

Elyse's Story: Project Support Intern at Service BC



**"This is the first time I've had a job like this long enough where I was able to better 'learn myself.'"
– Elyse Henderson**

Elyse Henderson was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) when she was eight years old. Despite this challenge, she is currently working at Service BC in the role of Project Support and has been able to try her hand at different tasks. Most recently, she is supporting a major records management project which utilizes her Master's Degree in Library & Information Science (MLIS).

While searching for jobs online with her dad, Elyse learned about the B.C. Government's [Work-Able: Graduate Internship Program](#)¹. Thanks to this program, she was able to land a 12-month paid internship working with Service BC. She had a positive experience working for the Ontario Public Service as a summer student back in 2012/2013, and it was this experience that inspired her to intentionally search for opportunities within the BC Public Service. Elyse set out with the goal of recreating the positive experience she had in her past government role, and to work for an employer that would be supportive of her disability.

Although Elyse admits that she struggles to do math above a grade one level and has challenges with her working memory, she has an advanced understanding of language comprehension, and is able to process and distill information in ways that even surprise her - which is something that has proven to be a major asset within her role at the BC Public Service. Her colleagues are aware of these challenges and are able to accommodate them by presenting her with new information linearly and sequentially as much as possible in order to support her memory retention. This simple accommodation has given her the opportunity to learn alongside her peers and has made an impact on the quality of her work.



With Elyse's disability being "invisible," she advocated early on what some of her needs would be. Her team was very supportive and provided her with extra time to complete each task. In the cases where a task needed to be handed off to a team member to complete, she was told that, "it's okay" and that, "it's part of the internship to learn" where they could best support her to find her place in government. The current project she has been assigned in records management has set rules and patterns to follow, and this kind of consistency plays to her strengths.

Being in this type of working environment has taught Elyse valuable lessons about herself and her working style. She commented:

"This experience has given me more real-world, out-of-the-classroom context in order to learn more about myself and adapt faster."

When asked about her favourite part of this experience so far, she added:

"I can try different things and ask plenty of questions with the benefit of being in a position of learning. There is structure and first-hand experience with business practice that will serve me well as I progress in my career."

Thanks to the success of her work and presence on the team, Service BC was encouraged to take on an additional intern for this year's Work-Able Program, which is now in progress. Knowing that her work had created a positive impact in not only her life, but someone else's, is something she is very proud of.

Her advice to other job seekers with disabilities is to:

1. Make sure to research all positions before applying
2. Be persistent
3. Identify (if you can) the support systems you need in place in order to succeed
4. Know your rights as an employee
5. Don't give up

Elyse hopes that sharing her story can help other people feel encouraged to take the first steps in their careers, and in effect, other employers can learn how to adopt these approaches within their own workplaces based on these positive experiences.

Link References:

¹ Work-Able: Graduate Internship Program http://www.accessibleemployers.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Work-Able-Case-Study.Final_2017.pdf