

The Presidents Group is a network of BC. business leaders who are championing improved employment outcomes for people with disabilities in BC.

## YVR Hosts a Hiring Fair to Encourage More Inclusive Hiring

In September 2019, Vancouver International Airport (YVR) hosted its first hiring fair for people with disabilities.



There are 26,500 people who work on Sea Island where the airport is located, according to Gwen Dimen, Employment Advisor, Human Resources for Vancouver Airport Authority. The Airport Authority—the community-based, not-for-profit organization that manages YVR—holds more than 500 of these jobs; the rest are held by airport partners.

“We knew if we really wanted to make a difference, we needed to start doing a better job connecting with all the other employers on Sea Island,” says Dimen. “This was our first attempt at that, and we are pretty happy with the result.”

Participating companies included Vancouver Airport Authority, Swissport, Paladin, G4S, HMSHost, Jacob Bros, Plaza Premium, Strategic Aviation, WestJet, World Duty Free, Pacific Coastal Airlines, PCL Construction, Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), Dexterra, Paradies Lagardère and Securiguard.

“Our expectations were met in terms of employer participation,” says Dimen, who adds that whenever you're hosting an event for the first time—regardless of what it is—100 percent participation isn't going to happen.



“Now that people know what to expect and we've created some buzz around the airport, we anticipate even more airport partners will participate in the future,” she says.

As originally envisioned, the intent was to go beyond a regular hiring fair. “We recognize



we may not have the perfect job for everyone right now,” says Dimen, “but perhaps this event would inspire someone to go down a different education or career path than they originally considered.”

For this reason, the event was also called an Open House. The Airport Authority had over 40 volunteers ranging from director to operational level present during the event to speak with attendees about their career paths and jobs. Approximately 300 people attended.

Airport Authority volunteers were inspired, and participants saw the need and benefit of customized employment.

“The one size fits all approach may work sometimes, but it is not how we are going to best engage the disability community in meaningful and lasting employment,” Dimen says.

Feedback has been positive. As far as how many people have been hired, it's too early to tell. Dimen did send a survey to the partners a week and a half after the event and found out that one person has been hired. Ninety days from the event, she'll send another follow up to see if that number has increased.

The need is certainly there. Dimen says there are over 600,000 working age British Columbians (age 15-64) that have a disability. “It just makes sense that we should all work together to make the airport a great career option for those individuals,” says Dimen. “It makes good business sense too. People with disabilities have proven to be excellent employees. Research has also shown they experience lower turnover rates, which in turn helps reduce employers' costs associated with recruiting and training new employees.” Thanks to the hiring fair, minds are being changed.

“[The event] was a fantastic way to promote ourselves as employers and get to meet many potential candidates face to face,” wrote one employer on the survey. “This helps alleviate any uncertainties because we can discuss on the spot some easy ways to accommodate someone with a diverse ability. It definitely opens your mind to new possibilities and a fantastic group of qualified talent.”

Depending on size, organizations can host a hiring fair independently or partner with others. What's important is putting forth the effort. “To really make a difference, we just all need to do something regardless of whether it's small or large,” says Dimen. “It is really better to have tried and failed than to have not tried at all. If your organization is trying something new or different, start it as a pilot program and focus on achieving small successes first.”