

# The Impact of an Employment Model for Individuals with Disabilities: Boston Children's Hospital Down Syndrome Program Apprenticeship

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**Boston Children's Hospital**  
Down Syndrome Program

## BACKGROUND

Adults with intellectual disabilities have high rates of unemployment/underemployment. Previous research has shown that employing people with disabilities benefits both individuals and organizations that employ them.<sup>1,2</sup>

Created in 2009, the Boston Children's Hospital Down Syndrome Program (DSP) Apprenticeship is a 2-year, paid, part-time, job training program. It involves:

- Competitive application process
- Onboarding through Human Resources
- Continuous training and supervision.
- Job responsibilities:
  - Office work: emails, faxing, scanning, collating clinical and resource packets, mail distribution, entering patient appointments and data entry into EPIC.
  - Sharing resources with families
  - Setting up exam rooms

Four adults have completed the apprenticeship program.

- One hired as full-time in Dev. Med. Center
- One hired as part-time research asst in DSP

## AIMS

To Identify:

- Benefits and challenges for:
  - Individuals with DS
  - Co-workers
  - Supervisors
- Best practices to create a supportive, inclusive, and successful work environment for individuals with DS.

## METHODS

Nine 30-minute phone or Zoom interviews were conducted.

- N=3 Employees with DS
- N=6 Coworkers of employees with DS

Analysis: Qualitative methodology was used to identify main themes.

- Benefits and challenges identified
- Strategies to support success.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Questions to Coworkers

Describe the **impact** of working with people with DS?

### Coworkers' Responses

*"It has **opened my eyes** and educated me more about the abilities of people and what their contributions can be at work."*

What are the **benefits** of having a person with DS in your workplace?

*"I think the **biggest benefit is for the families** who come to our floor and can see them working and doing their job. I am sure it's impactful for them."*

What are the **challenges** of having a person with DS in your workplace?

*"Sometimes it was **distracting**. He wanted to chat, and it was hard for me to stop him or remind him to stay on task."*

Have your **attitudes or beliefs** changed?

*"This has **totally changed my attitudes** and beliefs on how important this is. Though it can be tough, efforts need to be made so it always continues."*

### Questions to Apprentices

What skills have **you learned**?

### Apprentices' Responses

*"I learned to do emails and faxing. I also learned EPIC, PowerChart (EMR), REDCap, and data entry."*

What were the **challenges**?

*"I think the toughest part was being around the kids. **It was new for me, but it turned out fine**. I was just nervous at first."*

What **helped** in your job?

*"When I started using **my phone timer** to time my lunch breaks"*

What are you **proud** of?

*"When I started working there my mother drove me each day, but then **I learned how to take the train alone** and I was really proud to do that on my own."*

## SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES

DS Program leadership reflected on strategies to support employment for individuals with DS.

- Consistent hands-on modeling, job coaching, and supervision with immediate, direct feedback
- Simplified, clear instructions and visual schedules to teach tasks and responsibilities.
- Identification and monitoring of short-term and long-term goals.
- Identify reliable "go-to" contacts to provide direct in the moment support.
- Supervisor shadowing to help identify training needs and specific modifications to optimize job performance.
- High expectations required, performance monitoring and feedback essential.



## CONCLUSIONS

There are benefits and challenges identified by employees with DS and their coworkers, however, there was an overwhelmingly positive impact to the employment model. Implementation of training, supports, and strategies can promote success.

## REFERENCES

1 Kumin L, Schoenbrodt L. Employment in Adults with Down Syndrome in the United States: Results from a National Survey. *J Appl Res Intellect Disabil*. 2016 Jul;29(4):330-45. doi: 10.1111/jar.12182. Epub 2015 Apr 6. PMID: 25847188.

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