

**BRANDON, MANITOBA**

[WWW.WESTMANCOALITION.CA](http://WWW.WESTMANCOALITION.CA)

# WCEO: Westman Coalition for Employment Opportunities Inc.

Looking to meet the employment services for individuals with disabilities, community partners in the Southwest region of Manitoba decided to pool their resources and created the Westman Coalition for Employment Opportunities (WCEO). This partnership consists of 13 service providers located in the Westman region who facilitate interagency collaboration through this coalition, creating synergies that accomplish more than would be possible through their existing organizational capacities working in isolation.

Coalition partners work together to provide coordinated quality employment related services addressing the needs of individuals living with disabilities in the region. This partnership model adopted by the Westman Coalition has introduced an alterna-

tive service delivery method featuring separate programs and components, each of which operates under the coordinating group.

The Westman Coalition also works in partnership with individuals living with mental, psychiatric, physical and learning disabilities. WCEO's goal is to provide employment services that will prepare and support individuals to obtain and maintain employment or self-employment. Services are client-driven and are geared to match clients' individual needs and abilities. As a result, individual goal setting and planning is a key feature in all services offered.

Its history dates back to 1994, when a group of agencies serving people with disabilities in the Westman Region formed a partnership, partly in response to the decrease in Social Assistance Recipient funds available, and partly in response to the need to streamline, co-ordinate, and enhance services. Subsequently, Brandon agencies serving people living with disabilities explored different innovative ways to respond to client needs for employment related services. Since the incorporation in 1995 this organization has grown from a partnership of 5 Brandon based agencies to an active partnership of 13 agencies including 4 from rural Westman communities and 3 that serve the

→ entire region. Clearly the Westman Coalition for Employment Opportunities Inc. is vital to the provision of employment services to clients living with disabilities in the Westman region.

The Westman Coalition for Employment Opportunities Inc. was thereby established to co-ordinate activities and eliminate service duplication. This coalition also helped improve access to flexible employment services and increase the range of employment options for individuals, as agencies could now better meet the individual needs of people living with disabilities in their region.

Project services and activities of the Coalition fit into four main categories. These are Pre-employment, Skill Enhancement, Rural Services and Supported Employment. The Pre-employment initiatives provide employment assessment and life skills instruction while assisting the individual with job search. The Skill Enhancement component provides one-on-one learning opportunities to acquire new skills to meet clearly defined goals, often in partnership with referring agencies. Since much of the Westman region is rurally based, the Rural Services component provides support to individuals outside of urban areas who require the services that WCEO offers. Finally, Supported Employment provides highly supportive

employment training, placement and follow-up services in Brandon, Minnedosa and Neepawa.

The Transitional Employment Program (TEP) operates in partnership with Brandon Community Welcome Clubhouse and the Westman Coalition for Employment Opportunities. TEP's goal is to reintroduce individuals recovering from severe and persistent mental illness into the labour market. This program is participant driven, which allows registered participants to determine

their own progress. Each participant can decide whether or not to accept a job. Provisions can be made for a replacement worker should the regular employee fall ill or need some time away.

The innovative, collaborative model of supporting persons living with disabilities in pursuing economic opportunities that has been developed

by the Westman Coalition for Employment Opportunities is truly a model to learn from. Synchronizing services in order to ensure the broadest and most seamless supportive environment for these individuals, combined with their commitment to participant-led planning, has led to an empowering approach that has produced excellent results for residents of Westman.

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