

Breakthrough Project points to improved daycare flexibility ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Creating flexibility in child care would remove some barriers to the workplace for women, says a Moncton group that has been exploring the issue for two years.

Breakthrough Project at the Moncton YWCA is wrapping up its work, two years after being started with \$164,200 in federal funding to identify barriers to the workplace for female job seekers in the Moncton area and look for solutions.

Alicia Duffy, the youth programs co-ordinator with the YMCA, said child care issues were a familiar theme heard by the group, with stakeholders saying the cost and availability of daycare make it prohibitive to find work.

Participants in the project said employers look at mothers as less dependable than men without children because of their family commitments.

Duffy said possible solutions include implementing human resources policies that allow women to leave work and pick up children from daycare, then make up those hours either at home or outside their scheduled shift.

The creation of daycares within businesses, and allowing parents to share one daycare spot among multiple children, would also alleviate the pressure felt by many women in the workforce, said Duffy.

Duffy said another obstacle to employment for some women is "unconscious bias," which she defines as "those prejudices and stereotypes that we kind of hold on unconsciously."

Disability issues a concern

Disability is also an obstacle for some women, but Duffy said that would be less of a problem if employers knew about grants available to make their workplace more accessible.

The project consisted of 11 women from diverse backgrounds who met regularly to provide employment-focused feedback, about 15 women who provided one-on-one interviews, and eight local businesses of varying sizes to give input from the business sector.

Participant Amy Fraser is physically disabled and relies on a wheelchair to get around. She says she's been frustrated by the attitudes of many employers when she approaches them for a job.

"I get through it. I was like, 'Screw everybody — I'm not in it for the money, anyway. I'm trying to make a difference so that's all that matters.'"

Fraser feels being part of the Breakthrough Project offers her a chance to lend her voice and hopefully be heard, but she says what's most important is for business owners to act.

"Everybody listens to me but are they going to take the action? There's people that do and people that don't, so you never know."

Duffy hopes the project will change the attitude of employers so the challenges faced by women like Fraser will become a thing of the past, and level the playing field for female job seekers.

"I see us looking a lot into inclusivity and diversity as a competitive advantage," she said, pointing to tech giants like Google and Facebook as leaders in hiring practices.

"We'd like to see businesses reflect, almost, to do an assessment of where they're at, to challenge themselves to think, 'How can we make our business more ready for women, more optimized for women with a disability, or to check that unconscious bias that they might hold, or their staff might hold.'"

Duffy and her team will release the full findings from the group's work on Friday in Moncton.

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