

Final Report

Employment Programs for Youth with Disabilities: An Environmental Scan

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Executive Summary

The goal of this community consultation activity was to undertake a community-based analysis of existing services and programs for Youth with Disabilities (YWD) in the Lower Mainland, with a focus on HRSDC's programs and services. This included the review of existing Lower Mainland employment services and programming specific to YWD. It also included the identification of opportunities to assist YWD in becoming prepared for employment associated with the upcoming 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. The results of this preliminary activity will be used to assist HRSDC and other Government departments to effectively begin coordination and delivery of employment programs and services for YWD.

The project utilized various community consultation formats with the involvement of a wide range of participants (including YWD, employers, employer networks, HRSDC funded service providers, non HRSDC funded service providers, disability organizations, First Nations groups, government departments, and funding agencies). Several themes arose from these community consultations that help to focus on the effectiveness of employment programs and services for YWD in the Lower Mainland. The key themes identified are as follows:

Awareness

Concerns regarding awareness, both of needs and services include:

- ? No centralized marketing of programs for YWD within the region;
- ? Limited communication between case managers, service providers, YWD and employers;
- ? Employers' lack of knowledge of programs/services available to support YWD on the job;
- ? Employers' perceived misconceptions about YWD; and
- ? Service providers' lack of awareness regarding the needs of employers in terms of job requirements, level of support desired and business decision-making processes.

Access

Considerations in the area of access are:

- ? Stable relationships between YWD and service provider staff are crucial;
- ? The need for formal assessment tools (disability, interest/career, etc.) to assist YWD and their case managers make informed decisions;
- ? The case managers' awareness of disability issues is essential to appropriate program referrals; and
- ? The willingness of YWD to "self-identify" and take part in programs designed specifically for them.

Service Provision and Implementation

The service provision and implementation theme includes issues such as:

- ? The need for increased on-the-job supports and mentoring for YWD;
- ? Lack of services or outreach for YWD outside of Greater Vancouver, especially for those with specialized disabilities (FAS, FASD, Downs Syndrome, Mental Health issues, etc.);

- ? The time constraints associated with delivering programs and assisting clients, which limits the ability of service providers to “see the big picture” and develop creative solutions to help their clients; and
- ? The need to streamline processes for accessing value-added supports for YWD.

Systemic and Administrative

The systemic and administrative theme encompasses issues integral to improving the existing system. These issues include:

- ? The need for a common definition of youth and disabilities that crosses funding platforms;
- ? The need for a tracking database that crosses over funding platforms to accurately track each individual’s progress through the system;
- ? The need for suitable labour market information and demographics for YWD;
- ? The need to review and revise the definition of “success” to reflect more “realistic” outcomes; and the need for easier access to, and earlier involvement in, vocational assessment for youth with the information being carried forward to new program staff.

Identified Priority Actions

Through the consultation process, participants identified the following priorities for action:

- ✍ Increase job retention supports, job coaching and mentoring for YWD across all funding boundaries;
- ✍ Improve knowledge of existing resources for YWD and service providers by creating a central source of information;
- ✍ Develop training programs that combine skill building, certification, and work experience (place-train model) in areas where labour shortages will exist in the next ten years;
- ✍ Provide information and transition supports to YWD at an early age (K-12) to better prepare them for employment opportunities;
- ✍ Clarify the role and definition of ‘job coach’ to simplify and streamline funding across funding platforms;
- ✍ Connect with YWD through a centralized employment centre or mobile outreach program;
- ✍ Create a central source of program and service information for YWD that is thorough, consistent and easily accessed;
- ✍ Coordinate an annual conference on disability issues for stakeholders;
- ✍ Invite YWD and employers to take part in designing employment programs; and
- ? Harmonize local, provincial and federal efforts to provide vocational assessments, help youth in K-12 to find employment, and help youth make the transition from high school to the world of work.

HRSDC - Next Steps

The following “next steps” are suggested for HRSDC:

- ? Conduct a further study of gaps and duplication of programs and services for YWD that builds on the preliminary findings of this report;
- ? Create and maintain a comprehensive website that lists ALL programs and services, and includes a job board specific to their needs, that youth with disabilities can access;
- ? Develop a marketing package for employers, which would include information on services, subsidies and supports available to assist employers when hiring YWD;
- ? Assess the feasibility of creating a “central marketing agency” that acts as an intermediary between employers and services providers to promote hiring YWD; and
- ? Explore viability of a central one-stop resource centre for YWD that provides mobile outreach services and referrals in outlying communities.

2010 Winter Games Opportunities

- ? Opportunities identified focus on developing more responsive programs through strategic partnerships between employers, government, unions, educational institutions and service providers.
- ? Employment opportunities were noted for labourers, clerical workers, retail staff, tourism and hospitality workers, project managers, engineers, customer service specialists, cashiers and building maintenance staff.
- ? However, pessimism was voiced about how appropriate many of these jobs would be in the long run for YWD, who typically require a longer-than-usual training period and who often are unable to work in high-pressure situations.