Transcript for Videos from spring 2018 Presidents Group employer event.

Shared Employment Perspective: Paddy Gallagher, Vancity.

Neurodiverse Talent: Autism in the Workplace: Pacific Autism Family Network (PAFN).

Mental Health in the Workplace: Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC).

Experiencing Unconscious Bias: John Horn.

Shared Employment Perspective: Paddy Gallagher

Paddy Gallagher, a Vancity employee with autism, speaks on how his role has made an impact on his life and the importance of inclusive hiring.

Video Transcript:

(Paddy Gallagher) I started as an administrator going part-time in the head office, and now I'm a full-time administrator for the Learning and Development department. A big part of my role is helping out with Orientation Immersion, Vancity's onboarding program, this includes sending what to expect emails to the participants. Some of the responsibilities I have connecting with our branches, and making logistical arrangements.

I started out with Vancity because they were working with an organization that I was connected to called posAbilities. I had never been into an office environment before, let alone a credit union, but I did well on my interview and so I was hired. During my first few months, my manager and coworkers helped me learn my jobs, either through example or with written instructions.

As the weeks went on, I started to develop a relationship with the Learning and Development team who helped my transition with their reassurance and support, especially during stressful situations. Eventually, I expanded my

roles not only to the other teams on my floor, but also with people outside of our building. Even though I am a capable employee, there were some stuff that I still continued to improve on each day. For example, initially it was tricky for me to learn how to discreetly complete some tasks without interrupting the meeting, I since learned to take cues from my coworkers before I start any course of actions during the lessons.

I've also learned that despite the structured schedule of Orientation Immersion, I had to be flexible if sessions go over time or if I get behind in my work. I can count on my team for support if I'm stressed. During my early years, I would sometimes skip my breaks in order to get more of my work done (audience laughing) until my colleagues convinced me to take them so I won't become tired and lose my concentration. One major struggle that I have to overcome now is not for me to become overloaded with a lot of tasks because I don't like to let down a fellow employee. So, I should remember that everyone is usually very understanding and yeah (chuckles).

Before I started with Vancity, there was a few facilitators that were needed, one to run the orientation program, oversee the participants, the other to do my current jobs. Now that I've taken over the administrative duties, only one person's needed to oversee immersion, while the rest of our team can go to the regular office and work on their other tasks.

More recently, my manager asked me for my feedback and said, how he can improve overall as a manager, and I suggest to him that, when we have our meetings, that he should try to arrive on time

(audience laughing)

and if he cannot make it, to message me, even if it's just a few minutes and it's before our meeting, So, he has since taken this advice to his heart and it has benefited not only me, but for the whole team as well.

I've also become somewhat of a mentor for other people with diverse abilities and would sometimes give them advice or their coworkers on how to make their onboarding experiences more easily. I have also trained some work experience students in how to work in an office environment.

I am truly grateful of working at Vancity, where all the staff treat everyone like equals and look out for each other. If I had to name three things that have helped me succeeded in Vancity, they would be, the support and encouragement and trust from my coworkers, knowing that Vancity is an

inclusive and nonjudgmental work environment, and through learning my tasks through visual instructions or on hands-on approaches.

I am excited to see so many people in the audience attending a session on how to hire people like me into the work force. I hope this speech helps you to see why hiring diversely is a good choice for your organization. Thank you.

Neuro Diverse Talent: Autism in the Workplace

Jenna Christianson-Barker and Heather Linka of the Pacific Autism Family Network (PAFN) discuss how employers can utilize a talent pool of candidates who are neuro diverse and some tips on how to best work with these individuals.

Video Transcript:

(Jenna Christianson-Barker) So just a little bit about our organization and why we're invested in the employment community. So we're a new group. This is our hub location here in Richmond. We're a hub and spoke model dedicated to building capacity in how families access autism services and then addressing gaps in those services.

So, when we were doing our initial consultation, employment was something that came out as a huge need in the autism community. So, we invested quite a bit of resources and staff into that.

(Heather Linka) And also supporting employers with inclusive hiring efforts would be our program: Ready, Willing and Able, which is the program that I'm now supporting which links employers like yourselves to our community agencies where we find individuals that are good fits and we send them right to you.

(Jenna Christianson-Barker) So this is Practical Tip One. Putting together a few practical tips, this was the first one we wanted to touch on because even putting these practical tips together was difficult because diversity is diverse. The autism community is extremely diverse. And it's really hard to say these things work for this group because that's not necessarily true.

There is of course some overlap and some generalizations that we can make, but as a preface, just know that the community is so diverse. So if you have one staff member that identifies as being on the autism spectrum, that's not gonna look the same for the next staff member.

And just to kinda give you a wide range of opportunities through the work we've done, we've supported people with multiple master's degrees into very well-paying positions. And we've also supported some guys into jobs that need some more support, on the job support. So, just a really wide range of types of support that are needed and types of opportunities in your workplace that could fit.

We hear a lot about tech and autism, which is wonderful, but our guys aren't all good at tech so keep that in mind too.

(Heather Linka) An interesting example about this is through our work with SAP actually. They had a really great program to onboard individuals with ASD into their Autism at Work program.

And so, as we were doing the onboarding there, it was this really slowed down onboarding process where they were working on their own projects outside of their teams, and so yes, this is created for people on the spectrum. But then once we were in it there was one individual there, where no, this whole slowed down process is actually giving him extreme anxiety, and this is not working.

So even though it's created for individuals with autism, diversity is diverse and it's not going to work for everyone.

(Jenna Christianson-Barker) So the interview process. When you think about what an interview is, you're coming into a place where you're making a quick judgement about someone's ability to socialize with you. Do they make good eye contact? Do they shake your hand appropriately? Do they be enthusiastic about the job?

For some guys in our community, that sounds like the worst thing ever and is all of their challenges put into a box. So, the interview process can be pretty scary. We talked about that earlier as well. So just working to create that casual environment and being flexible in that. Heather, you had a good example about our own interviewing process.

(Heather Linka) Yeah, so for the Go Group that I was mentioning earlier, we were doing all of our interviews in our cafe space where they would eventually be working. And so, I had my interviews all set up for the day. And we would be sitting in one of the booths there. But then, I think it was one or maybe even two individuals that were coming for interviews, just sitting in a booth that's enclosed is extremely limiting in their space and that gave them anxiety.

So then of course I had to adapt my interview for them. It was an easy accommodation to make, just moving to a different table where it wasn't in a booth environment. I just wanted to drive home the fact that we need to be adaptable and accommodating and flexible on the fly as well.

(Jenna Christianson-Barker) If you're uncomfortable talking about it, it's gonna make them even more uncomfortable talking about it. So be prepared for that, and if they have self disclosed, have some prepared questions that you're gonna ask about what that means, what that looks like, what type of support you would like.

Some things around language as well. Language in our community can be a bit complex and sensitive, so practice. What we do is I ask individuals, "how do you like to be identified?" And making sure that we're sensitive to that as well.

Again, because everybody has different opinions about that and you need to respect that.

(Heather Linka) And one more thing too, about the interview, how we're saying about multiple avenues to showcase talent. For a lot of individuals that we see, it's really hard for them to speak about their own personal talents especially, in an interview when the questions might be quite vague.

So, another great way that a lot of employers are giving them this opportunity would be like a walkthrough of the space where they actually would be working, and because then it's actually really real, it's not just a vague idea, imagining yourself to do this. "How well will you do it?" "Well, let's actually walk around and let's talk about it and see, would this be challenging for you?" "Would you enjoy this?" Is a great way to also assess their talent.

(Jenna Christianson-Barker) And then, when you're finishing the interview up, providing clear expectations and what's coming next that can

alleviate some anxiety and miscommunication around how long it's gonna take for you to get back to the person, if they're supposed to provide reference. Just be really clear and specific about what's coming next.

And right into direct communication. That's the next piece of what we wanted to talk about as a Practical Tip. This is something that, as a manager, I had to learn how to be better at. We do have an inclusive staff, and I thought I was being direct and not micromanaging. And so I had to navigate how to not micromanage but still be more direct. So just thinking about using plain language, be very specific about expectations.

That thing we talked about earlier with the employment framework is great for this as well, having something specific to look back on. Seek confirmation of understanding and don't rely on those unwritten rules about body language or kind of what's expected in the workplace. If you've ever seen that movie The Circle, it's expected that you spend x amount of hours hanging out with friends outside of the office. Well, our community might not know that if you don't tell them. And that's a weird rule so don't do that.

(laughter)

(Heather Linka) I guess as we saw earlier with the mental health examples, how there is a stigma about talking about mental health and there's sort of a taboo or just really an uncomfortability, like we have a fear of the unknown. That's just something that, it's running away from tigers someone was saying earlier. So this is the same too and it's gonna be uncomfortable until you start practicing it and until you start saying it.

I think a lot of individuals, especially on the spectrum, can appreciate just the support and addressing it right up front when you're talking about accommodations or their needs.

(Jenna Christianson-Barker) And then when challenges do arise, one, don't panic. Two, try to address those things quickly. Don't let them fester, don't assume that they're gonna kind of fix themselves as they go. I know that that's something, again, as a manager that tries to be a little bit more hands-off I had to learn that you can't just let it work itself out. Sometimes you do need to intervene as quick as possible and make sure that the person has the supports they need to overcome whatever that challenge is.

Engage in your support system. So, the first step of that would be to have your support systems in place. Know who those people are. It might not just

be one person. It might be multiple people for different things. So know what all of that looks like. And then have those available for your staff as well, so they know who to go to if something comes up.

Be open to creative solutions. Along the lines of accommodations, in a past workplace, we supported an individual who was having a really hard time with the lighting in his workspace. So, this particular employer had really expensive lighting so it was actually gonna be a pretty difficult thing to go out and change all the lighting. Well, instead they went to Ikea and bought a little umbrella thing that goes over his desk. So a creative solution, it was like a $20 accommodation, not a big deal, so just think creatively about how you address things.

(Heather Linka) And another example that I have seen or something that I use is having routine check-ins. In my previous role I was sort of the job coach, but this could come from a manager's standpoint as well. If we have routine check-ins, we can identify small problems or just even uncomfortabilities along the way rather than waiting for them to eventually tell you when something is quite a bigger problem.

So I think that's really important to remember. And with the responsibilities and expectations, we also want to have the same expectations for our neurodiverse talent as any other. If we are providing so many accommodations or not treating them like another employee, really we're not helping them become independent. And it will be doing them a disservice in the end.

(Jenna Christianson-Barker) It's a hard balance to find the right amount of supports and not over support, and being sensitive to a person's needs rather than over accommodating as well.

So along the lines of partners. There are so many great partners here in Vancouver and the Lower Mainland that you can have access to. So know your organization and what your needs are and then find partners that fit within that. And make a relationship with them. Take the time to get to know their services and what they have to offer, what the limitations of that may be and how you draw in other partners to help with those pieces of things.

For instance, our organization doesn't provide mental health supports beyond some basic counseling. So, if we need someone to provide more serious mental health supports we'll pull in another partner. And it's good for

the organization that we're working with to understand that and have the right supports in place.

Employ an internal champion, we've had the privilege of working with several big companies and sometimes that gets a bit chaotic because we're talking to 20 different people. That's really great if on your end, you have kind of one or two people that really champion your inclusive hiring initiative, which is probably all of you guys. They get to work with us on our end.

And just be clear about what type of support fits within your organization. Of course, sometimes there's a need for on-the-job supports but if, for security reasons, I don't know, at the airport, I'm making this up so if it's not true, airport people, sorry…

… but if you're not allowed to go into a certain area, you let us know and know what your limitations are, and we'll figure out how to work around that. And vice versa, just trying to figure out how we can best support the person. But understanding what your limitations are and how your organization can supplement the support services.

And realizing that a support organization isn't gonna be there forever. We're always certainly there if challenges arise but our job is not to be there every single day with that employee. So, it's part of the relationship to help build capacity in each side of the employee and the employer.

(Heather Linka) Right, so within that, as things do sometimes get complicated with the manager, whoever's doing the diversity inclusion, there's the job coach, there's the family members, the employees, so within that it's important to define the rules of each so that everyone knows what they're supposed to do. Everyone is there to support the individual and everyone wants to do their best. But I think that it's best to define the rules because they can kind of get grey, those areas.

(Jenna Christianson-Barker) Yeah, for sure, a thing that we had come up with Heather, so hopefully this is good that I share this is, an employer was contacting her directly regularly about some issues that came up with an employee rather than talking to the employee about it.

And the employee started feeling a bit defensive about that, like "why aren't they talking to me?" "Where am I in all of this?" So knowing, kind of, what each of our relationships are is really important for all of the parties

involved. Making sure that the employer understands it's still your employee, if there's a challenge talk to them directly. We're here to support and making that all clear with everybody.

Provide mentorship within your organization. Employee resource groups were talked about earlier which is wonderful. I think there's a need too, for that direct one-to-one mentorship. And part of that can be that it provides a structure for having a direct communication within the organization that's kind of that friend, so it takes some of that barrier away from some people in our community that have a hard time building those relationships.

It gives a structure to that, and provides an opportunity to have some of those kind of intangible conversations. "Where is it okay to eat lunch?" "If I have to leave five minutes early, do I have to ask permission?" Or whatever the question is, it gives some of those informal structures to do that. And when there is a challenge or something coming up in the workplace, it can draw that out when it's not in a formal environment. So, a peer mentor may be able to address challenges or notice challenges earlier on.

(Heather Linka) Right, so what one employer that we work with as part of their big framework,

They assign two different types of mentors to an individual coming onto their team who identifies with being on the autism spectrum. So they'll have one that's their mentor, which is their workplace mentor, the person they can go to for workplace type questions like about their team meetings or actual work that they're doing on their team.

And then another one that's called their buddy, and that's one that would be more for the culture things, like how Jenna was referring to lunch breaks or maybe they're having intern social outings, anything like that.

(Jenna Christianson-Barker) And an added benefit of this, is that it costs no money, and it provides leadership and learning opportunities for atypical staff to be able to connect.

So questions, we have quite a bit of time set aside for you guys to ask us any questions.

(Audience member) Okay, I have one. So we've kinda had the chicken or the egg conversation, targeted recruitment, and so do you have any thoughts on is it better to have a job already defined and then to come and

access your services? Or is it better to touch base and get a sense of the possible candidates and to tailor a job to someone and their strengths and interests?

(Jenna Christianson-Barker) I think it can go both ways. We've done some things with employers in the past where we'll come in and look at their workplace and talk about positions that could be a good fit with our candidate pool, so we know what our candidate pool looks like and the people that we're getting ready for employment.

And then we can kind of say, "Within our candidate pool, this makes sense." So a bit of both, combining those two opportunities of having a defined position and also looking to the individual. Obviously I think the other side of looking to the individual is always gonna have the better outcome, because you're starting with their abilities rather than taking a job and figuring out what doesn't fit. But both are good, both are inclusive hiring.

(Heather Linka) Yeah, it'll depend on them, like you guys, the employers and what you have the capacity or what you feel most comfortable with. And we can make either one work.

(Audience member) I wanted to ask if I could, could you just state some of the opportunities for being able to connect people, to connect employers, to focus on the autism spectrum?

(Jenna Christianson-Barker) Sure, through Heather's work and through the Ready, Willing and Able project, they've supported 247 people here in BC to employment. And that looks like everything that employment looks like. So, in the north we've been really successful working with wineries, so positions that are seasonal. What's great about those positions is that they are fairly flexible in terms of time.

SAP that was here earlier, Stephanie, we've been working with them to support their Autism at Work project. So again, a much different opportunity that's quite a robust process in terms of what the onboarding process looks like for them. They do have a specific inclusive hiring process, so they do a cohort model, where they hire a group of individuals on the spectrum and go through a longer onboarding process.

(Heather Linka) They do a totally different interview process as well. Actually, it's not really an interview at all. But they bring in individuals and they work on an activity and then we can observe how they work through

this activity. "Oh, do they ask questions?" "Are they resourceful?" "Do they offer help to others?" "Are they analytical?" So they use different methods.

And then we would take them aside, once we feel they're comfortable, and then we can ask them about what kind of background do they have, what are they interested in? So it's all very slowed down so it is a bit more time intensive. But they've seen a lot of success with that program.

(Jenna Christianson-Barker) Yeah, SAP's a great partner. One, because they're intentional about their inclusive hiring and the other's because they're a big employer so they can do some innovative things and take time with that.

Thank you so much for having us and letting us chat. I put it out there that we're here as a resource. We're proud partners of the BCWIN project and other initiatives going on, so it's never from our end a competitive thing about who does what.

So we're happy to partner with whoever you're working with them to help provide whatever information you may need.

Mental Health in the Workplace

Krista Benes of Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) discusses the labour market as it relates to mental health. With the right supports, employers can discover an untapped labour pool, while making their workplace more inclusive.

Video Transcript:

(Krista Benes) So over the next little bit, what I'd like to speak to you about obviously is mental health and employment. You know, it's interesting, the intersection between mental health employment and how it really resonates with all of us.

Just in the cab ride over here this morning, the cab driver who had pulled up to take me from my hotel here was saying, "Oh you know." He said, "Oh, what are you here to do?" and I said "Oh, I'm gonna give a talk on mental

health and employment." And he said, "Oh." He said "There's been so many deaths by suicide among taxi drivers in the last number of years, given the changes in regulations and the increase with Uber driving, et cetera."

And he said, "You know, employment can create a lot of stress and by not having employment can create a lot of stress." And it was just interesting in how quickly he responded and had something to say about the intersection of mental health and employment. So, it's an important area and one that I'm happy to be working in.

Today I'd like to talk to you about addressing mental health at work. We'll have a look at the employment cycle, some promising practices as well as take a closer look at some case studies of the work that we've done at the Commission. So the Mental Health Commission of Canada is a not-for-profit organization. We're funded by Health Canada and our original 10-year mandate that we conducted looked at developing Canada's first ever mental health strategy. It addressed stigma and discrimination, and we built knowledge exchange across Canada.

As well through that mandate, it was expanded to include the housing and homelessness project the At Home/Chez Soi Project. Our current funding has been renewed for an additional two years and the work that we're doing now focuses on suicide prevention; addictions and mental health; population based mental health; and engagement with Canadians, provinces, territories, and federal partners.

It's very individualized, what impacts our mental health, but there are so many variables. And we know that employment is one of those big variables. In fact, 50% of your health is determined by factors such as your income, your disability status, and your employment and working conditions.

We know that the economic and social conditions in which people live in are now being recognized as important factors and determinants in individual health, with income emerging as the most critical factor. The rate of people leaving long-term disability income programs in Canada is less than 1%, yet we know that most people want to work.

Most people see work as an essential part of their recovery. Most people feel really good about being productive and it's a basic human need. It's a typical adult role in most societies. It can be a way out of poverty. And working may prevent entry into the disability system in the first place.

So, over the course of our time together this afternoon, we're going to look at some of the ways, some of the barriers to employment. Mental health is fluid. It's on a continuum and it can vary over the course of even one day. It can move from good to poor along a gradient. Mental health is the capacity of each of all of us to think, feel, and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face.

It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice interconnections and personal dignity. It differs though from a mental disorder. A mental disorder causes major changes in person's thinking, emotional state and behavior and disrupts the person's ability to work and carry out their usual personal relationships.

So there's a difference between the two. However, the presence of mental illness does not mean a lack of mental health. So as you can see from this gradient, a person can have optimal well-being. However, they could still have the presence of a mental illness and be actively feeling symptoms related to those, that illness.

Whereas in the bottom half of the gradient, a person languishing with minimal well-being while living with a mental illness. So for example, if you have a diagnosed mental illness but you're doing things to also support your mental health, we talked about a couple of those things that impact our mental health already, you heard examples.

But if I'm exercising and I'm getting enough sleep and I'm, you know, nourishing my body with really great food, I can move along the continuum to improve my mental well-being, even though I'm still diagnosed with a mental illness.

So I just wanted to give you a picture, that the two can operate together and can be impacted along sort of a gradient line and can change. So to place the 1 in 5 people living in Canada with a mental illness today in the context of how many people are living with other major illnesses in a given year, there's about 1 in 25 people in Canada living with heart disease, and 1 in 15 people with type 2 diabetes. So the number is quite high, 1 in 5.

We all know, either we're experiencing mental health issues ourselves or we know a family member or a colleague. We're all touched by it. Mental health problems and illnesses are the number one cause of disability in Canada and

account for nearly 30% of disability claims and 70% of the total costs. 10% and 25% of mental disability costs currently borne by employers, they could be avoided.

We're gonna talk about some strategies of how we can avoid some of those costs. We also know that the longer a person is away from work due to illness, the less chance there is a successful return to the workplace. So if somebody's been off work for six months, they have about a 50% likelihood of returning to work. However, that decreases to 10% if they've been away from the workplace for nine months or longer. So the sooner that we can intervene and the sooner that we can work towards supporting people getting back to work, the better.

And we know that if unaddressed, the impact of mental health problems on lost productivity, including absenteeism, presenteeism and turnover will cost Canadian businesses $198 billion over the next thirty years. So we have to do something about it. These are some of the costs associated with an unhealthy workplace.

Presenteeism, I'm not sure, does anyone know, do you all know what presenteeism is? Where if you show up to work and you could be surfing the internet all day. You look like you're there, you're dressed in the part, you know, you've got what you're supposed to wear but you're not doing anything. You're not accomplishing anything because you're so focused on your own mental health or your mind is somewhere else.

Workplace conflict can be a big source of an unhealthy workplace. Organizational change. Turnover and related costs. And this is one of the main reasons that people leave a workplace, is because they're unhappy with the workplace culture or the unhealthy workplace that they're in.

So there's an employment gap. Up to 90% of Canadians living with a severe mental illness are unemployed. We know that unemployment is associated with a twofold to threefold relative risk of death by suicide compared with being employed. So why? Why is mental health in the workplace such a major issue that we're dealing with still, even though people want to work and want to be employed?

There's stigma. There's still a lot of stigma around talking about mental health and mental illness. There's lack of employer awareness and training, although not for this group because you're all here learning about things you

can do. The episodic nature of the illness. We know that we can be really, really well for a long period of time.

However, then we're not. And there's not often things in the system in place to account for that. You know, whether it's even financially supporting individuals when they're off. There's a lot of stress that comes with the disincentives that are built into the system, that we can't always account for.

The hours of work, full-time versus part-time. And you know not all jobs come with the opportunity to be able to work part-time. And so developing flexible work hours and work schedule can be a really important component for people living with a mental illness. However, it's not always easy to find that balance.

So we have an untapped talent pool, though, waiting for us. And we know that we need to tap into them. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce has identified skill shortages as one of the top 10 barriers to competitiveness in Canada, costing the Canadian economy billions in lost GDP. One source estimates that we're going to be about 2 million workers short by 2031. And roughly 60% of Canadian CEOs report the labor shortages already affecting business growth.

So we're gonna have to get creative about thinking about where we go to meet these shortages in finding the workers that we need. The good news is that Aspiring Workers, the group that I'm here to talk about today, they have the skills that we need. They're qualified. According to Statistics Canada over 50% of Canadians with disabilities aged 25 to 62 have a post-secondary education. They're on time. Research shows that 86% of persons with disabilities rate on average or better in attendance. They're high-performing. 90% of persons with disabilities rate on average or better on job performance, compared with their colleagues without disabilities. And their loyal. Job turnover among people with a disability is estimated to be 20% of the rate of other employees.

And Statistics Canada research indicates that in organisations with accessible employment practices, employee retention was 72% higher among people with disabilities. Want to reduce the stigma for them, change attitudes and processes towards hiring and retaining those living with a mental illness. We know that employment plays an important role in the recovery from mental illness.

The concept of recovery refers to living a satisfying, hopeful and contributing life, even if there may be ongoing limitations from mental health and illnesses. It refers to a process or journey of healing in which to the greatest extent possible, people are empowered to make informed choices about the services, treatments and supports that best meet their needs.

And as I say, at the heart of recovery is the idea that people have goals and the opportunities to move forward and the hope to meet those goals. And employment has always been, when I worked in frontline mental health with the Canadian Mental Health Association, when a person was further along in their recovery, employment was one of the goals that was always set continuously as a plan for moving forward.

So, one of the things that we look at is when we think about employment for people living with mental illness, is that we have to think of the big picture. Anywhere from what we're doing around recruitment, all the way through to prevention and promotion. And I think it's important that we take a holistic perspective when we think about these elements.

So when we talk about recruitment, you know, what can we do to embrace this talent pool? How can we… I think that some of the more conventional channels of looking for… to fill vacant positions are not always going to land on the candidates from the Aspiring Workforce. Embracing diversity looking for different ways to try and target your talent pool.

I think we need to be flexible about the onboarding process. There's a number of organizations out there, like I was mentioning around supported employment, that can really make a difference in helping you to get the person you need to get the job done. But it's important to have that conversation right from the get go with employees. What can we do to support you at work? How can you be the best? How can we support you to be the best worker that you can be and be successful in your job? I think having those conversations upfront and early can prevent or circumvent any issues that may come on down the line.

Just conscious of my time, sorry.

We know that currently mental illness is rated by employers as one of the top 3 drivers and 80% of short and long-term disability claims. But when employers offer an integrated disability management program, the duration

of health leaves in absence are cut in half. And in turn employees are likely to remain employed and find success in a supportive environment.

So with regards to prevention and promotion we talked about wellness activities that you can implement in your workplace to ensure your workplace is a good one that's supportive and creates a culture that's mentally healthy for employees. There's training and education. One of the programs that we offer at the Mental Health Commission of Canada is the Mental Health First Aid program, similar to like, a first aid. Is that what it's called? First aid program.

The Mental Health First Aid program is one where it trains people to look for the signs and symptoms of a colleague who may be in distress. And how do you respond? How can you be there to be that first support on the scene to help? That creates awareness and reduces stigma in the workplace.

Stay at work. We can talk about accommodations. We know that accommodations don't cost that much money. In fact, most accommodations cost less than $500. Reduced hours, flexible start times and finish times. Increase the number of breaks. Have a space where a person can work quietly. Working from home options. You know, having a wellness room. These kinds of things make a huge difference.

When somebody is off on medical leave, it's important to have continuous communication with them when they're away from work. You know, develop a plan to maintain contact. And then when they return to work, talk about a graduated scheduling, a recovery focused plan, one that they're a part of so that they can know what they can expect. They best know their needs.

And so working with them to support them to get back to work and getting work in an environment that they're comfortable with is the best way to approach that. This is just a bit of a recap. Raising awareness. We all have a role to play, you know, culturally at work. It's not just, it's got to be frontline employees, management.

I'll just play a quick clip if there's a chance.

(Howie Mandel from clip) In the United States, I was on the Howard Stern Show. And I have OCD. And part of it is I have these rituals that I can't touch things. And he thought it was funny to, the door was kind of dirty and nobody would open it for me. And I started to panic and go through anxiety. And I didn't know we were still broadcasting.

I said, "No, I see a psychiatrist. I have OCD, I'm medicated. This is not funny, this is not a joke." And they ended up opening the door for me. And then I realized that this got broadcast. And I went down onto the street. This was Manhattan in New York. And I walked out into the street and I thought, you know, how can I deal with this, you know? And how can I even look at anybody?

And right when I walked into the… I was facing the traffic. Somebody came up to me and said, "Are you Howie Mandel?" And I wouldn't even make eye contact, I was so embarrassed. And I went, "yeah" and they said, "I just heard you on Howard Stern." And I went, "Oh my God." Like, what do I do now? Do I just run into traffic and just end it here? And the next two words were the words that made my life different. And the guy just said into my ear, "Me too."

If we take care of our mental health like our dental health, we'll be okay. We all talk about our dental health. Talk about my mental health? No, no, no. In corporate North American Canada, you can say in the middle of day, "I got to leave at 3:00. I got to go see my dentist." But you look at the looks in the office when you say, "You know what? I got to go to a psychiatrist." You'll get looks and that's what's wrong. And that's why we got to talk about it. There's no stigma. I'm crazy, I'm mental. I'm talking about it.

(music)

(Krista Benes) So Howie's a great advocate for raising awareness around mental health and for Bell Let's Talk. Okay, so very quickly, these are the workplace mental health factors. When I talked about creating a positive psychological health and safety environment at work, these were identified in the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety.

There are 13 factors that really impact employees' mental health at work. There's a great set of videos that we have, and I can give you the link to that, that you could use at a lunch and learn or in any way that you could to raise awareness around what's impacting our mental health at work. Things like civility and respect, engagement, organizational culture, work-life balance, these are all important factors.

We know that millennials will change jobs an average of 4 times in just the first 10 years of their lives. So these are the things that they're citing as important and the reasons why they're leaving workplaces. So I think it's

important that we all address these items if we want to keep employees in our workplace.

As I said, here's some of the resources around increasing awareness and education. These factor videos are available on our website. I talked about the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety. As I said, this is a resource that's freely available on our website and it talks about how do we implement the standard into our workplace? And so there's a number of pieces that come with that to support organizations in doing this, the Assembling the Pieces guide.

And there was a case study research project that was done, and it followed 40-plus organizations across Canada of various shapes and sizes to implement the standard in their workplace. And what this project did was followed those organizations, identified some of the promising practices that they found throughout the research project, the things that worked for them, the things that didn't work for them.

It's a great way to be able to reach out to an organization that may be similar to yours in size or even in type of business, and work with them to try and figure out how to implement a psychologically healthy and safe workplace. Of the organizations who implemented the standard. So the first was the Michael Garron Hospital. This is the Toronto East General Hospital.

It's a community teaching hospital which includes inpatient beds comprised of acute care, rehabilitation, complex continuing care and mental health. The hospital has over 2,500 unionized and non-unionized employees and health care providers, 413 physicians and midwives and over 500 adult and student volunteers. And they implemented the standard as a strategic priority in order to support their staff. Their goal is to increase staff engagement, which they believe will lead to improved inpatient care. And ultimately, they believe it's the right thing to do.

So some of the outcomes. The organization has experienced a 7% decrease in overall health care costs over the last 4 years and a decrease in days absent from 10.66 in 2008 to 6.55 in 2014. The overall staff engagement scores have significantly increased, placing them as a leading community hospital in 9 of 11 engagement categories. And they believe their staff engagement score improvements have been a significant driver in improving their patient satisfaction and overall quality metrics.

The last point I wanted to make was that we recently got the results back from a business case project that we worked with a number of researchers from McMaster University and the Institute for Work and Health on. And what they set out to do was to explore how organisations support and accommodate workers with mental illness, and consider the costs and benefits of supporting and accommodating workers with mental illness.

So what they did was… they did a study that looked at both the qualitative and quantitative costs with making accommodations for people living with mental illness. And then they did an economic analysis of those costs to see what the return was, whether it was a negative or positive one, for both the employers and the workers.

And what they found was really quite amazing. They looked at 5 different workplaces that were varied in size, geography, sector and structure from a small cafe to a large governmental organization. And they interviewed people in the workplace. They interviewed the individual who had been diagnosed with the mental illness, or who self-identified as living with a mental illness. They interviewed colleagues. They interviewed management.

And then they looked at a number of factors. So when they considered the economic analysis these were some of the costs that they considered as they looked at the 5 different organizations, the 5 individuals working across the organization. So how much did it take to plan for the person's time? What was the time that it took to meet with the person to make those accommodations? They looked at things like productivity at work, the individual's intent to stay.

And then there were a number of intangible benefits that couldn't be included in the economic analysis but were of equal value, things like job satisfaction, quality of life, work relationships. But what they found was that for the small cafe, for example, the worker benefits projected over a 5 year period. So both the cost-benefit analysis for both the worker and the organization were projected over a 5 period.

And as you can see there is as little as 1.9 times the benefit and as great over 12 times the benefit for the worker. And some of these accommodations that are listed here were very, you know, were quite small. The manager writes down tasks, runs through the tasks the day before, sends text message reminders, gives regular check-ins.

They found that most people relied on universal supports that were available, and that there weren't really very many additional accommodations that were made. So most people would rely on sick days or flexible work from home options to get the accommodations that they needed. And the positions varied anywhere from a person in a management position to a solutions analyst or an inspector.

We're very proud of the results and the work that the researchers did on this project.

So I just wanted to say thank you very much for having me today.

Thank you very much.

Experiencing Unconscious Bias

A guided discussion by John Horn to identify unconscious bias and 'unintended' barriers in our workplace.

Video Transcript:

(John Horn) I want to start off by acknowledging that we're on the traditional, unceded territory of the Coast Salish people represented here by the Tsleil-Waututh, the Musqueam and the Squamish First Nations. I want to pay my respects to elder's past and present and get everyone to think a bit about what unconscious bias might mean as we go together in our journey of reconciliation over the years and years and years ahead to a place that's more equal, more fair and a more inclusive community.

Here's what we're gonna talk about today. How many people here have some sort of idea about unconscious bias as a concept and as a training mechanism to enhance and accelerate diversity inclusion? I'm going to go through a bit of some of the key concepts about unconscious bias and share with you some activities, some stories, some quick kind of takeaways that you can bring back to your work and life.

And then I want to give a lot of time to think a bit about once we kind of accept and think about the unconscious biases that we bring to our work and life everyday. What are some strategies and tactics for mitigating those biases. So how does this strike you as the kind of things that we want to achieve together today. It's understanding some core concepts. I think there's a real importance about people walking out of here today with a personal connection to what this means to them and you're not going to resonate right away with all the biases that I'm going to list.

I'll talk a bit about our partner and the research they've done to identify hundreds of different biases that we bring to work and life every day. But making a personal connection to at least one is important. We'll talk a bit about some strategies and tactics for mitigating bias.

So how many people here have a brain? Right, so if we have a brain we have a bias. And so what does that mean? I'll talk about two things. So one is that over the last sort of thousands of years humanity's culture, so this microphone, smartphones, how we talk, what we wear, where we get our information, the internet, cars, is all parts of our culture that has evolved at exponential paces.

Our brains are still hardwired for the savannah, all right? What I mean by that is that our brains haven't really evolved at the pace that our culture has evolved and this makes things pretty complex in today's world. So we still think in these really fast ways of using bias to identify times we could be in danger. Using bias to define who's in our in-group and who's maybe in the out-group, right? And that could be by how people look if they're strangers, the colour of their skin, their size, how they talk, accents, no accents, different languages, that sort of thing, right?

These are all types of biases that reflect this sort of hardwiring of the human brain that's more reflective of when we were hiding from sabre-toothed tigers then we were, sort of, like, shrinking away from someone in a hoodie outside of SkyTrain terminal. But it's an important thing to take away is that our culture is evolving at a pace that our hardwiring of our brain is not keeping up to. That's one piece.

There's also these ideas of thinking fast and thinking slow. So something about our biases is, biases are kind of good they help us make decisions based on experiences. So if you have a certain kind of experience, like, if you stand really close to someone and don't smile and stare at them you're

gonna get a certain kind of reaction and it's gonna happen over and over and over and over again until you meet that one person who also behaves that way and then you can have your moment.

But sort of experience after experience and after experience with that data is gonna help you over time make a quicker decision to not do that, to take a step back, to smile, to nod and this is how we build these kind of social skills and how we make very quick decisions, right? Some more complicated or complex kind of decision-making, like, where you're gonna go on a family vacation or what to do with a million dollar grant you just got from the government, these kinds of things will be examples of how you might take a longer time to process this.

Biases is still gonna creep its way in. I'll talk a bit about that. But how those are examples of very quick decision making and how bias can be helpful, like, humans wouldn't get a lot done if it took us hours and hours to process what route to take to work, right? Or how we may not get a lot done if we didn't have the patience to go through more complex or complicated decisions and take the time we needed to take.

So I'm gonna pause here for a second and talk a bit about what Vancity went through. So Vancity has partnered with Neuroleadership Institute. Has anyone here heard of the Neuroleadership Institute? So if you google David Rock and the Neuroleadership Institute, you'll come up with a few pretty awesome articles just about like unconscious bias, what it is and how to mitigate certain kinds of bias and most importantly how to really look at diversity and inclusion as an accelerator for a healthier workplace, a healthier community, okay?

So we partnered with this organization. We have gone through so far 2, what I called sprints, so 30 days of learning, where there's three what I call brain friendly videos that go through some key concepts about what is unconscious bias, how do they define it and organize these hundreds and hundreds of kinds of biases and then we have created discussion guides so people could talk about them.

Vancity made a very interesting choice. Typically this organization, they focus on just managers or people leaders going through the training. We made the choice to have everybody go through the learning. There's, as you can imagine, quite a cost attached to that but you can see the outcome of this, like, it's a hard thing to unlearn at this time. So we did a pilot group in

August/September and then the rest of the organization that were available to go through the training went through in November/December.

It's one of the most successful training initiatives we've ever run in terms of completion. So about 94% of the organization has completed this training experience. It's just under, it's like, 93.4, I should be honest, it's 93.4% of people have completed and we're gonna be running another sprint in May or June to have everyone who's been hired since, was a way during that experience, to go through this learning.

That's one part of it, is this sprint. Three videos, a live webinar to discuss these concepts and now what we're working on is thinking about how we're going to sustain this. So how do we sustain this training through integration into some of our other learning and development programs, day to day work and people decisions, things like that.

I'll give some examples about what that looks like at the end, okay? Great.

How many people have seen this before? And what is it? It's the ladder of inference. So I was mentioning before about how human beings make decisions. So we see things, you've all seen me, you've probably made decisions about beards and ties and single or straight, white able-bodied men of privilege. And some of those things are confirmable because I just disclosed that to you and some of them are not confirmable like, you might wonder what's going on in my head and in my brain and you're gonna learn more about how to apply some of these concepts today and mental health and inclusion and access programs and accommodation kind of decision-making this afternoon.

So we have observational data based on our experiences and our biases we're gonna select the kinda certain aspect of this data, we're gonna add meaning to it maybe through some feedback or through conversations that we have. We're gonna make assumptions based on that meaning and that feedback. And then we're gonna draw conclusions kind of like, take action on what we decide.

And that's sort of like, there's a feedback loop in this. So as we have more experiences that are similar, different, you are gonna be quicker and quicker when you identify or are faced with some of those situations. So when we talk about the ladder of inference in our diversity inclusion model in a 5-day onboarding program for new hires and an immersion in Vancity's culture for

existing employees, we often talk about how the ladder of inference works when people walk into a branch or how the ladder of inference might work when people call into our call center.

Now what are the kind of split-second decisions, what are the biases that come to bear in people's mind, whether they're a financial services representative or a teller, a branch manager and what actions being taken might have positive or perhaps not so positive consequences and what are ways we can put in different kinds of decisions or thinking to mitigate bias as we go up and down our ladder of inference.

How this happened in a team meeting that I was leading a few weeks ago was we were talking about some of the nature of our youth internship program or a community leader internship program and focusing on providing employment for people who face barriers to employment. And one of the people on our team said, "but the interns we've had have all been awesome." Like they don't have barriers to employment, right?

So you can see going kind of up and down the ladder right there. There was an acknowledgement that the output of work is the only defining quality of someone who is working in an organization. Not really acknowledging what might be going on in their head. Why someone had to change their schedule to work from home because they have an anxiety disorder, which is a thing that happened. Or other kinds of invisible disabilities or invisible challenges people might face that could make their pursuit of employment difficult.

So that was an example where we got to talk about the ladder of inference and it was pretty funny because it was a person who teaches this stuff to new hires, so it was very receptive to getting some critical feedback about that concept.

These are very specific ways biases manifest. So it's likely that you are going to favour people that look and speak and talk and behave in ways you do. You're probably gonna… people favour decisions that are safer, like, the less risky that could be about trying a new thing at work. It could be public speaking, things like that. Things that are safer and come more comfortable is usually the route humans take.

And then as I take you back to the savannah and thinking how our brains are still hardwired to run away from tigers and saber-toothed tigers and elephants and mammoths and things like that. It's like it starts to make a bit

more sense that we favour safety and comfort over risk and innovation often. We struggle to think about things that are far away as opposed to what's right in front of us.

And I gotta say as a fast talker, a natural activator, when I was going through this learning experience myself, I thought that the thing that I needed to work on the most was my bias for speed. To get things done quickly, start things, move things forward. And when I was asking for feedback from my team and my colleagues they all said, "sure but that's one you know about and you've been trying to mitigate that bias over time. What you suck at the most is you put so much focus on the people that are right in front of you. You literally get out of your office, walk out the door, look at the people that are here and then work through a concept and probably assign work there. So anyone who's working from home, working from a branch, away at a meeting is just left out of this and unless they're given specific instruction isn't brought along this piece of work and so things emerge out of context. That's the thing you probably need to work on the most."

So it's an example of favoring things that are closer. And I'll talk about some tactics in a second.

And then this is like one of the greatest challenges of humanity. You don't need to solve this today. We can't. But you should probably think about it, is whether it's online communities or your social networks. Really think about how many people in your circle of friends, your Facebook friends, who you follow, the content you consume online or in print disrupts your worldview, right?

Or how many people are actively calling out your perspectives and views. This is a thing about biases. We tend to really gravitate to an in-group and people that see the world and think the same way that we do.

So let's talk about hurricanes. So one of the really cool nuggets, for all the data heads out there, that the Neuroleadership Institute left us with is, they're talking about how to bring this up in compelling ways. Did you know that one of the reasons that there was more devastation and tragedy after hurricanes with female names is related to unconscious bias? Why aren't people prepared when they hear Katrina, Irma, Sandy but they get more prepared with Juan, George, Ivan?

So this is decades of research around this outcome. People from the Weather Network, FEMA Disaster Relief, have found that there is, it is unequivocal that after female named hurricanes there's more destruction and the theory is that people, because they're biased to women and the strength of women and the devastation that a female named hurricane will leave do not prepare as much as they do when they hear a male named hurricane.

Right?

So I was all in when I heard that as a part of their pitch. That is interesting stuff and I bring this up because this is deep. This goes to the very fiber of how we think, how we imagine ourselves and others and I encourage you to read more about it.

Let's take a break from me chatting and let's plant some seeds of understanding our bias. We've all taken some time to think about that and let's talk about what to do next. So I'll share a couple of examples of what I've taken into my practice and what sort of things that we're doing on these micro levels and somewhat teen levels but to sustain this at Vancity.

So when I faced the decision, one of the things I can to mitigate my bias is to imagine someone else's perspective. I'm not going to be able to always verbalize a problem or an idea to a group of people to test it against different kinds of perspectives. But there's a chance that I can imagine some of that in my head.

So I have this friend of mine, we worked together at UBC when I worked there. His name is Darren and his very values aligned with me but he's way more ruthless. And so the knock on me is when I have to make people decisions, I'm a pretty nice guy and I tend to be a bit overly flexible. That's some feedback I've gotten, not from the team I manage surprisingly.

So when I imagine a people decision I often will take his perspective and ask what would Darren do in this situation. And really listen to that voice in my head about his perspective and what he would do differently and then apply that to my decision. That's one example and it does need to be a friend, you know, that helps. But think of someone who operates a bit differently than you. That's one way.

Another is to imagine, and it's a pretty fun exercise, like what would a famous person do? Don't pick Hitler. But like, what would a famous person do or a celebrity do? Someone who, you might not know exactly how they

think but they're sort of this image or this idea about them and how would they make a decision. That's one example.

Another thing we've done is a recent hire for our team, we hired a new employee a couple months ago, was to actively surround myself with people who see the world differently than I do. So it was a great opportunity because he was gonna be working very closely with this person we were hiring. There's a reason there. And also, just like, naturally sees the world very differently than I do.

And the other person we brought on too, we frustrate each other because she slows me down and I make her uncomfortable because I go so quickly so it seemed like a pretty good combination of different perspectives to really get to the truth of the matter so to speak.

So understanding what the biases are and then how they're gonna inform the interactions with your team or decisions you're making for sure.

One time in a job long ago before I had unconscious bias training and really thought deeply about this I may or may not have hired a man named John who was an extrovert. It went okay but I think I would have done things differently knowing what I know now.

And then a thing that's been helpful for me, advice I got from a mentor a while ago, was the phrase 'there's something going on, I can't totally put my finger on it, but I want to talk to you about it.' And I want to help work with you to explore what's going on because that's pretty safe language. It identifies that you're not coming in with judgment, you're coming in with curiosity and then hopefully together the outcome could be reached.

I'll wrap up with one last tip about mitigating the bias for the thing that's right in front of you because as you know, this is one that I said I have to work on a lot. When you're on conference calls, super simple, include the person or the people on the phone first. Do it every time and then it becomes habits. Like write a note, make it a practice. It goes a long way for them, it also, if they're trying to coast through a meeting because they're on the phone, they think no one's gonna pay attention to them, it wakes about pretty quickly…

(laughter)

…and it changes their behaviour as well and their expectations. That's just a simple thing to do.

So this is what we set out to achieve. We were looking at some of these things. We were pursuing and investigating in terms of diversity inclusion, looking at becoming a place where intercultural understanding is the norm, access is the norm and this idea of unconscious bias really underscores all of this kind of stuff. So you think about what our perceptions are, how we think, how our brain is wired and that's not good or bad it's just the way it is.

And then what happens because of it was this kind of foundational piece that needed to happen before we could really move forward at scale with all this other stuff. Like focusing on Indigenous communities, access to people that have neurodevelopmental disabilities or physical disabilities, understanding how to make a community culture, an organizational culture, where everybody's a little bit uncomfortable because everybody's kind of more or less coming to the table on similar terms.

So everyone should be kind of uncomfortable because anyone who's totally comfortable is gonna be the dominant culture, the dominant decision-maker and that means they're taking a bit from others. So to have that, we knew we needed this foundational piece, right?

And then the choice of the Neuroleadership Institute. I'm gonna come down and high-five you because you're really patient. The Neuroleadership Institute is a best-in-class for brain friendly training. So as someone who's done this a lot in a few organizations, there's a correlation between how the micro learning of this particular kind of training is connected to the results we got, right?

So we weren't asking people to take a 90 minute webinar and pound their face against the keyboard to get through to get the same outcome. We had formative videos and gave a lot of power to everyone in the organization to bring it up on their terms how they saw fit and in their work.

Thank you very much for your time. It's a pleasure to be here.

Have a wonderful day.