

deam idea conference

PRESENTED BY



Alberta
Employment
First
Network

**PROGRAM &
EVENT DETAILS**

welcome

to the DEAM IDEA Conference 2026

In celebration of Disability Employment Awareness Month, the Alberta Employment First Network (AEFN) presents the 5th annual DEAM IDEA Conference — a multi-day learning and workforce development experience focused on strengthening inclusive employment practices across Alberta. Hosted this year in Edmonton at Northern Alberta Institute of Technology.

As workforce pressures continue to grow across sectors, organizations are looking for sustainable ways to attract, retain, and support talent. Inclusive hiring is increasingly recognized as a key driver of workforce stability and organizational strength — not only expanding access to skilled talent, but improving retention, team performance, and long-term business resilience.

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conference schedule

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2026

- 4:00 PM DOORS OPEN**
- 4:00 PM – 8:00 PM NETWORKING RECEPTION & COCKTAILS**
- 6:00 PM EMPLOYNEXT SPONSOR REMARKS**
- 6:05 PM WELCOME & INTRODUCTION FROM AEFN**
- 6:05 PM – 8:00 PM NETWORKING CONTINUES**

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2026

7:30 AM Registration Opens

8:00 AM Buffet Breakfast (Atrium)

9:00 AM Program Begins

Opening Prayer

Speaker: Sahana Parameswara, Executive Director, Gateway Association

Welcome Remarks: Emcee Zachary Weeks

Opening Keynote: Marco Pasqua

10:30 AM Morning Break

11:00 AM Program Resumes

Emcee Remarks: Zachary Weeks

Breakout Sessions

- 1 Beyond the Hire: How Mentorship Strengthens Your Talent Pipeline; *Facilitated by Susannah Tawse, MentorAbility* (PIC 122)
- 2 Inclusive Employment from an Indigenous Perspective; *Facilitated by Derek Bruno, SevGen Consulting Inc.* (Main Stage)
- 3 Inclusive Apprenticeship & Employment in the Trades; *Facilitated by Emma Kieftenbeld & Ryan Marshall, NAIT* (PIC 120)

12:05 PM Lunch

1:05 PM Program Resumes

Emcee Remarks: Zachary Weeks

Speaker: Angela Flaman, Director, Alberta Employment First Network

Breakout Sessions

- 1 Accessibility is for Every Body; *Facilitated by Diana Dimmock* (PIC 120)
- 2 Human Rights and the Duty to Accommodate in the Workplace; *Facilitated by Linda Davidson & Diana Pearson, Alberta Human Rights Commission* (Main Stage)
- 3 Beyond the Checkbox: Creating Inclusive Workplaces That Thrive; *Facilitated by Christine Malone, Canada Post* (PIC 122)

2:25 PM Afternoon Break

3:00 PM Program Resumes

Movement Break; *Facilitated by Kyle Lobb*

Closing Keynote: Erin Davis

Closing Remarks

4:30 PM Networking

EMCEE

Zachary Weeks

Zachary Weeks is an Edmonton-based accessibility consultant, disability advocate, public speaker, and community leader. As a person with cerebral palsy who uses a power wheelchair, Zachary combines lived experience with more than a decade of professional and community leadership to help organizations turn accessibility and inclusion into meaningful action. He has served on the City of Edmonton's Accessibility Advisory Committee since 2013, including as Chair and Vice-Chair, and has advised businesses, governments, community organizations, and major events on physical, digital, and organizational accessibility.

Zachary has never forgotten the difference his first job made in his own life. It transformed far more than his pocketbook—it strengthened his mental health, confidence, independence, sense of purpose, and connection to his community. That experience continues to shape his belief that meaningful employment is about much more than earning an income; it is about dignity, belonging, opportunity, and being recognized for what a person can contribute.

Zachary is also a recipient of both the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal and Platinum Jubilee Medal in recognition of his community service and advocacy.



KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Marco Pasqua

Marco Pasqua is an award-winning entrepreneur, accessibility consultant, inspirational speaker, and best-selling author with cerebral palsy. His talks focus on navigating life's biggest transitions, overcoming adversity, and reframing challenges as creative fuel.

He first took the stage at age 10, where he discovered the lasting impact of storytelling. Since then, he's become a spokesperson for multiple national and international organizations, advocating for people with disabilities globally and proving that with the right energy and ingenuity, anything is possible.

As an entrepreneur, Marco has helped shape purpose-driven tech brands and embed accessibility into organizational culture. He's spoken on stages across the country, including over 300 presentations during his time with United Way's Impact Speaker campaigns — honing his voice and presence in both corporate and community spaces. He's presented at TEDxStanleyPark, the Duke of Edinburgh Awards, and advised municipal and corporate leaders on inclusive design, employment, and policy. His work has been recognized with numerous honours, including the King Charles III Coronation Medal (2025) for national contributions to accessibility, a Paul Harris Fellowship from Rotary International, and an early-career nod as Entrepreneur of the Year by SEEDS.

Marco's passion for universal design and inclusive innovation has led to long-standing collaborations with organizations like the Rick Hansen Foundation, as well as advisory roles with The Presidents Group, the Province of BC's employment inclusion committee. He also serves on the boards of two national non-profits supporting Canadians with disabilities, advancing systems-level change and inclusive policy development. He leads with lived experience, a powerful voice, and the belief that real impact is built through human connection.

SESSION INFORMATION

Accessible Workplaces: Building Meaningful Pathways to Employment

This session will explore what it takes to create more accessible and inclusive workplaces — from recruitment and communication to meaningful access and employee retention. Marco Pasqua will unpack disability, challenge common assumptions about what people can and cannot do, and provide an Alberta-specific perspective on employment and disability supports.

Participants will explore practical ways to reduce barriers throughout the employee experience, communicate more confidently and respectfully, and create conditions that support people to participate, contribute and succeed at work. The session will also highlight the value of collaboration between employers, employees and disability employment service providers.

The focus is simple: move beyond assumptions, recognize barriers, and consider what employers can do to create workplaces where people can thrive.



morning breakout sessions

11:05 AM – 12:05 PM

Beyond the Hire: How Mentorship Strengthens Your Talent Pipeline (PIC 122)

Hiring great people is only the beginning. Creating an environment where employees feel supported, connected, and empowered to grow is what drives long term success.

This interactive session explores how mentorship can strengthen every stage of the talent pipeline, from career exploration and recruitment to onboarding, professional development, and retention. Through practical examples, discussion, and collaborative activities, participants will explore how mentorship fosters belonging, builds confidence, and supports more inclusive workplaces.

Whether your organization has a formal mentorship program or is just beginning to explore the idea, you'll leave with practical strategies to integrate mentorship into your workplace and create meaningful connections that help employees and organizations thrive.



SUSANNAH TAWSE, MENTORABILITY

Susannah Tawse is a facilitator, strategist, and human-centred designer who has spent more than 20 years helping people and organizations better understand problems, challenge assumptions, and design practical solutions together.



As Southern Alberta Project Lead for MentorAbility Alberta at Gateway Association, she works across employers, community organizations, and supported employment partners to create mentorship experiences that help job seekers experiencing disability explore careers while

giving employers a low-risk way to connect with talent, build awareness, and strengthen their workforce practices.

Susannah brings both professional and lived experience to this work as a person living with multiple invisible disabilities. She is particularly interested in making inclusion feel less overwhelming and more actionable — starting with the real challenges organizations are already trying to solve.

morning breakout sessions

11:05 AM – 12:05 PM



KAZEEM ABOLAJI, MENTORABILITY



Kazeem Abolaji is a project leader, workplace inclusion strategist, and community connector focused on turning conversations about disability inclusion into practical opportunities. As Northern Alberta Project Lead for MentorAbility Alberta at Gateway Association, he works across employers, employment service providers, community organizations, and industry partners to create mentorship and career-exploration opportunities for people experiencing disability. His work includes building employer partnerships, developing inclusive workplace learning

experiences, supporting a regional network of facilitators, and creating stronger connections between job seekers and the industries they want to explore.

Kazeem's background spans workplace inclusion, employer engagement, sales, training, and program development, giving him a perspective that sits at the intersection of people and business. He is particularly interested in moving inclusion beyond policies and good intentions by helping organizations identify practical ways to engage talent, challenge assumptions, and build more accessible workplaces. His approach centres on curiosity, relationship-building, and creating opportunities where employers and job seekers can learn from one another.

morning breakout sessions

11:05 AM – 12:05 PM

Inclusive Employment from an Indigenous Perspective (Main Stage)

This session will ground participants in the history and lived realities of Indigenous communities, setting the context for inclusive employment as an ongoing, urgent priority.

Participants will explore how to engage with Indigenous partners to develop effective employment strategies, and gain insight for inclusive Indigenous employment across corporate, non-profit, and municipal sectors. Drawing on real experience building businesses on- and off- reserve, Derek Bruno will offer practical approaches for recruiting, engaging, and retaining Indigenous people with disabilities in meaningful work, leaving attendees with a clearer picture of their role in making progress for healthier workplaces.



DEREK BRUNO, SEVGEN CONSULTING INC.

Derek M. Bruno is a proud member of Samson Cree Nation and an entrepreneur that has built companies on- and off-reserve. As a previous politician for his Nation, Derek helped provide supports and programs at the community level for Indigenous employees, and currently supports corporate, non-profit, and municipal clients plan for and implement inclusive employment strategies.



morning breakout sessions

11:05 AM – 12:05 PM

Inclusive Apprenticeship & Employment in the Trades (PIC 120)

This session explores inclusive apprenticeship and employment in the skilled trades, creating space for important conversations about how we can build pathways that work for more people. As the demand for skilled workers continues to shape Alberta's workforce, creating opportunities for a broader range of talent is increasingly important—from opening the door to the trades to supporting individuals as they build meaningful, long-term careers.



EMMA KIEFTENBELD, NAIT

Emma Kieftenbeld (she/her) is a Career & Employment Liaison at NAIT, where she connects employers and students through hiring fairs, information sessions, and other career focused events. In addition to this, she helps students navigate the journey from classroom to career by teaching pre-employment skill building. For a number of years prior to this, Emma worked in supportive employment with newcomers and people with disabilities, helping employers to diversify their workforce and build inclusive attitudes.



RYAN MARSHALL, NAIT

Ryan Marshall is an Academic Liaison – Apprenticeship Focus at NAIT, specializing in apprenticeship programming and pathways into the trades. With a Red and Blue Seal as a Parts Technician and a background in apprenticeship legislation, Ryan is passionate about supporting learners and professionals at all stages of their careers. Currently pursuing a Business for Journeyperson Pathway to Management Diploma, Ryan advocates for inclusivity, equity, and allyship in skilled trades. Dedicated to providing a collaborative environment, Ryan believes in the transformative power of mentorship and representation to build a stronger, more diverse trades community.



afternoon breakout sessions

1:25 PM – 2:25 PM

Accessibility is for Every Body (PIC 120)

What if accessibility wasn't something we added after a barrier was identified, but something we considered from the very beginning?

This session challenges common myths about accessibility and explores how inclusive design can create better workplaces for everyone. Through lived experience, practical examples, and an intersectional approach, participants will consider accessibility across physical spaces, furniture, equipment, policies, workplace culture, and psychological safety.

Attendees will leave with practical strategies for designing workplaces that embrace human diversity and help people feel welcomed, valued, and able to contribute.



DIANA DIMMOCK

Diana Dimmock is the founder of Accessibility 4 Every Body Consulting Inc., a size-inclusive consulting firm based in Sherwood Park, Alberta. Drawing from her lived experience as a disabled and plus-size woman, she brings an authentic and intersectional perspective to accessibility consulting.

Diana partners with businesses and organizations to uncover and address the often-unseen barriers that unintentionally exclude employees and customers. As a consultant and public speaker, she is passionate about advancing equity while demonstrating that accessibility and size inclusion are also smart business strategies. By helping organizations serve more people, increase customer loyalty, and grow with integrity, she reframes accessibility as a holistic, human-centered practice that benefits everyone.

Through consulting, workshops, and professional development, Diana helps organizations create environments where every body feels welcomed, respected, and valued.

afternoon breakout sessions

1:25 PM – 2:25 PM



Human Rights and the Duty to Accommodate in the Workplace (Main Stage)

This session introduces essential information about Alberta's human rights legislation, especially as it relates to disability and the workplace. Participants will be introduced to concepts such as the duty to accommodate, undue hardship, and bona fide occupational requirements, and learn more about related Commission resources that facilitate accommodation in employment.

FACILITATED BY LINDA DAVIDSON & DIANA PEARSON



Beyond the Checkbox: Creating Inclusive Workplaces That Thrive (PIC 122)

Explore disability and inclusion in the workplace through an employer lens, with insights drawn from both personal and professional experience. This session will examine evolving perspectives on disability, universal design, intersectionality, and practical approaches to creating more inclusive and supportive workplaces where everyone has a role to play.

CHRISTINE MALONE

Christine Malone is the Manager, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion for Canada Post. She has had the privilege of working in the field of equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility at local, regional and national levels, for more than 25 years. This has included valuable experience in the nonprofit and municipal sectors. Christine is passionate about social justice and in particular, issues related to employment and implementing inclusive workplace practices.

Christine recently relocated from Ottawa to Edmonton. As a Metis woman living with disabilities and raised in Saskatchewan, Christine is a proud auntie of four energetic and entertaining nieces and nephews. A believer in lifelong learning, Christine enjoys travel and good food as well as creative writing and drawing when inspiration strikes.

MOVEMENT BREAK FACILITATOR

Kyle Lobb

Kyle Lobb is a NAIT graduate in the personal fitness training program, graduated in the class of 2017. Since that time, Kyle has not only sought to make a career as a fitness trainer, but to offer his services as a trainer and advocate for the disabilities communities in the Edmonton area. As a fitness trainer and an advocate. Kyle has a strong passion for assisting the Autistic and Neurodivergant community, but is always looking to learn more about different communities and how to assist them in any way that he can.



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CLOSING KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Erin Davis



Erin Davis (she/her) helps organizations move beyond performative DEI to embed inclusion where it matters most—within leadership decisions, governance, and everyday operations. As the Founder and Lead Inclusion Strategist of Erin Davis Co., she partners with executive teams, boards, and HR leaders to translate inclusion from intention into action—strengthening performance, culture, and long-term sustainability.

An award-winning strategist and sought-after speaker, Erin has contributed to global conversations on gender equity and leadership at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. She is also the host of *Unapologetic with Erin Davis*, a platform for bold conversations and quiet truths shaping the future of leadership and work.

Based in Edmonton, Treaty 6 Territory and Region 4 of the Métis Nation of Alberta, Erin lives with her husband and two children, where together they are building a world where inclusion is not an initiative—but a lived reality.

SESSION INFORMATION

What Are We Missing? Turning Awareness into Everyday Action

Awareness is an important starting point for inclusion — but what happens next? In this closing keynote, Erin Davis invites participants to consider how inclusion moves beyond good intentions and into the everyday experiences, decisions, systems, and practices that shape our workplaces and communities.

Through the idea that discomfort is data, Erin will explore what we can learn from the moments that challenge what we think we know, and why getting curious about those moments can reveal barriers, assumptions, and opportunities we might otherwise miss. Participants will also be challenged to consider how we know inclusion is actually happening — looking beyond activities and intentions to the experiences and outcomes that provide meaningful evidence of progress.

Ultimately, the keynote will invite participants to consider what they can do differently when they return to their workplaces and communities. Because meaningful change rarely happens all at once. It happens through the small, intentional choices we make again and again.

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2026 sponsors

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