

## Community Living Chatham-Kent launches 'Be the Spark' campaign

By [Ellwood Shreve](#), Chatham Daily News

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Brett Gore, middle, has gained some valuable work experience at Abstract Marketing helping the company create a new website for the agency. Abstract Marketing owners Andrew Thiel, left, and Mark Requena are recognized by Community Living Chatham-Kent for 'sparking change' by making their workplace more inclusive. (Handout)

Community Living Chatham-Kent has launched the 'Be the Spark' campaign to encourage people to become engaged with including those with intellectual disabilities in the community.

Angela Corso, manager of community relations for Community Living Chatham-Kent, said the agency is looking at four specific areas to spark change, including the workplace, home, community and schools.

She said this is in keeping with the agency's goal "that all people live in a state of dignity, share in all elements of living in the community and have the opportunity to participate effectively."

Corso said Community Living is focusing on the workplace to launch the Be the Spark campaign, noting the agency has a lot of success stories matching clients with employees.

She credits Abstract Marketing, which is creating a new website for the agency, for being a spark by enabling client Brett Gore to gain valuable work experience by helping with content configuration on the new website.

Steve Stokley, manager of JOBWORX, through Community Living, said there are currently 115 people working through the program across Chatham-Kent.

He said jobs range from working at insurance companies, gas stations, grocery stores and greenhouses, adding the jobs are in Chatham, Dresden, Ridgetown, Blenheim and Tilbury.

While the majority of jobs are part-time, Stokley said there are clients working full-time for several years.

He cited Tracey Major as example, noting she has worked for Kent and Essex Mutual Insurance for the past seven years, who is a valued employee with several defined responsibilities.

One of the first hurdles that often needs to be cleared in placing clients through JOBWORX is the misconceptions people may have.

"Probably the hardest thing to get across to the general public and business owners that people who are on ODSP (the Ontario Disability Support Plan) they really do want to work," Stokley said.

He noted 75 per cent of people on ODSP are not working, "but the vast majority of them would like to be working."

Stokley added that since many have waited so long to get a job, "they are often your best employee, ever."

He said they have a great attendance record and are more apt to be extra careful on the job, because they already live with a disability.

Stokley said the jobs provided through JOBWORX are competitively paid, but noted they don't have to be 40 hours a week.

He said there are people in the program who would love to fill a position that may only require four to six hours a week so they can have an opportunity to be out in the community.

"For us, it's all about inclusiveness."

Stokley said if anyone is interested in finding employees through JOBWORX, they can call 519-351-0460.

"I've got four staff that would love to come out and talk to any employer that has any interest," he said.