	13	30	39	12	94	175
People with disabilities employed by same employer (six months post-intervention)	11	22	39	12	84	125

Source: ESDC quarterly reports to June 30, 2022.

2019-2020 participant results

As early as the third quarter of the project, employers began to suspend their recruitment activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is reflected in the 2019-2020 results, where fewer than 70 people with disabilities were served, much lower than the following years of the project.

Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, 13 job seekers were successfully matched, where 85 per cent were still employed with the same employer after six months.

2020-2021 participant results

In the initial months of the pandemic, recruitment and interviews all shifted to online format and many employers took this time to reassess their recruitment needs, with limited job postings and limited job seeker engagement. As the year progressed, the project team explored new avenues for job seeker recruitment, attending virtual hiring fairs, as reflected in the high number of people with disabilities served. With the increased participant engagement, BC WiN pre-screened candidates creating a pool of available candidates to be considered for future openings.

2021-2022 participant results

BC WiN continued the recruitment approach of attending virtual hiring events and creating candidate pools. However, referrals remained low early in the year, so the team introduced a social media strategy to reach candidates directly. The COVID-19 pandemic continued to be a challenge, with 70 per cent of job seekers with disabilities disengaging from employment search across the province, as reported by WorkBC service partners. To increase recruitment, the team launched hiring challenges with regional employers and developed cohort training to prepare candidates. The team used a variety of digital strategies (Google Ads, social media campaigns, LinkedIn Recruiter, and targeted web site landing pages) to recruit job seekers and began hosting online virtual candidate information sessions as referrals remained low with the Omicron wave of COVID-19. Other creative approaches to engage job seekers included tailoring roles to fit candidates, as well as hiring people with disabilities for project team positions to assist with social media and administrative needs.

JOB SEEKER PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Obtaining participation from job seekers in evaluation activities was a challenge for the project team. The job seeker surveys were designed with minimal questions (fewer than 20 questions per survey) and each took less than 10 minutes to complete. Participants were provided with an explanation of the survey research when the IWC team introduced the research component of the BC WiN and explained the participant consent form. The IWC team also provided reminders for participants to complete the surveys. Though all participants were aware of the research components of the initiative and signed the consent to participate, there was limited follow-through from participants when it came to completing surveys.

Results from the job seeker surveys are reported below; however, due to the low response rates, these results should be interpreted with caution, and not taken to be a complete representation of all participants.

JOB SEEKER SURVEYS

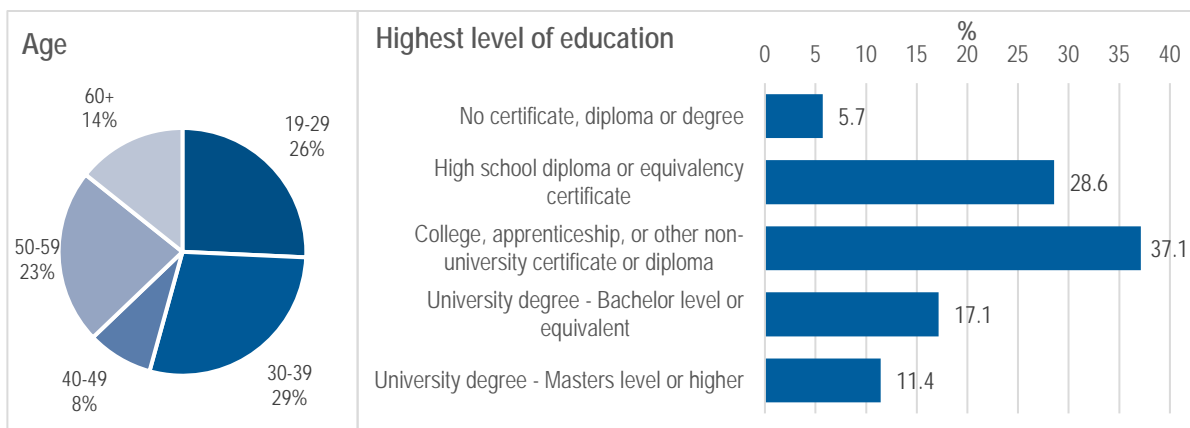
The baseline survey was designed to capture the basic demographic information and expectations, followed by two additional surveys that would capture employment outcomes, experience with BC WiN and supports, and general employment experience.

As of July 5, 2022, the baseline survey was completed by 35 job seekers who were successfully matched with employment, with a response rate of 37.2 per cent (35 out of a possible 94). The first follow-up survey was completed by 15 job seekers after six months of employment, and the third survey up was only completed by four job seekers after 12 months of employment.

Baseline survey results

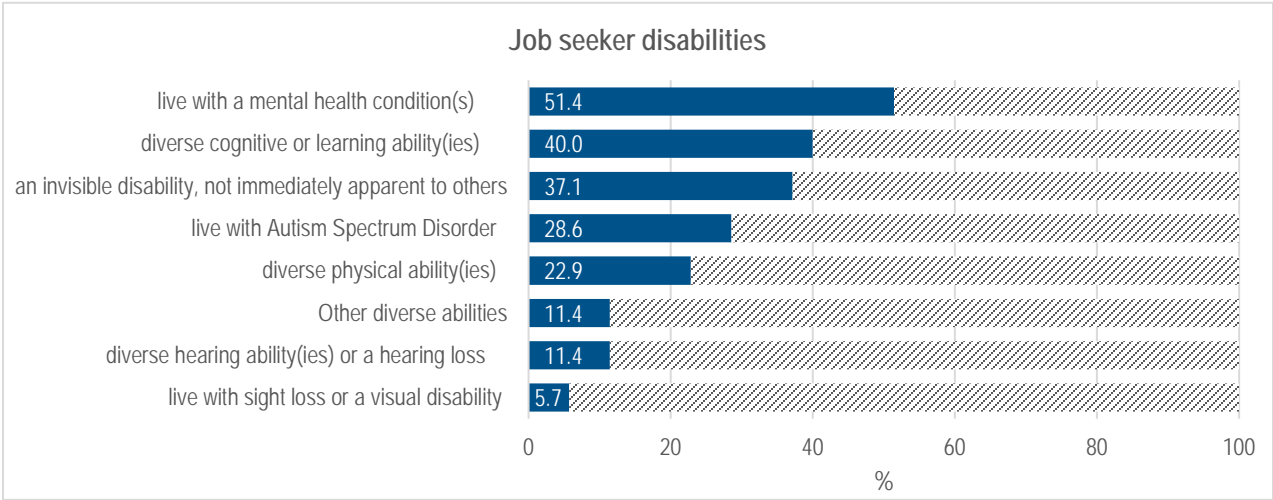
Participants ranged from age 19 to 69 with an average age of 41, and most participants had a college degree or above (Figure 3).

Figure 3 Job seeker baseline survey results, age, and highest level of education



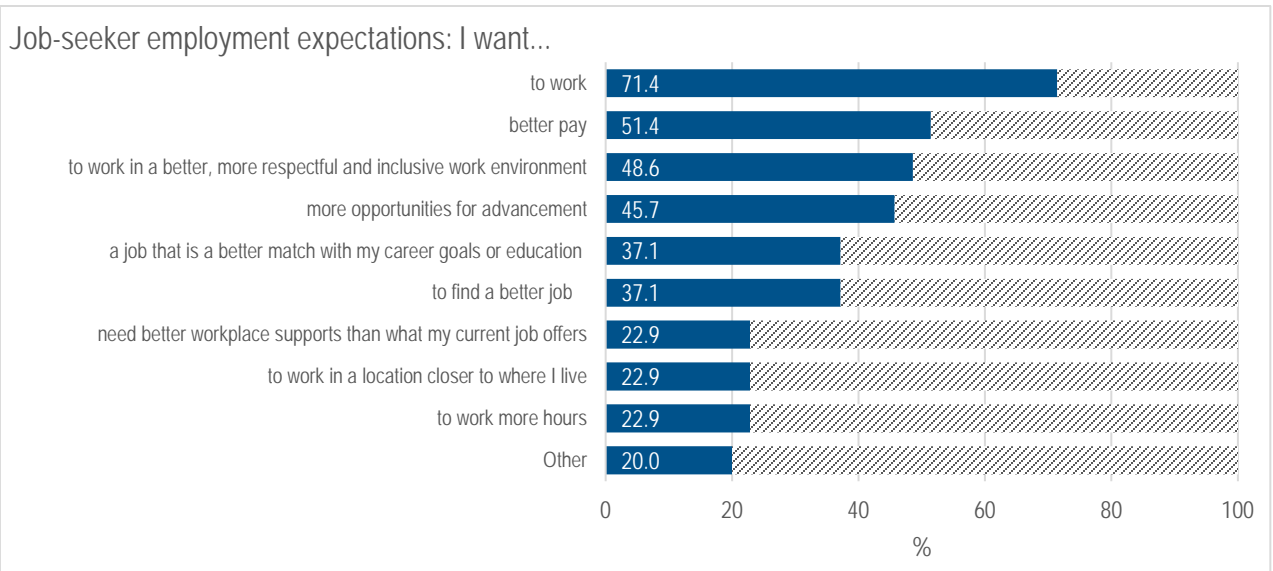
Participants were asked to indicate any disabilities they live with (Figure 4). On average, participants lived with two disabilities, ranging from one to six. Half of respondents indicated living with mental health conditions (51.4 per cent) followed by other diverse cognitive disabilities (40.0 per cent), invisible disabilities (37.1 per cent), living with Autism Spectrum Disorder (28.6 per cent), and diverse physical disabilities (22.9 per cent).

Figure 4 Job seeker baseline survey results, disabilities



When asked about their expectations for employment, most respondents wanted to work (71.4 per cent), receive better pay (51.4 per cent), work in a better, more respectful and inclusive environment (48.6 per cent), and have more opportunities for advancement (45.7 per cent).

Figure 5 Job seeker baseline survey results, employment expectations



Participants were asked to describe any challenges they faced when previously looking for employment. All but four respondents (89 per cent) provided an open-ended answer detailing their challenges. Challenges were wide-ranging from motivation to finding the right fit, to access to accommodations or challenges with aspects of their disabilities. These key themes are displayed in Figure 6.

Figure 6 Job seeker baseline survey results, employment challenges

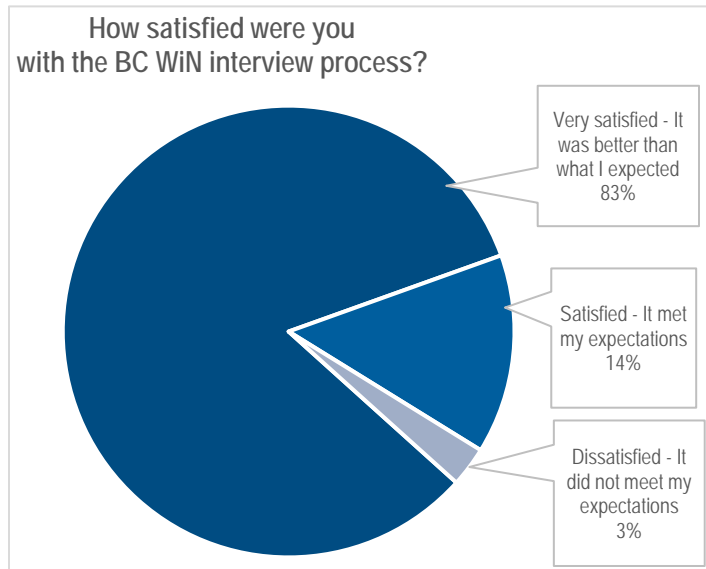


A common theme among respondents was the challenge of getting employers to understand their condition and accommodations. One respondent wrote: *“Discrimination by potential employers once they find out about my disability or the need for some form of accommodations turn them off.”* Similarly, another respondent expressed the challenge of getting accommodation as the reason for joining a referral agency and eventually connecting with BC WiN: *“It was hard at the time to find employment on my own because most jobs I tried to apply to wouldn’t understand my condition to work. So that’s what made me join [the referral agency].”*

Another theme emerged regarding the challenge of finding a good fit, based on their skills, as one respondent described: *“I was unable to find a good fit, in terms job responsibilities and marketing myself to employers.”* Other respondents mentioned the challenge of searching for employment during the pandemic, with one citing the *“competitive situation during a pandemic”* and another mentioning the compounded challenge of having a disability during the pandemic, *“COVID has made looking for a job really difficult. In addition, a lot of companies are looking for positions requiring standing for extended periods or heavy lifting, and I can’t do either.”*

When asked directly about their experience with BC WiN, nearly all respondents were satisfied or very satisfied (97 per cent) with the BC WiN interview process (Figure 7). Nearly half of respondents (51.4 per cent) left positive open-ended responses regarding their experience with BC WiN. Two examples of participant responses are provided in the Job Seeker Experience text box.

Figure 7 Job seeker baseline survey results, satisfaction with BC WiN



Baseline survey job seeker experiences

"I had a very pleasant experience. [The IWC] did my first interview and made me feel very comfortable right from the start. I don't think I would like anything changed. I have a high regard for [the IWC] and BC WiN and continue the amazing work you do as an organization in supporting others, striving for more inclusive, respectful workplaces."

- Participant 1

"The process was great, and the support was very helpful! I was happy to find employment in my area of study and field of experience."

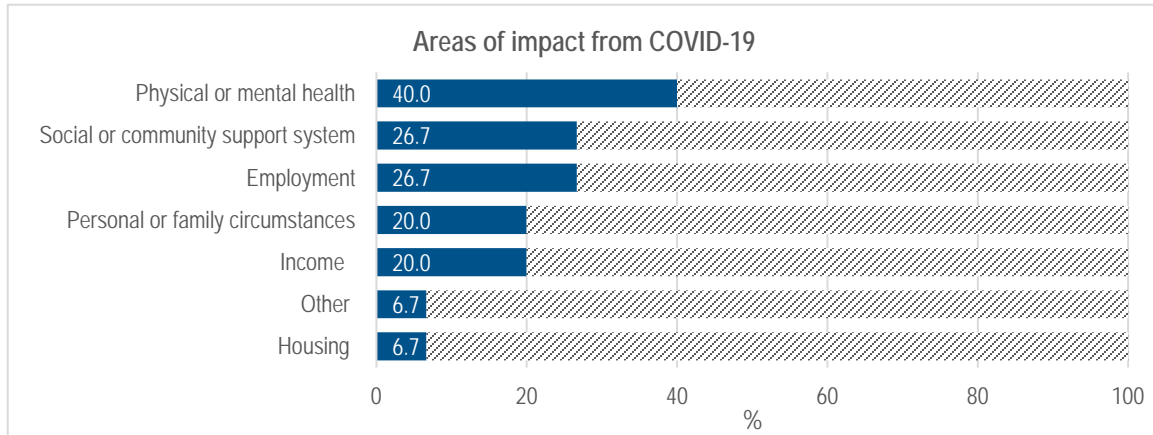
- Participant 2

Follow-up surveys

The first follow-up survey was completed by 15 job seekers after six months of employment, all of whom were still employed at the time of the survey. The response rate for this survey was only 17.9 (15 out of a possible 84 job seekers who were with the same employer at six months), thus the survey results should not be considered fully representative of all BC WiN participants.

By the launch of the six-month follow-up survey, the COVID-19 pandemic had already made an impact on many people seeking employment. Respondents of the six-month survey were asked about the impact COVID-19 had on their lives. The most common area of impact was physical or mental health (40.0 per cent), followed by impact to their social or community support system (26.7 per cent), employment (26.7 per cent), personal or family circumstances (20 per cent), and income (20.0 per cent).

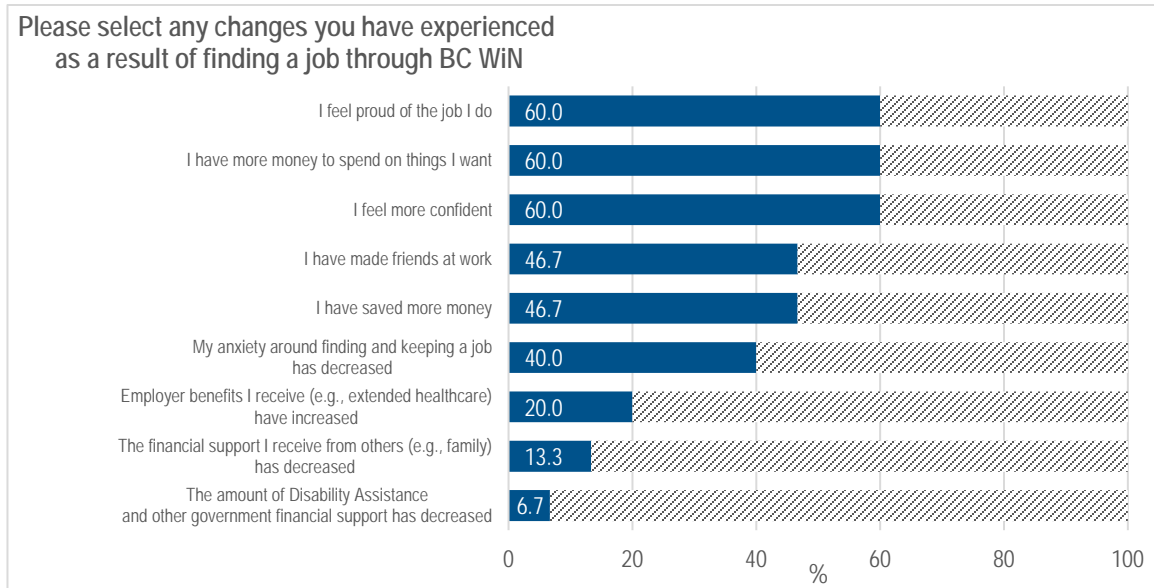
Figure 8 Areas of impact from COVID-19



Among respondents, 26.7 per cent reported needing additional supports (such as a job coach), but only one reported needing additional supports to do their job well. However, this respondent indicated that they did not communicate that need to their employer and thus their employer did not provide any additional supports. As discussed further below, this is consistent in our interviews with job seekers, where there was an overall reluctance to ask for additional accommodations and supports from their employers out of concern that as new employees, these requests would be interpreted negatively or put their employment in jeopardy.

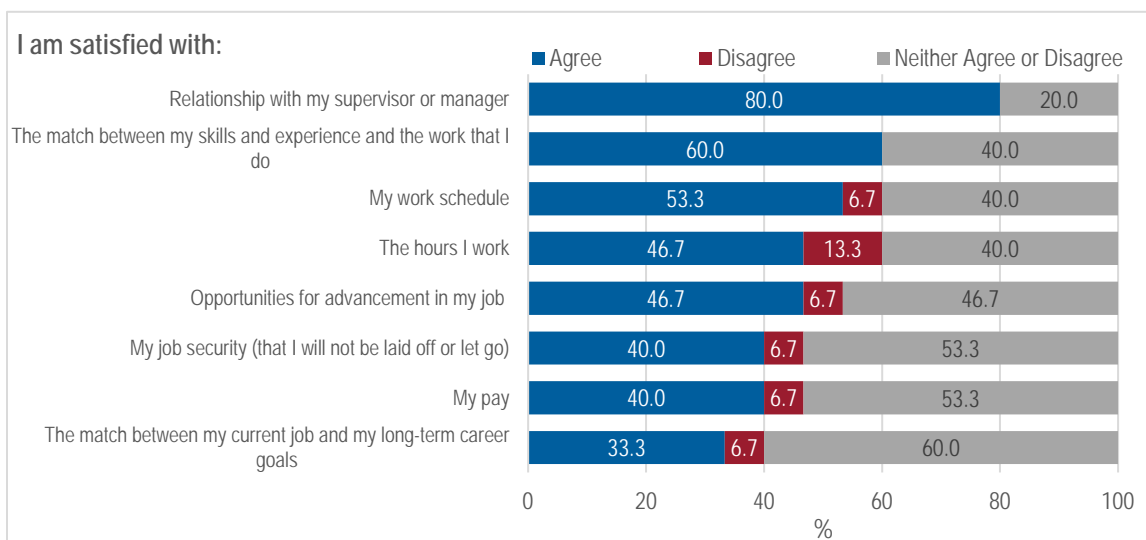
Respondents were asked if they experienced any changes as a result of finding a job through BC WiN. Most respondents reported feeling proud of their job (60.0 per cent), having more money to spend on things they wanted (60.0 per cent) and feeling more confident (60.0 per cent). Nearly half of respondents reported having made friends at work (46.7 per cent), having saved more money (46.7 per cent), and having decreased anxiety around finding and keeping a job (40.0 per cent). Whereas only a small number of respondents experienced a change in their benefits or additional financial supports, few reported that their employer benefits had increased (20.0 per cent) and that any financial support from family members (13.3 per cent) or disability assistance (6.7 per cent) had decreased.

Figure 9 Changes experienced as a result of finding a job through BC WiN



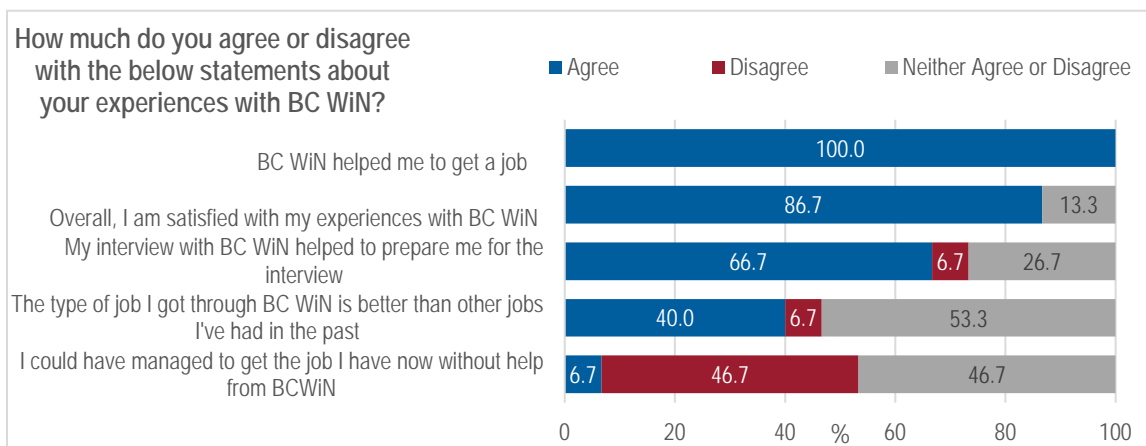
Respondents were also asked about their satisfaction with the employment they obtained through BC WiN. Most respondents agreed they were satisfied with their relationship with their supervisor or manager (80.0 per cent), followed by the match between their skills and the work they do (60.0 per cent), and their work schedule (53.0 per cent). Fewer respondents were also satisfied with the hours they work (46.7 per cent), the opportunities for advancement at their job (46.7 per cent), job security (40.0 per cent), pay (40.0 per cent), and the match between their current job and long-term career goals (33.3 per cent).

Figure 10 Satisfaction with employment



Finally, respondents of the six-month follow-up survey were asked about their experiences of support from BC WiN. All respondents agreed that BC WiN helped them get a job and nearly all were satisfied with their experiences with BC WiN (86.7 per cent). Two-thirds of respondents agreed that the BC WiN interview helped them prepare for their job interview (66.7 per cent). A large share of participants felt that their current job was better than ones they'd had in the past (40.0 per cent) with nearly half indicating that they could not have managed to get their current job without the help of BC WiN (46.7 per cent). Overall, the majority of respondents were satisfied with their BC WiN experience at the six month follow-up.

Figure 11 Support from BC WiN



Respondents were also offered an opportunity to share any additional comments about their employment situation or experience with BC WiN. Three respondents mentioned that their role was part-time or temporary, and they were hoping to find full-time or more permanent work. A few respondents mentioned that BC WiN was very helpful and supportive, with one respondent mentioning that BC WiN was very helpful in navigating the system: *“Great work. BC WiN has been the closest to a Case Manager to help me to navigate the system. Thanks!”* Another respondent stressed the importance of BC WiN’s support, feeling comfortable to disclose their disability for the first time: *“I agree that working with BC WiN to help me find employment has greatly reduced my anxiety surrounding job security. This is the first time I have disclosed my disability to an employer and BC WiN was extremely supportive in that respect.”*

Only four participants completed the 12-month follow-up survey. Due to this low response rate, the research team reviewed responses for overall themes. When asked about any outcomes of finding employment through BC WiN, most mentioned that they have more benefits and wages, more confidence, and general satisfaction with their employment.

The 12-month survey included questions about the inclusive culture in the workplace. In general, respondents were not confident their workplace promoted a strong culture of inclusion. When asked to expand upon the culture of inclusion, one respondent commented on the gap between corporate intention and the practice of inclusion, *“There are employee resource groups that are places for employees of different marginalized groups to congregate, but sometimes I get the impression that those are intended to be education tools for the executives rather than mutual support for the members.”*

Themes of workplace inclusivity were further explored in the in-depth job seeker interviews, which we turn to below.

Additional job seeker feedback

At times during the initiative, job seekers have reached out directly to the evaluation team to comment on their experiences. One job seeker offered the following feedback on BC WiN and the role of the Inclusive Workforce Consultant (IWC):

“I am thoroughly pleased with the services and support I received. [The IWC] was thorough, supportive, and prompt in her communication. Her work is exemplary of BC WiN and the funding from the government is well spent supporting the organization, program, and retaining [the IWC’s] services.”

In a job market where it is not easy to find employment as a person with a disability, the services [the IWC] provided helped me match with the appropriate employer open to equity, diversity, and inclusion. Her continued time and resources have made the experience invaluable, and I feel that I can take on a job that will enable me to both work at my best and receive the accommodations I need in a workplace.”

It is my hope that [the IWC] will be recognized for her efforts and be recognized as an indispensable resource for the labour market that has a number of able-bodied work-ready people who have disabilities and need to match with employers that will not only fully utilize their talents but also provide the help they need to succeed.

[The IWC's] help has given a good reflection of BC WiN and the value added by the government supporting her and the organization. It is my hope she will continue to support BC WiN and be able to help others with special needs. She should be recognized, commended, and rewarded for her efforts! I could not have found a well-fitting opportunity without her. Her service does much for the public good."

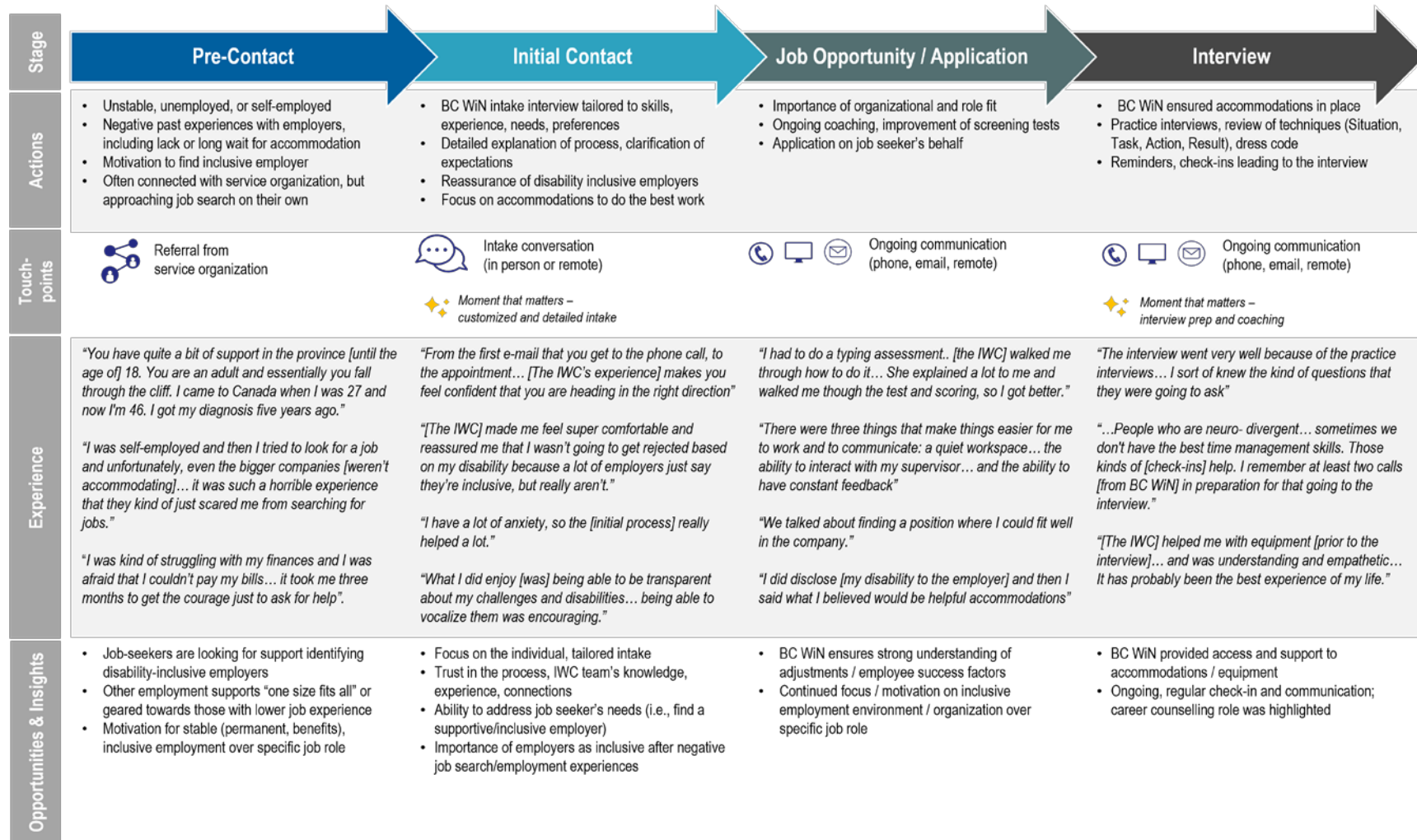
JOB SEEKER JOURNEY MAPS

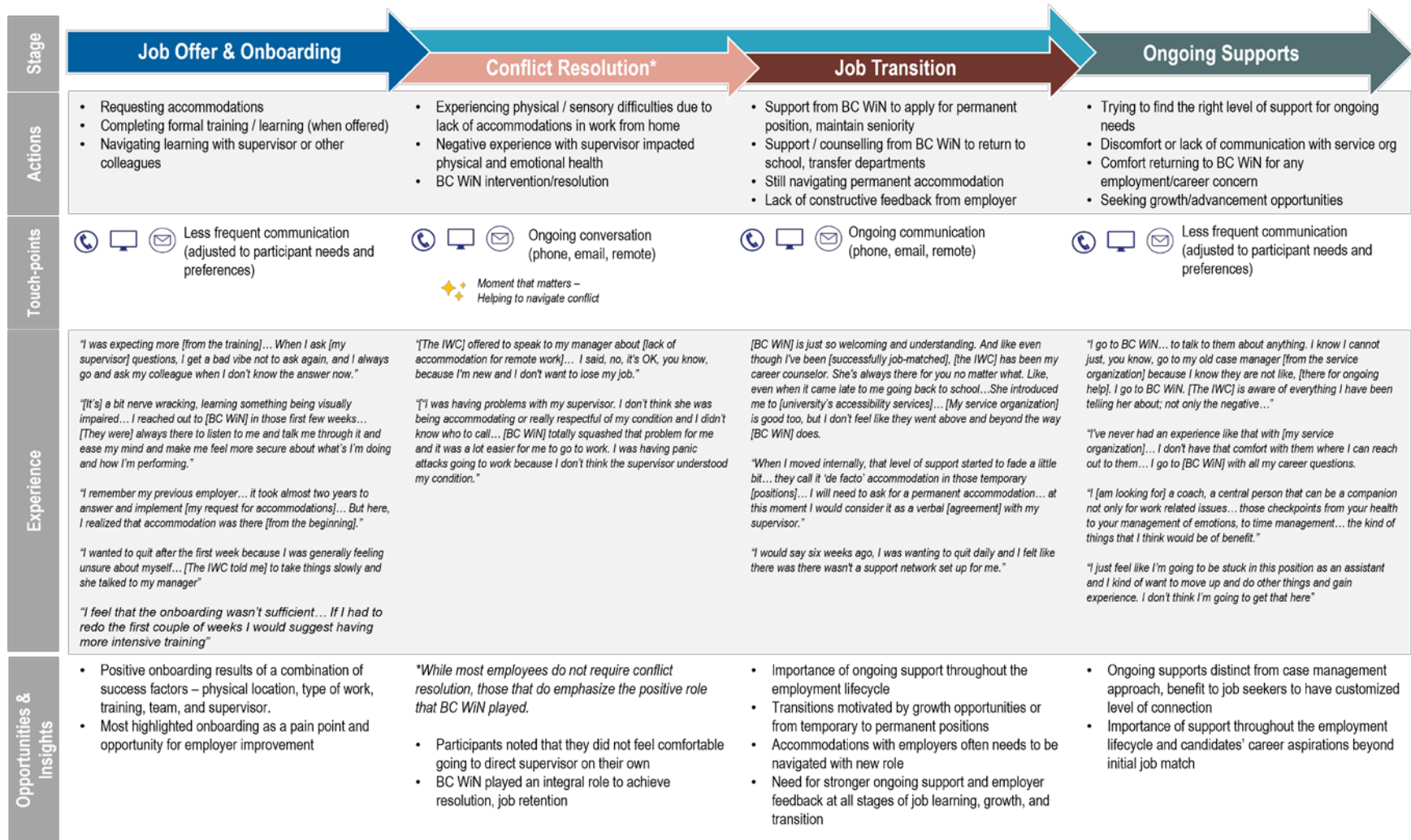
Due to the limited number of follow-up survey responses, the evaluation team elected to supplement this data with job seeker interviews to better understand the job seekers' experience and outcomes of the job matching process. Job seeker interviews were also designed to explore the job matching process to surface insights into the effectiveness of the BC WiN model, what makes it different from other approaches, where key challenges and opportunities exist, and how they could potentially be addressed.

To achieve these evaluation goals, a semi-structured interview protocol was designed with the intention of developing a series of job seeker journey maps. Journey maps, which are a visual representation of the user's service experiences, illustrate the story of the user as a sequence of steps to capture multiple observations that include the characteristics of each interaction (touchpoints), the actions/steps taken both by the user and by the service provider, and the thoughts and feelings experienced by the user (Strickdorn et al., 2018). While journey maps have been used in design practices in a variety of commercial contexts, they have been increasingly deployed in human services contexts to help explore why and how a service works, constantly switching between the objective and subjective journey representations to explore where service improvements can be made (Bate & Robert, 2007).

The evaluation team worked with the IWC team to select six individuals to participate in the interviews. The interviews were designed to learn more about the individual's job search, experience with BC WiN, and experience being matched to their employer. The evaluation team then used the responses from the interview to create a detailed picture of what the BC WiN job-matching experience is like from the perspective of job seekers, to provide additional insights into that journey. After reviewing the individual job seeker's journey maps, the evaluation team then consolidated these into one visual representation to highlight common actions taken by the job seeker and the IWC team, specific touchpoints during the journey, and to highlight key themes and insights from the data, represented in Figure 12.

Figure 12 Job seeker journey map





Job seeker journey map overview

Prior to connecting to BC WiN services, the interviewees highlighted their motivations for their job search, which included finding more stable, regular, or quality employment. While we only spoke with a handful of job seekers, they highlighted that they were under-employed, experienced precarious employment, or had negative past employment experiences. For some, this led to the decision to be self-employed, although they found self-employment to be precarious and financially unstable. These experiences are consistent with findings in the research literature that highlights that people with disabilities often experience pay discrimination or select self-employment as an alternative after experiencing barriers accessing the traditional labour market (Tompa et al., 2020). People with disabilities are nearly twice as likely to be in a precarious employment situation relative to those without disabilities, and people with disabilities report consistently worse employment conditions than their counterparts, characterized by job insecurity, irregular hours, low pay, lack of flexibility, job mismatch, lack of training opportunities, lack of union membership and job benefits, and lack of a positive safety climate (Shahidi, 2022). In addition, the individuals we spoke with noted that their primary motivation for working with BC WiN was to find an inclusive employer, which all expressed as more important than the specific job role or tasks associated with the job opportunity.

Job seekers were referred to BC WiN through the specific service organization that they were working with. This is consistent with the unique approach of the BC WiN model, which was designed to better coordinate service organizations' connection with employers. This allows service organizations to focus on engaging and preparing their clients for employment and supporting them with additional wrap-around supports, while the IWC team's role is to focus on the employer's recruitment needs and the job seekers' fit with available positions. However, one individual who was referred through an employment specialist in a service organization highlighted that they were eager to connect with BC WiN because they were frustrated by the lack of results from that service provider: *"I felt that the [service organization] that I was working with wasn't very fruitful... they weren't really looking at opportunities that would fit my abilities."*

Once connected with BC WiN, initial contact took the form of an intake interview, where a member of the IWC team worked with the candidate to discuss employment needs and preferences, relevant work history and skills, as well as specific accommodations or adjustments needed to succeed in a role. While some job seekers had met the IWC team in person, others connected remotely (e.g., through phone, email, Zoom or a combination) due to COVID-19 health restrictions. Throughout initial contact and review of available opportunities with employment partners, job seekers highlighted the IWC's focus on both role and organizational fit, as well as

the IWC's role in clarifying the job matching process, outlining expectations, and discussing next steps, as characteristics of the BC WiN model that felt uniquely supportive.

Job seekers had different experiences being matched to an employment opportunity. Some had connected specifically with BC WiN because there was an opportunity that they already knew aligned to their skills and experience, while others connected with BC WiN primarily out of the motivation to work with an inclusive employer. For the latter, the IWC team then worked with the job seeker to identify employer/organizational fit and job seeker preferences, and then seek out available opportunities with employer partners. Once an employment opportunity was identified, the IWC team typically worked with the job seeker to apply, while some required additional support and coaching to qualify for initial applicant screening eligibility requirements. Once screened, job seeker applicants were referred to employers with additional details to the employer with respect to any adjustments or accommodations – both for the interview and the role itself. Several job seekers also noted that the IWC team worked with their service organization or other organizations to ensure that they had necessary supports and access to assistive technology if required (e.g., an individual with a vision impairment noted that BC WiN assisted with securing a screen magnifier prior to the interview with the employer). The frequency and nature of touchpoints were tailored for individuals during this phase of the journey as well (e.g., phone, email or Zoom format).

Following the referral, the IWC team worked with the job seeker to prepare for the job interview, providing tailored supports and coaching to ensure that the job seeker was well positioned for success. Individuals noted that supports were tailored for their preferences – some requiring coaching, practice questions, and mock interviews, while others received helpful reminders leading up to the interview. Typically, the frequency of touchpoints with the IWC team increased during this phase to ensure the candidate's success. Many job seekers spoke of their anxiety with respect to performing in an interview setting for a variety of reasons. Some job seekers who identified as neurodiverse noted that having IWC coaching for behavioural-based interview questions was particularly helpful given that this format often presents a barrier to demonstrate their skills and experience. Other job seekers noted that their anxiety stemmed from past negative employment experiences and not fully trusting that employers would be accepting of their disability. Most job seekers interviewed noted the significant role that BC WiN played to support their positive interview experience.

Once connected with employment, job seekers' journeys diverged. While their journeys followed the stages of initial onboarding and settling into the role, they encountered a variety of barriers and challenges while on the job. During these individual experiences, some job seekers noted that BC WiN provided additional, tailored supports, whether that was in the form of conflict resolution with their direct supervisors, helping them to transition to a new or modified role with the same employer, and coaching them with respect to their ongoing career development and options. However, some job seekers we interviewed noted that they lacked overall support

during onboarding and adapting to their roles, relying on family members to help them problem-solve and maintain their employment, despite feeling that they did not want to continue in their employment.

While all job seekers we interviewed for this exercise continued to be employed with their original employer, some individuals were no longer in the same initial role. Some job seekers noted that they intended to seek out other employment opportunities aligned to their career growth aspirations and were preparing to enter another employment search. All noted that they were currently at a place where the frequency of touchpoints with BC WiN had diminished, but some highlighted the positive, ongoing role that BC WiN played in continuing to check in and support them when needed.

Moments that matter

Journey maps often visually represent the experiential high points and low points associated with a service journey, bringing into focus the specific points of friction or obstacles that prevent individuals from achieving their goals and that contribute to a negative experience (i.e., commonly referred to as “pain points”). In the context of job seekers’ experiences with BC WiN, there were moments where individuals indeed experienced barriers, but these were often attributed to their experiences with the employer, and they highlighted that BC WiN played an important, positive role in addressing the barrier or resolving the issue. Given this, the research team has highlighted specific “moments that matter.” Some of these moments can be characterized as primarily positive or supportive experiences or primarily negative experiences where job seekers did not feel well supported. However, there were also moments where the job seekers experienced positive benefits of working with the BC WiN model, even though some of these moments were precipitated by negative experiences with the employer.

In the job seeker journey, several individuals spoke to the importance of the initial intake interview in terms of establishing trust in the job matching process and the support that they would receive as people with disabilities. Job seekers conveyed that negative past experiences with employment made them wary when entering this new service relationship, but that the IWC team’s focus on their individual needs, strengths, and on job and organizational fit put them at ease. As one job seeker explained: *“This is a very well managed process. I really appreciate the service, particularly from [the IWC] and even interactions with [the research team] as well... Everything has been very professional, very well explained, what to expect, and also what not to expect. That's important as well for a person with disabilities... people end up losing trust when institutions and professionals [don't meet expectations]. I can find myself trusting B.C. WiN.”*

Several job seekers highlighted the significant role that BC WiN played in preparing them for their interview with employers. Having customized, personalized support to succeed during the

interview – from coordinating accommodations and adjustments, being provided a list of practice questions, coaching, mock interviews, and in some cases providing tips on what to wear – was highlighted as essential support that led to a positive employment outcome. Many attributed their positive interview experience to BC WiN supports. One job seeker noted: *“The interview went very well because of the practice interviews [with BC WiN] and I sort of knew the kind of questions that they were going to ask.”* Another job seeker expressed: *“I kept forgetting about the questions... how am I going to be prepared with everything? [The IWC] reminded me of the STAR keywords trick and familiarized me with the interview questions... She was very detailed about everything.”*

As noted above, job seekers’ journeys diverged with respect to the onboarding process with employers, transitions into new roles with those employers, and their ongoing employment. Most individuals shared that the frequency of touchpoints with BC WiN diminished after initial onboarding, but that the IWC team checked in periodically to support this transition period. During this phase of the journey, all but one of the job seekers interviewed spoke of a general lack of onboarding supports from their employers, making the transition into employment difficult. Some job seekers spoke of being rushed through onboarding and general lack of support from their employer. One job seeker explained, *“We did the computer tests... I think, eight or nine modules on the computer. So, it's easier than to teach you hands-on... [but] because they're computer modules, it's not the same.”* Another job seeker explained: *“I was expecting more [from the training] ... When I ask [my supervisor] questions, I get a bad vibe not to ask again, and I always go and ask my colleague when I don't know the answer now... Other colleagues are not happy with the training [either]. What should we do? [My supervisor] is higher than us.”* Another job seeker offered: *“The training wasn't for me... I struggled a lot in that department.”* Finally, one job seeker, reflecting on what improvements could be made in the process, shared the following: *“I feel that the onboarding wasn't sufficient at the beginning... I went into the office for one day of training and then I was on my own... if I had to redo the first couple of weeks, I would suggest having more intensive training and just not throwing people into the situation when especially [they] have very diverse skills too... I think that should be mandatory if someone else was going to be in the same situation.”*

During this phase of the journey, some job seekers conveyed that the IWC team coaching was beneficial to ensure that they felt supported in those early stages, while others conveyed that this was a highly stressful point in the journey, noting an overall lack of support. Some job seekers highlighted that the frequency of their mistakes and negative feedback from the employer was discouraging: *“The only feedback that I received [during onboarding] and continue to receive is negative feedback... I would say I was going to quit every day.”* Another job seeker noted that the frequency of mistakes also led to minor physical injuries: *“I was really hurting myself a lot like cutting myself and jumping off ladders... I wish someone told me like, what's safe and what's not safe considering... they do have some safety [training]... but we kind of got rushed.”*

Several job seekers we interviewed shared that they struggled during the initial onboarding and transition into employment to advocate for themselves due to other mental health considerations, describing feelings of heightened anxiety that diminished their wellbeing. Evidence suggests that adults with disabilities experience more mental health distress compared with those without disabilities (Cree et al., 2020) and, as discussed above, results from our own surveys indicate that many job seekers matched to employment by BC WiN either live with a mental health disability or experienced worsening mental health due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Job seekers that we interviewed noted an overall lack of support from their direct supervisors that resulted in them not asking for any further support or accommodation (i.e., assistive technology, equipment) when needed. They spoke of a general impression that, as a new employee, they shouldn't signal specific needs or requests because it might jeopardize their employment. However, when asked about BC WiN's role in supporting them through the onboarding process, several explained that they did feel supported by the IWC team and had a positive ongoing relationship with BC WiN during these initial experiences with employment. For example: *"I wanted to quit after the first week because I was generally feeling unsure about myself... [The IWC told me] to take things slowly and she talked to my manager."* Another job seeker indicated that they declined BC WiN's offer of support regarding the lack of an adjusted workstation: *"BC WiN offered to speak to my manager about that [as my condition is getting worse] ... I said, no, it's OK, you know, because I'm new and I don't want to lose my job."*

Some of the job seekers that we spoke with had experiences where they required job transition and conflict resolution supports from BC WiN with their employer. In contrast to our baseline survey results that demonstrate an overall positive relationship between job seekers and their direct supervisors, the job seekers that we spoke with for the journey mapping exercise had different experiences. Those that experienced conflict characterized it as resulting from the supervisor not understanding the nature of their disability, the importance of providing adjustments, and the overall lack of inclusiveness. During this phase of the journey, the IWC team played an important role in mediating conflict towards a positive resolution. As one job seeker explained: *"I was having problems with my supervisor. I don't think she was being accommodating or really respectful of my condition and I didn't know who to call... [BC WiN] totally squashed that problem for me and it was a lot easier for me to go to work. I was having panic attacks going to work because I don't think the supervisor understood my condition."* Another noted that once they transitioned from an initial temporary position with their employer to a new, permanent role, the level of accommodation and support diminished and was less formalized: *"When I moved internally, that level of support started to fade a little bit... they call it 'de facto' accommodation in those temporary [positions]... I will need to ask for a permanent accommodation... at this moment I would consider it as a verbal [agreement] with my supervisor."*

Significantly, while a conflict with one's employer represented a negative experience, job seekers highlighted that this was a moment when they felt highly supported by BC WiN and that they emphasized the positive experience of working towards a resolution and finding a better outcome. *"The thing that most stands out to me is probably when I was having the issues with my supervisor, how [the IWC] totally helped me... because she knew that I was too scared to go and told my manager what was going on. That's probably one of the things that I'm thankful for because it really made my experience a lot better."* Job seekers also noted that BC WiN played a role to help them find a better position, fit, or location/hours with their employer and that the conflict and/or employment transition had been positively supported by the IWC team.

With these supports and adjustments, most interviewees noted that they were satisfied with their current employment situation or that although generally satisfied, they were considering new opportunities to pursue further career growth and development. Many job seekers expressed the difference between employers "talking the talk" and "walking the walk" when it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Several conveyed that they felt that aspects of their current employment experience fell short of their expectations with respect to the accessibility and inclusivity of their workplaces: *"I don't think [my employer is] inclusive at all... It's me and one other guy who does their filing... So, in my opinion, I feel like I'm the only one there."* Another job seeker explained because the nature of their disability was invisible, the employer did not know how to be inclusive: *"I wonder if there needs to be more explanation about diversity and disabilities... A lot of people, you know, are extremely capable in some areas, and then it's lacking in other areas. Just because you're not in a wheelchair, they don't, and they can't see the disabilities. You know? They may not be able to understand."*

Insights and opportunities for better practice in recruitment and service delivery

The job matching journey maps surfaced some unique insights and opportunities with respect to the ongoing evolution of the BC WiN model. From job seekers' perspectives, having access to a network of employer partners committed to accessibility and inclusion was a motivating factor for working with BC WiN. Several job seekers noted that they had researched employers' DEI profiles to find an inclusive employer but often they could not be sure by public DEI statements alone that the employer would be truly inclusive. Having the reassurance from BC WiN that the employers they work with are committed to inclusion and would not immediately reject their job candidacy because of their disability was important. The IWC team's ability to establish this trust and reassurance with job seekers was evident in the intake interview and was reinforced with BC WiN's focus on job and organizational fit for the job seekers and their individual needs and preferences, rather than being a "one size fits all" approach.

Another key benefit of the BC WiN model is the nature of continuous, ongoing support tailored to the individual needs of the job seeker. All individuals that we spoke with noted that in contrast

to their relationship with their service organization, the IWC team provided a more customized and personal connection with their job matching services that fostered a deeper sense of trust and security knowing that they could look to IWC support even after the initial employment match occurred. As one job seeker conveyed regarding their relationship with their referring service organization: *“Once I got the job, we kind of broke away...”* When asked who they look to for support when experiencing issues on the job, several noted BC WiN was their preferred route: *“I go to BC WiN... to talk to them about anything. I know I cannot just, you know, go to my old case manager because I know they are not [there for ongoing help]. I go to BC WiN. [The IWC] is aware of everything I have been telling her about; not only the negative...”* As another job seeker expressed: *“I’ve never had an experience like that with [my service organization] ... I don’t have that comfort with them where I can reach out to them... Like, I even went to [BC WiN] for school advice, I go to [BC WiN] with all my career questions.”*

This type of ongoing, personalized support following initial hiring is a unique component of the BC WiN job matching process that stands in contrast to other supported employment models. As reviewed by Hole et al. (2016), disability employment models in BC that provide more generic, performance indicator-driven job matching do not allow for individualized support that establishes long-term success. Successful employment journeys for job seekers with disabilities underscore not only the importance of employee/workplace fit, requiring an individualized approach, but also the importance of ongoing ancillary supports, as well as the significance of addressing the demand side of employment, which includes employer attitudes (Hole et al., 2016). As the journey mapping exercise demonstrates, many individuals relied on BC WiN for support or did not feel like they had adequate ongoing support to address barriers and challenges that they faced in employment, including onboarding, transitions, and continued learning and growth.

While these aspects of the BC WiN model demonstrate both the need for ongoing support of people with disabilities in their employment journey as well as the contribution the IWC team has made towards employee retention, they also point to further opportunities to work with employer partners on DEI capacity building. In the debrief of the journey mapping exercise with the IWC team, it was noted that there are opportunities to work with employer partners to ensure that organizations continue to build DEI capacity across the organization, and that more work can be done with respect to the training and capacity building of direct supervisors and managers. In addition to building direct supervisors’ and managers’ attitudes, skills, and ability to support employees with disabilities, there might be further opportunities to develop employers’ capacity with respect to workplace mental health. For example, employers may consider the adoption of the voluntary National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace, which is a voluntary set of guidelines, tools, and resources to guide organizations in promoting mental health and preventing psychological harm at work (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2022).

The journey mapping exercise clearly highlighted the need for employers working with BC WiN to improve their onboarding processes to ensure that newly recruited employees feel well supported in their transitions. BC WiN and employer partners might also consider reviewing the accessibility of current onboarding processes for different learning styles, neurodiversity, and other barriers, to ensure that they are inclusive of all employees. As part of the onboarding process, BC WiN and employers could also consider other onboarding approaches such as more routine and regular check-ins, peer supports such as a “buddy system,” or establishing an employee resource group so that new employees can become involved with DEI priorities and activities at work.

Finally, the journey mapping exercise highlighted the need for overall service coordination, collaboration, and support with respect to employee retention. Together with employers and service organizations, there is an opportunity for BC WiN to review and address employee retention, job transition, as well as employees’ learning, growth, and career aspirations. A focus on the demand side of employee retention (i.e., employers creating the conditions where talent is retained and thrives) may be an important future aspect of BC WiN’s focus. For example, now that the BC WiN model has had experience working with employers to strengthen capacity in recruiting and hiring people with disabilities, it can work with employers to deepen DEI within their organization and throughout the employment lifecycle by engaging in specific initiatives to increase their capacity and supports with respect to employee retention.

EMPLOYER PARTNER RESULTS

EMPLOYER PARTNER RESULTS

As this project refines and tests a demand-driven approach to inclusive employment, BC WiN identified that it would establish employer partner agreements to participate in testing the model’s more comprehensive DEI training and recruitment supports, setting a minimum of five large employers and 10 small and medium enterprises (SMEs). As of the publication of this report, several employer partners who are SMEs have yet to resume their recruitment activities of people with disabilities, which were put on hold during earlier waves of the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of the pandemic on small and medium sized businesses has been well-documented: these businesses have been reported as more likely to experience financial challenges and constraints due to the rising cost of inputs, decrease in profitability, and difficulty in financing debt that accumulated earlier in the pandemic (Li et al., 2022), all which could impact their ongoing recruitment and DEI efforts.

While there has been variability in employer partner engagement throughout the project due to the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Table 2 outlines all employer partners active with BC WiN as of June 30, 2022:

Table 2 BC WiN employer partners

Employer partner	Partner since (Year)	Size
ICBC	2018	500+
BCAA	2019	500+
London Drugs	2014	500+
Port of Vancouver	2019	500+
Vancity	2014	500+
Ledcor	2020	500+
Canadian Western Bank	2020	500+
BC Hydro	2021	500+
BC Pension Corporation	2021	Over 100

Employer partner	Partner since (Year)	Size
FedEx	2021	500+
Hudson World Duty Free	2019	500+
Parq Vancouver	2014 (previously Edgewater)	500+
Small Business BC	2019	10 to 50
UBC Sauder School of Business	2019	Over 100
Musora Music	2022	50 to 100 (100 PT Instructors not included)
Auticon Canada	2022	Over 100
YVR	2017	500+

Once the employer partners with BC WiN, the IWC team works with the employer to understand their unique business needs, job opportunities, upcoming recruitment cycles and identifies potential barriers to successfully engaging people with disabilities in their organization. Table 3 summarizes key employer indicators tracked through this project.

Table 3 Employer indicators summary

	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Number of capacity building activities	9	34	24
Number of employers to job seeker matching activities (recruitment campaigns)	35	109	64
Number of unique employers engaged	13	8	17
Number of employers that hired PWD as part of Opportunities Fund activities	10	4	16

Source: ESDC quarterly reports (results not yet available for 2022-23).

During this project, the BC WiN model also offered expanded employer supports to build their DEI capacity and achieve their goals with respect to accessible and inclusive employment. Many of these activities were adjusted because of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. As highlighted in our interim report from March 2021, BC WiN worked with several employers on DEI capacity building while recruitment activities were suspended.

Additional highlights of BC WiN activities with employers include:

- Completed accessibility reviews of current recruitment practices to build current and future capacity to attract job seekers with disabilities during and post-COVID-19;
- Increased understanding by employer partners of how to attract people with disabilities during a pandemic when there is concern about heightened risk to personal and workplace safety;
- Increased employer involvement to identify which employment opportunities are suitable for remote work arrangements, conduct recruitment activities accordingly and identify and facilitate technical requirements and capacity to ensure that people with disabilities will be well-prepared and supported to perform their tasks effectively;
- Increased employer capacity to reframe employment opportunities to communicate flexible work arrangements and other accommodations;
- Created and made available employer tools and resources (including job descriptions, website active offers, interview guidelines and e-learning for hiring managers) to support increased hiring of people with disabilities during and post-pandemic;
- Developed virtual interviewing and multi-media job previews and scenario-based learning vignettes for anticipated in-demand positions;
- Developed customized training for cohorts of people with disabilities to prepare for jobs that are expected to be in demand as recruitment resumes;
- Created a larger talent pool of candidates with disabilities who have the preparation and training for either in-person or remote opportunities that are available immediately or when hiring resumes over the coming months.

EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF BC WIN ON EMPLOYER CAPACITY

To document how the project fulfills its key objectives of supporting employer partners in developing their capacity for hiring and retaining people with disabilities, this component of the evaluation sought to document how employers are currently engaged with BC WiN and, depending on their history, how this engagement might have changed over time. It also sought to understand employer partners' current capacity for hiring and retaining people with disabilities, BC WiN's involvement in building this capacity, and any advantages or disadvantages associated with the BC WiN model.

Employer assessment

Given that BC WiN has partnerships with employers at various stages of engagement (i.e., some working with BC WiN for several years, and some who had only recently initiated a partnership), it was agreed that a mechanism for understanding these variations would provide useful context for interpreting BC WiN's contribution to their overall capacity development. An assessment tool was developed to summarize the current overall capacity of individual employer partners with respect to implementing inclusive recruitment and retention strategies, as well as to provide an indication of partners' current engagement with BC WiN.

Organizational assessment has been recognized as an important strategy in DEI management to reflect on organizational strengths and opportunities for improvement, usually organized around a series of best-practice statements or examples (Trenerry & Paradies, 2021; Iwanaga et al., 2021). The tool developed for this 'point in time' exercise was based on a review of benchmarking tools used to track DEI employer practices within companies.⁴ The tool also incorporated a conceptual framework of results-based actions for employers that were considered key elements to an effective DEI strategy, which was developed during the pilot research phase of the BC WiN model. This framework, which is now referred to the "Four Pillars of Accessible Employment," is currently being applied by BC WiN to identify areas of opportunity to improve employer partners processes, capabilities and supports. Unlike some of the tools reviewed for this exercise, the goal was not to formally evaluate employers or submit them to a ranking exercise, but to better understand where employers are at in terms of current policy and practice. The tool was also designed to be concise rather than comprehensive of all actions articulated in the 'Four Pillars'.

The research team identified a list of ten questions that were identified in the pillars but also common against similar DEI assessment tools. The questions were formulated as "best practice" statements and organized according to the following scale: 1- *Have not started work in this area*; 2- *Planning and development underway*; 3- *This is in place, and we have evidence of its use*; 4- *This is well-established and the employer models it for others*; and 5- *Don't know/unable to assess*.⁵ An additional ten-point checklist was also included to determine whether a specific accessible employment component was already in place with the employer (e.g., staff have

⁴ Tools reviewed include: The National Diversity and Inclusion Benchmarking Study; Bersin by Deloitte Research Programme Study on Diversity and Inclusion in Canada; United States Chamber of Commerce: Workplace Disability Inclusion Assessment Tool; Disability Equality Index; Burton Blatt Institute Inclusive Culture Checklist.

⁵ The scale was adapted from various assessment tools, including the President's Group Untapped Talent: B2B Guide for Innovative Hiring and Retention tools for employers (President's Group, 2020) and the Tool for Organizational Self-Assessment Related to Racial Equity (Coalition of Communities of Color, 2014).

undergone training, policies and practices in place, presence of an employee resource group, etc. See Appendix C for full details).

BC WiN's IWC team were asked to complete the tool for each employer partner to establish these summary employer profiles, to be referred to by the research team in the development of the approach to qualitative interviews with employer partners themselves. Given this exercise was conducted through the late spring/early summer of 2021, it was acknowledged that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employer partners' current ability to engage with BC WiN would result in the IWC team not being able to assess all employer partners in its network and that not all employers would be able to participate in interviews. As such, the evaluation team has planned to follow up with an additional group of employer partners for further exploration of these topics in the final stages of the project.

In total, the IWC team was able to identify five employer partners who were engaged in supported activities to recruit and retain people with disabilities at the time of the interviews. It was also noted that two additional employer partners, while highly engaged with BC WiN, were too early in their relationship with the model to effectively assess their capacity but could be generally situated in the space of currently developing DEI best practices.

Predictably, employers who had a longer history of engagement with BC WiN had, in general, implemented many of the best practices outlined in the assessment questionnaire and checklist, but only one employer partner was consistently assessed with "*This is well-established and the employer models it for others*" while the others were either in planning/development stages or had implemented key practices and had evidence of its use. Notably, all but one employer partner assessed in this exercise had not yet established an accountability process, including measurable goals and performance data, although planning and development were underway. Similarly, all but one employer partner had not yet implemented a proactive approach to addressing physical barriers in the workplace (e.g., accessibility audits, meeting or exceeding accessible building code requirements). Two out of the five employers assessed had introduced an employee resource group, peer mentoring, or other support for people with disabilities. Two out of the five employers assessed had encouraged suppliers or subcontractors to demonstrate their own commitment to accessibility, through their ability to meet the needs of their employees and customers with disabilities.

Employer partner interviews

Outreach with employer partners to participate in interviews was dependant on their levels of engagement with BC WiN in 2021, which varied due to COVID-19. SRDC prepared a semi-structured interview protocol. The interview protocol reflected the overall research objectives to understand employer partners' current capacity for hiring and retaining people with disabilities,

BC WiN's involvement in building this capacity, and any advantages or disadvantages associated with the BC WiN model. Based on the results of IWC assessments, each interview protocol was also tailored for the employer partner, to allow for a more targeted conversation that was informed by an understanding of where employer partners were in relation to their history with BC WiN and the presence of DEI practices outlined in the assessment tool. In total, five interviews were conducted.

Interview transcripts were compiled and analysed using an inductive thematic coding method (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in NVivo software, first by assigning preliminary themes organized by the interview protocol and organizing framework of the BC WiN "Four Pillars" model (i.e., commitment, readiness, recruitment, and retention), and then by searching for sub-themes and patterns within these nodes.

Motivation and experience working with BC WiN

All employers interviewed held positions that included a human resources function for their organization, many of whom were either directly involved in recruitment or were responsible for improving the talent management and talent acquisition process. Some of these individuals also play a role in directly supporting DEI efforts of their organization; however, no employer partners that participated in the interviews felt comfortable speaking on behalf of their employer with respect to their overall DEI strategies and initiatives. Instead, they welcomed the opportunity to speak to their experience working with BC WiN, which was primarily from the recruitment and hiring perspective of their organization. Half of the employer partners interviewed had several years of experience working with BC WiN, from as early as the initial pilot project, and the other half had been working with BC WiN only over the course of the previous 12 to 18 months.

For all employer partners interviewed, the primary motivation and history of working with BC WiN stemmed directly from wanting to increase recruitment of people with disabilities. Employer partners spoke of wanting to maximize all recruitment streams and hiring the best talent to fulfill roles. Underlying these motivations was an appreciation of a diverse and often untapped talent pool where employers already had an awareness and understanding of the business case for hiring people with disabilities. Employer partners interviewed understood and valued that their organization could benefit from qualified candidates who have the skills, education, and experience to fulfill positions, where individuals could reach their potential with the necessary supports and adjustments in place. As one employer noted: *"We have a goal to increase our footprint from a diversity perspective and make sure that we're evolving as an employer, tapping into valuable but underutilized candidate pool."*

To engage with BC WiN, employers are required to demonstrate a pre-existing commitment to creating an inclusive workplace. Several employer partners noted that their organization's commitment was formalized through their participation in the Presidents Group, a network of employers in BC who are champions for more accessible and inclusive workplaces. Presidents Group members have publicly committed to becoming more inclusive in their employment practices of hiring individuals with disabilities and support one another through a community of practice to advance DEI initiatives. These employer partners noted that it was through the ongoing collaboration between BC WiN and the Presidents Group that they were first connected to BC WiN to operationalize a commitment to make their recruitment and hiring practices more inclusive. As one employer partner conveyed: *“Basically, the rationale for me, talent is talent and I need to find the best match and focus on the task at hand... but I was far from the expert, so I wanted some advice.”*

Two employer partners – one with several years of experience working with BC WiN and one who had begun working with BC WiN more recently – approached their goals of recruitment within the context of a pilot project. In both cases, the intention was to concentrate on recruitment efforts in specific corporate teams and to learn through this process so that their organization could eventually scale successful approaches.

BC WiN's role in building employer DEI capacity

Employer partners interviewed primarily spoke of BC WiN's role in developing their organization's DEI capacity from the recruitment and hiring perspective. These experiences included working with BC WiN to review job descriptions to be inclusive of people with disabilities and to address where possible barriers with respect to job design might exist (e.g., focusing on transferable skills, potential to work from home, and flexibility with respect to hours). Employers also described working with BC WiN to review their hiring processes from an accessibility perspective, including editing and adapting interview questions and guides, ensuring adjustments and accommodations were proactively addressed throughout the recruitment and hiring process, and offering suggestions in terms of how to approach reference checks, letters of offer, and onboarding for new employees.

Employers noted that working with BC WiN played a role in connecting their organization's DEI values or commitment with practical approaches. They noted that, by breaking down the recruitment process to apply strategies for inclusion at each stage, BC WiN played an instrumental role in moving their organization from awareness of the benefits of diversity to becoming more accessible in practice. In other words, BC WiN was the mechanism for their organization in moving from the “why” to the “how.” As one employer explained: *“I can tell you, [BC WiN] provoked healthy debate about the quality of our job descriptions, whether we had the right requirements or were focusing on things we should be focusing. So that was very good.”*

That was a lot of value, and again, it made it easier for us to take the overall principles the company was already teaching us to make it tangible, at least for recruitment.”

Employer partners spoke of the value working with BC WiN to offer customized guidance and support to recruiters and hiring managers, as well as building their understanding and confidence with using inclusive hiring and recruitment approaches. They noted that BC WiN played an important role in developing their team’s overall comfort using the “language of disability” and that individualized coaching and support made a difference in addressing any initial hesitation amongst recruiters and hiring managers that harboured reservations that they might get something wrong, or unintentionally cause offence.

Employer partners generally viewed BC WiN training resources, such as the Untapped Talent e-learning guide, as being a niche support for personnel involved in recruitment and hiring, so they hadn’t broadly introduced the training throughout their organizations even though they were provided with the resources to do so. They appreciated that this resource offered tactical information and strategies and viewed it as a resource for members of their team directly working with BC WiN in hiring people with disabilities. Several employer partners also spoke of the BC WiN collaboration with the Presidents Group to offer more in-depth training for hiring managers, which included facilitated sessions to encourage engagement and deepen learning of the content. In general, employer partners noted that they benefited from the tailored approaches and customized support that BC WiN could offer in addition to the e-learning, as they put inclusive hiring strategies into practice. One employer said: *“When BC WiN came into [our organization] to do specific training with our recruitment team, that was really valuable because the recruitment team could come and say these are some of the concerns that we’ve encountered. Could you please advise us? How would we address some of these concerns?”*

Many employer partners spoke of the importance of having a subject matter expert that they could turn to as they learned, knowing that they did not have the answers, but feeling more at ease knowing that there was someone they could call for support. This ongoing and personalized method of coaching employer partners through each stage of recruitment and hiring was an important element of applying any information or practice outlined in the e-learning modules: *“Hiring people with disabilities is about just starting the dialogue. People have questions or they’re maybe hesitant to start. [We] can help by pointing them to people like [BC WiN] who can provide more information... “*

Employer perspectives on the job matching process and recruitment outcomes

Employer partners were asked a series of questions with respect to how BC WiN supported their organizations in finding diverse talent. Many employer partners spoke of the process whereby BC WiN begins by establishing a strong understanding of the organization’s hiring needs, hiring

process, and job requirements. This might be supported by a conversation to gain an in-depth appreciation of the expectations for the role, specific working conditions (e.g., hours, shifts, ability to work from home), and overall business needs. Employer partners noted that it was only after a process to understand their hiring needs that BC WiN then advertises the position, works with its network of service providers to find qualified applicants, and pre-screens candidates against the job position for eventual referral back to the employer.

Several employer partners spoke to the value of receiving referrals of candidates who were not only pre-screened with respect to job fit, but also included a detailed profile to highlight any specific adjustments or accommodations that the candidate required. This might include suggestions on how to approach the interview, such as providing the candidate with time to respond, or tailoring questions in a specific way. They noted that preparing their own recruiters and hiring managers with this information increased their confidence that they would be prepared to address accommodations proactively.

Employer partners suggested that the BC WiN model, which includes partnership with, and recruitment from, organizations serving people with disabilities was instrumental in creating an environment of proactive disclosure. One partner noted that in their mainstream recruitment practices, candidates typically don't disclose information about their disabilities or request accommodations, even if they are proactively encouraged to do so. Another employer partner suggested that BC WiN's practice of outlining specific candidate requirements or insights for adjustments was helpful in applying inclusive practices at the beginning of their engagement with a potential employee. Again, employer partners felt that knowing they could follow up with BC WiN to answer questions, provide specific recommendations or be there for ongoing support contributed to overall confidence of their teams to recruit from a diverse pool of candidates. Employer partners noted that BC WiN also provided customized support for hiring managers, including attending interviews and debriefing on the process afterwards to continuously improve processes and understand next steps. BC WiN also provided assistance, where required, to coach hiring managers through reference checks and assist with employee onboarding. As one employer explained: *"I think that conversation just happens that much more naturally when it's through a partnership because it's all out in the open. We're getting proactive information from BC WiN about what we might need to consider in terms of modifying our approach to the interview or the selection process versus waiting for a candidate maybe to disclose to us at the point that they're actually in the interview, which maybe isn't the best time. It doesn't allow for preparation or consultation. So that's another huge advantage. And see, when is it allows for us to be proactive."*

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Given that the employer interviews took place during 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic was noted as a key factor in the reduced number of job candidate referrals at this point in time. These employers suggested that the overall lack of candidates impacted their ability to comment on the effectiveness of the BC WiN model to find people with disabilities to fulfill available roles, but that they benefitted from working with BC WiN to develop their overall capacity to strengthen recruitment and hiring practices from an accessibility and inclusion perspective. Overall, these employers suggested that although they had limited experience in hiring people with disabilities at the moment, they anticipated being well-prepared for an eventual increase in job seekers and continued to work with BC WiN to advertise positions and recruit candidates. As a result, the evaluation team plans to conduct a second round of employer partner interviews in the final stage of the project, both to gather additional perspectives from employers, as well as to explore themes with employer partners who have additional experiences with the BC WiN model in developing their DEI capacity throughout the organization (i.e., beyond recruitment and hiring, with a focus on employee retention as well).

Perceived advantages and disadvantages of the BC WiN model

Employer partners highlighted the advantages of BC WiN as providing expertise and tailored supports in a focused and specialized way. Many felt that what set BC WiN apart from other community partnerships was its specialized focus on recruitment. They had confidence in the model that they were able to reach a diverse talent pool through BC WiN's network of service providers. Some employer partners expressed that they were not interested in managing several relationships with different service providers and that BC WiN offered a "one window" approach to working with a variety of organizations. They noted that because BC WiN has a relationship with a network of service providers, the employer partner receives the benefit of that network, while only having to cultivate a single relationship with BC WiN.

Employer partners noted that they valued having the ongoing support through the recruitment and hiring process so that hiring managers knew where to turn with specific questions. Employer partners noted that in comparison to other organizations that they worked with in the DEI space (i.e., community partners, general DEI training and supports) BC WiN offered "focused and narrow" expertise with respect to recruiting and hiring people with disabilities: *"I think the difference with B.C. WiN is they offer more of a boutique approach, like they really take you through the initial stages of really understanding, your organization, your needs, and what your ideal candidate [would be] ... what the need is of the business and what type of individuals will thrive in this type of environment. And then they really work with you on finding those specific types of candidates."*

Employer partners also spoke of their confidence in the BC WiN recruitment experts who refer candidates who are screened to meet their business needs. Some employer partners noted that BC WiN stood apart from other supported employment models because it is focused on setting both the candidate and the employer up for success by keeping a deliberate focus on candidate fit. They trusted BC WiN's expertise as recruiters and had confidence in the team's knowledge to screen candidates for knowledge, ability, and capacity for positions, while providing the added benefit of understanding how to match specific candidate needs and working conditions. As one employer noted: *"One of the things that I find most successful about BC WiN is that they're not just looking to just place someone just for the sake of placing someone; that they really do want this person to succeed... I think setting them setting someone up to succeed and in the right role and the role that they're going to thrive in and that they can find some accommodations that match their abilities as well, is much more beneficial than just placing someone in a position where they're going to be stressed out. They're not necessarily going to feel that they can speak about some of their concerns and just kind of get lost and left."*

With respect to disadvantages of the model, most employer partners noted that their business needs for hiring were beyond what BC WiN could accommodate – both in terms of overall numbers of qualified referrals as well as filling roles with highly specialized requirements, (e.g., positions requiring several years of experience or technical qualifications such as in the commercial banking sector). Several employer partners shared that, because their overall measure of success for working with BC WiN was to demonstrate that they were increasing their talent pools and hiring people with disabilities, they were unable to comment fully on the advantages and/or disadvantages of the model.

For those employer partners who had relationships with BC WiN prior to the pandemic, they also highlighted the importance of "success stories" as an incentive for organizations to build momentum with respect to DEI efforts and make investments into future DEI goals. They noted that having evidence of the effectiveness of tapping into this candidate pool helps to address misconceptions and unconscious bias about increasing diversity in the workplace. They noted that the importance of sharing experiences and setting examples for others in their organizations was the most effective means of embracing accessible employment practices more broadly. One employer highlighted that: *"Good stories also build momentum [and] capacity, because I think then there's that that evidence that it can work, that we can have success tapping into this candidate pool. I think it builds some confidence and alleviates some fears because I think there's still, in some cases, maybe some uncertainty about what if this doesn't work? How will I manage through this? Just some unknowns. And so, I think the more we've seen some success stories, the more momentum we've built in terms of willingness to embrace it as well."*

Significantly, several employer partners volunteered their perspectives on the sustainability of the BC WiN model beyond the lifespan of this current project. They noted that because there were no fees associated with accessing BC WiN's services and supports, they were able to

overcome initial implementation hurdles associated with operationalizing a commitment to diversify their hiring. When these perspectives were explored further, employer partners noted that other organizational priorities often took precedence to developing the knowledge and expertise required for operationalizing commitments around inclusive recruitment and retention practices. Some commented that they were unlikely to be able to develop such expertise within their organizations or to establish comparable relationships to those that BC WiN had already in place through its network of service providers. Some noted that to pay for similar services, they would have to justify the expense through the number of candidates that they were able to hire, which was difficult to do presently due to the COVID-19 related impacts on the candidate pool. One employer offered: *“We need external help.... Lots of us, we have good intentions, but honestly, we don't know how to implement them, and we have enough on our priorities that we don't have the time to learn everything.”*

Nonetheless, employer partners acknowledged the value of the services BC WiN offered and noted that they were unlikely to have made comparable progress on developing internal capacity without it. There was an acknowledgement that because of the partnership with BC WiN, employers were able to achieve a level of consistency and focus to their DEI efforts. Unlike traditional recruitment models or agencies where there is little contact beyond submitting a job listing and receiving the candidate referrals, they noted that BC WiN required their participation and consultation to ensure that appropriate changes to their hiring processes were in place. It was through the partnership, they observed, that they were able to develop their own understanding and confidence to incorporate inclusive recruitment and hiring practices consistently, while developing their own capacity as specialists within their organizations. As one employer conveyed: *“They provide so much value... It's a bit overwhelming to know how to recruit diverse talent. And it's not like the want and the desire isn't there. But there is a foundation that you need to lay and it's not that easy. You don't just put that on a job description... Partners like this make a huge difference in being able to connect employers to talent and especially ones like BC WiN that provide so many resources at each level of building that foundation, of understanding how to engage with the talent, of how to accommodate the talent... an invaluable resource.”*

LESSONS LEARNED

IMPORTANCE OF DEMAND-DRIVEN STRATEGIES

In contrast to supply-side workforce strategies that focus on preparing individuals with job skills needed for employment, demand-driven strategies focus on employer needs, organizational conditions, and the work environment as significant variables of employment success. While typical demand-led models take their cues from what jobs employers need filled or what job-related skills are required for in-demand occupations, there is increased attention on demand-side strategies that also include changing the behaviour of employers (Zizys, 2018). Changing employer behaviours becomes significant in creating more inclusive and accessible workplaces so that employers can access diverse talent.

Although employers express positive attitudes towards accessing a diverse talent pool in the disability employment research, there is also strong evidence in the literature to suggest that employers' attitudes do not always translate into actual hiring of people with disabilities (Iwanga et al., 2018). As a result, successful demand-led interventions for people with disabilities must have a thorough understanding of underlying reasons that stand between employer attitude and action. Common myths and misconceptions regarding the employment of people with disabilities often stem from lack of knowledge and experience on effective practices for recruiting, hiring, and retaining people with disabilities, as well as failure to address unconscious bias amongst employers and in the workplace (Bonaccio et al., 2020; Murfitt et al., 2018). To bridge this divide, demand-led strategies must address the real concerns of employers about hiring and retaining people with disabilities and be able to address those concerns and needs, often dispelling persistent myths with evidence (Bonaccio et al., 2020; Chan et al., 2010a).

DISABILITY CONFIDENCE AND BC WIN'S ROLE AS 'TRUSTED BROKER'

Disability confidence refers to the suite of knowledge and skills employers require to effectively engage people with disabilities in their recruitment processes, to understand and implement workplace adjustments, and to create inclusive workplaces (Lindsay et al., 2019). However, evidence points to employer preferences to build this confidence alongside a "trusted broker" who can offer information and advice over time (Murfitt et al., 2018). Rather than simply having the information resource, employers are looking for such brokers that match diverse talent to job requirements, and who they can look to for expertise on disability related issues, and

reassurance that there is a “responsible contact person” who can be accessed immediately about issues that arise concerning people with disabilities in the workplace (Gufstaffson et al., 2013).

While employers may be less risk averse to hiring people with disabilities in occupations where the demand is high and the supply of qualified workers is low (Chan et al., 2010a), a “trusted broker” reduces the perception of risk in meaningful ways. As trust is established with employers to shift behaviour, employers can then turn their attention to developing the attitudes and skills necessary to recruit, hire, and retain talent with disabilities effectively. There must be a sense that the broker knows their business and can offer tailored solutions such as disability training, assistance with developing inclusive policies and procedures especially for recruitment, and addressing barriers in the workplace (Murfitt et al., 2018). More than simply guiding employers through the process, these “trusted brokers” also inject security into new and uncertain situations (Gufstaffson et al., 2013).

Disability confidence goes beyond having a supportive and inclusive work culture and requires leading and modeling social change as a willingness to learn, try new ways of working, and reaching beyond one’s “comfort zone” (Lindsay et al., 2019). Interventions at key decision-making levels are the most important first step in demand-side employment interventions. However, changing mid-level managers’ perceptions and attitudes is also important, especially since these individuals both display the most ambivalence towards people with disabilities and play a key role in the day-to-day interactions between the employee and the workplace (Chan et al., 2010b).

One of the most effective ways of increasing disability confidence across all levels is through positive experiences working with people with disabilities. Since recruitment can still be viewed as “high risk,” demand-led strategies can also look to experiential programs such as volunteering, mentoring, internship programs, or work trials to increase firsthand exposure to the potential of people with disabilities. Experiential opportunities mutually benefits both employers and people with disabilities: employees across all levels of the organization acquire disability confidence while people with disabilities gain the confidence and skills that can be applied to more traditional forms of employment (Murfitt et al., 2018). These approaches also underscore the importance of the role of support organizations for employees with disabilities as well as the role of “trusted brokers” for employers. Each provides ever-present support corresponding with employee and employer needs to ensure that the experience is positive (Gufstaffson et al., 2013).

Findings suggest that the BC WiN model provides unique expertise and fulfills a need as a “trusted broker” for its employer partners. BC WiN’s IWC team establishes trust by focusing on employer needs and ensuring that their job matching services are oriented to the employer, while simultaneously connecting to service organizations that can support the employee. In playing this role as the support for employers and a liaison to the service organization network,

the IWC team is uniquely positioned to facilitate employers' strategies to address unconscious bias while facilitating their capacity to hire, recruit, and retain people with disabilities, thereby becoming disability confident. As our findings suggest, building and deepening disability confidence across an organization takes ongoing resources and effort and cannot stop after the initial hiring has been made. During employee transitions or cases where conflict arises, the IWC team also plays the trusted broker role to ensure a positive outcome for both the employer and employee, as well as identifying additional opportunities in the employee lifecycle where the employer may need to increase its DEI capacity for the successful onboarding, retention, and development of employees with disabilities.

BC WiN AND EVALUATING LONGER-TERM OUTCOMES

BC WiN's demand-focused model and key services of building employer DEI capacity and matching job seekers with disabilities to available positions offers some emerging lessons learned for evaluating outcomes as well. While many models of supporting employment for people with disabilities focuses on the preparation, hiring, and accommodation of candidates, the BC WiN model underscores the factors that foster successful and meaningful employment. These include providing a deep understanding of employer perspectives and needs to build DEI capacity, a focus on the organizational environment, role, and employee fit to ensure job matching success, and providing customized support and expertise for both employers and job seekers that is oriented towards long-term success.

Following these longer-term outcomes has presented certain challenges, further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic, where it has been difficult to engage job seekers with disabilities in participating in surveys after initial employment (i.e., low responses to six-month and twelve-month follow-up surveys). In addition, following employer partners' experiences in deepening their DEI capacity has been challenging as there has been a large degree of employee turnover in the project's partner organizations, especially among human resources personnel. As the *Increasing Employment Through Inclusive Workplaces* project enters its final months of delivery, the evaluation team will continue to work with the IWC team to engage participants in follow-up surveys and employer partner interviews so that these longer-term outcomes can be further explored.

Interim results also present opportunities to share what we have learned with BC WiN stakeholders about future directions of the model. As our findings suggest, there are opportunities to continue to support employer capacity beyond recruitment and hiring into the subsequent stages of the employment lifecycle (i.e., onboarding, employee development, retention, performance management) to test and refine the BC WiN model. To build organizational disability confidence that supports accessibility and inclusion for the long term, BC WiN's demand-led approach offers insights into how employers benefit from a trusted broker

who can offer both unique expertise and customized support to address employer needs when conflicts or employee transitions inevitably arise. With additional planned activities to engage employers and service organizations on these lessons learned, we will continue to explore their perspectives and needs with respect to how the BC WiN model can contribute to the service ecosystem to support people with disabilities at all stages of their employment journeys and create inclusive workplaces dedicated to employee retention and long-term success.

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APPENDIX A: COVID-19 SURVEY IMPACT ON PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Impacts of COVID-19 on People with Disabilities' Employment Experiences



20
BC SERVICE PROVIDERS

Survey sent to BC WIN's service partner network, representing approximately **566** clients

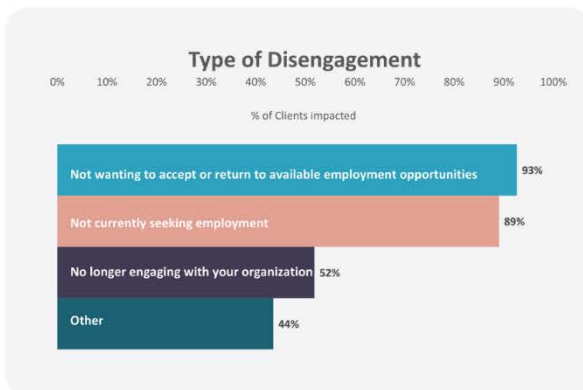



"Clients who already face multiple barriers seemed to demonstrate less resilience and more anxiety around COVID."

"The shifting labour market which has added a complex layer to most businesses - the physical distancing, PPE, having to think about another layer of accommodation is very challenging for employers"

IMPACT OF COVID-19

Responses suggest that not only are job seekers disengaging from employment, but employers are more hesitant to hire people with disabilities during the pandemic.

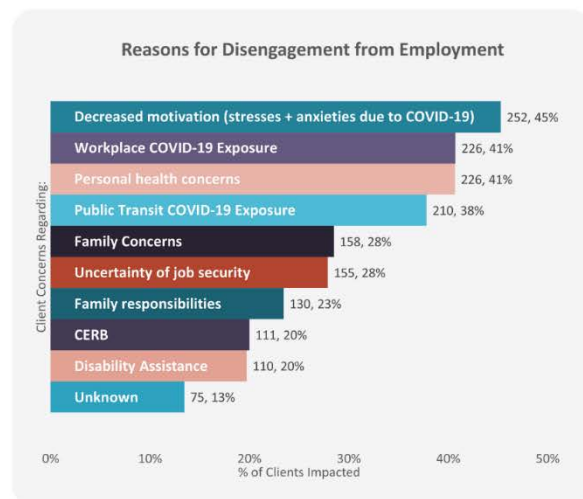
NOT BUSINESS AS USUAL

The survey highlighted the need to adapt to COVID-19:

Employers require further supports to shift their approaches to engaging people with disabilities during the pandemic.

Persistence of pandemic requires understanding how job seekers engage in employment currently and shift to longer-term thinking.

Concerns about personal safety and job security present real barriers to employment for vulnerable job seekers.



APPENDIX B: NATIONAL WORKPLACE ACCESSIBILITY STREAM MILESTONES

- Continued recruitment for employer partners, as businesses began to open and had needs to hire additional staff
- With BC WiN service delivery partners, the coordination and delivery of two cohort training sessions for three in-demand occupations
- Development of the Untapped Talent – B2B Inclusive Recruitment and Retention E-learning series, with eight employer partners committed (to date) to participate in the one hour – three module training
- Completion of five recruitment practices reviews, including review of career websites for inclusive language, review of job descriptions and revision of behaviour-based interview guides (for people who are neuro-diverse) with employer partners
- Development and delivery of two virtual Inclusive Hiring Manager Training sessions for larger organizations, and one DEI Respectful Workplace training session for a medium-sized employer
- Development and delivery of two virtual training sessions for HR teams on how to Influence Hiring Managers when presenting candidates with diverse abilities
- Development and delivery of one virtual Autism-specific recruitment and retention training session delivered for hiring managers
- Development of the first video vignette to highlight entry retail employment opportunities – this vignette targets people who are neurodiverse and would benefit from the visuals of ‘a day in the life of’ Stockers and Cashiers
- As a lead sponsor, participated in a Virtual Career Fair for UBC, SFU and University of Victoria, aiming to attract students, graduates, or alumni with disabilities for employment opportunities, and presented to each institution separately
- Completion of five employment retention activities to support employees who are neurodiverse and concerned about returning to their previous positions due to COVID and one additional retention activity for an individual who is neurodiverse whose job was at risk.

APPENDIX C: EMPLOYER ASSESSMENT & CHECKLIST

Employer partnership/engagement characteristics

- How long has employer been a partner with BC WIN?
- What are the roles/responsibilities of your key employer contacts (e.g., HR professionals, hiring managers, etc.)?
- What is the current frequency of contact between the employer partner and BC WIN?
- Does the frequency of contact change significantly based on workforce needs (e.g., seasonal employment, COVID-related hiring pause, etc.)?
- Is there a customized DEI action plan in place with the employer partner?
- How many recruitment campaigns have been completed or are planned with this partner?

IWC team assessment of employer partner DEI capacity	<i>Have not started work in this area yet</i>	<i>Planning and development underway</i>	<i>This is in place, and we have evidence of its use</i>	<i>This is well established, and the employer models it for others</i>	<i>Don't know / unable to assess</i>
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Does the employer partner have a shared vision for DEI?

Is there evidence of a shared commitment to DEI across various levels of the employer partner's organization (e.g., both leadership and staff)?

The employer partner takes a proactive approach to addressing physical barriers on its premises (e.g., accessibility audits, meeting or exceeding building code)

The employer partner has established a DEI committee/counsel, employee resource group, employee mentoring, or another practice to engage the perspective of those with lived experience

The employer partner has established partnerships with organizations that connect job seekers with disabilities to employment

IWC team assessment of employer partner DEI capacity	<i>Have not started work in this area yet</i>	<i>Planning and development underway</i>	<i>This is in place, and we have evidence of its use</i>	<i>This is well established, and the employer models it for others</i>	<i>Don't know / unable to assess</i>
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The employer partner has established an accountability process including measurable goals and collects performance data (organizational and employee level)

The employer partner has prepared its existing staff and hiring managers to shift their recruitment practices to support people with disabilities at all stages of employment (e.g., from recruitment, onboarding, promoting, and supporting employees return to a workplace after an absence)

The employer partner has adjusted its recruitment practices to remove barriers in the advertising, screening, and interviewing of candidates with disabilities

The employer partner has retention practices in place that ensures employees with disabilities meet their full potential from orientation, on-the-job training, feedback/coaching, and adjustments to ensure they can learn new skills or take on more responsibilities

Does the employer partner have a shared vision for DEI?

Employer checklist	Yes	No	N/A
We have a public diversity and inclusion statement or commitment			
The term "disability" or "disabilities" is specifically mentioned in our diversity and inclusion materials			
We have an internal structure in place whose goal it is to address diversity and inclusion (e.g., a committee, workplace champion, etc.)			
We help and encourage suppliers or subcontractors to demonstrate their ability to meet the needs of their employees and customers with disabilities			
Our staff have been trained to understand and meet the needs of job applicants, customers and employees with disabilities (e.g., awareness/sensitivity training, addressing unconscious bias, etc.)			
We have policies and practices in place which enable staff to deliver effective reasonable adjustments for job applicants, customers and employees with disabilities			
We have a formal practice or policy regarding the collection of data regarding our workforce diversity (e.g., employment equity data, turnover rates, cost of recruitment, etc.)			
Our work premises have been audited and adapted to ensure they are as accessible as possible, for as many job applicants, employees and customers as possible			
We have a formal policy or practice in place to ensure that employees with disabilities are actively enabled to realize their potential (e.g., orientation, on-the-job training, career development, promotion)			
An employee resource group, peer mentoring, or other social supports exist for people with disabilities			

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