



ISSUE: There are efficiency and cost issues to consider when employing people with barriers.

THINGS TO CONSIDER: Organizations that employ people with barriers will need to give special consideration to a number of cost related factors. These factors will impact budgets in ways that are unique to every organization. Typically, there are a few key variables that will determine the overall budgetary and efficiency impact. These include:

- The capacity or skill level of employees with barriers, and understanding the limits of their capacity even with time and experience.
- The total number of low threshold staff in an organization, and the balance of these employees against other staff.
- How closely the job duties and responsibilities of an employee with barriers are tied to the delivery of the organization's product or service.

Some organizations will have a higher tolerance for absorbing efficiency costs depending on their organizational objectives. Regardless, the key to success is to be clear about your organization's objectives and to plan accordingly. In doing so, there are some other important costs and things to consider:

- **Employment Support:** Experience has shown that dedicated, internal employee support is critical to maintaining employment for those with multiple barriers. The level and type of employment support will vary for each employee depending on their circumstances, abilities and life skills. Employment support needs can centre on issues such as life skills, housing, addictions, mental health, and relationships among others. In order to address employment support needs, organizations may choose to hire someone with social work experience, contract out for support services, or offer counseling options as part of an employee assistance program. In doing so, you will need to budget for salary or professional service fees.
- **Enabling Support:** Enabling supports such as providing bus passes, meals and other food and household staples can make the difference between success and failure for many low-threshold employees. This is particularly the case in the early part of their employment before they have accumulated earnings to cover those costs themselves. For some, such as those who do not have the capacity for full time employment, enabling supports will be a permanent commitment by an employer.
- **Training:** Training is another important employee support consideration. Employees with barriers require training opportunities including both job and life skills. Furthermore, especially in the case of people with multiple barriers, ongoing relearning and reinforcement of skills and knowledge for the continuum of their employment is often required.
- **Productivity:** Although some people with barriers to employment function well in the workplace, many face challenges that make it difficult for them to produce at the same level as other employees. These challenges can include mental health and addictions issues as well as developmental challenges. Offsetting these challenges will require additional help from staff within the organization and flexibility in the development of job duties for these employees. It is important that employers recognize this and where possible create tasks and duties that meet an employee with barriers "where they are at"



- rather than plugging an employee into a standard set of job responsibilities. This will alleviate frustration for everyone, employee and employer alike. Additionally, in tailoring specific tasks and duties to an employee's capacity will allow them to be more productive overall, reducing the productivity cost to the organization.
- **Quality:** Attention to detail and skills deficits in employees may or may not impact the organization's ability to produce a high quality product. Without a product of competitive quality an organization will face market challenges. In order to mitigate these challenges, employers will need to provide sufficient skilled leadership support and monitor the quality of work by employees to stay on top of potential quality issues. Additionally, an employer may want to be thoughtful about who is assigned certain tasks and duties in order to avoid potential risks to quality.
 - **Opportunity Cost:** Depending on the nature of an organization and the products and services they provide, there may be some opportunity cost to the organization in employing people with barriers. For example, an organization may not be able to provide a certain kind of product because its employees do not have the skills and capacity to deliver the product at a level acceptable to the marketplace. In other words, what your organization can deliver is dependent upon the capacity and skills of your employees. This should not be a limiting factor in the decision to hire employees with barriers. In fact, this can easily be offset by smart decision making about the types of products and services an organization is capable of providing, and also the thoughtful and realistic assignment of tasks and job duties.
 - **Time & Commitment:** It is important to recognize that hiring employees with barriers is an ongoing and long-term commitment. An individual's skills and capacity may or may not evolve over time during their employment. With that in mind, employers should be realistic and recognize that the issues highlighted above will be ongoing and considerations for the duration of a person's employment in an organization.

For more info on Potluck Recipes for Success:

Heather O'Hara - Executive Director

T: 604.683.0073 ext. 379

E: heather@potluckcatering.com

W: www.potluckcatering.com