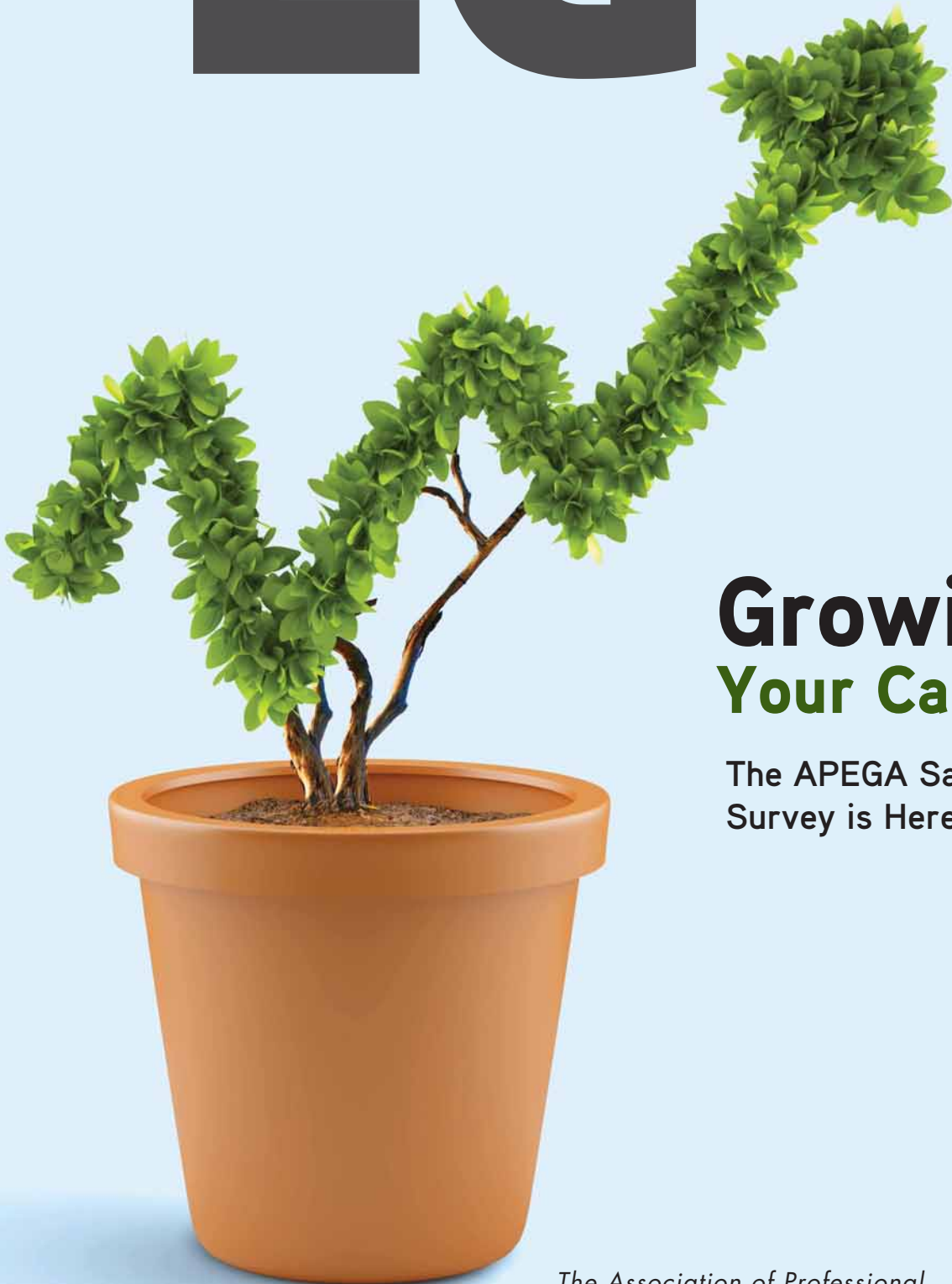


PEG

FALL 2014



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*The Association of Professional
Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta*



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Real Jobs, Real Pay — Real Success

A partnership involving the Rotary Club helps APEGA Permit Holders fill job openings with people with developmental disabilities. Good fits abound, supporters say — and the workers themselves are not the only beneficiaries

BY **CORINNE LUTTER**

Member & Internal Communications Coordinator

Communicating is often a challenge for Jeffrey Kim. But that doesn't stop him from loving — and excelling at — his job as a filing clerk in the Urban Land Engineering Department of Stantec in downtown Edmonton.

Jeffrey, 25, has autism. He started a temporary job at Stantec in 2011, scanning documents and filing them in the company's electronic library. The APEGA Permit Holder was so impressed with his neat and meticulous work that he was asked to stay on as a permanent employee.

"He takes pride in his work and puts 100 per cent into it," says his father, Youngsoo. "He takes it very seriously and he likes it when other people appreciate his work, too."

Before starting at Stantec, though, it was difficult to find employment for Jeffrey. He tried working at a few places but it never panned out.

"Jeffrey needs a lot of nurturing at work. It takes longer to train people with special needs and not many employers are willing to do that," explains Youngsoo. "The biggest challenge was to find a workplace that's tolerant and patient, and provides meaningful work."

Jeffrey and his family found exactly that at Stantec.

MAKING IT MEANINGFUL

Jeffrey is one of five employees Stantec has hired through the Rotary Employment Partnership, a project of the District 5370 and 5360 Rotary clubs, the Alberta Association for Community Living (AACL) and the province's Persons with Developmental Disabilities Program. The goal of the partnership is to create meaningful employment opportunities for people with developmental disabilities. Supporters say it lives up to its slogan: Real Jobs with Real Pay.

"The employer gets an employee who is committed and eager to work. The employee gets an opportunity to earn a real

pay cheque and contribute to society," says Nadine Fulmer, who coordinates the partnership in Edmonton.

There are always potential employees looking for work. Ms. Fulmer says more than 30 people with developmental disabilities are currently seeking jobs through the partnership, but only about two people find work each month. Most of those seeking jobs receive Government of Alberta support through Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped. Many have previous volunteer and work experience and hold high school, college or vocational degrees.

Just like everyone else, Ms. Fulmer says, workers in the program have strengths, talents and skills to share. "These are people who really want to work and not rely on government funding."

Since 2002, more than 300 people have been hired through the partnership in Edmonton, Calgary, Lloydminster, Grande Prairie and Red Deer. A wide variety of companies have participated, from one-person businesses to large international corporations, from hotels and restaurants to banks, software companies and office suppliers. Several APEGA Permit Holders, including Stantec, have also come on board.

Stantec first got involved in 2010, when senior leaders Rick Prentice, P.Eng., and Dave Kinders, P.Eng., championed the initiative. Mr. Prentice, the company's Vice-President, is a Rotarian. Mr. Kinders, Senior Principal of Community Development, is connected to AACL through

his 15-year-old daughter Kelly, who has Tourette Syndrome and cognitive delays. Stantec invited AACL to its offices to talk to staff about the employment partnership.

"We had the presentation in our biggest boardroom. It seats 75 people and it was standing room only," recalls Mr. Kinders. "It was overwhelming how many staff were interested. Just about all of them had some connection to a person with disabilities, whether a child, a niece, a nephew or a neighbour."

"Historically, people with disabilities have been kind of hidden from the public eye, and yet here we have a great resource in terms of an untapped employment pool — people who are really willing to work and yet often don't even get an interview for a job."

DAVE KINDERS, P.ENG.

*Senior Principal of Community Development
Stantec*



IN HIS ELEMENT

Jeffrey Kim, who has autism, is one of five employees hired by Stantec through the Rotary Employment Partnership. Jeffrey found a “tolerant and patient” employer, his father says, that values his dedication and the high quality of his work.

-photo by Magdalena Pawlowski

QUICK FACT

What is a developmental disability?

This term is used to describe people with a disability who have difficulty learning and need assistance to carry out the practical and social activities of daily living. It can apply to a wide range of individuals, including those with Down syndrome, cerebral palsy or autism.

Source: Rotary Employment Partnership

It’s not surprising that the Edmonton-based, international company embraced the idea. “We put people first,” after all, is a corporate value. Big, bold letters on its business cards read: “We are better together.”

Mr. Kinders says: “Historically, people with disabilities have been kind of hidden from the public eye, and yet here we have a great resource in terms of an untapped employment pool — people who are really willing to work and yet often don’t even get an interview for a job. This was a real opportunity to give back to the community, and it has a very real connection with many of our employees.”

One of the keys to the partnership’s success is the support and information provided

to employers before, during and after the hiring process. “We provide support as long as the company needs it,” says Ms. Fulmer. That includes information for employees and supervisors on what to expect from people with different challenges, like autism, developmental delays and cerebral palsy.

To start the process, coordinators like Ms. Fulmer meet with employers to answer questions and explore job possibilities. The goal is always to come up with positions that a person with developmental disabilities could perform and that also benefit the business. Employers are encouraged to think about job tasks, not just job titles, and if necessary reorganize positions to create opportunities. A job coach is also available to help staff with training.

GOOD WORKS

POSTIVE PRESENCE

Calvin Austron, P.Eng., Operations and Production Manager at RAM Manufacturing, right, joins Todd Uditsky on the company's shop floor. Mr. Uditsky, who has a developmental disability, is a general labourer who was hired through the Rotary Employment Partnership. He loves his job and RAM is happy he's on the team.

Jobs don't have to be full time to be meaningful. In many cases, jobs created through the partnership start off as part time and evolve into full time as the employee learns new skills and gains confidence.

"We work with employers to develop potential job possibilities. We help them think about jobs that could add value — for example, things that aren't getting done because other employees don't have time," says Ms. Fulmer. "There's a lot of matching that goes on to make sure there's a fit. Not only can the person do the work, but will they fit into the company's culture?"

At Stantec, administrative positions were developed to fit the skills and abilities of potential job candidates. "Not everybody can do every job. But there is a fit somewhere for them," says Mr. Kinders.

One Stantec employee had cerebral palsy, used a wheelchair and communicated using a computer with a voice box. "We took three jobs and moved some tasks around to customize it for what she could do," he says. "You do have to be a little flexible and maybe a little creative in how you make the job fit, modify some duties and build some natural supports."

'THE PEOPLE HERE ARE NICE'

Across the city in an industrial park on the west end, Todd Uditsky is busy hanging up parts in the powder coating room at RAM Manufacturing, a company that creates lifts and elevator systems for people with disabilities. Mr. Uditsky, who has a developmental disability, has worked at RAM for almost 10 years and he's not planning on leaving anytime soon.

"The people here are nice," he says. "If I need something and don't know where it is, I just ask and they always help. It's a lot better than the other jobs I had before."

Company founder Richard Meunier, P.Eng., heard about the Rotary Employment



-photo by Corinne Lutter

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

If you're wondering whether a person with a developmental disability would fit into your workplace, the Rotary Employment Partnership has developed the following questions to consider.

- Are there jobs that are left undone at the end of the day because your staff cannot or do not make them a priority? Ask your managers and staff to consider making a list
- Is this unfinished work causing stress for you or your employees?
- Are higher paid, more qualified employees doing tasks that take them away from more important priorities?
- Would some of these tasks provide added value for your customers?
- Would it be more efficient and cost effective to delegate these tasks to a part-time employee?
- Could a person with a developmental disability do this work?

“It’s good having a diverse mix of people in your organization. It keeps everybody a bit more human, to be an inclusive workplace.”

RICHARD MEUNIER, P.ENG.

Founder, RAM Manufacturing

Partnership through a friend in the service club. His interest piqued, he contacted AACL. “We manufacture lifts for people with disabilities, so it was in line with what we do as a business,” he explains.

In the course of his work, Mr. Meunier sees the challenges people with disabilities face. “Whether you have a physical disability or a mental disability, getting integrated into the workforce and other parts of society is not always easy,” he says. “It’s good having a diverse mix of people in your organization. It keeps everybody a bit more human, to be an inclusive workplace.”

Mr. Uditsky was hired as a general labourer, a job that involves moving parts around during manufacturing, assembling small parts, and keeping the shop and office neat and tidy. “Being clean and organized helps create an efficient workplace. There is value in what Todd is doing for the company,” says Mr. Meunier.


He required a little extra training at first, but a shop supervisor took Mr. Uditsky under his wing and mentored him. He sometimes still needs extra guidance and supervision, but he fits in like any other employee. Sometimes, he can be found chatting over lunch about wrestling and the company hockey pool.

“He gets along with everybody, is hard working and has a positive attitude,” says Calvin Austrom, P.Eng., the company’s Operations and Production Manager. “It just takes a little more patience and understanding of his disabilities.”

An added benefit to the company, Mr. Uditsky’s loyalty has saved RAM time and money in the long run because it doesn’t have to continually keep training new labourers, a job that typically has high turnover.

‘A CONTRIBUTOR TO OUR SUCCESS’

Nuna Logistics, an Edmonton-based company that provides civil construction and mining support services in the Canadian North, has also had success hiring through the Rotary Employment



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Partnership. Colleen, an administrative assistant, was hired by the APEGA Permit Holder more than a year ago, and the filing system in the human resources department has never been better, says Human Resources Manager Johanne Johnson.

After learning about the partnership, Ms. Johnson approached senior managers to get the OK for a new part-time position. She sold them on the need for a filing clerk — it didn't make business sense for highly qualified employees to spend their time putting away paper when they could be working on more important priorities.

"Nobody wants to do filing. It's time consuming and you could spend hours looking for something," she says.

Before hiring Colleen, Ms. Johnson had some worries. Would the rest of the staff accept her? Would it take more time to train her?

"All of those concerns are real.

The integration of Colleen into the Nuna community was longer than it is for most people. But now she's part of the team and a contributor to our success."

POSITIVE STEPS

Like most parents, Youngsoo Kim wants his son to have a purpose in life and a valued

place in society. He hopes that Jeffrey can one day have the skills to live semi-independently. His job at Stantec is a step towards that goal.

"Jeffrey is one of very few lucky people," says Youngsoo. "I'm really grateful to this group of people who have very kind hearts at Stantec. Without these special people, Jeffrey probably wouldn't have lasted in the job. I really admire the culture

there."

Stantec's Dave Kinders encourages other companies to take the leap and create an employment opportunity for someone with a disability, and see how things evolve. "Take advantage of the supports offered by the AECL and Rotary," he suggests. "Someone needs to be a leader and take a chance."

SIDEBAR

READY, WILLING AND ABLE

More than 30 people with developmental disabilities are currently seeking work through the Rotary Employment Partnership. Some of these individuals are profiled below. Could one or more of them be a match for your company?

- Taylor is outgoing and friendly, and enjoys working with people. He is skilled with computers and enjoys working on digital presentations. A Calgarian, he has experience volunteering for TELUS Spark as a much-loved greeter and guide. He has also worked for a number years as a greeter at the Calgary Stampede. Taylor wants a role where he can work directly with people in a facilitator or greeter role, and also contribute his computer skills
- Francine is looking for full-time employment in Edmonton in administration, data entry or reception. She has experience answering telephones and filing, and doing basic data entry. Her strengths include attention to detail and strong interpersonal skills, including a great sense of humour. Despite many setbacks in her life, Francine has worked hard to be successful and is living in her own apartment, driving her own car and pursuing many interests. She seeks full-time hours in a welcoming team environment
- Kevin seeks part-time employment in Edmonton in the heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) industry. He completed the HVAC program at NAIT as an audit student, where he took classes in refrigeration, gas and heating, air conditioning and electrical theory, and took part in electrical labs. Kevin enjoys working with his hands, taking things apart and learning how they work. He often finds creative solutions to technical problems. He has experience working as shop trainee and is ready for new challenges
- Kyle is from Lloydminster. He is quiet but friendly, and he enjoys being around other people. He likes to work in teams but can also work independently. Ideally, he'd like to work full time for an event or catering company, or for a landscaping company. He understands the value in hard work, and he doesn't mind getting dirty and working with his hands. He also enjoys computers, music and travelling
- Chelsea is a young woman from Edmonton who has just begun to explore the working world. She wants to put her exceptional organizational skills to good use in part-time employment in administration, data entry, filing or food services. Chelsea has experience as a stock person, a dishwasher, a camp counsellor and a meeting coordinator. She is an avid sports fan and in her spare time participates in basketball, bowling, golf, badminton and billiards
- Crystal is committed to lifelong learning and is currently taking online courses in basic accounting and bookkeeping. Crystal has experience working as a retail sales associate, a kitchen helper in a fast-food restaurant, a daycare worker and an animal groomer. In addition to customer service skills, she has a proven track record of working well within a team. She is eager to find a part-time job in retail or animal care, or as a bookkeeping assistant

MORE INFO

Would you like to learn more about the Rotary Employment Partnership and how you can get involved?

Visit aacl.org

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