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## Toronto's Good Foot courier service also delivers good karma

By ARI ALTSTEDTER  
From Tuesday's Globe and Mail

*Virgin Mobile among 45 clients of non-profit company that employs people with developmental disabilities*

A new Toronto delivery service that exclusively hires developmentally disabled people doesn't want you to use their couriers because it would be a good deed. They want you to use them because it would be good business.

Good Foot Delivery's mission may be altruistic, providing jobs to people who face considerable barriers to employment, but when it comes to accomplishing it, they compete for clients as if altruism was an afterthought.

"If I was going to start another enterprise I didn't want it to fail," said Kirsten Gauthier, a veteran entrepreneur who helped found the company with her brother Jon. "I mean, it's got to work."

And so far it has. Only a month shy of its first birthday, Good Foot boasts a client list 45 names long and the distinction of being one of Virgin Mobile's preferred suppliers. Its business plan calls for 200 clients and 25 couriers at the end of two years. And thanks to some help from Virgin Group's Richard Branson, a London branch is already in the works.

Roy Banse, whose interior design company has been using Good Foot to get its drawings and samples to clients around the city, praises the couriers for being faster and more reliable than their competition.

"We thought we might have to give up a certain level of service in order to do something for the good, and we found that that's not the case," he said in an interview.

Jon Gauthier, Good Foot's head courier has a developmental disability himself. He and his sister had the idea for the company after a conversation about the difficulties he has finding steady work.

Because of these difficulties, Mr. Gauthier says the meagre stipend provided by the Ontario government is often the only reliable income people like him have, leaving them with little spending money and less opportunity to feel like a meaningful part of society.

Thanks to Good Foot, he says the five couriers currently employed can now count on a steady paycheque. But even more valuable is the sense of purpose and being part of a team that employment provides. According to Mr. Gauthier, employees often hang around the office even when they're not working.

Melissa McNeil, the company's executive director, has noticed that being viewed across the city as couriers, rather than people with disabilities, has done wonders for their self-esteem.

They have the ability now to go into any office and say, "I'm with Good Foot Delivery and I'm here to pick up your package," she said.

To hire more couriers, Ms. McNeil said the non-profit company is focused on making money to put back into the business.

To do that, Ms. McNeil knew Good Foot had to have more than just good karma and good service: it needed good marketing. The firm is priced competitively and actively advertises itself through slick pamphlets, business cards and event invitations all designed by professional graphic artists.

The world knows when a company uses one of their couriers because Good Foot publicly thanks them on Twitter.

The couriers themselves look professional zipping around the city by foot and on public transit in their black T-shirts, black North Face jackets and satchels, all emblazoned with the Good Foot logo.

More than just a successful business, Good Foot is striving to build a community among its employees. From office lunches donated by local restaurants to free weekly classes at a trendy downtown yoga studio, Ms. McNeil says Good Foot is focused on enriching its employees' lives as well as their pocketbooks.

Although it is currently in the process of receiving charitable status from the federal government, Ms. McNeil says even that won't change the entrepreneurial spirit that has made Good Foot such a hit among clients.

"They may switch to us because of our social purpose," she said, "but they'll only stay with us if we offer a great service."

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