



Living Wage Waterloo Region 2016 Employee Survey Results

Living Wage Waterloo Region is pleased to share the results of the 2016 Employee Survey. The survey was conducted in the spring and summer of 2016 to explore workers' experience in the ten organizations that joined the Living Wage Employer Program in 2014.

A total of 152 employees participated in the survey between May and July of 2016. Based on fall 2015 numbers provided by employers the response rate is estimated at 29 percent of all employees who received the survey. Two employees agreed to a follow up interview. Approximately half of the participants worked at non-profit organizations and half at for profit organizations.

The Living Wage Employer Program allows for phased implementation of living wage by employers. This means that some employees may not have been paid the living wage rate at the time of the survey.

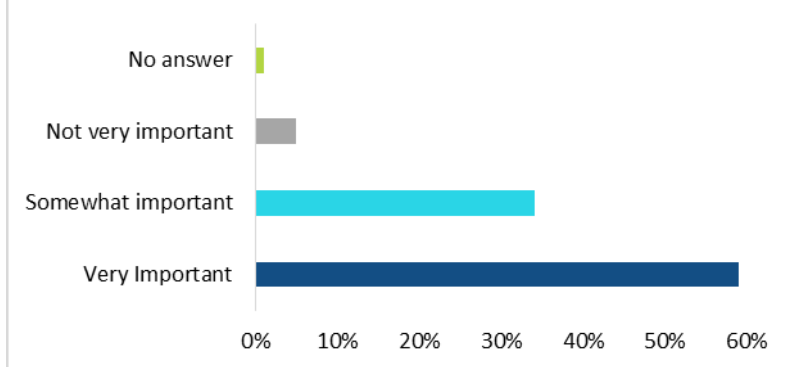
- 87% (127) of participating employees were paid at least a living wage when their employer signed on to the program.
- 11% (17) reported a wage increase after their employer joined the program.
- 2% (5) of respondents were hired after their employers signed on to the program and reporting earning less than the living wage.

1. Employees value working for a Living Wage employer

How important is it for you to work for a living wage employer?

Of the 17 respondents whose wages were increased in the last two years all but one said working for a living wage employer is very important. Eight (8) of these employees mention financial instability and the rising cost of living. Three (3) stated the importance of a living wage to alleviate the stress working with low-income members of the community. The one respondent who reported it was not very important stated their living expenses were covered by the combined household income of all working family members. The five respondents not making a living wage said

Importance of working for a Living Wage Employer



working for a living wage employer is either very or somewhat important. These respondents stated it is important for the reasons of the cost of living and the fact that paying a living wage shows the value employers put on their employee's work and overall quality of life.

2. Living Wage helps workers cover basic expenses

How would you describe your financial situation?

The living wage is calculated annually based on actual costs of living in a specific community. It is a modest budget that includes basic living expenses and a small cushion for emergency. It does not include savings for retirement, children's education or debt repayment. The living wage is calculated based on full-time work.

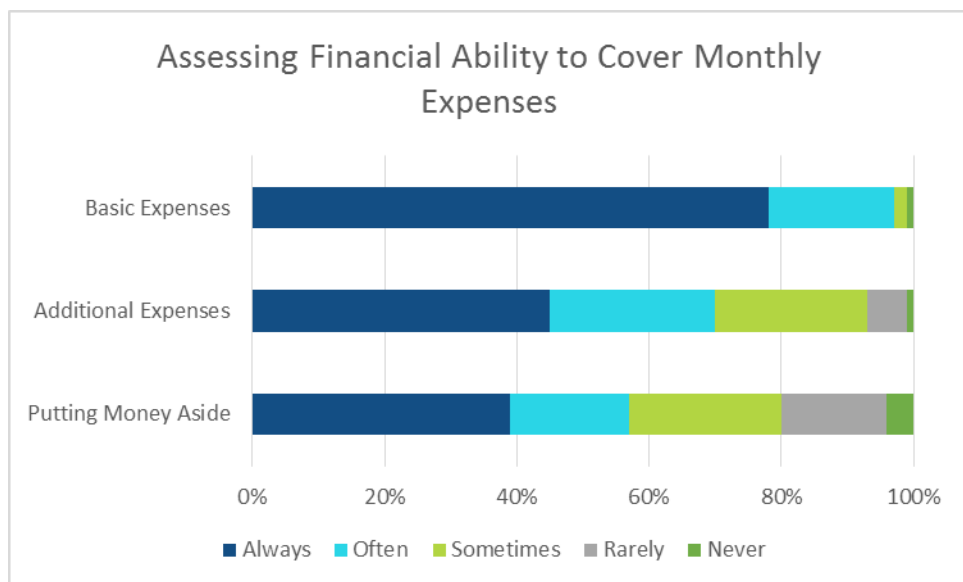
Basic monthly expenses (rent, groceries, utility bills, clothes, hygiene, medication, child care)

Additional expenses (movies, socializing, culture, car expenses, repairs)

Saving for Emergencies and future plans (vacation, savings, household item replacement)

Only 1 employee reported never being able to cover expenses. In the comment section they stated this was due to student loans. This employee was paid a living wage prior to their employer signing on to the program.

Of the 5 employees not paid a living wage 4 (80%) reported always being able to cover expenses and 1 reported often able to cover expenses.



There were 8 respondents who answered 'Always' to all three questions regarding ability to pay expenses and save for the future. 7 of these referred to spouse's income as a major contributing factor of being able to cover all the expenses. In all, there are 10 references to the importance of partner's income. One respondent reported earning the living wage rate, but also has to work a second job to supplement their pay.

"Cost of living and cost of family life is expensive. Regular minimum wage doesn't come close to offering enough financially to fulfill what a household needs to survive."

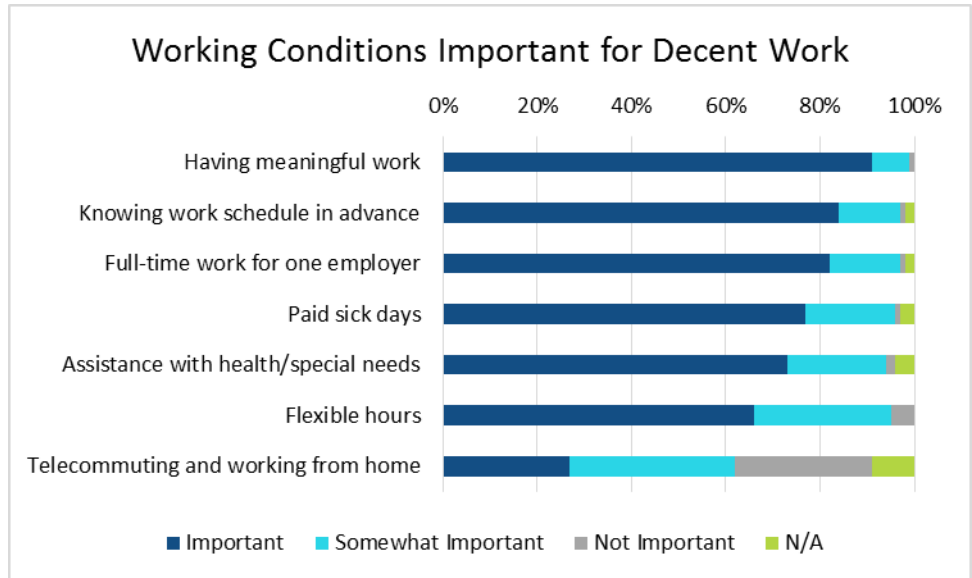
Decent Work

The Province of Ontario started a review of the Ontario Employment Standards Act in 2014. Many advocates, such as the Workers Action Centre in Toronto or \$15 and Fairness campaign, have brought to the foreground work related issues such as the need for paid sick days, elimination of discrimination in the workplace, advanced work scheduling, fair wages and compensation, as well as universal drug and dental benefits for low-income workers who do not receive social assistance coverage and cannot afford to pay for basic health expenses. Additionally, based on the broader determinants of decent work allowing for "social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration", the Waterloo Region Living Wage 2016 Employee Survey included questions to assess the importance of working conditions, certain job-related benefits and certain elements of a workplace culture.

3. Meaningful work, advance scheduling and adequate hours rate high

What working conditions do you find important for decent work?

All benefits listed in the survey questions, except telecommuting, are seen as important to some extent by at least 90% of respondents. Meaningful work is important or somewhat important to 98% of respondents. Ninety-seven percent (97%) of employees surveyed report it is important or somewhat important to know their work schedule in advance and to be able to work fulltime for one employer.

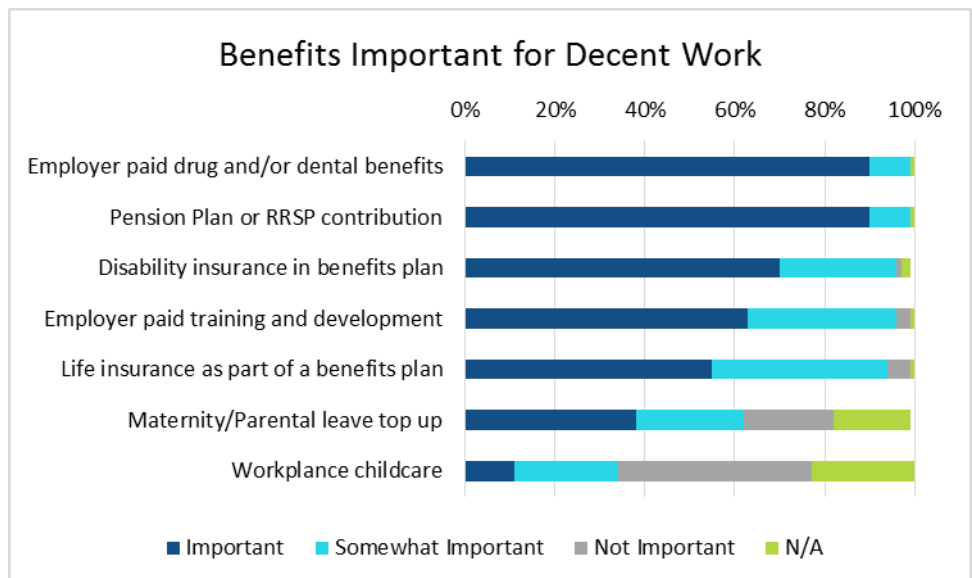


One of the comments regarding the work-life balance to make *“allowances when person is experiencing personal or family challenges”* was strongly echoed in one of the follow up interviews. Some examples given are extended maternity leave, flex time for medical appointments and emergencies with children, vacation time to suit the family. Other comments express support for the advanced work schedule, working from home and *“being coached to think creatively through difficulties”*.

4. Health and pension benefits important for workers

What benefits do you find important for decent work?

All respondents rated drug and dental benefits as important, as well as having a pension plan and/or RRSP contributions. Parenting benefits are rated low, probably because of respondents that may not have young children or any plans to have children. Answers may have been different if the question was asked in a more general tone, as important to many, not just to the respondent.



Respondents commented that part time works and contract employees are not eligible for benefits. There was a comment about mental health days being needed alongside/with sick days for those working in “Helping professions”. One respondent commented that vacation time is an important benefit and when older employees change employment places the vacation should be tied to age of employee rather than years of service with the new agency.

5. Workplace Culture also important to employees

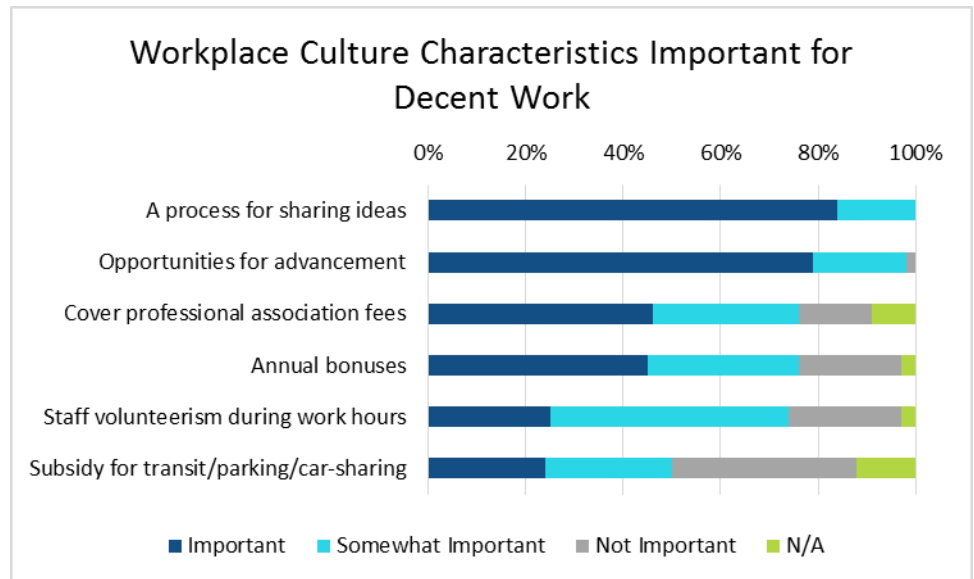
What do you find important regarding workplace culture for decent work?

Consistent with the high importance of meaningful work when it comes to working conditions, a process of sharing ideas is deemed important by all the employees.

Subsidy for transit/parking/car-sharing is considered important to only 24% of respondents and 39% felt it is not important.

Two respondents mentioned the facilitation of active transportation including safe and covered bicycle parking.

23% of respondents considered staff volunteerism during work hours as not important. Two (2) respondents commented that they do not support volunteerism during work hours.



“Just to know that they care not only about the bottom dollar but they care about me and my family means a lot. It gives me that energy to wake up every morning and come to work so that I can go out and help others.”



Interested in more details? Please click [here](#) for the full Living Wage Waterloo Region Employee Survey Report.

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