

Nfld. & Labrador

Job agency celebrates milestone

Firm finds jobs for people with developmental disabilities

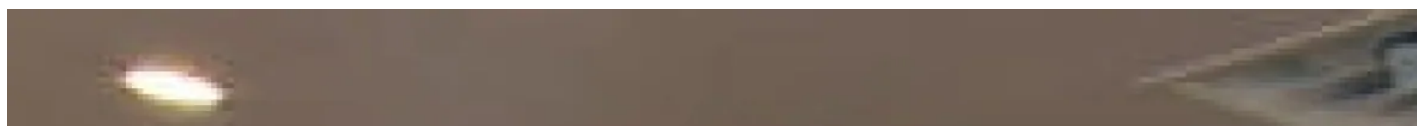
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Tim Sheppard has been working at Pita World on Torbay Road in St. John's for six years. He is the company's longest-serving employee. (CBC)

Avalon Employment, a not-for-profit supported employment agency in St. John's, celebrated 20 years of operation on Wednesday.

The agency finds jobs for people with developmental disabilities.





Sean Wiltshire is CEO of Avalon Employment Inc. (CBC)

Sean Wiltshire started the organization two decades ago as a summer job for himself.

He said he's seen a major employment shift in the province over that time.

"Before, you were always trying to get them to hire an individual with a disability out of a social responsibility to the community," said Wiltshire.

"Today, it's completely different. They hire them for the economic reasons that they need good employees."

Wiltshire added that over the years it's become easier to match people with jobs, and more companies are turning to him for reliable workers.

"It's real jobs, for real pay, in real communities."

Return on investment

Wiltshire said a recent review of his program revealed a big return on investment for Avalon Employment Inc. The company is funded by the provincial government.

"For every dollar government gives us to support somebody going to work, the return on investment for them is anywhere between \$2.50 and \$3.80. So it's a good investment."

Tim Sheppard has become a key employee at Pita World in St. John's.

He's the company's longest-serving employee, having worked at the Torbay Road outlet for six years.

Sheppard performs a variety of tasks in an average work day.

"I wash dishes and I clean ... sweep the floors, and I put drinks in the cooler," said Sheppard. "I get to meet customers and I earn some pocket money for myself."

Sheppard got the job with the help of Wiltshire's agency. Now, he's saving for a vacation this summer.

"I might go on a trip to California to see my niece."

In an economy with high turnover in the service industry, Pita World owner Ryan Pride says finding long-term workers is a challenge.

"Usually an employee only sticks around six months, max," said Pride.

"Having Tim here, he's a great help. Washing dishes, cleaning, helping us out with the food, prep work ... whatever we need him to do. He's great."

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