



# GOOD PRACTICES GUIDE

RECRUITMENT AND EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES



# INDEX

## **01 The first step of the odyssey**

Brief description of the project & Scope of the guide

## **02 The journey map**

Parts that make up the guide & Brief explanation of each part

## **03 Good practices**

40 Evidence-based practices to inspire your inclusion odyssey

## **04 Hints & tips**

55 Practical tips, quick strategies & real-life lessons

## **05 Quick wins**

31 Quick wins that boost a culture of inclusion

## **06 Success stories**

Get inspired by the testimonies of Byron, Igor, Jordan & their companies

## **07 The wind of change**

Resistance to change & Types of resistance

## 08 The echo odyssey

The positive impacts of using inclusive practices

## 09 Beyond the map

Looking ahead

The ERASMUS+ BEO (Business Engagement Odyssey) Project consortium is formed by the partners GTB (Belgium), APEA - Portuguese Association of Supported Employment (Portugal), ASEE - Association for Supported Employment Europe, BASE - British Association of Supported Employment (United Kingdom), HAO - Health Action Overseas (Romania) and URI - University Rehabilitation Institute (Slovenia).



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Information is available in alternative accessible formats, on request.

# 01

## The first step of the odyssey

### Brief description of the project & Scope of the guide

**In Europe, approximately 87 million people live with disabilities. Many have skills, motivation, and a desire to work, but they continue to face barriers to employment.**

The Supported Employment model has shown that these obstacles can be overcome and that the active participation of companies is crucial to success. The Erasmus+ BEO – Business Engagement Odyssey Project was created to strengthen this connection between companies and people with disabilities and training Supported Employment professionals to engage employers more effectively.

This Good Practice Guide is the result of a Detailed Needs Analysis and a participatory process that brought together 26 persons from different perspectives and countries (i.e employers, Supported Employment professionals, and people with disabilities) in a World Café, creating a space for open and constructive dialogue. The recommendations you will find here are not distant theories, they stem from real experiences, shared by those who live, work, and invest in inclusion every day.

The World Cafe goal is simple: to inspire and support companies in creating inclusive work environments where talent and opportunity meet, because when that happens, everyone wins.

### **Now it's your turn.**

Every company has the power to be an agent of change. This guide offers ideas and tools, but the real impact comes when they are put into practice - when an interview is scheduled, when a job is adapted, when an opportunity is created. By taking this step, you're not just opening doors for someone; you're opening new possibilities for your own organization.

**Inclusion isn't a favour; it's an investment in the future.**

***"Supported employment agencies can help you navigate funding, adjustments, and hiring processes."*** Robert Elston  
(BASE)

# 02

## The journey map

### Parts that make up the guide & Brief explanation of each part

Just like the Supported Employment model, each chapter of this guide stands alone and you can visit them in any order you like. But, if you will allow us, we have left some compasses and maps to guide you on this odyssey of best practices and discoveries, helping you make the most of each experience.

## Chapter Good Practices

**Definition:** These are established methods or standards that have been proven to work well and are widely accepted. They often represent the "best way" to perform a task or process.

**Characteristics:** They are usually well-documented, repeatable, and can be applied consistently across different situations. Good practices often involve a series of steps or guidelines that ensure quality and efficiency.

## Chapter Hints and Tips

**Definition:** These are practical suggestions or useful techniques that can make tasks easier or more efficient. They are often based on personal experience or specific situations.

**Characteristics:** Hints and tips are usually more informal and can be specific to particular contexts or tools. They might not be universally applicable but can provide significant benefits in the right circumstances.

## Chapter Quick Wins

**Definition:** These are actions or changes that can be implemented quickly and easily but yield immediate and noticeable benefits. They are often low-effort, high-impact activities.

**Characteristics:** Quick wins are typically simple to execute and require minimal resources. They are designed to provide rapid improvements and can help build momentum for larger initiatives.

## Chapter Success Stories

**Definition:** Success stories refer to real-life examples or case studies that highlight how individuals with disabilities have overcome barriers, secured meaningful employment, and thrived in their professional roles.

**Characteristics:** Success stories serve as inspiration, evidence of best practices, and tools for advocacy, demonstrating what is possible when inclusive policies, supportive environments, and individual determination align.

## The wind of change

While policies and training are essential, successfully implementing diversity and inclusion initiatives also demands a deep understanding of internal resistance, its origins, how it manifests, and how to address it constructively.

In this chapter, we explore the root causes and various forms of resistance. We also propose key strategies that can serve as stepping stones on the odyssey toward inclusion, helping to align the entire team in a shared direction.

## The Echo of the Odyssey

This section delves into the profound, ripple-like effects of inclusive employment, revealing how it transforms lives, workplaces, and society as a whole.

At its heart, inclusion empowers individuals from vulnerable groups by nurturing confidence, purpose, and belonging, while elevating their material and emotional well-being. Beyond personal growth, it reshapes societal attitudes,

replacing stigma with acceptance and positioning inclusive companies as beacons of ethical leadership.

For organizations, the impact is equally powerful: a culture of openness and collaboration emerges, sparking innovation, strengthening leadership, and fostering loyalty. By embedding inclusion into their core, businesses don't just adapt - they thrive, creating environments where diversity drives both human fulfillment and organizational success.

***"One employee told me, 'You gave me a reason to live by hiring me.' That's the power of inclusion."*** Marina Nagy  
(Radisson Blu Hotel)



# 03

## Good practices

### 40 Evidence-based practices to inspire your inclusion odyssey

Inclusion is built every day, in the choices we make and the relationships we create. These best practices are organised into areas ranging from internal culture to workplace integration, showing that when each person is valued and involved, the entire organisation and community benefit.

## **A** STRATEGY AND ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

### **A1 - Incorporating/Embedding social responsibility as part of the company's strategy**

Integrating social responsibility into decision-making processes and strategic objectives, rather than treating it as an isolated area.

### **A2 - Co-creation of practices with stakeholders**

Involving employees, customers, suppliers and the community to develop actions that are aligned with reality and have greater impact.

### **A3 - Setting measurable goals**

Defining clear indicators to monitor social and environmental results, increasing transparency and effectiveness.

#### **A4 - Employees as promoters of social responsibility**

Recognise and support initiatives from employees themselves, valuing authenticity and involvement.

#### **A5 - Multidisciplinary services in more areas of the company**

Expand the presence and activities of multidisciplinary teams to more internal sectors whenever necessary, supporting a sustainable integration.

#### **A6 - Responsibility and inclusive image**

Companies that take responsibility for hiring people with different types of disabilities demonstrate care and social commitment. This behaviour strengthens their organisational culture and builds a recognised image of inclusion and responsibility.

#### **A7 - Management of partnerships and unique experiences**

Establish solid connections with companies and carefully manage each experience, minimising negative impacts and promoting positive learning.

#### **A8 - Equal conditions and opportunities**

Ensure that workers with disabilities have the same working conditions, including equal pay, the same labour rights, permanent contracts where applicable, and equal access to learning and professional growth opportunities.

#### **A9 - Inclusion is team work**

Involving company leaders, HR and employees of the work floor in the integration process creates a structured support team that permits a real time answer to the needs and difficulties that might arise during the whole integration process of the person with disability.

***"When employees drive Corporate Social Responsibility, it feels genuine, not just a marketing stunt."*** Audrey Bodman  
(BASE)

## **B CONNECTION WITH THE COMMUNITY AND COLLABORATIVE NETWORKS**

### **B1 - Integration with the local community**

Listen and collaborate with the community to generate positive impact and be seen as a partner.

### **B2 - Collaborative work with the third sector**

Create cooperation networks between companies, public institutions, and community groups.

### **B3 - Job brokering with Supported Employment Organisations**

Supported Employment professionals promote the creation of groups of candidates prepared with tailored training and active employer participation. Vocational profiling by Supported Employment professionals allows candidates to be matched to specific roles and environments.

### **B4 - Open Days at companies**

Promote open days so that candidates can get to know the company before formally applying and employers have the opportunity to get to know and recognise potential future employees.

### **B5 - Sharing networks between companies**

Create events that bring together sector representative companies, allowing for the exchange of experiences, challenges and solutions. Encouraging dialogue about the 'why' and 'how' of inclusion strengthens collective learning and generates synergies between organisations.

### **B6 - Effective partnerships and communication**

Value and promote good partnerships between Supported Employment professionals, companies and candidates. Ensuring clear and constant communication between all partners strengthens collaboration, motivation, loyalty and a sense of appreciation among workers with disabilities, increasing the success of integration.

*"Supported employment organizations are experts. Lean on them for guidance and resources."* Lynn Decraene (Decathlon)

## **C** INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND PARTICIPATION

### **C1 - Creating spaces for sharing stories**

Encourage the sharing of personal or community experiences to strengthen bonds and raise awareness of causes.

### **C2 - Suggestion box**

Provide an anonymous or non-anonymous channel for internal proposals and improvements, strengthening transparency, and participatory culture.

### **C3 - Evaluation/satisfaction questionnaires**

Evaluate the internal climate periodically, including perceptions of inclusion and accessibility. Anonymous questionnaires can reveal how employees truly feel about diversity efforts, highlighting both successes and areas needing improvement. Remember to respond or act upon the findings of the questionnaires.

### **C4 - Setting up a disability staff network**

A disability staff network supports employees as well as providing valuable advice to employers about concerns. Even in jobs considered monotonous, cultivating positive and meaningful relationships between colleagues adds value to work, increases motivation and reinforces a sense of belonging.

### **C5 - "Beekeeper" - Buddy System**

Assign a 'beekeeper' - a non-HR, non-managerial role - to check in with employees, ensuring inclusion is personal and ongoing. The beekeeper's role is to listen, support, and connect employees with resources, without disciplinary authority. A beekeeper builds trust by being a neutral, approachable point of

contact for all employees. This role ensures inclusion is embedded in daily interactions, not just formal reviews.

***"A buddy system helps new employees feel secure and understood."*** *Matthew Wood (Millwood)*

## **D TRAINING AND AWARENESS RAISING**

### **D1 - Awareness training for everyone**

Ensure continuous training and knowledge transfer between companies, candidates, trainers and teams.

### **D2 - Specialised and aware mentors**

Assign mentors who are willing and trained to support people with disabilities both in their tasks and in their personal growth.

### **D3 - Structured mentoring programmes**

Individualised support from day one, preventing early dropouts and ensuring constant monitoring.

### **D4 - Personalised mentoring and training**

Recognise that not all disabilities are visible. Adapt training and monitoring to each person's reality, allowing colleagues to act as mentors and monitor the growth of employees with disabilities.

### **D5 - Peer mentoring**

Peer mentoring is when a person with a disability is mentored by a person with a disability in the workplace. The presence of the person with a disability helps colleagues to relax and adjust their perceptions, showing that integration depends on the type of role and is not a simple matter.

***"When employees see their colleagues' stories, they feel inspired to contribute to inclusion."*** Byron Reid (Status)

#### **D6 - Certification and skills development**

Offer tailored training programmes, recognising skills through certificates and providing ongoing feedback to enhance professional growth.

#### **D7 - Training leaders and teams on disability**

Ensure that leaders, employers, and colleagues receive training on general disability awareness. Also, with regards to an individual training on an understanding of the impact of a person with disability in employment. When the company prepares everyone who influences the person's work, from those who set schedules to those who give instructions, a better way of communicating and learning for that person is created. Informed consent should be sought from the individual, and discussion takes place on what information should be shared. Also, if the individual would like to be involved in the training.

## **E INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION**

#### **E1 - Recruitment with alternative formats**

Replace or supplement the application process with a short video or other alternative recruitment formats, instead of the traditional CV, and practical work experience or a working interview, so people can demonstrate, rather than just tell what they can do. Working interviews and work trials are an excellent alternative to an interview.

#### **E2 - Recruitment through Supported Employment Organisations**

Benefit from the in-depth knowledge these organisations have about candidates and adaptation needs. A good relationship with Supported Employment social organisations can help coordinate and understand what

roles are available, how candidates can be placed and how to resolve any issues that may arise during integration.

### **E3 - Integration of Supported internships**

An internship with an individualized training program allows the candidate to integrate the job market with gradual adaptation and mutual assessment without immediate pressure.

***"Work trials let people experience the job. You can't explain pressure or downtime, they need to feel it."*** Taylor Jones (Tim Hortons)

## **F RESPECT FOR AUTONOMY AND SELF-EXPRESSION**

### **F1 - Decision on sharing one's disability – Informed Consent**

Ensure that the person decides whether and how they want to communicate their disability.

### **F2 - Personal presentation moments – lived experience**

Annual initiatives where employees voluntarily share their lived experience, in a safe and confidential space.

## **G INTEGRATION IN THE WORKPLACE**

### **G1 - Natural supports**

Identify and use natural supports in the workplace, like colleagues, that can support a person with disabilities to integrate and to learn their job.

### **G2 - Step-by-step, tailored changes**

Implement small changes specific to each job and each person, facilitating safe and gradual integration.

### **G3 - Initial training in the company**

Begin the new integration with a few days of action-based training, with monitoring and supervision by another colleague. Use the onboarding process to gradually familiarise the new employee with the role, colleagues and organizational culture, while supporting their confidence and performance.

### **G4 - Extended and progressive integration**

Avoid frequent rotations of supervisors or mentors. Allow sufficient integration time for the person with a disability to adapt to the environment and have opportunities for growth within the company and their role.

### **G5 - Flexibility and adaptation of work (Reasonable Accommodations)**

Offer flexible arrangements, such as part-time work, flexible start times, adapted job design and individualised plans, to respond to the needs and potential of each employee with a disability.

### **G6 - Post-placement follow-up and multidisciplinary support**

Ensure that, after placement, the person with a disability receives ongoing support. This may include intervention of specialised technicians (psychologist, doctor, therapist) or multidisciplinary teams whenever necessary, and the awareness of companies that they can resort to this support, increases the confidence and sustainability of integration.

***"Support is the key - not just at the beginning, but throughout the process."*** João Antunes (Inditex)

### **G7 - Continuous monitoring by the job coach**

Ensure regular and continuous contact with a known job coach of the Supported Employment Organisation, who checks in frequently and responds



quickly and professionally to all questions. Whenever necessary, face-to-face meetings can be held between the person with a disability, the employer and the job coach. Even without having all the answers, the job coach thinks together and refers to appropriate services, offering support to both the person and the company. Whenever possible, gradually reduce ongoing support as integration takes place.

### **G8 - Opportunity for career progression**

Providing the same opportunity for career progression for everyone increases the motivation of the person with a disability, making them feel valued and recognised for their abilities.

# 04

## Hints & tips

### 55 Practical tips, quick strategies and real-life lessons

This chapter brings together practical tips, quick strategies and real-life lessons that facilitate the inclusion of people with disabilities and promote social responsibility in organisations. Organised by key areas, these suggestions help turn good intentions into concrete actions, from recruitment to integration, from organisational culture to community engagement.

#### STRATEGIES, ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AND MINDSET

- ☐ Integrate social responsibility and inclusion as part of management, not as an optional extra.
- ☐ Make social responsibility attractive: promote a culture that values these practices as a competitive advantage and source of motivation.
- ☐ Avoid superficial initiatives: strategies must reflect authentic leadership commitment.
- ☐ Establish inclusive practices as the norm: when leaders present inclusive actions as routine, they become part of the organisation's DNA.
- ☐ Value generational diversity and create spaces for mutual listening.
- ☐ Understand individual differences and internal resistance, addressing them constructively.
- ☐ Inclusive practices enrich the customer experience, strengthen the brand

and add value to the company.

- ☐ Create a culture that values diversity of opinion, where listening is as important as understanding and acting.

## CONNECTION WITH THE COMMUNITY AND COLLABORATIVE NETWORKS

- ☐ Establish partnerships with other companies, associations and local communities to generate positive impact.
- ☐ Engage business leaders in the community to reinforce social impact.
- ☐ Share successful experiences and administrative procedures to facilitate adoption by other companies.
- ☐ Inclusion generates sustainable and competitive value, strengthening lasting relationships with customers and the community.
- ☐ Ensure ongoing support from associations to employers, not just candidates.

***"Authentic leadership communication builds trust. Employees and the public can spot insincerity."*** Norman Sterritt (Triangle Progression to Employment)

## INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND PARTICIPATION

- ☐ Create accessible communication channels so that employees can suggest improvements, give feedback, or share needs, such as physical or digital suggestion boxes, internal forums, or listening sessions.
- ☐ Involve employees in all stages of the process, promoting a sense of belonging and collective responsibility.

- ☐ The more people involved, the stronger and more lasting the support network will be.
- ☐ Work with specific groups (e.g., sensory disabilities, autistic people, neurodiversity) to create tailored policies.
- ☐ Include employees in drafting strategies, procedures, and inclusion initiatives. For example, invite representatives from different teams to collaborate on developing mentoring protocols or flexible schedules.
- ☐ Encourage internal mentors who can listen to and support employees, creating spaces where they can express vulnerabilities and challenges without fear of judgement.
- ☐ Peer support programmes help reinforce that employees' voices are valued and that their experiences are useful for everyone's development.
- ☐ Promote regular check-ins, follow-up meetings, or internal surveys to assess whether practices are working and whether adjustments need to be made.
- ☐ Ensure that feedback leads to concrete actions, showing that employees' opinions influence real decisions.

***"Transparency about challenges builds credibility. Don't hide setbacks, address them."*** Salomé Barreira (Domino's Pizza)

#### **TRAINING AND AWARENESS**

- ☐ Offer specific training to better respond to individual needs.
- ☐ Involve all levels of the organisation: colleagues, mentors, HR and leadership.
- ☐ Workshops and internal reflection sessions help to maintain focus on shared values and individual boundaries.

- ☐ Raise awareness of individual differences in productivity and ways of working. Listening is not the same as understanding.
- ☐ Support understanding of internal resistance and address it constructively.
- ☐ Leadership support makes practical inclusion “normal” and sustainable.
- ☐ Involve employees from the outset in defining, planning and evaluating initiatives, increasing meaning and legitimacy.
- ☐ Conduct individual interviews or focus groups before implementing inclusion policies, so that decisions are based on real experiences.

***"Inclusion starts with leadership. Ensure everyone, from managers to frontline staff, feels responsible for the project."***

João Antunes (Inditex)

## **INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION**

- ☐ Job Matching - understanding the disability and the job requirements reduces frustration and increases retention.
- ☐ Offer flexible opportunities with mentoring and personalised support.
- ☐ Share vacancies with organisations specialising in inclusion and disability (Supported Employment organisations).
- ☐ Create objective job descriptions, including desired characteristics without excluding profiles.
- ☐ Promote informal moments with candidates before the interview to build rapport and trust.
- ☐ Assess retention rates for people with disabilities and adjust policies as necessary.

## INNOVATION AND FLEXIBILITY AT WORK

- ☐ Offer flexible hours and part-time work where possible.
- ☐ Offer remote working and/hybrid working – if the job permits.
- ☐ Consider support not only for the individual, but also for their family and support network.
- ☐ Innovate in the way you work to better respond to different needs.

***"In our stores, we've learned to slow down and adapt. Working with colleagues with disabilities forces us to rethink workflows, explain processes better, and prioritize teamwork. The result? A happier, more cohesive team that meets KPIs without sacrificing well-being."*** Salomé Barreira  
(Domino's Pizza)

## INTEGRATION AND SUPPORT IN THE WORKPLACE

- ☐ Create a dedicated mentor or support person, especially in the first few months.
- ☐ Building trust takes time; monitor and readjust support as needed by the employee and the company.
- ☐ More time and more dedicated people increase the impact of inclusion.
- ☐ Ensure that employees have an opportunity to express their needs and limitations.
- ☐ Not all disabilities are visible. Adapt training and allow colleagues to provide direct mentoring.
- ☐ Small daily follow-ups help with integration and development.

- ☐ Integration should be inclusive and not perceived as 'positive discrimination'.
- ☐ People with disabilities, when they feel supported, tend to show more commitment to the company.
- ☐ Offer ongoing emotional support, including peers with similar experiences (Peer Support).

**"Flexibility isn't just about hours, it's about tailoring the job to the person's strengths."** Mateja Juvančič (Mestna Knjižnica Ljubljana)

#### PRACTICAL TOOLS AND RESOURCES

- ☐ Create guides and toolkits to facilitate engagement and implementation of best practices.
- ☐ Publicly share successful practices to inspire other companies.
- ☐ Develop clear materials to guide employees on participation and benefits of social actions.
- ☐ Use tools such as TSI (Training Systematic Instruction), adapted to the modern context.
- ☐ Create cross-functional teams within the company to discuss real difficulties and needs.
- ☐ Create secure and accessible channels for suggestions and ideas (e.g. "Suggestion Box").

**"Peer support provides emotional backing that managers or HR can't always offer."** Byron Reid (Status)

# 05

## Quick wins

### 31 Quick wins that boost a culture of inclusion

**Small actions, big changes.** Quick wins are simple, fast to implement, low-cost actions that generate immediate and visible impact. In the context of inclusion and social responsibility, these changes make it possible to improve processes, engage employees and candidates, and create a more inclusive organisational culture without the need for major investments or restructuring. The goal is to act on what is possible now, building trust, motivation, and tangible results.

**Key tip: focus on what individuals can do, not on what they cannot do.**

***"Good practice isn't just about placement, it's about ongoing support and growth."*** Miriam Reyskens (ASEE)



## QUICK WINS TABLE OF CONTENTS BY AREA

RECRUITMENT			
QUICK WIN	BENEFIT	EFFORT	IMPACT
Simplification of the recruitment process	Efficient and economical recruitment, especially for small businesses and cooperatives	Low	High
Receive CVs and conduct interviews via videoconference	Facilitates participation of people with reduced mobility or who live far away	Low	High
Refer candidates to more suitable areas	Better match between profile and position	Low	Medium
Transparent communication about opportunities (e.g. social media)	Attracts candidates and increases confidence. Engage directly with Supported Employment organisations	Low	Medium
Simple and accessible processes for cooperatives	Reduces cost and complexity	Low	Medium
Ring fencing job opportunities for people with disabilities. Allocating a specific number or % of jobs advertised only for disabled people.	Ensures opportunities are skills-based and results-focused, reducing bias	Medium	High
Guaranteed Interviews – disabled candidates are guaranteed an interview if they meet the minimum criteria for the role	Promotes fairness and encourages applications from people with disabilities, increasing diversity	Low	High

TRAINING			
QUICK WIN	BENEFIT	EFFORT	IMPACT
Individual and group training	Develop skills quickly	Medium	High
Training leaders, tutors, and colleagues	Promotes inclusive use of tools and respect for diverse abilities and communication styles	Medium	High
Multi-format training platforms	Inclusion of different learning styles	Medium	High
Regular check-ins and feedback	Ensures training effectiveness and allows for quick adjustments	Low	High

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT			
QUICK WIN	BENEFIT	EFFORT	IMPACT
Open conversations about aspirations and values	Builds trust and connection	Low	High
Implement personal development plans	Guides professional growth and engagement	Medium	High
Use personal assessment tools (Values Questionnaires, Hand, Life Wheel)	Get to know employees better	Medium	Medium
Incorporate results into the training plan	Customise training and opportunities	Medium	Medium

FLEXIBILITY			
QUICK WIN	BENEFIT	EFFORT	IMPACT
Flexible hours and part-time work	Improved individual adaptation	Low	Medium
Remote or hybrid working	Expands access to employment for people with reduced mobility or living far from the workplace; promotes work-life balance	Medium	High

COMMUNICATION			
QUICK WIN	BENEFIT	EFFORT	IMPACT
Accessible feedback channels	Enables everyone to participate	Low	High
Regular check-ins/internal surveys	Assess whether practices are working	Low	High
Participation in decisions	Involves employees in defining rules and inclusion initiatives, fostering ownership	Medium	High
Peer Support Programmes	Reinforces that employees' voices are valued, building a supportive community	Medium	High

*"Trust is the foundation. Build it through consistent, transparent communication."* Salomé Barreira (Domino's Pizza)

INTEGRATION			
QUICK WIN	BENEFIT	EFFORT	IMPACT
Dedicated tutor or support person	Facilitates integration and confidence	Medium	High
Comprehensive support	Supports both the employee and their network, ensuring holistic integration	Medium	High
Continuous support (tutoring, mentoring)	Provides dedicated, ongoing guidance and adaptation	Medium	High
Small daily follow-ups	Supports continuous development	Low	High
Inclusive integration (small daily actions)	Promotes adaptation without appearing as positive discrimination.	Low	Medium

RESOURCES			
QUICK WIN	BENEFIT	EFFORT	IMPACT
Guides and toolkits	Facilitates rapid implementation	Medium	Medium
Regular contact between Supported Employment Organisations and employers	Increases quality of monitoring and strengthens trust and ongoing partnership	Medium	High
Cross-functional teams	Addresses real needs and finds immediate solutions	Medium	High
Specialised technical support	Access to psychologists, social workers, and job coaches	Medium	High
Accessible suggestion systems	Allows everyone to contribute ideas and improvements	Low	Medium

## CONCLUSION

Quick Wins are about small changes that value employees, promote inclusion, and increase the positive impact of the organisation. By implementing these actions, the company demonstrates real commitment, strengthens internal and external trust, and creates a fairer, more motivating, and productive work environment.

*"Mentorship isn't about knowing everything about a disability, it's about understanding workplace impacts."*

Edyth Dunlop (ASEE)

# 06

## Success stories

Get inspired by the testimonies of Byron, Igor, Jordan & their companies

### Real stories to guide you.

Inclusion is not just a goal; it is a journey shaped by real stories, marked by steps forward and, at times, steps backward. Yet, above all, it is about the transformative power of opportunity. In this chapter, we turn the spotlight on the voices of employers, employees and job coaches who have walked this path. Their testimonies and success stories reveal how Supported Employment breaks down barriers, fosters innovation, and enriches workplaces. From small businesses to large corporations, these narratives demonstrate that inclusion is not only possible but also profoundly rewarding - for individuals, teams, and organizations alike.

These stories are more than inspiration; they are proof that when employers commit to inclusion, they unlock potential, drive loyalty, and build stronger, more diverse teams.

Let these voices guide you as you explore how Supported Employment can transform your workplace and redefine what it means to be an inclusive employer.



## BYRON REID

FROM JOBSEEKER TO PEER SUPPORT WORKER

My name is Byron. I'm a Peer Support Worker at Status Employment and this is my story.

Just four years ago, I was living what many would consider a comfortable life. I was working in Dubai as a business consultant. I had a wife, two beautiful children, and things seemed stable until everything changed, suddenly and without warning.

At 45 years old, I suffered a major stroke that left the entire right side of my body paralyzed. I never imagined something like this could happen to me. What do you do when your life is turned upside down in an instant?

I spent three long months in rehabilitation, fighting every day to regain speech and some movement in my right leg and arm. But that was only part of the battle. My heart stopped several times, and my kidneys failed, my health challenges were severe and complex.

Because of these complications, I had to leave my family behind in Dubai and return to the UK for treatment and support. I applied for visas to bring my wife and children over to join me, but I was rejected. The reason? We didn't "score enough points" under the UK immigration system. It's hard to even put into words how devastating that was.

Alone, grieving the separation from my family, and trying to navigate life with a disability, I fell into a deep depression. I found myself stuck in a cycle of rumination and at my lowest point, I even contemplated suicide.

That's when I was referred to Status Employment by Lambeth Talking Therapies. I was assigned an Employment Advisor who made me feel at ease, was understanding, helpful and introduced to me the philosophy that gaining employment had the ability to aid my recovery, that employers would be able to see my value. At first, I was sceptical. How could I be of use, I'm not job ready? I've since learned that being job ready is a pink elephant or Unicorn that doesn't exist!

My Employment Advisor introduced me to the idea of joining Status Employment as a Peer Support worker where I could use my lived experience to help other people who were also struggling with health and mental health challenges, something I couldn't ignore.

Fast forward to today, one year and seven months later and I'm proud to say I've been working at Status, helping others regain and retain paid employment. Supporting others gave me something I desperately needed: purpose. I am now in a new role with Status Employment as an Employer Engagement and Partnership lead. In this role I get the opportunity to help businesses realize what inclusion really looks like, a living testimony of what can be achieved and how employment positively impacts changing people's lives.

I have been supported in an environment where I feel included, where my opinions matter, and where my ideas are heard and respected.

It hasn't erased all the pain or solved every problem, but it helped me shift my focus away from rumination and toward something meaningful. I've learned that healing doesn't always look like what we expect, sometimes it looks like helping others heal, too.

## Company's story: Status Employment

Byron Reid came through Status Employment through our Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) service as a candidate. As Byron mentioned in his testimony when he came to our service his confidence was very low but the employment consultant recognised that Byron had many talents and that he needed a job.

At the same time Status Employment had put in a funding bid for a peer support worker and we advertised for a worker. Byron's employment consultant persuaded Byron to apply for the job. He did some work with him on confidence building at helping him recognise his skills.

He was interviewed with other potential candidates, but Byron's enthusiasm shone through, and he was offered the job. He started an entirely new service and was supported by both the senior employment consultant and the chief executive in giving Byron appropriate training. This was focussed on the supported employment five step process. This enabled Byron to gain confidence to do the job. This support and training enabled Byron not only to do the job but also to succeed in the Job helping numerous candidates move towards and gain employment.

After a year of Byron working and becoming a valued member of Status Employment, a new opportunity came. This was as an employment engagement lead; another post that we had got funded. Byron was very interested in the post and because of his previous work before his stroke he felt the post was suitable for him.

He applied for the job and was offered the job. He has now been in the job for over a year and has been supported by Status Employment staff and has quickly become a valued member of staff. His insights have been incredibly useful for other Status Employment staff members and the company.





## IGOR

### LIVING SUCCESSFULLY WITH CHALLENGES

Exactly fifteen years have passed since I started working at the Ljubljana City Library with the status of a person with a disability. I obtained this status in 2006, after undergoing a work capacity assessment at the University Rehabilitation Institute of the Republic of Slovenia – Soča (URI Soča) in November of that year.

I completed secondary school for preschool education in 1998 and in 2002 graduated from the Faculty of Preschool Education as a preschool teacher. I worked for one year in a kindergarten in Mengeš, completing my internship, which is a requirement for taking the professional exam. However, I did not complete the internship, as it was difficult for me to concentrate on the whole group of children either outdoors or in the classroom. Since birth, I have had a diagnosis of a mild form of Asperger's syndrome, which made it difficult for me to work with a group of children. As a result, I was unsuccessful for six years in finding employment in my field of preschool education.

At that time, the library was looking for volunteers to help organize materials, and I immediately contacted URI Soča to see if I could join and train for work as a librarian. URI Soča and the then Oton Župančič Library signed a training agreement, allowing me to work full time at the library while attending group meetings and individual sessions with a clinical psychologist, who monitored my progress and cooperated with both mentors.

My tasks included sorting and recording donated materials, preparing gifts for users on special days, as well as providing general information to users about the layout of library materials.

In February 2009, I successfully passed the librarian qualification exam, and on January 15, 2010, I was employed as a librarian with supported employment, achieving a 100% work performance rating. Whenever I face personal or work-related challenges, I meet regularly with my mentors and once a month with a clinical psychologist at URI Soča, who continues to follow my progress even after employment.

So far, I have been promoted twice, achieving the titles Library Assistant and Senior Library Assistant. To earn promotion points, I have attended numerous trainings and prepared two exhibitions — *Apollo 11 and the Exploration of the Moon* (2019) and *Exploring and Discovering Land and Sea* (2024) in the children's department. Early next year, I plan to submit my application for advancement to the final title of Independent Library Assistant.

I must emphasize that my goal is not simply to collect points but to ensure that young library users benefit from my work, by discovering and borrowing diverse materials presented in the exhibitions.

Recently, I have been assigned to take minutes at team meetings and participate in reading sessions, where we discuss books we have read. A colleague prepares these sessions and asks me to record the minutes. I also take part in an online reading group via Zoom, where we talk about books, and in 2024, together with users and colleagues leading the group, we traveled to Oslo as part of an Erasmus+ project, meeting again this year. In Oslo, each participant presented a book-related topic; I gave a presentation on the history of the city of Oslo.

I have a good relationship with my colleagues at the library and feel accepted. I live independently in my own apartment, which I renovated myself, and on weekends, I visit my parents and friends. For relaxation, I attend concerts of the Kromatika Orchestra (I am a season subscriber) and visit various exhibitions. I also go to the seaside with friends, travel, and attend rock concerts. Each year, I read at least 20 books. I am satisfied with my life and my work. I am kind to people and always willing to help when someone asks. I live successfully with the challenges of Asperger's syndrome.

## Company's story: Ljubljana City Library

The Ljubljana City Library (MKL) in cooperation with the University Rehabilitation Institute of the Republic of Slovenia – Soča (URI Soča), employed a person with Asperger's syndrome through vocational rehabilitation and supported employment. The initiative for cooperation and the subsequent employment originally came from URI Soča. Igor initially worked at the library on a voluntary basis but was later employed at the library after completing training for a suitable position and a retraining program for librarianship. The selection of an appropriate job position, identification of suitable tasks now performed by Igor, and determination of the right scope of responsibilities required the cooperation of all involved parties.

Through ongoing collaboration between the employer, the Ljubljana City Library, URI Soča, and with the support of two mentors from the library—whom Igor can approach daily—as well as other colleagues, Igor feels accepted in the library.

Igor performs tasks such as organizing library and non-library materials, writing minutes from monthly meetings, receiving and donating book gifts, and participating in reading groups with dedication and diligence. Considering Igor's work performance and commitment, he has advanced over the years and gained the trust for potential further career development.

Employing persons with disabilities is for the employer and other employees, as well as for the person with a disability, a unique challenge that, in its own way, brings personal growth for everyone involved, fosters acceptance of diversity, and promotes equal participation in work, according to individual abilities.



## JORDAN LUNDAY

MAKING IT WORK

Meet Tim Hortons team member Jordan Lunday who has been supported in his employment by Triangle Progression to Employment. Taylor Jones, Area Manager at Tim Hortons UK & Ireland, explains how they make reasonable adjustments to accommodate all of their employees.



Scan the QR code or watch the video:  
['Making it work' on YouTube](#)

## Company's story: Tim Hortons

Tim Hortons is a global brand with over 5,500 locations worldwide across 13 countries. Tim Hortons is the third largest coffee brand globally. It employs over 100,000 people. Tim Hortons has a strong commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility through its community outreach programmes and work with charitable foundations. 12 stores are now open in Northern Ireland.

In 2018 Tim Hortons opened a new branch in Coleraine (Causeway Coast and Glens Council, Northern Ireland), and was recruiting staff for their new store and this was when they had initial engagement with Triangle Progression to Employment 1, a local Supported Employment organisation. Triangle's Employment Officer approached Tim Hortons management team to introduce the Supported Employment Model and explain the practical supports Triangle could offer to both the employer and new employees. Supported Employment is a 5 Stage process, a structured and person-centred approach designed to help individuals with disabilities move into meaningful, sustainable work.

Following the introduction between Tim Hortons and Triangle Progression to Employment, Jordan, a job seeker with Triangle, applied for a Team Member role and, after a successful interview, was offered a 16-hour contract in September 2021. As part of the agreement between Tim Hortons and Triangle, Jordan received on-site support when he started the job, including structured job coaching delivered through a professional method known as Training in Systematic Instruction (TSI). This approach involves breaking down each work task into smaller, manageable steps to make learning easier and more effective. It also helps the employee gain confidence and independence more quickly, while reducing the need for ongoing one-to-one training from other staff. The initial on-site coaching period proved highly effective. Jordan quickly adapted to his new role, learning to serve customers, prepare hot and cold beverages, organise donut and food orders, and maintain the cleanliness of the customer area. Once he felt comfortable in his duties, the Employment Officer gradually reduced their direct support, allowing natural workplace relationships and team support to take over. This transition was key to helping Jordan integrate fully into the team and establish a sense of ownership over his work.

Triangle continued to maintain regular contact with both Jordan and Tim Hortons, visiting the workplace to monitor progress, address any emerging challenges, and identify opportunities for further development or upskilling.

Tim Hortons demonstrated a strong commitment to inclusivity throughout the process. The company worked closely with Triangle to implement reasonable adjustments/accommodations that would allow Jordan to perform at his best. For example, his duties were focused on the front-of-house area, where his strengths in customer interaction and attention to detail could shine. He was not required to serve at the drive-through, which ensured that his role matched both his skills and comfort level.

This collaborative approach proved to be a success for all involved. Jordan flourished in his role, becoming a valued member of the Tim Hortons team and enjoying the independence that comes with paid employment. He also gained access to various staff benefits, including food and beverage discounts, which further strengthened his sense of belonging within the company.

The positive outcomes of Jordan's employment inspired a broader partnership between Tim Hortons and Triangle. Together, they developed 'Accelerate into Employment' Recruitment Academies across Northern Ireland, where participants receive accredited industry-specific training alongside general employability support. Each academy graduate is guaranteed an interview with Tim Hortons, creating a clear and supportive pathway into paid work. These academies have already led to several successful job outcomes for other individuals with disabilities.

Taylor Jones, Store Manager, Tim Hortons, explained "In addition to supporting Jordan, I attended most of the Accelerate into Employment recruitment academies. Where I met with the individuals taking part to explain the roles available, discuss expectations and answer any questions they had. Most importantly I used these sessions to share my own career journey with Tim Hortons, to show what's possible for anyone joining our team.

Across other stores we've also made various reasonable adjustments to support employees. This has included flexible working arrangements around contracted hours, adapting certain duties to better match individual strengths and

providing additional in-store support to help team members complete their online training where needed”.

Reflecting on the experience, Taylor Jones, Store Manager, shared: “Jordan is a great asset to Tim Hortons - his personality is perfect for the front of the house. He’s meticulous in everything he does, and I’ve seen his confidence grow so much since he started. The input from Triangle was invaluable, from supporting Jordan’s induction to regular check-ins that help ensure everything continues to go smoothly.

The support from Triangle has also changed how I approach onboarding. Their guidance showed me that small adjustments can make a big difference, not just for the individual but for my whole team. I believe this has helped me build a more inclusive and understanding workplace culture.

As a result, I am more confident and intentional about employing people with disabilities. It’s not just about filling roles – It’s about creating a team that reflects our community, where everyone feels valued and has the chance to grow.”

This case study demonstrates that with the right support, training, and attitude, inclusion is not just achievable - it’s good for business, good for employees, and good for communities.

***"Problems arise with all employees. Disability isn't the issue, it's about support and adaptation." Matthew Wood (Millwood)***

# 07

## The wind of change

### Resistance to change & Types of resistance

Successfully implementing diversity and inclusion initiatives requires not only policies and training but also a deep understanding of internal resistance, its causes, manifestations, and how to address it constructively.

### 1. Understand the root causes of resistance

Resistance is often rooted in fear - fear of change, fear of the unknown, or fear of losing status or control. It's essential to explore *why* resistance exists before trying to overcome it. This includes:

- **Listening carefully**, not just hearing words, but understanding the underlying concerns ("reading between the lines").
- **Using tools** such as employee surveys, focus groups, or one-on-one conversations with management and staff to uncover underlying issues.

***"Build trust by being honest, reliable, and consistent in your communication."*** Amber Swyngedouw (Plopsa Group)



## 2. Communicate effectively, with empathy

Communication must be two-way and grounded in empathy. Key points include:

- **Listening to understand**, not just to respond.
- **Helping employees** and employers answer the question: "*What's in it for me?*" People are more likely to embrace inclusion when they understand how it aligns with their own roles, values, and benefits.
- Stepping into others' shoes - understanding the positions, needs, and pressures.

## 3. Recognize different types of resistance

Not all resistance is the same:

- **Resistance** when implementing something new.
- **Unintentional resistance** often stems from a lack of practical knowledge. For example, people may support the idea of inclusion but not know *how to implement it*. A common phrase is: "*I agree, but ...*"

Supported Employment agencies can support with:

- Practical guidance and tools.
- Clear expectations.
- Peer support or coaching.

## 4. Provide clear vision and practical tools

People are more open to change when:

- There is a **clear, shared vision** of *why* the change is needed.
- **Steps toward change** are broken down and **practically supported**.
- A "change matrix" approach can help: "*I will change my behavior when...*" - providing concrete motivators and support for each stakeholder group.

*"People fear the unknown. Education and open dialogue can break down these barriers."* Lidija Krajnc

## 5. Build trust and relationships

Resistance is reduced when strong relationships are built across all levels:

- Foster trust between employees, middle management, and leadership.
- Promote shared goals and values.
- Ensure that inclusion efforts are not seen as top-down impositions, but co-created practices.

## 6. Monitor wellbeing and respond proactively

Regularly assess employee wellbeing and organizational climate:

- Identify tensions early and respond before they escalate.
- Create safe spaces where concerns can be openly addressed.
- Acknowledge that D&I initiatives are ongoing processes, not one-time events.

## 7. Share success stories and positive examples

- Celebrate each progress, being small or big.
- Share real stories of success and growth, including individual and team experiences.
- Reinforce the idea that inclusion benefits everyone, not just vulnerable groups.

## 8. Respect individual identity

- Avoid singling out employees from vulnerable groups.
- Promote inclusion by treating everyone with respect and fairness - not by highlighting differences, but by valuing each person's contribution.

In summary, dealing with internal resistance to diversity and inclusion is not about pushing people to change, but about inviting them to grow with understanding, support, and a shared vision. It requires patience, clarity, and a genuine commitment to building an inclusive culture that works for all.

***"Hidden resistance thrives in silence. Encourage open conversations to bring issues to light."*** Rien Vanraepenbusch (GTB)

# 08

## The echo odyssey

### The positive impacts of using inclusive practices

Inclusive business practices are not just a moral imperative - they are a powerful catalyst for positive change, both within organizations and across society. They create a wide range of positive impacts, both within the organization (internal) and in society (external). These benefits were consistently identified by employers, Supported Employment professionals, and candidates

By actively integrating employees from vulnerable groups, companies unlock a wide range of benefits that ripple outward, enriching the lives of individuals, strengthening workplace culture, and fostering a more equitable society. These impacts have been consistently recognized by employers, Supported Employment professionals, and candidates alike, underscoring the transformative potential of true inclusion.

***"Inclusion drives innovation. Teams that reflect their community create better products and services."*** Lee Corless (BASE)

## Empowering individuals: The personal impact

For employees from vulnerable groups, inclusive workplaces are life-changing. The most frequently cited benefit is **improved self-esteem and self-confidence**, as individuals gain recognition for their contributions and feel valued for who they are. Work provides more than just a paycheck; it offers **structure, meaning, and purpose**, leading to a **better daily mood and emotional well-being**.

The social dimension is equally profound: employees experience **more frequent and meaningful interactions**, which sharpen their social skills and foster **greater social inclusion**. They feel they are part of the company, and this sense of belonging boosts their **motivation**, which in turn improves **productivity**. This sense of belonging extends beyond the workplace, reassuring not only the employees themselves but also their families, who see their loved ones thriving as part of a team.

Financially, inclusion translates into a **better material situation**, as a regular income enhances living standards and promotes independence. Ultimately, these changes contribute to an **enhanced quality of life**, where the dignity of work opens doors to broader opportunities and personal fulfillment.

## Shaping society: The external ripple effect

The influence of inclusive employment extends far beyond the office walls. By integrating people with disabilities or from marginalized backgrounds into the workforce, companies help **shift societal attitudes**. Visibility in the workplace normalizes diversity, allowing individuals to be seen first as colleagues, not as “disabled” or “different.” Over time, this visibility **reduces stigma and increases acceptance**, as performance and capability take center stage over preconceived notions.

Inclusive businesses also **promote social responsibility**, demonstrating that ethical practices and profitability can go hand in hand. This commitment to

fairness enhances **brand image and customer reach**, as consumers increasingly support companies that reflect their values. In this way, inclusion becomes a driver of both social progress and business success.

## Strengthening organizations: The internal transformation

Within the organization, the benefits of inclusion are equally compelling. Workplace culture evolves to become more **open, respectful, and collaborative**, with less rigid hierarchy and a stronger sense of team spirit. Employees across the board are inspired by the **empathy, purpose, and positive thinking** that inclusive environments cultivate. This creates a “**domino effect**” of **motivation and empowerment**, where every team member feels invested in collective well-being.

Leadership, too, undergoes a positive shift. Middle managers and team leaders often develop **stronger interpersonal skills** and adopt a **strengths-based approach**, working alongside employees as equals rather than authority figures. This not only improves management effectiveness but also fosters a culture of **mutual care and accountability**.

From a strategic perspective, inclusive practices enhance **sustainability and innovation**. Diverse teams bring a variety of perspectives, sparking **creative problem-solving** and driving profitability. Reduced turnover and higher loyalty, lower hiring and training costs, while **clearer communication** - tailored to the needs of all team members - streamlines operations and builds trust. Perhaps most importantly, organizations learn to **align their mission with the personal goals of their employees**, clarifying values and creating a cohesive, purpose-driven culture.

***"Performance culture should shift to a learning culture. Accountability and teamwork drive success."*** Lynn Decraene (Decathlon)

## **A virtuous cycle**

The impacts of inclusive business practices form a virtuous cycle: empowered individuals contribute to stronger teams, which in turn build more resilient organizations and a more inclusive society. By embracing diversity in all its forms, companies do more than just "do good" - they unlock new levels of **innovation, loyalty, and long-term success**, proving that inclusion is not just the right thing to do, but the smart thing to do.

# 09

## Beyond the map

### Looking ahead

The Erasmus+ BEO – Business Engagement Odyssey Project stands as a testament to the transformative potential of inclusive employment, not only for individuals with disabilities but for businesses and society as a whole. This Good Practice Guide, born from a collaborative and participatory process, underscores a fundamental truth: inclusion is not an act of charity, but a strategic investment in human potential, organizational resilience, and societal progress.

***“Inclusion is not rocket science”*** Lee Corless (BASE)

## Breaking barriers, building bridges

The journey toward inclusion begins with recognizing the systemic barriers that prevent millions of people with disabilities across Europe from accessing meaningful employment. The Supported Employment model, as highlighted in the guide, demonstrates that these barriers are not insurmountable. By fostering active partnerships between companies, Supported Employment professionals, and individuals with disabilities, the project reveals how tailored strategies -



rooted in real-world experiences - can create pathways to employment that benefit everyone involved.

## A culture of inclusion: From theory to practice

Inclusion is not achieved through policies alone; it requires a cultural shift within organizations. The guide's emphasis on **organizational culture**, **community engagement**, and **internal communication** illustrates that inclusion must be woven into the fabric of daily operations. Companies that integrate social responsibility into their core strategy, co-create practices with stakeholders, and set measurable goals are better positioned to build environments where diversity is celebrated and leveraged as a strength.

The **Good Practices**, **Hints & Tips**, and **Quick Wins** sections provide actionable steps for businesses to implement inclusion at every stage - from recruitment and training to workplace integration and career progression. These strategies are designed to be adaptable, ensuring that companies of all sizes and sectors can participate in the inclusion odyssey. For example, offering flexible work arrangements, creating mentorship programs, and using multi-format training platforms are low-effort, high-impact actions that foster accessibility and belonging.

*"If you set something up for somebody with a disability, you're setting it up for everybody."* Lee Corless (BASE)

## The ripple effect: Empowering individuals, transforming societies

The impact of inclusive employment extends far beyond the workplace. For individuals with disabilities, meaningful work fosters **self-esteem**, **financial independence**, and **social integration**, replacing isolation with purpose and dignity. Families, too, experience relief and pride as their loved ones thrive in supportive environments. Within organizations, inclusion cultivates a culture of **collaboration**, **innovation**, and **loyalty**, as diverse teams bring fresh perspectives and strengthen problem-solving capabilities.

Externally, inclusive businesses challenge societal stigma by normalizing diversity in the workplace. As companies demonstrate that ethical practices and profitability can coexist, they inspire others to follow suit, creating a ripple effect that promotes acceptance and equity. Customers, increasingly drawn to brands that reflect their values, reward these companies with loyalty and trust, further reinforcing the business case for inclusion.

## Overcoming resistance: A shared vision

The guide acknowledges that resistance to inclusion is often rooted in fear - fear of change, of the unknown, or of losing control. Addressing this resistance requires **empathy**, **clear communication**, and **practical support**. By involving employees at all levels in the inclusion process, companies can co-create solutions that align with their values and operational realities. Sharing success stories, celebrating progress, and providing ongoing training help to build trust and demonstrate the tangible benefits of inclusion.

*"The first step is always the hardest - find someone passionate to lead the change."* Marina Nagy (Radisson Blu Hotel)

## The Odyssey continues

The Business Engagement Odyssey is not a destination but an ongoing journey. The guide's call to action - **"Now It's Your Turn"** - reminds us that real change happens when ideas are put into practice. Whether through small, immediate actions like accessible recruitment processes, or long-term commitments like mentorship programs, every step counts. Companies that embrace inclusion not only unlock the potential of individuals with disabilities but also position themselves as leaders in a more equitable and innovative future.

In conclusion, the Erasmus+ BEO Project offers more than a roadmap; it provides a vision of a world where talent and opportunity meet, regardless of ability. By adopting the principles and practices outlined in this guide, businesses can transform their workplaces, empower their employees, and contribute to a society where everyone has the chance to thrive. The odyssey toward inclusion is one worth taking - for **when we invest in diversity, we all win.**

***"Build a network of support so no one feels alone in the process."*** Edyth Dunlop (ASEE)

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