

# Phase three report

QATHET INCLUSIVE  
MANUFACTURING  
PILOT PROJECT



## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We acknowledge with respect and gratitude that this work takes place on the traditional and treaty territory of the Tla'amin people, who are a self-governing Nation. The name qathet was gifted to the Regional District in 2018; the word qathet means “people working together” in ayayjuthum, the language of the Tla'amin people (and of its sister Nations). We are grateful for this word, as it aptly describes what we are hoping to achieve with the qathet Inclusive Manufacturing Pilot Project: a successful model of inclusion in employment in the manufacturing industry. We express gratitude to the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction for funding through the Community and Employer Partnership Program that makes this Project Based Labour Market Training (PBLMT) initiative possible. We are also grateful for funding from the Vancouver Foundation. Local institutional support comes from inclusion Powell River Society (the project holder). Michael J. Prince, from the University of Victoria, provided additional oversight of the research process – helping us to refine our tools and our reporting. We are so grateful for all of these supports. Special thanks go to all the participants in the final phase of the research project: employees, family members, supervisors, management, and Advisory Committee members who took time to share their experiences and perspectives in interviews, surveys, and/or journals. Some direct quotes from their contributions can be seen throughout the report. This work would be meaningless without their input and commitment to meaningful, inclusive employment in Powell River/qathet region and throughout the Province of British Columbia. Thank you, sincerely.

A note about terminology: For the purposes of this report, the word ‘participant’ refers to all those mentioned in the paragraph above who participated in the research component of this project (employees, family members, supervisors, management, and Advisory Committee members). We acknowledge that this use of the word ‘participant’ is broader than that used by the PBLMT program that funds this initiative. For clarity, all those who work at OneLight as employees are in fact ‘participants’ in the PBLMT, and we are grateful for the opportunity this provides.



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## Executive summary

When sheltered workshops closed in B.C. 25 years ago, it was because of a commitment to community living – that is, meaningful inclusion of people with and without disabilities in community life. However, 25 years later people with disabilities are *still* left out of the labour market. And according to a recent provincial report on basic income<sup>1</sup> single working-age adults without children and youth transitioning to adulthood are two groups continuing to struggle with poverty in this province. It is time to do something different.

With support from the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, inclusion Powell River stepped in to fill the void. We went into this project creating a model that we knew based on research and best practices would be beneficial to people with intellectual disabilities, and inclusive of everyone else. But we didn't know how to best implement it, which is why we proceeded as an 18-month pilot project. We were setting out to learn, through both our successes and our mistakes.

The model has five elements: inclusive culture, natural supports, experiential training, flexible scheduling and tasks, and equitable duties and compensation. And the research question grounding the inquiry was: *What are the impacts of the inclusive employment model being implemented in a manufacturing setting that lead to productive and meaningful participation in the labour force by people with and without disabilities?*

We tested the model at a social enterprise called OneLight, a social enterprise where fire starters are manufactured out of recycled materials. And we have learned a lot! Significantly, we have learned that the impacts of this employment model are far-reaching: (1) individual-level impacts include mental health, quality of life, and skill development. (2) Workplace impacts relate to recruitment and retention, morale and productivity, and innovation. And (3) community-level impacts include strengthening both the community and the economy. An exciting message we have heard through the course of this research is that when you center people, you get community. And community makes all of us stronger.

We have also learned that creating an inclusive workplace culture is easier than some employers might think. When it comes to the other elements of the model – particularly flexibility, training, and equity – there needs to be a strong commitment on a leadership side and good communication. We have compiled tips and other resources for employers who are interested in making changes to their business or organization to become more inclusive. Additional tools are also included as appendices.

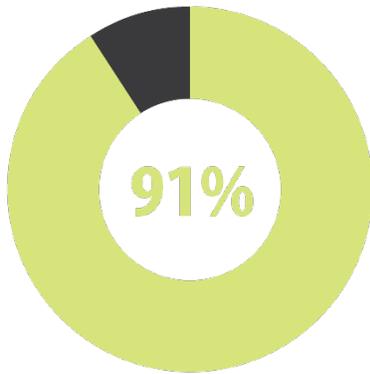
Many questions remain about what elements of OneLight's model are transferrable to other settings, and we all still have much to learn. We hope that others will join us in this collective effort to uphold the human right to employment, by taking steps to alter our economy to become inclusive of the full range of abilities in our community.

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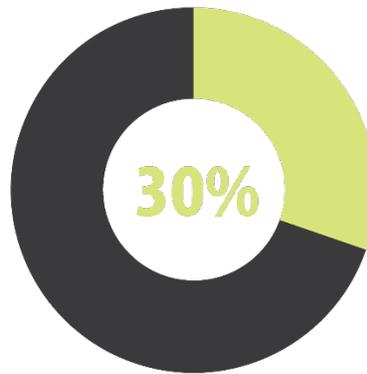
<sup>1</sup> <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/about-the-bc-government/poverty-reduction-strategy/basic-income-report> (Province of BC, 2022)

## The people and process

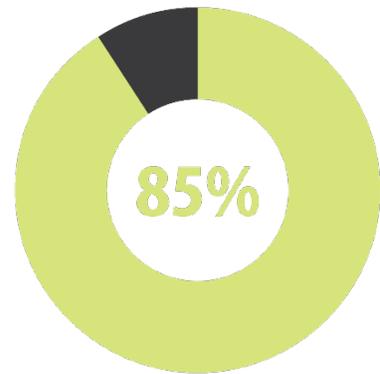
The qIM Pilot Project evolved out of a need to create employment opportunities for people with disabilities who are left out of the labour market, especially people with intellectual disabilities (ID). The manufacturing process and facility of OneLight are *designed* for people with ID, but have been made inclusive by *also* employing people without disabilities. The result is people with and without disabilities and other barriers to employment working side-by-side to manufacture a fire starter product that diverts materials from the landfill, making lighting a fire easier and celebrating inclusive design.



OF EMPLOYEE  
PARTICIPANTS IDENTIFY  
AS HAVING A  
DISABILITY\*



OF EMPLOYEE  
PARTICIPANTS  
REQUESTED FORMAL  
ACCOMMODATIONS

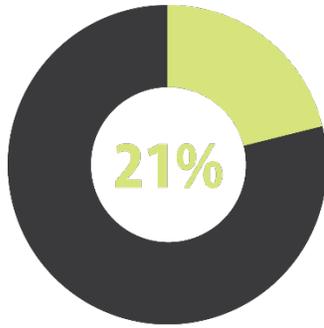


OF EMPLOYEE  
PARTICIPANTS ARE  
SINGLE ADULTS WITHOUT  
CHILDREN <sup>2</sup>

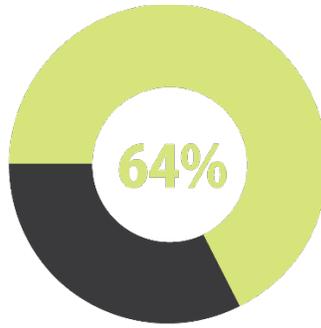
*\*People who self-identify as having disabilities are diverse. This number includes intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities, mental health disabilities, and other barriers to employment. <sup>2</sup>*

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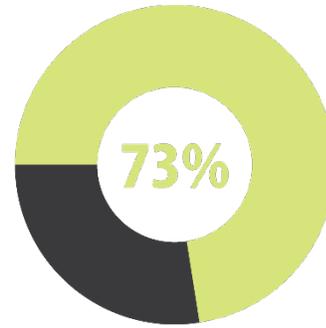
<sup>2</sup> One of two groups identified as experiencing high rates of poverty in BC:  
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/about-the-bc-government/poverty-reduction-strategy/basic-income-report> (Province of BC, 2022)



21%  
OF EMPLOYEE PARTICIPANTS ARE YOUTH TRANSITIONING TO ADULTHOOD <sup>3</sup>



64%  
OF EMPLOYEE PARTICIPANTS SAID YES TO BEING A NATURAL SUPPORT FOR OTHERS



73%  
OF EMPLOYEE PARTICIPANTS EITHER TAKE THE BUS OR WALK TO WORK

3

The 18-month pilot project included three phases of research. This report shares learning from the third and final phase for which data was collected during February 2022. Its focus is on a) impacts of the inclusive employment model, and b) tips for employers who want to hire inclusively.

Input for this phase of the project has been provided through interviews, surveys, and document review.

# 24 interviews

18 employee participants (2 of whom are in assistant manager roles; 3 of whom were joined by family members)

6 managers (one of whom is no longer working at OneLight)

# document review

- New consent forms
- One journal\*
- Sales and production data
- Flexible hours data
- Human resource data
- Retention tracking
- Strategic planning documents
- qIM website (qimproject.com)
- OneLight website (onelight.ca)

*\* journals were provided as an option for people who prefer to share their perspectives in writing*

# 15 surveys

- 8 employee participants
- 2 supervisors/managers
- 4 advisory committee members
- 1 volunteer



<sup>3</sup> One of two groups identified as experiencing high rates of poverty in BC: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/about-the-bc-government/poverty-reduction-strategy/basic-income-report> (Province of BC, 2022)

## The product

OneLight fire starters will start a fire in minutes without kindling and are built with 99% recycled materials that are diverted from the waste stream. OneLight is a social enterprise created in 2020 with a vision for inclusive employment in manufacturing with the added goal of creating products made from recycled materials. The fire starters are handmade with recycled untreated lumber, paper rolls, candle wax, and a wick.

### Benefits

- People believe in the product: good for morale, retention, and sales.
- As a handmade product, there are workplace tasks suitable for a wide range of abilities.
- Manufacturing is satisfying work with tangible results.
- It is part of the circular economy: a source of pride.

*“ For me it’s very important the product we are making, because it’s meaningful. The product is good on the environment, it’s made in Canada. I see a lot of potential, and I see results. – Rhys (pseudonym), employee participant*

*“ We’re splitting wood and packing boxes. You start the morning with pile A and then you’ve made pile B. So, there is a very visual connect to the work you’ve done. You can see what you have accomplished. – David, manager*

*“ I want to work at OneLight – I would go to this job any day. It’s manufacturing, I get to build things. – Evan, employee participant*

### Challenges

- It is a low profit margin product.
- Labour costs are high.

*“ We are going to be able to look at other products in the near future. That’s the only way for us to be sustainable. – Adrian (pseudonym), manager*

*“ It just so happens that OneLight is a low margin thing. If we were making diamond rings it would be very different. – Leni, manager*

## The business model

**OneLight’s mission statement:** To create meaningful employment that promotes equity, inclusion and diverse abilities in the work force.

As a social enterprise, the primary purpose of OneLight is social. In particular, its social purposes are inclusive employment and diverting waste from the waste stream. This does not mean it cannot generate revenue, but that is not its *primary* purpose. This is sometimes referred to as a triple bottom

line: people, planet, and profit. As a social enterprise, OneLight has administrative support from inclusion Powell River, and it has funding support from the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction and the Victoria Foundation.

The social enterprise has created 39 jobs in total – with 33 **active** jobs at the time of writing

**25 employee participants** (2 of whom have received promotions and are now floor manager assistants)



**8 Work Opportunity employee participants** (all of whom became employee participants after the 12-week work opportunity placement was over)



**4 managers** (team lead, 2 floor managers, sales and marketing manager)



**1 project manager**



**1 project manager assistant**



**1 janitorial position**

When asked about the **RISKS** of this business model, **100% of research participants pointed to the lack of stable funding.**



When asked about the **BENEFITS** of this business model, people pointed to

a) improved quality of life of people working there, and



b) the fact that this creates qualitative improvements to the community and the economy.

*“ I’ve gone through this whole project with a small amount of confusion in the back of my mind, because a business makes money. It’s wonderful to do this, where people have purpose to come down here every day, and it’s made of recycled materials. And I’m absolutely thrilled that we’ve got sales all over North America. What concerns me is if this project ends! We’ve got this huge wonderful sales base, where once people try the product they just have to keep getting it, and if we don’t get future funding it will be difficult to continue. – Barb, employee participant*

## Benefits

- Employers actively play a role in advancing the human right to employment.
- Employees feel valued, and in turn place great value on their work.
- Many people who have previously experienced insurmountable barriers to accessing or maintaining employment have a stable job for the first time. This impacts quality of life.
- The return on investment occurs at a community level when more people are employed. They are more active and contributing in many positive ways to family, the community, and the economy.

*“ It’s not so much the monetary gain, it’s more about human condition – that excites me. I just see incredible benefits in that. I’ve always felt things are sort of backwards in this profit thing. I was in the construction industry so long and I used to be proud of what I built. And then I just saw the quality going down and down and down. People underbidding other people just to make a profit. – Richard, employee participant*

*“ As we enter an era of climate disasters, pandemics and mass human migration, we have it absolutely backwards. We should measure the success and worth of our enterprises by how much they enrich the lives of all our community members and the ecosystem in which we are entwined. – Anonymous response*

*“ The social aspect has to be right there with the profit, and that kind of community responsibility would help advertising and profit in the long run anyway. – Jazz, employee participant*

*“ I’ll always be the person that says more social, less enterprise, because I know first hand the merit of working in a social profit. It speaks to your heart; it fills your cups. It’s so much more than just money. – Dawn, manager*

## Challenges

- Balancing the need for profit revenue with the commitments to inclusive employment and waste diversion can sometimes be difficult.
- A lack of clarity in purpose (or having multiple purposes) can lead to friction when making decisions.

- Trying to do too many things at once leads to capacity challenges. More managers needed.
- Precarious or time-limited funding adds to stress and feelings of instability for management, employees, and families.
- Hurdles in communication among branches of government Ministries continue to impact people's pay and stress levels.
- Some concern that it does not reflect a typical business model.

*“ To me the two are inseparable, in that without a viable financial model there is no opportunity for the social purpose. So, I would say that a balance of these two things on equal footing is what I would personally strive for. - Anonymous response*

*“ I know they want to bring some more products – candles. I see a lot of future if they give us an opportunity to continue with this product, with others, I see more potential for us. – Rhys (pseudonym), employee participant*

*“ The lack of clear definition is a problem, especially if you're not funded. One thing I think that was lost in OneLight was practical lessons from real business. Not necessarily hierarchy, but structure and management. – David, manager*

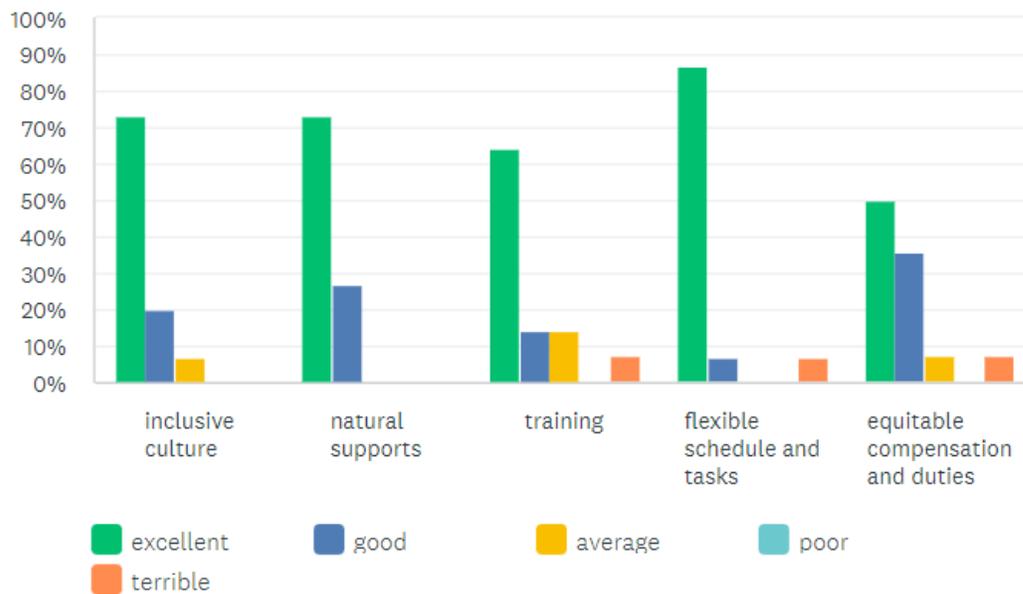
*“ How do you find likeminded funders to keep you afloat when the sales days are lean, the enterprise part is not functioning as well? – Dawn, manager*

## The employment model

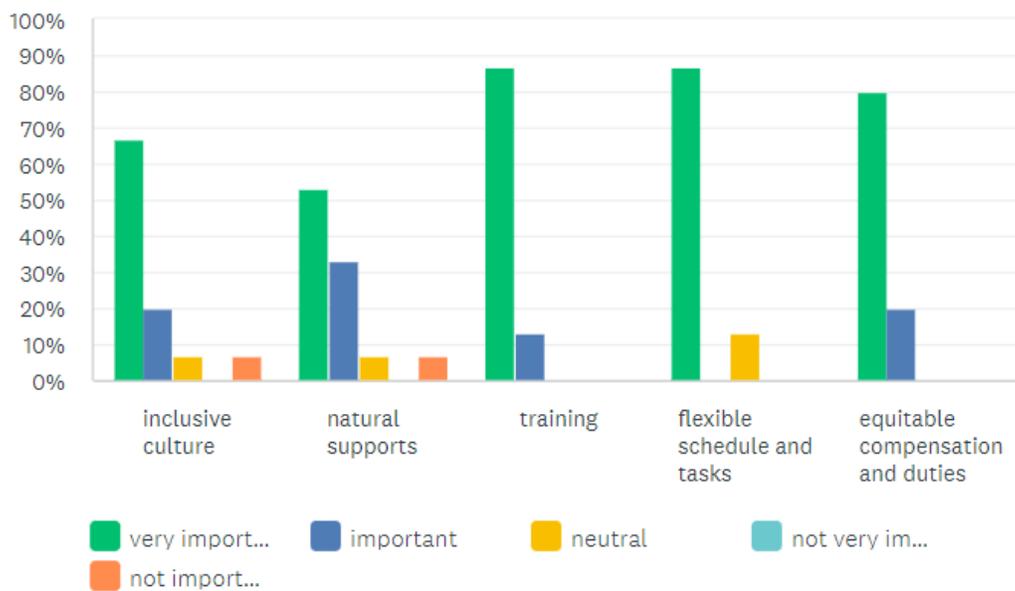
OneLight's inclusive employment draws from existing research and best practices related to reducing barriers to employment. The five elements of OneLight's inclusive employment model are:

- 1) **Inclusive Culture:** setting up the conditions where everyone can belong.
- 2) **Natural Supports:** emphasizing a culture where coworkers support each other.
- 3) **Training:** providing on-the-job training, as well as team training.
- 4) **Flexible scheduling and task modification:** where work is fit to individual needs.
- 5) **Equitable duties and compensation:** everyone is paid fairly, and has equal access to diverse jobs.

Survey responses show that OneLight is doing well at each of these goals, and particularly at providing flexibility. A significant element of flexibility is having choice in terms of how many hours one works: most employee participants are working 10-20 hours per week.



Survey responses also indicate that all five elements – especially training and flexibility – are important in providing productive and meaningful employment for people with and without disabilities.



Interview responses elaborate on how these various elements work together:

#### Successes

- The inclusive culture and flexibility are celebrated by 88% of interviewees for creating a work environment that sets them up to succeed.
- The commitment to inclusion shows up in concrete actions related to: equitable access to duties and compensation, flexibility, and training people in both tasks and teamwork.
- Choosing a building and location that are accessible is an important part of inclusion.

- Natural supports emerge when inclusion is deliberately fostered as part of the workplace culture. These extend outside of the workplace into community life.
- Many people stated that the inclusive culture is first and foremost cultivated through kind and caring supervisors. **(See Appendix A for tips for employers)**
- Regular staff meetings help with relationship building, transparency, and open lines of communication.

*“ I believe it should be the model for all businesses. There’s a lot of workplaces that discriminate – not outright, but by little condescending words or something like that. When we did the training, it was apparent to all of us that we were heading into a different kind of work atmosphere: safe, everyone’s equal, no matter your limitations. – Justin, employee participant*

*“ We use the flexible scheduling. Normally they start at nine, but we use it because it works with the ferry and we come in at 10. So that’s really good for us, otherwise you couldn’t come to work. There’s no reason why other employers couldn’t do it. – Jenny, parent of employee participant*

*“ The thing that I think is the most important about this job between the bosses and the employees is knowing the individual and exactly where they’re at. It was working a certain way and suddenly the management changed, so it was a big adjustment period for everyone. I think it’s settling in pretty nicely now. – Dusty, employee participant*

*“ It’s actually my first job ever, amazingly, so it’s totally transformed me. – Lief, employee participant*

*“ It’s good because I can get the bus home, because the bus stop is right there. This is a good location. They were going to move to a new building on Duncan, but now that doesn’t work, because some people catch the bus. They want it in town so it works for people. – Thomas, employee participant*

## Challenges

- A lack of clarity when it comes to the expectations and parameters in terms of flexibility, productivity, and/or commitment to inclusion can lead to tensions among the three, and confusion and uncertainty.
- A lack of consequences related to (undefined) expectations can lead to stress and frustration.
- Some concerns around balancing inclusion with productivity.
- Training at the management level is vital for the success of the inclusive employment model. Illness, sudden staff changes, or other unexpected events underline the importance of clear succession planning through transitions. This includes leadership training, team training, getting to know employees and the business, and relational skills.
- There are elements to leadership roles that extend beyond what was evident in job descriptions in some cases. This can sometimes lead to both managers and employees taking on more than expected.
- More managers would be beneficial for ensuring all elements continue to be prioritized.

- A lot of time has passed since team training. Folding refreshers into monthly staff meetings would be helpful for everyone.
- A new safety rule prevents all employees from being able to use the saw – this is experienced as contradicting the commitment to equity.
- COVID-19 and related protocols have interfered in some ways with more opportunities for socializing and natural supports. Some employees would appreciate more facilitated social opportunities, and more consistency in introducing people to each other, as shifts are not always with the same people.

*“ Because of the quick changeover with the staff, it’s been a lot of experiential learning. More structured training would have been helpful: Leadership training. It’s tricky to know what the baseline expectations are. What are the boundaries around that flexibility? What are the basic expectations? – Trish, manager*

*“ Staff meeting is helping – we’re getting to know the names. But it needs to be done a little bit more, so we know who everyone is. I like to feel like I belong there and welcomed. I want people to talk to one another and get to know the people, and who needs help. – Evan, employee participant*

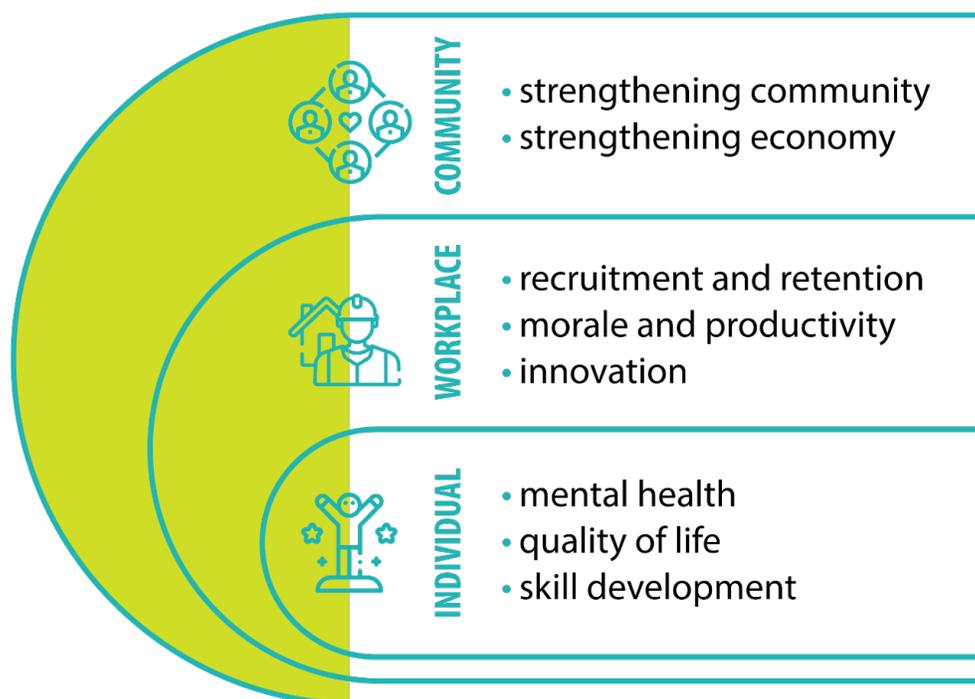
*“ It’s just that we’re understaffed at a supervisory level. We need a lot more than just two floor managers. – Stefan (pseudonym), employee participant*

*“ I definitely think it comes down to making sure the facilities are more accessible. It could be as simple as the kind of packaging tape you buy. The noise it made was troublesome for one worker, so you can buy quieter tape. Stuff like that makes the workplace more hospitable to needs you might not even think of. – David, manager*

*“ Having an open team to continually support that and be receptive to feedback when they’re missing the mark a little bit, that’s really important. – Dawn, manager*

## Impacts

The research question is: *What are the impacts of the inclusive employment model being implemented in a manufacturing setting that lead to productive and meaningful participation in the labour force by people with and without disabilities?* In hearing from people over the course of the project, we have heard three different levels of impacts:



### Individual-level impacts

OneLight fire starters are called “life-changing” for many reasons. Both employee participants *and* managers shared how employment at OneLight has impacted their mental health, quality of life, and skill development.

#### Mental health

Since working at OneLight, several people have identified a complete elimination of suicidal thoughts, and many have expressed anxiety and depression are no longer having as negative an impact on their lives. These are a result of a number of factors, including:

- Having a place to go where there is a sense of belonging and community – particularly but not only during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Doing purposeful and meaningful work.
- Being relied upon, learning, and contributing.
- Feeling respected and heard; being treated as a whole human. **(See Appendix B for sample intake interview script)**
- Having fun and building relationships. **(See Appendices C and D for team training overviews)**

- Making money.

- “ *I think we’d see a lot less mental health issues as well, or existing mental health issues a little more stabilized with this kind of model too. – Lee, employee participant*
- “ *Your thoughts and physical needs as a human being are taken seriously. This is the most inclusive thing I’ve been part of. Being a single parent, they’ve really been super sensitive to my needs as a parent. – Jazz, employee participant*
- “ *It’s brought me a lot of confidence. I feel like a productive member of my town here. – Justin, employee participant*
- “ *So having a bit of extra money has made a huge difference in my life – a huge difference. Before this job I was in some really deep depression, suicidal states. In and out of the hospital. Since I’ve had this job I’ve had some lows but not one suicidal thought. – Richard, employee participant*
- “ *I enjoy being the person at the other end of the phone who gets to say that’s OK. You take care of yourself first. It’s so good to be the person I would have wanted if I needed a mental health day. – Trish, manager*

That said, the instability around funding along with instability in management have led to some stresses for people, including fears of relapse when it comes to mental health. Not knowing whether or not their jobs will continue was identified by almost everyone as a major stressor.

- “ *The big scare is, are they going to be running in April? I’ve been trying to prove myself in these two months – I’m going to try to be there every day and not miss a shift, because these two months are critical. – Evan, employee participant*
- “ *I can focus on the negative really easy. Back to depression. OK. Starting tomorrow I’ll be depressed. But I don’t have to think like that. There’s a waiting list which is kind of cool. – Lee (pseudonym), employee participant*
- “ *Some of the things that have happened to create this inclusive environment are coming unravelled a little bit with the nervousness of it ending. But that’s what happens with all of us with fear. – Raya, manager*

## Quality of life

Experiencing a sense of purpose, increased social connectedness, improvements in mental health, and earning fair wages have led to overall improvements in quality of life for many people. These have led to new opportunities including:

- Getting out of debt
- Building credit
- Helping others out
- Investing in interests and hobbies
- Buying healthy food
- Insuring a home and/or a vehicle
- Participating in more activities
- Travel, or visiting friends and family
- Shopping in line with one's values (ethically produced clothing; healthy food)
- Not worrying about how to pay the bills
- Not relying on others as much
- Learning how to budget
- Planning for the future

*“ At Christmastime for the first time in a long time I bought a few presents, so that was kind of nice. And I'm getting trailer insurance now, so I don't have to worry about the neighbour's house going down and mine going with it. – Richard, employee participant*

*“ This job has given me the opportunity to LIVE... not just exist! – Barb, employee participant*

*“ With this job, Henry's been able to build credit, which you would never be able to do just on your pension. – Jenny, parent of employee participant*

*“ I used to live paycheck to paycheck, and now I have extra money in my pocket so I can spoil my daughter, help my sister out when she needs it. It's nice to have that buying power, you know? – Justin, employee participant*

There have been some challenges with payment and communications at a government level, which has interfered to an extent. Additionally, there is still room for improvement when it comes to equitable duties and wages.

*“ A little bit of stress with the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. There have been problems with that – this month has been tighter because of that: a big amount of my cheque is seized. Once they sort through it, I will get those funds back. – Jazz, employee participant*

*“ In fact, I would advocate to increase if at all possible because our minimum wage is not a living wage. People who make minimum wage are usually working two jobs in order to support their life. – Adrian (pseudonym), manager*

*“ The equity has been more challenging. If you really love one job, but you’re not as efficient at it, then you might be chosen to do one that you’re more efficient at. It’s super complicated. – Leni, manager*

### Skill development

Experiential on-the-job training that provides skills in relation to particular workplace tasks has been appreciated, as was team training at the outset (by many). But there have also been opportunities for further skill development along the way, including:

- Sales training.
- Sharing tips among workers to improve efficiencies.
- Trying new tasks.
- Taking on more responsibility (such as floor manager assistant, and driving the truck, janitorial) with wage increases to compensate.
- Fire and earthquake drills.
- Integrating safety training into staff meetings, with an accessible guidebook. **(See Appendix D for sample safety plan)**

*“ We had good safety training. Clear and understandable. – Gaetane, employee participant*

*“ It’s very clear. It’s broken down into steps that I can handle, because I have a brain injury. – Justin, employee participant*

*“ Sales training is going pretty good. I’m reaching Edmonton right now. I’m calling grocery stores and hardware stores to see if they want our fire starters. We call them and do emails. Training is helpful. – Thomas, employee participant*

Other life skills have also been developed as a result of working at OneLight:

- Budgeting
- Time management
- Special awareness
- Responsibility
- Social skills
- Leadership skills

- “ *This has taught me how to be fiscally responsible – this is what you get and this is what you spend. I’ve been able to budget because it’s regular. The consistency. – Michelle, employee participant*
- “ *When she started I thought: give her a cheque, because this is the first time she’s getting paid and it’s physical. She could take it to bank. A direct deposit is an abstraction – you don’t see it you don’t feel it. And she needs to touch it to know. – Doran, parent of employee participant*
- “ *One thing I’ve noticed is a time consciousness has changed. He’s aware what 15 minutes is now. It’s taught him those time segments and how long he should be. – Jenny, parent of employee participant*

Both employee participants and managers have identified places where more training and skill development would be helpful:

- Ensuring new staff (employee participants and managers) have access to all the training and knowledge that was provided at the outset of the project.
- Having reference guides to help with transitioning to new managers.
- Providing more opportunities for upward mobility within the workplace.
- Formalizing skill-sharing opportunities among employees (ie. at staff meetings).
- Providing training for additional work-related skills, as possible (ie. typing).
- Training in relational, leadership, and communication skills.

- “ *I wish that sometimes some of the employees would explore other tasks. You never know you might thrive in a role that you never thought you would. – Dawn, manager*
- “ *A lot more mental strategy comes into it [floor management] than I thought it would. A part of the job description, when they gave me the promotion, was they said I’d also have to talk to everybody. I didn’t really understand how important that was. So, that little part that I saw was a lot bigger in person. On paper it was small. – Stefan (pseudonym), employee participant*
- “ *A lot of people coming for sales training can’t type. It would be so amazing if we could offer some typing courses. There’s capacity for that, if there’s enough management to oversee it. – Adrian (pseudonym), manager*
- “ *I feel like we could learn from watching each other. I’ve been trying to share what I know, but there hasn’t been a place or time where I could present that. – Lief, employee participant*

## Workplace impacts

In addition to having impacts on the people who work at OneLight, the inclusive employment model has impacted the enterprise itself. Recruitment and retention, morale and productivity, and innovation were all discussed during interviews.

### Recruitment and retention

While the global pandemic led to labour shortages the world over, OneLight exhibited remarkable retention of employee participants. Although turnover at the management level was high in the final phase of the project, employee participant retention was remarkable.

## EMPLOYEE PARTICIPANT RETENTION

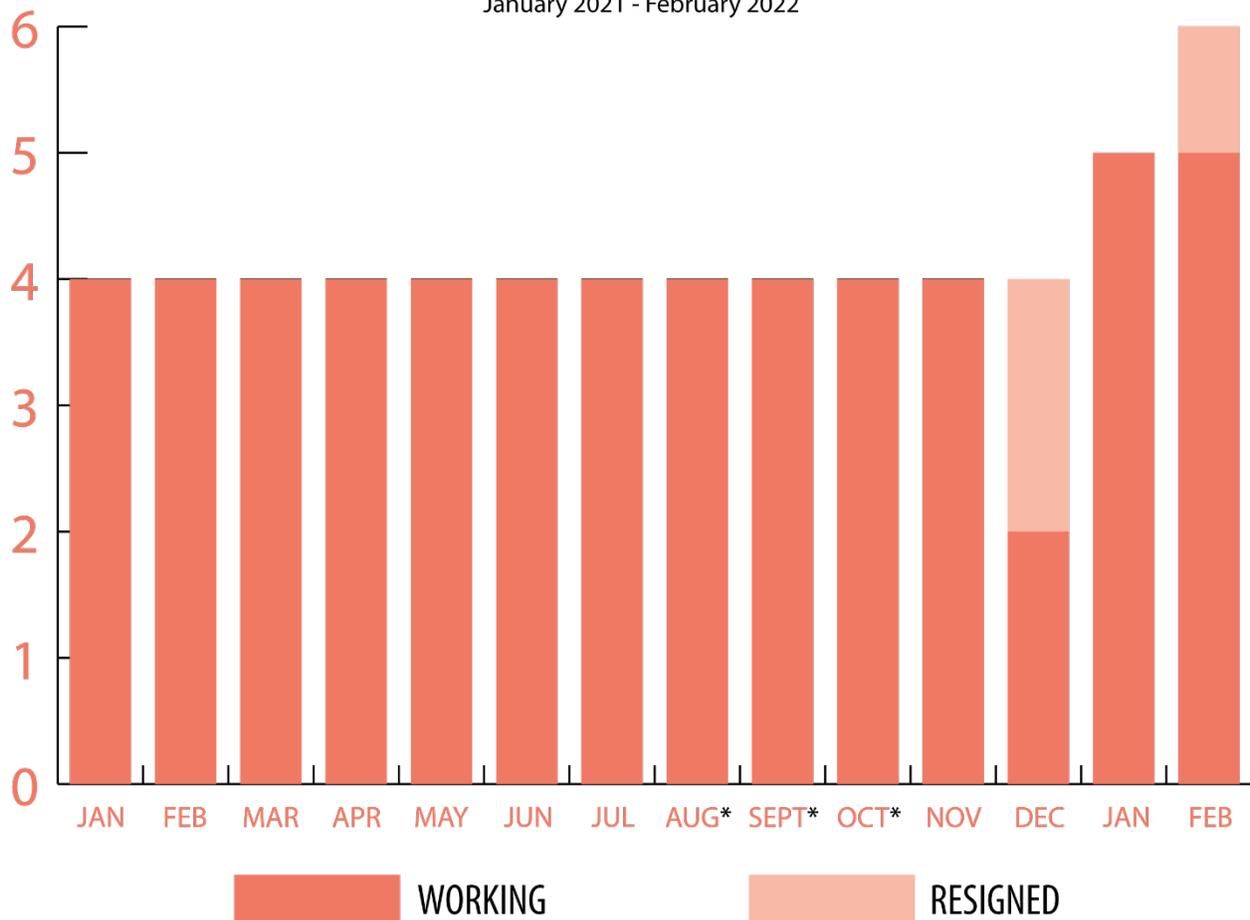
January 2021 - February 2022



\* Temporarily closed due to a critical incident. All employee participants were on call these months.

# MANAGER RETENTION

January 2021 - February 2022



\* Temporarily closed due to a critical incident.

100% of employee participants and managers who work at OneLight at the time of writing said they would stay there if given the opportunity. Reasons include:

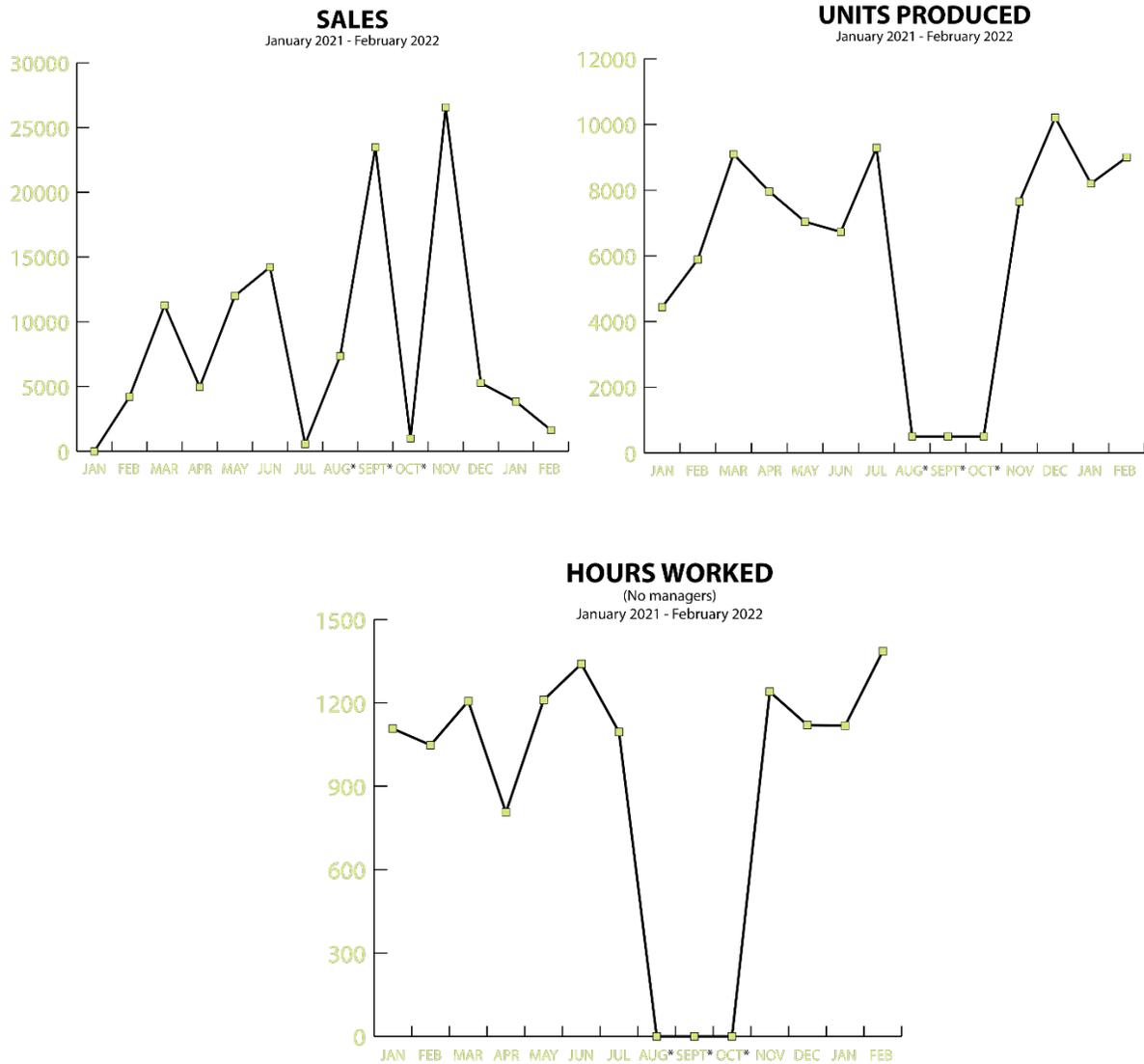
- The intake interview felt comfortable and safe from the very beginning
- Feeling a sense of belonging
- Enjoying having purpose and routine
- Making good money
- Believing in the product
- Believing in the organization's social purpose
- Experiencing personal growth
- Experiencing a level of competency
- Feeling respected and supported by employers and coworkers
- Continuous learning and being challenged
- Appreciating improvements to quality of life
- Not having other options, due to barriers to employment

- “ *It was interesting to be part of an interview where I didn’t have to hide my weaknesses. I feel really blessed. – Jazz, employee participant*
- “ *I’ve been here a year and a half and it’s still fun. I’m still really enjoying assembling. I’m very attached to this job. – Roberta, employee participant*
- “ *I don’t know where else I’d work, because of my disabilities. My back is sore all the time. Between that and being bipolar, there’s a lot to work and stuff. Because of the flexibility in particular, and that and I like everybody that I work with. And I know what I’m doing so well now. – Michelle, employee participant*
- “ *For me, they’re not always good days, but I still feel motivated to show up even on the shittier days. Because there wasn’t pressure - It’s a first. They really listen; they’re willing to hear what we need to say. That’s different. – Lee (pseudonym), employee participant*
- “ *They helped me get daycare and preschool for my daughter. Their additional help enabled me to have a job which is good for my mental health, and for our household. – Jazz, employee participant*

Important lessons have come from the higher turnover in management. These include:

- The need for greater clarity and structure.
  - More training and support.
  - Ensuring expectations are captured in the job description.
- “ *One of the problems that I saw, and one of the reasons I don’t work in not-for-profit world, is that I had responsibilities outside of my job description and I didn’t get paid more. – Anonymous response*
  - “ *I definitely agree that it creates a high level of safety to have someone who you know what their role is, and what the expectation is, and that they know what the expectation is of everyone else. And in the last couple months, it’s been a rotation of lots of new people. – Leni, manager*
  - “ *If training was in place for the supervisory team as well – that model – it would be clockwork. It would be easy for someone in a pinch to put on the shoes for that role, and keep the train moving forward. – Dawn, manager*

## Morale and productivity



\*temporarily closed after critical incident

In interviews and surveys, both employee participants and management talked about feeling valued and also valuing the work. Factors positively impacting morale include:

- Shared goals, fostered through bonus structure, team training, and team meetings (**See Appendix E for sample standards of practice**)
- A diverse mix of people
- Sense of belonging
- Being treated with respect
- Sense of purpose
- Stretch breaks

- Switching tasks

This not only increases morale, but drives many people to show up and do their best.

- “ *In order for the human machine to be productive, it has to be taken care of. It keeps the morale up and it keeps people wanting to come to work. – Jazz, employee participant*
- “ *I had to leave early once, and I wanted to make up the two hours, so I came in during the next day. I felt better making up my own time for my own integrity. – Lee, employee participant*
- “ *Other jobs try and rally the team with ego. And here, you’re rallying the team because everyone cares for one another, and as a team we want to succeed. – Justin, employee participant*
- “ *I just enjoy the mix of people! I find that we all really tend to have a good time, and just laugh and make jokes with each other. – Dusty, employee participant*

Challenges to morale and productivity include lack of structure, insecurity around funding, and implicit or explicit comparisons among employees can each have negative impacts on morale. More attention to having a fully accessible space – including ergonomic chairs and tables – would also support morale and productivity.

- “ *I wish the [new] managers went through team training. We don’t have to take two weeks, but we have to take some time. It feels loose, so it’s a little bit stressful. – Michelle, employee participant*
- “ *I want to thrive! I want to get a house one day in any town that I want and have a dog or – I want those choices. That’s what drives me to be a good worker: I want things. I’m scared of losing this job. We’re going to lose our funding soon. And that terrifies me. – Stefan (pseudonym), employee participant*

## OneLight’s bonus structure

Participants receive an extra 50 dollars a month per met goal, for each of five goals:

1. New customer (collective goal)
2. Monthly sales target reached (collective goal)
3. Monthly production target reached (collective goal)
4. Individuals follow Covid protocols (individual goal)
5. Participants must advise us if they will be absent (individual goal)

*“ I think it is vital that everyone invited into an inclusive employment opportunity goes in with full knowledge about productivity and the goals of the project or business. I think they need to be fully aware that they may work noticeably faster or noticeably slower than their colleagues, and that’s OK. – Adrian (pseudonym), manager*

## Innovation

Employee participants, family members, managers, and others have had regular opportunities to provide input at every step of this 18-month pilot project. Input from diverse perspectives within the social enterprise has been invited in many ways:

- Three phases of research.
- Branding session.
- Strategic planning.
- Invitations to sit on hiring committees.
- Monthly staff meetings.
- Approachable management that invites input from employee participants around production efficiencies or other workplace concerns.

Through these various forms of input, many valuable innovations have occurred at OneLight:

- New ways of doing counts, and tracking what has been input in the computer.
- Visual cues (ie. a line on the basket) so people can see how much has been done.
- Creating a punching in/punching out system.
- Design of the logo and name of the product.
- Small or large adjustments to production, to create efficiencies or ease.
- Creating assistant floor manager and janitorial positions for employee participants.

*“ We were approachable and that led to employee feedback getting shared among everyone, rather than just tweaking their own approach. We review it, and then go to the floor and teach people the new way. Some of them were significant changes that really helped. – David, manager*

*“ So if any kind of issue comes up that’s a barrier, if you mention it, it gets addressed. You just have to be communicative. – Barb, employee participant*

*“ It benefits everyone: the line on the laundry basket. Everyone’s using it now. I like that they adapt things, and that’s a visual aid. It’s excellent. – Jenny, parent of employee participant*

*“ One participant just got us in to Mazzulo Motors. I would have never thought about that. It’s the perfect target customer: ready to spend money, has a disposable income. – Adrian (pseudonym), manager*

More time and spaciousness for continued learning and development – and tolerance for risk - could lead to yet-unseen innovations. The pandemic and other outside factors (such as the global supply chain issues) have also been a challenge when it comes to innovation.

“ *In the government grant world a year is a long time, but it’s not a long time in the business world. So we’re still just figuring out the basic functions of the machine. Once more of that is sorted, I think you can have more people taking on more responsibility, being compensated for that, and having less of this top management down. I look to the future we want to live in – Focusing on where we are now could destroy any advancement or innovation. – Leni, Manager*

“ *Hardware stores can’t deal with anything right now because they’re just trying to source affordable timber. Grocery was booming, but so busy trying to stock the essentials due to the pandemic. Our marketing is still fledgling – we’re still in a start-up phase. It could be that they’re looking for more established brands. – Adrian (pseudonym), manager*

## Community-level impacts

Many of the impacts of the employment model at OneLight occur collectively – in the community and the economy in which the social enterprise is embedded.

Strengthening community

**94%** **unemployed or never employed**

31 employee participants were either unemployed or never employed before working at OneLight

**27%** **precariously employed or self-employed**

9 employee participants were either precariously employed or self-employed before working at OneLight

**THE IMPACT** of not only employment but social connection that occurs at OneLight ripples out into the community in many ways. The benefits of this extend beyond those who work at OneLight to their families, neighbours, and entire community.

## COMMUNITY IMPACTS

Both employee participants and managers at OneLight speak of community impacts such as:

- Taking care of children, family, and friends.
- Becoming more independent, lightening the load for people they rely on.
- Becoming more actively involved in the community.
- Personal growth, which impacts how people show up in other aspects of their lives.
- Creating a strong network around each other, so needs are addressed before evolving into crises.
- Transferring learning from this workplace to others.
- Helping to build a caring community culture in general.
- Role modeling inclusive business culture for others.



- “ *This job is making it possible for me to take care of my daughter in a way I haven’t before, and it’s something meaningful for me. I don’t take that for granted. – Adrian (pseudonym), manager*
- “ *It’s taught him those time segments and how long he should be, and OK it’s time to switch to the next thing. Which I would have had to prompt, so now I can back off. I didn’t realize that was missing, it’s just – Oh, I don’t have to do that anymore! And it’s because of this. – Jenny, parent of employee participant*
- “ *I just think that it really ripples out into the community. It’s not just about what happens at work: people are having relationships with each other. Someone who lives farther away and doesn’t have a car, oftentimes we can give them a ride. You never know what can happen, the more you interact with people, the more opportunities come up. – Dusty, employee participant*
- “ *The lady that’s been sick – I’ve been checking in with her, seeing how she’s doing, bringing her things from town. It’s got a cohesiveness now, where we kind of care for each other. - Barb, employee participant*
- “ *Something has to change because the normal employment model doesn’t work for so many people. I’ll take a lot from this that’s transferable into other workplaces. – Trish, manager*

That said, there are still barriers to community that need to be addressed. For some people, informal connections aren’t quite enough and more structured opportunities for meaningful connection would help to address those barriers.

- “ *They’re looking forward to more socializing, either after work, and maybe some extracurricular activity, to socialize and get to know each other more. – Doran, parent of employee participant*
- “ *I’d like it if we could have nights where we could hang out. – Henry, employee participant*

### Strengthening the economy

Creating jobs and building community is good for the local economy:

- Being part of both the circular and social economy.
- Altering the local economy by being part of a business that puts people first.
- Shrinking the gap between rich and poor in our community.

- “ *I hope we can always stay true to being part of a circular economy, just because we need more good models of that in the world. – Adrian (pseudonym), manager*
- “ *We have to look at things from a stance of it is a civil right to have access to employment. And we are not getting there through a profit-driven model where we are always about efficiency and not sufficiency. It feels deeply relieving to say that, because I’m a very entrepreneurial person. I understand the cost-benefit analysis; I understand the game. I like the word value proposition better than business case because value proposition is about value, and it’s a value to have people at work. It is a value to have community. It is of the greatest value, no matter what the price tag. – Leni, manager*
- “ *There’s a big gap between people with disabilities and people who are ready and able to work, and it would be nice to be able to have that bridged a little bit more often. I just feel good about being part of something that could influence more of this to happen. – Dusty, employee participant*

People also shared how OneLight impacts their personal economic participation:

- Donating to charitable organizations.
- Having more disposable income, which is spent locally.
- Making deliberate value-based choices about how and where to show up economically.
- Supporting other people financially.

“ *It not only improves the condition of myself, but that gets me out in the community supporting different businesses, different people. There’s a huge profit in that! – Richard, employee participant*

“ *And I don’t have to charge as much as I used to [for other work], but now I could use a sliding scale. I’ve been finally able to do things that align with my ethics. The way I shop, everything I do. So I can just live the way I always have wanted to live, and it’s because of OneLight. – Michelle, employee participant*

“ *I’ve been donating some money for the Pacific Wildlife. I was like Oh man, I want to save those animals. Can we donate? – Roberta, employee participant*

The relationship with the local economy is also complicated, when the business and employment model differ dramatically from the dominant one. Some concerns include:

- Whether it sets high expectations for flexibility in other workplaces.
- Whether social purpose undermines profit.
- Whether the work experience will be transferrable to other employment settings.

- “ *Some of these things need to be a bit tighter because I don’t think we’re setting people up to win in a different environment. – Raya, manager*
- “ *I think we have to be really careful to make sure we’re helping people with potential transition to a real world schedule. – Adrian (pseudonym), manager*

## Conclusion

As a social enterprise, OneLight brings together a unique product, business model, and employment model. Over the course of 18 months, impacts have been observed at an individual, workplace, and community level. Many of these impacts are far-reaching, and the feedback has been overwhelmingly – but not exclusively – positive. Many employee participants and managers alike have expressed that the experience has been truly transformational and have a strong desire for it to not only continue, but expand.

Challenges exist in terms of capacity, structure, and clarity. There are many moving parts, and this highlights the value of structures and human resources that can provide clarity and guidance in times of uncertainty. A sustainable funding model to support ongoing is the biggest challenge.

The ultimate intention of this project has been to learn:

OneLight has learned that all five elements of its inclusive employment model are important, and that some are easier to implement than others. It has also learned that when those who face the greatest barriers to employment find meaningful work, the entire community benefits.

Not having tested this model in another setting, there is still a lot to learn about inclusive employment. Many questions remain about which elements of OneLight’s approach are transferrable, and to which settings. How to best support other employers who want to be more inclusive is also a question that remains.

## Appendices: Toolkit for employers

Throughout each section of this report is a textbox called ‘tips for employers.’ All of these tips are compiled in Appendix A: Tips for employers. Throughout these tips, interested employers can also find sample tools (additional appendices) created by OneLight which they can adapt for fostering inclusion in their own workplace.

Appendix A: Tips for employers, [LINK HERE](#)

Appendix B: Sample intake interview, [LINK HERE](#)

Appendix C: Team training overview, [LINK HERE](#)

Appendix D: Sample safety plan, [LINK HERE](#)

Appendix E: Sample standards of practice, [LINK HERE](#)