



John Campbell / The Independent

CAMPBELLFORD -- Bulk food owners Gary and Margaret Ann Rowan highly recommend Community Living Campbellford/Brighton's supportive employment program. Jim Vogel has worked for them for more 17 years and is an excellent employee, they say. Jan. 26, 2011

## Campbellford job a plus for disabled employee

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CAMPBELLFORD -- As jobs go, it's quite modest - three hours or so once a week - but it's made a huge difference in Jim Vogel's life.

He's a 58-year-old Stirling-area resident who happens to have an intellectual disability. Seventeen years ago he was hired by Bulk Plus in Campbellford to clean up around the store every Wednesday.

"He looks forward to it," said Charlene Foster, Mr. Vogel's outcome support facilitator with Community Living Campbellford/Brighton. "Jim has definitely benefited from employment ... he's become a lot more independent."

"He's a very steady worker," said store co-owner Gary Rowan. "He does an excellent job."

Margaret Ann Rowan said hiring Mr. Vogel was a good fit because he's very conscientious about his work.

"He had supervision at first but he doesn't need supervision now," said Ms. Rowan.

When Mr. Vogel started at the job, if anybody approached him he would be all flustered and he didn't know what to do, she said. But with the help of Community Living staff, he overcame his shyness with customers.

Bulk Plus is the kind of employer the two keynote speakers at the recent Business Appreciation Breakfast had in mind when they said businesses gain by hiring people with disabilities. People with disabilities make up 16 per cent of Canada's population, making them the country's largest minority, but 70 per cent of them are unemployed, said Joe Dale, the executive director of the Ontario Disability Network. They represent a huge untapped pool of labour, Mr. Dale said.

Mark Wafer, who has hired more than 50 people with disabilities at his seven Tim Hortons stores over the years, dispelled many of the myths surrounding workers who have intellectual or physical challenges. Mr. Wafer cited numerous statistics showing they are productive, dedicated employees.

Amy Widdows has seen it for herself. As Community Living's support and services supervisor, Ms. Widdows looks after the program that encourages employers to hire people the agency serves and thereby make the community more inclusive.

"Everyone has the same desire and right to work competitively in their own community," she said.

This week, Community Living is stepping up its efforts with the launch of a new program to help people with disabilities find work. It has established a job training site at Campbellford Memorial Hospital's dietary department. The agency is providing a job coach to provide hands-on assistance to a woman who has a keen interest in working in a restaurant acquire skills that will improve her chances of landing a job in a competitive market, Ms. Widdows said. The training is set up for a maximum of 12 weeks.

Liquidation World has also agreed to serve as a training site, she added.

Community Living serves more than 100 people in Northumberland County and is prepared to help any of them who express an interest in working or being a volunteer. They have the same dreams and aspirations as anyone else, Ms. Widdows said.

To help them realize their goals, the agency has to deal with certain myths, such as people with disabilities aren't safe on the job, she said.

"Statistics have proven otherwise," Ms. Widdows noted, adding they are also extremely loyal.

"There are so many more advantages to being an inclusive employer than not," she said.

The agency provides job coaching at the workplace for as long as necessary and it remains involved should further assistance be required, such as additional training in the event a routine has changed.

People Community Living has helped find work are paid whatever the company pays its other workers, Ms. Widdows said, and they're treated the same. The agency has had lots of success stories over the years and has begun to collect testimonials from employers, she said.

"I myself haven't had any negative feedback from any employer ever because we try to have the best fit," Ms. Widdows said. "The employers in this town are really becoming very inclusive, and they are very positive with our employment program."

The most recent figures show that, of the 19 people who requested help in getting involved in the community in some fashion, 10 are now volunteers, four found work or added to their hours, two are engaged in job trials and three are still waiting for an opportunity that suits them.

Since the agency bumped up the level of service it provides through the supportive employment program about a year ago, the response from businesses has been "snowballing," Ms. Widdows said.

"Employers are coming to us and asking questions - how can I get involved and how can this benefit my business?"

To learn more, call Amy Widdows at 705-653-1821 or e-mail [awiddows@communitylivingcampbellford.com](mailto:awiddows@communitylivingcampbellford.com).