**Excellence in Innovation- Diversity**

**Lisa Kuiper, Career Services, Brock University**

It is with great pleasure I nominate Lisa Kuiper of Brock University for consideration for the 2015 Excellence in Innovation Award - Diversity in recognition of her outstanding leadership and tireless efforts in addressing and raising awareness about issues of students with disabilities at Brock and amongst CACEE membership. Such efforts has paved the way for more students with disabilities to connect with employers so that they may be included and accommodated in the transition from school to work.

Lisa Kuiper has been with Career Services at Brock University for over 22 years and since 2001 in her role as the Employer Development/Events & Marketing Coordinator. During her employment as the Employer Development Coordinator Lisa identified a gap between employers seeking to recruit individuals with disabilities and students with disabilities being aware that employers want to hire them. Identifying this disconnect lead Lisa to further research and implemented better programming / service offerings for both employers and students with disabilities. Lisa's efforts have reinforced the emphasis for inclusivity and workplace diversity by providing a direct channel / connection between employers

In 2001 there were over 900+ Students with Disabilities who are registered with the Students with Disabilities Office (SWD) at Brock University. These were only the students who have registered with this office to receive accommodation services, and this number does not include Brock with disabilities that have not disclosed and registered with the SWD. With this information, she also researched what other institutions were doing and found very little resources that connected employers with students with disabilities. Most institutions were providing job search resources/processes and some had information on how to disclose their disabilities during the job search process although there was no formal connection of students with disabilities with employers. This lead her research to come across an organization called ?Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities? out of the University of Tennessee. Lisa joined the organization and attended their 2nd annual conference in Minneapolis and connected with their Director, Alan Muir. It was through Alan that Lisa learned about a formal partnership between the University of Tennessee Career Services Office and their Students with Disabilities Office.

Lisa then managed the coordination and implementation of developing a formal partnership with Brock's Students with Disabilities Office and Career Services, and through a number of formal meetings with the Director of the Students with Disabilities Office entered into such a partnership. It was through this partnership that the Bridge to Success website was born. Lisa was instrumental in developing and implementing the Bridge to Success website which links their two departments. The description on the website reads as follows:

Bridge to Success -

In cooperation with Brock University's Career Services and the Office of Services for Students Disabilities, the Bridge to Success website was developed to assist with the career and employment prospects of students with disabilities. The website provides students with disabilities access to career planning, the disclosure process, accommodations in the workplace, employers who are seeking to hire students with disabilities and resources in order to find employment. The website also includes information for employers seeking to make connections with students with disabilities and to recruitment them for their employment opportunities.

By linking of services, the Career Services Office and the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities will be able to connect recruiters who visit our campus with students with disabilities, but will also provide resources and services to ensure a successful transition from school to work.

The website also provides employers and students a main point of contact connection (Lisa Kuiper) to assist with making the connection with employer's and their job opportunities to students with disabilities seeking employment.

The Bridge to Success website, hosts information for Students with Disabilities on not only how to disclose their disabilities, but also provides the pros and cons of when it would be best to do so throughout the job search process. It has resource links to additional job search websites in addition to the Disability Impact on Career and Employment (DICE) assessment tool for students, graduates and alumni with disabilities. Lisa came across this assessment tool which had a quite a substantial fee associated with it and negotiated the assessment tool fee to be waived by Career Services so all students with disabilities would have access to the tool. The DICE assessment tool is available by referral (student is referred by the Students with Disabilities Office to Lisa Kuiper (Career Services)) to have the student utilize the tool). This assessment tool provides a report on how their disability might impact their career and employment choices and what accommodations they may require. The individuals then meet with Lisa to discuss the report's findings and a career plan is addressed. The DICE Assessment utilizes the National Occupational Classification System.

With the website up and running, Lisa hired a qualified student with graphic designing experience (who happened to have a disability) to create a brochure to highlight the Bridge to Success website that would be provided to employers and to Students with a Disability. The brochures were promoted in the Students with Disabilities Office and the Career Services? Resource Centre. The brochure was well received and even faculty members were provided a copy of the brochure for their reference. The budget for the brochure was in the $1-$1000 range which paid for the wages for the student and the printing costs. There were no costs associated with the website, as it was developed Lisa Kuiper utilizing Brock's in-house CMS.

The Bridge to Success website also features information for employer and organizations on recruiting and hiring students with disabilities. The website provides a main point of contact to help employers post jobs, host diversity information sessions, and interviewing students with disabilities.

With the Employer Development Coordinator, Lisa Kuiper being the main point of contact Lisa is able to discuss additional program offering to her employers, such as the Corporate Mentorship Program. The Corporate Mentorship Program works with employers to bring on board students to be mentored in their organization over the course of an academic year to learn about the culture, organization and careers available in their organization. Lisa was able to implement a Corporate Mentorship Program for specifically for students with disability, called the TD Corporate Mentorship Program for Students with Disabilities. The program brought on board 4 students with disabilities to be mentored throughout the academic year and the program was so successful TD hired all 4 for summer (paid) positions. The program was in its 3rd year.

With the implantation of the Bridge to Success website, there has been a significant increase in the number of employers posting jobs indicating their interest in recruiting and hiring students with disabilities and a significant increase in the number of employer diversity recruiting information sessions on the Brock campus. This has resulted in an increase in the number of students being successfully hired by these employers. Students with disabilities are now taking a more active role in their career plans (DICE), aware of employment opportunities and are more confident in when to disclose their disability and to apply to employer's who have gone through the Bridge to Success website (through Lisa Kuiper). The Bridge to Success website also provides a yearly applicant pool of students with disabilities to invite them to diversity recruitment events and to be able to alert them to these job/career opportunities. An outcome of the project and the implementation of the website that was not identified as a learning objective of the project, is the website opens the door to students, graduates and alumni who have not registered with the Students with Disabilities Office to come forward and identify themselves to employers and employment opportunities provided through the Bridge to Success website. The website also allows Career Services to make referrals back to the Students with Disabilities Office to inform them of services provided through their offices for accommodations and support.

In addition to her work, Lisa has been deeply committed to and involved in diversity issues at Brock and in her community. She is an active member of Brock University's Accessibility Advisory Committee, a Board Member of the Human Resource Professional Association of Niagara, a Board Member at Pathstone Mental Health, and has been sought out for advice from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce on addressing the issue of making the business case (to organizations and employers) to hire post-secondary graduates/students with disabilities. Lisa has also been trained on “Guiding Circles”, a career planning kit to assist Aboriginal Students. Lisa strives to utilize every available “pulpit” in her efforts to raise awareness about the issue of diversity.

**What was the budget range of this project?**

Low ($1-$1,000)

**What was the size of the team working on this project?**

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