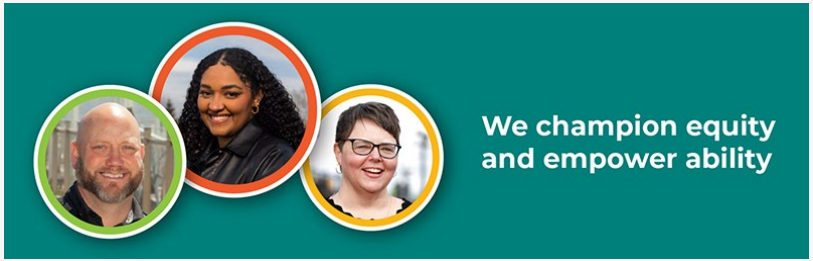
Creating Inclusive Employment

Addressing Barriers to Digital Tools & Tech-Enabled Jobs in Canada – Insights from Young People with Disabilities

March of Dimes Canada
Knowledge to Action Team

March of Dimes Canada

- MODC is a national charity with a 70-year history of helping people with disabilities achieve independence, dignity, and autonomy



- Driven by 2,400 dedicated employees and 500 volunteers, MODC supports around 30,000 service users
- Last fiscal year, over 3,000 people received digital technology skills training and support



The ‘Creating Inclusive Employment’ Project

How can we create barrier-free, non-traditional digital skill development pathways for young people with disabilities in Canada?

Accessibility Standards Canada

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INTRODUCTION

- People with disabilities are underemployed
- Limited access to developing skills to obtain employment
- Especially true for digital skills
  - Basic digital literacy, digital communication, spreadsheets, scheduling software, productivity tools, virtual collaboration tools, etc.

DIGITAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT

- Digital skills not taught in traditional education systems
- More technology getting introduced in classrooms
- Range of digital skills taught is limited
- No attention to accessibility features
- Some are missing out by being put in specialized classrooms



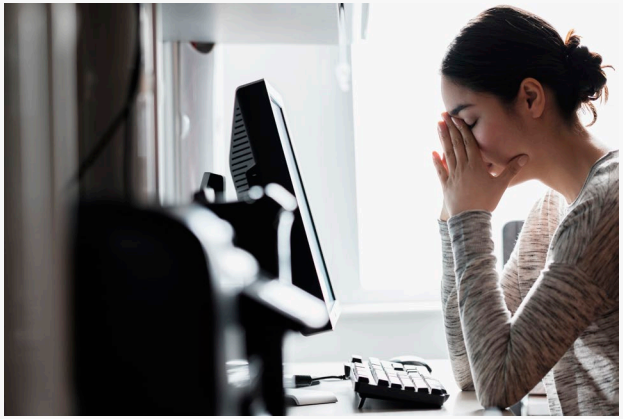
ALTERNATE PATHWAYS

- Our research found that in the absence of formal training, digital skills are being acquired through:
  - Self-teaching
  - Friends/social networks
  - Community organization
  - Courses

"I will access slack channels and discord groups that are dedicated to a certain developing software focus … and ask a question … people are nice enough to provide their own experiences on how to build something."

CHALLENGES WITH ALTERNATE PATHWAYS

- Environmental scan: Digital skill development programs largely absent from Canadian landscape
- Cost of technology and learning
- Inaccessible learning opportunities



"One of the biggest barriers for me is kind of cost. You don't want to invest a whole lot of money in this stuff and then discover that it's not accessible or it's not really useful"

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE WORKPLACE

- All jobs now require some technical proficiency

"I didn't have much tech training… they put me on the spot and was reassigned to dishwashing duties due to lack of support."

"Almost every job nowadays is a tech job in some way - where even if you are just doing labour, you have to use a computer to do your payroll or to check in."



IMPLICATIONS FOR THE WORKPLACE

- Major assumption: Youth have digital skills 'baked in'

"I think one of the big barriers is that there's this assumption that just because a child knows how to use a tablet or phone, that they are really good with digital skills … Like, they don't really teach them how to type, they don't teach them how to use Word and Excel and more advanced things, because it's just assumed that they know how to do it."

"I didn't know how to use screen readers on Windows. I could only use screen readers on Android. So that was very eye opening because I learned a lot of stuff just in the Windows OS."

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE WORKPLACE

- Overall stigma and lack of knowledge surrounding assistive technology and digital accessibility

“I've been in interview situations where the person on the other side did not understand what a screen reader is."

"If you're working at Best Buy and you bring in your computer and let's say I'm at the front desk and you bring it in, and I say I have to install a screen reader to be able to work on your laptop. That might be a little bit weird for you or even the employer might not be a thing they really go for."

MODC Partner: Project Search



MODC Program: SkillingUp

- A free program providing online training for people with disabilities to learn about:
  - Accessible technologies with a specialist
  - Digital fundamentals
  - Digital skills and job readiness

www.skillingup.ca



WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Community supports
- Employer investment
  - Inclusive hiring
  - Inclusive culture
- Educational reforms
- Educator training on assistive and emerging technologies

Thank You!

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