

JOE HOFFER – COHEN HIGHLEY LAW FIRM LLP



2010

London, ON

Twenty years ago, the law firm of Cohen Highley LLP demonstrated their commitment to include people who have a disability in their workplace. Joe Hoffer's personal commitment to this initiative is outstanding. He has been instrumental in advocating and championing for inclusion in the workplace.

Cohen Highley has four offices (Kitchener, London, Sarnia and Chatham) across Ontario and offers a broad range of legal services covering corporate-commercial, real estate, wills and estates, administrative and commercial and civil litigation.

For 20 years, Kelly Taylor was employed with the firm in a position which had a tremendously positive impact on her quality of life. Kelly's presence in the workplace, in turn, strengthened the team at the firm and enhanced Cohen Highley's position as an inclusive employer. Kelly was responsible for internal deliveries, client services and the upkeep of common use areas including the kitchen, boardrooms and photocopiers. In 1997, Joe and Kelly shared their experience by profiling their story in "It's a Smart Move", a publication provided to agencies to support the business case for hiring people who have a disability. Kelly has since transitioned into retirement and is enjoying life.

"There were some cost preconceptions that were associated with specialized equipment and programs, however we found these to be minimal. People tend to think it will cost a great deal of money to accommodate those with disabilities when really the cost is minimal."

- Joe Hoffer, Partner Cohen Highley LLP

Since hiring Kelly, Cohen Highley LLP has continued to provide dozens of additional opportunities to people who have a disability, hiring over 24 individuals with evident and non-evident disabilities.

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Advocating for Change

Joe has chronicled the Cohen Highley experience to challenge other London-area law firms to become inclusive employers. He has written articles in industry magazines and media such as the London Business Week and addressed business obligations regarding accessibility on FRESH Radio.

He has traveled to Toronto to speak at Queen's Park on the challenges faced by people with a disability. He represented ODEN at the Ministry of Finance pre-budget conference and the Social Assistance Review Commission.

His firm has representation on the Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure's Partnership Council.

Joe has participated in a panel to build strategies for effectively supporting adults with Down Syndrome to an audience of clinicians, managers, front-line staff and family members. This outreach challenged professionals to push the boundaries of inclusion to new heights.

In 2006, Joe and Kelly presented at the Canadian Association for Supported Employment Conference in Toronto. Their story directly resulted in many new job opportunities in the Business and Finance sectors.

Joe and Kelly have walked the runway during Community Living London's fund-raiser fashion show entitled "A Night of Heroes" that helped [raise over \\$76,000](#).

Joe has shared the business case for hiring people who have a disability with the Police Services Board of London and encouraged the Chief of Police to employ people who have a disability. Joe has played a key role in the Mayor's Challenge by advocating with Community Living London for the City of London to accept the challenge to hire a person who has a disability.

Joe has become a member of Community Living London's Board of Directors.

"Cohen Highley LLP is committed to reaching through barriers to attract the brightest, most creative and dedicated people to join our team. Our commitment to reaching through barriers begins at the application stage, continues through the interview process and afterwards. Accommodation and accessibility are ongoing commitments to ensure that new and existing employees are able to provide the best possible service to our clients."

- Joe Hoffer, Partner Cohen Highley LLP

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Recognizing Employment Excellence

In addition to the ***Champions League Award***, Cohen Highley has also been presented with the ***Ontario Leader in Accessible Employment Award*** which is sponsored by the Government of Ontario to an innovative business that has shown leadership by creating an accessible work environment; values the contribution of persons with disabilities; and promotes the development of an inclusive workplace culture for all.

Cohen Highley received an ***Ability First Award in the Large Business Category*** for demonstrating leadership in accessibility and hiring for ability.

Joe Hoffer has also received a Queen's Diamond Jubilee medal in 2013 for his contribution to inclusive employment and community support.

The Champions League award recognizes employers who've made great progress in hiring people who have a disability, promoting the movement and making a commitment to continue it in the future.