



Waterloo Wellington Dufferin

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT STUDY

May 2011

INTRODUCTION



Introduction

The youth experience in the workforce is a critical issue in Ontario today. The youth employment experience has been

different than that of the adult population at large. Youth unemployment rates have remained higher than the average over the long term and for most youth, the job search takes longer, and the discouraged worker phenomenon becomes an issue. It also appears that rural youth are poorly informed about the opportunities in their areas and future career opportunities and youth with disabilities face specific challenges during the job search process.

Several specific issues are worthy of exploration. These include employment and unemployment rates for youth; their job search knowledge or lack thereof, the availability and usage of job search services and resources; the means by which youth are marketing themselves to potential employers and the means by which employers are marketing job opportunities to youth.

The Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin (WPB) initiated a study to better understand how best to facilitate linking youth with service providers and employers with the objective of increasing employment rates among our younger population. Focusing on youth between 15 and 29 years of age, the study provides perspective and direction on the new types of services and resources that are required, as well as how existing services and resources can be enhanced to better meet the needs of youth including those with disabilities in exploring and pursuing employment opportunities.

The research was guided by a Project Steering Committee consisting of representatives from the social service and business sectors and carried out by an external consultant, Harry Cummings and Associates (HCA).

The study coordinators greatly appreciate the funding provided by Service Canada and the participation of the youth and the businesses and service organizations that made this study possible including: 2nd Chance Employment Counselling, ARC Industries, Cambridge Career Connections, Cambridge Memorial Hospital, Centre for Career and Employment Services - Georgian College, Orangeville, Challenger Motor Freight, Continuous Intake Coop Program - College Heights Secondary School, Conestoga College - Guelph Waterloo, Frey Building Contractors, Hybrid Turkeys Inc., Independent Living Centre of Waterloo Region, Lutherwood Employment and Housing Centre, Rosmar Welding, Sun Life Financial, Tri County Training, Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin, YMCA-YWCA of Guelph.



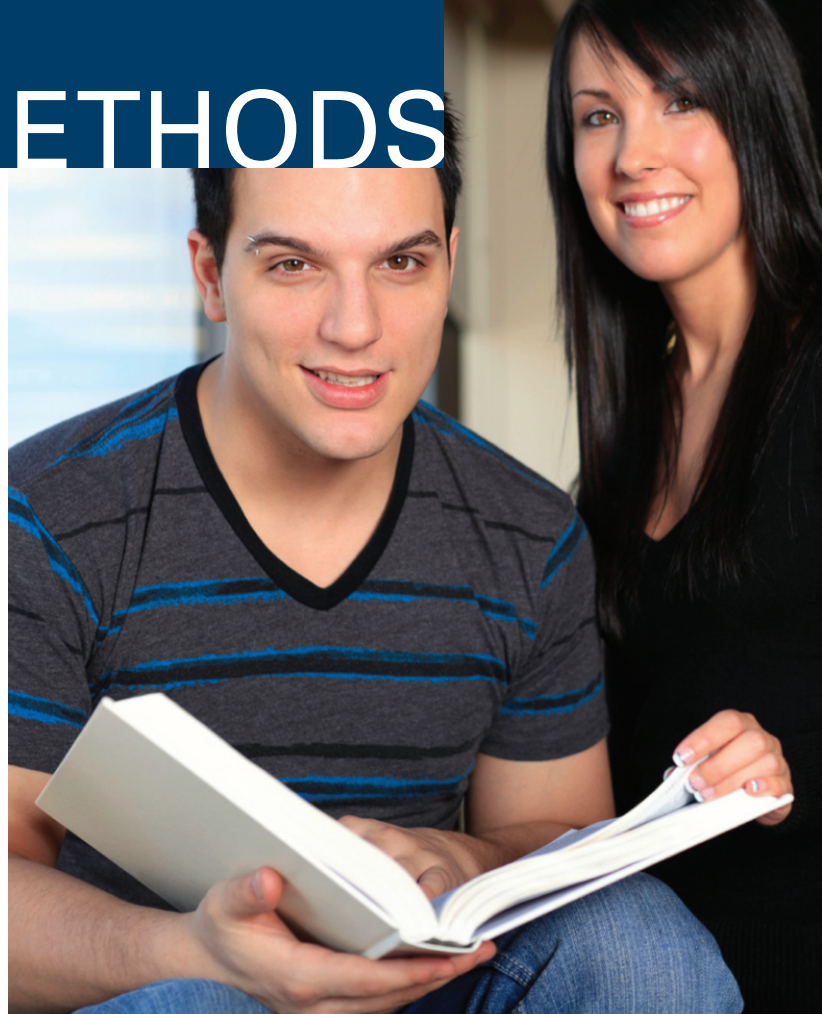
The full technical report with detailed findings is available from the Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Methods

A Project Steering Committee was established at the start of the study to provide guidance and advice on the research objectives and methodology and advice on issues as the research progressed. The members of the Steering Committee include:

- **Art Sinclair**, Vice President, Greater KW Chamber of Commerce
- **Barbara Moore**, Georgian College, Orangeville Campus
- **Carol Simpson**, Executive Director, Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin
- **Cathy Harrington**, Director of Employment Development Services, Lutherwood
- **Charlie Matjanec**, Employment Advisor, Conestoga College
- **Chris Baginski-Hansen**, Executive Director, 2nd Chance Employment Counselling
- **Doug Boucher**, Human Resources Coordinator, Independent Living Centre of Waterloo Region
- **Edward Pickersgill**, Co-ordinator, Our Place Youth Centre
- **Holt Sivak**, Program Manager, John Howard Society
- **Peter Cartwright**, General Manager, City of Guelph Economic Development
- **Val Millen**, Special Education Community and Workplace Officer, Waterloo Catholic District School Board (retired)



Various data collection methods were used in the study including focus groups, key informant interviews and a survey.

- Focus groups, interviews and an Internet survey were used to capture the views and insights of youth including those at risk and those with disabilities. A total of 27 youth participated in the focus groups and interviews and 223 youth participated in the online survey.
- Key informant interviews were conducted with seven employers representing different economic sectors to better understand the type of job opportunities for youth, as well as the way these opportunities are being promoted.
- Key informant interviews were conducted with nine Educators/Training Agencies (e.g. representatives from high school, college, university institutions, and other organizations) to not only understand the type of job search services/resources being made available to youth, but also how the delivery of these services has changed in recent years. Educators/Training Agencies were also asked to comment on what further changes are needed in terms of service delivery in order to improve youth awareness and access to job opportunities.



YOUTH SURVEY

Youth Survey Results

A total of 223 youth participated in the online survey ranging in age from 15 to 29 years with an average age of 19 years.

Approximately 62% of the respondents were female and 38% were male.

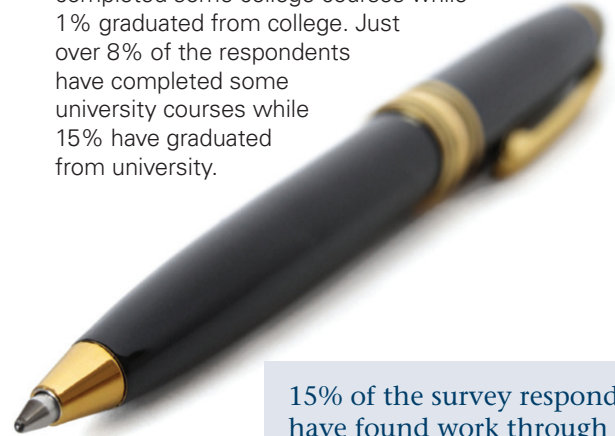
About half of the respondents live in Waterloo Region while 14% live in Wellington County and 5% live in Dufferin County. The remainder of the respondents (31%) live in neighbouring or nearby counties/regions. The majority of the respondents (62%) live in major urban centres such as Waterloo, Kitchener, Cambridge,

and Guelph while 38% reside in rural areas including small urban communities. The large majority of the survey respondents (91%) were born in Canada as were the majority of their parents (79%).

44% of the survey respondents have participated in a school co-op program.

- The rates for males and females are very comparable as are the rates for urban and rural based youth.

The majority of the respondents (63%) reported that they did not or have not completed high school while 8% reported a high school diploma as their highest level of education. Just over 4% of the respondents have completed some college courses while 1% graduated from college. Just over 8% of the respondents have completed some university courses while 15% have graduated from university.



15% of the survey respondents have found work through a temporary staffing agency.

- Although the rates for males and females are comparable, a slightly higher proportion of rural based youth found work through a temporary staffing agency compared to urban based youth (19% vs. 13%).



Employment Status

Overall, approximately 57% of the survey respondents are employed. About 48% of the 15 to 19 age group are currently employed compared to 69% of the 20 to 24 age group and 72% of the 25 to 29 age group.

A slightly higher proportion of male respondents are employed compared to females (62% vs. 55%), and a slightly higher proportion of respondents from small urban centres / rural areas are employed compared to respondents from major urban centres (55% vs. 61%).

Respondents with higher levels of education have higher employment rates.

Overall, approximately 14% of the respondents have stopped looking for work. About 19% of the 15 to 19 age group have stopped looking for work compared to 4% of the 20 to 24 age group and 7% of the 25 to 29 age group.

15% of the survey respondents have participated in a government wage subsidy program.

- A slightly higher proportion of males participated in a wage subsidy program compared to females (21% vs. 13%) as did a slightly higher proportion of rural based youth compared to urban based youth (20% vs. 13%).

Job Search Activities Used by Youth

Potential employees are using a variety of techniques when searching for a job. The two most common activities used by survey respondents are using a home computer to search for information on the Internet (71 %) and reviewing job boards/job listings at service agencies and/or on the Internet (53%).

Volunteering was identified by half of the survey respondents as an important way to gain work experience.

Picking up information from employment service agencies, attending job fairs, and participating in

job search skills development workshops are other common job search activities that are used by 23% to 27% of the respondents.

At least 20% of the respondents reported that they access one-on-one assistance from employment counsellors at employment service agencies and 8% participate in peer support/job search training programs. Respondents also use employment service agencies to access printing/ copying services (14%) and phone/fax services (7%),

The study shows that those age 20-29 are generally more active in searching for work than youth in the 15 to 19 age group. The most common job search activities used by those age 20-24 and 25-29 include using a home computer to search for information on the Internet (90%) and reviewing job boards/job listings at service agencies and/or on the Internet (70-80%). Between 40% and 50% of the survey respondents in the two older age groups have attended job fairs and between 30% and 40% have been assisted by an employment counsellor.

Several job retention challenges appear to be greater for youth residing in rural areas including:

- Inadequate pay (26% urban vs. 30%)
- Lack of full-time jobs (20% urban vs. 28% rural)
- Lack of access to transportation (13% urban vs. 22% rural)
- Inadequate job training (10% urban vs. 15% rural)



The most common job search activities used by respondents in the 15 to 19 age group include using a home computer to search for information on the Internet (60%), reviewing job boards/job listings at service agencies and/or on the Internet (39%), and participating in skills development workshops (20%).

Compared to urban based youth, a slightly higher percentage of rural based youth have participated in job search skills development workshops, picked up information from employment service agencies, and used printing/copying and phone services at an employment service agency.

Females appear to be more active than males in searching for work across a variety of job search techniques.

- The two leading activities used by females are using a home computer to search for information on the Internet (76% females vs. 65% males) and reviewing job boards/job listings at service agencies and/or on the Internet (57% vs. 48%). Females are also volunteering to a greater extent than males to gain work experience (58% vs. 37%).

Job Search Challenges

Almost 70% of the survey respondents have experienced some level of difficulty when trying to find work. Approximately 59% of the 15 to 19 year age group have experienced difficulty in their job search compared to 86% of the 20 to 24 age group and 87% of the 25 to 29 age group. The higher rate of difficulty experienced by the 20 to 29 group is likely linked to their interest and/or need in finding better paying jobs that are ideally related to their career goals and training.

Survey respondents identified a variety of challenges they experience in finding a job. The most common challenge is lack of work experience (58%) followed by lack of knowledge of available job search services (32%), lack of proper education (31%), and lack of access to transportation (29%).

A substantial proportion of respondents acknowledged that they do not understand the expectations of employers (21%).

Respondents also indicated that they need better job search skills (18%), that they feel uncomfortable accessing and/or using job search services (8%), and they need better computer skills to search for job information on the Internet (5%).

A substantial proportion of respondents also reported that they have personal and family commitments that interfere with their ability to look for a job (17%).

The most common job search challenges experienced by the 20 to 24 age group and the 25 to 29 age group include lack of work experience (70%), lack of proper/appropriate education (45%-60%), inadequate job search skills (30%-35%), and not understanding the expectations of employers (25%-35%).

The most common job retention challenges experienced by males include:

- inadequate pay (30%)
- inconvenient work hours (28%)
- lack of access to transportation (20%).

knowledge of available job search services (30%), and personal and family commitments that interfere with their ability to look for a job (20%).

Lack of work experience is the most common job search challenge experienced by males and females although to a greater extent for females (49% males vs. 63% females).

Lack of access to transportation is a common challenge for males and females although to a greater extent for males (35% males vs. 25% females).

An equal proportion of males and females experience challenges in understanding the expectations of employers (20%).

The most common job search challenges experienced by the 15 to 19 age group include lack of work experience (50%), lack of access to transportation (33%), lack of

Job Retention Challenges

Survey respondents identified a variety of challenges they experience in keeping a job. The most common challenge reported was inconvenient work hours (28%) followed by inadequate pay (27%), lack of full time jobs (22%), and lack of transportation (16%).

A substantial proportion of respondents also indicated that the job training they received was inadequate (11%) and that they did not feel they were being treated fairly by their supervisor and/or coworkers (10%).

The most common job retention challenges experienced by females include:

- lack of full time jobs (30%)
- inconvenient work hours (27%)
- inadequate pay (26%)
- lack of access to transportation (14%).

Some respondents also reported that personal and family commitments interfered with their ability to maintain a job (11%) and that they do not understand the expectations of employers (8%).

The most common challenges in maintaining a job vary across the three age groups. The most common challenges experienced by the 15 to 19 age group include inconvenient work hours (29%), inadequate pay (22%), lack of access to transportation (17%), lack of full time jobs (14%), and personal and family commitments (13%).

The most common challenges experienced by the 20 to 24 age group include lack of full time jobs (40%), inconvenient work hours (32%), inadequate pay (30%), lack of access to transportation (20%), not understanding the expectations of employers (18%), and inadequate on the job training (16%).

The most common challenges experienced by the 25 to 29 age group include inadequate pay (47%), lack of full time jobs (33%), inadequate on the job training (17%), unfair treatment by the supervisor and/or coworkers (17%), and inconvenient work hours (13%). Access to transportation appears to be a lesser challenge for this age group (3%).



FOCUS GROUPS



Youth Focus Groups and Interviews

The youth focus groups and interviews were conducted with youth from the Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge, and Guelph area.

The ages of the youth ranged from 15 to 26 years with an average age of 19. The findings from these sessions confirm that youth including youth with disabilities are engaging in multiple activities when searching for work.

One of the most common job search activities identified through these youth is searching for job opportunities on the Internet from home or from an employment service agency or library. This includes searching specific business/employer websites, conducting general searches using search engines such as Google and Yahoo, and using job search engines (e.g. Monster.ca, Wowjobs.ca, Cambridge jobs.ca, Kijiji.ca, Craigslist.ca, and Simplyhired.ca)

Older youth (20-29) are experiencing more extreme challenges finding work compared to the 15 to 19 age group.

- A slightly higher percentage of female youth have experienced some level of difficulty when trying to find work and females are experiencing more extreme challenges finding work compared to males.

A slightly higher percentage of urban based youth have experienced some level of difficulty when trying to find work

- Urban based youth are experiencing more extreme challenges finding work compared to rural based youth.

Youth are also making extensive use of the services and supports at employment service agencies. This includes accessing computers and the Internet, preparing and printing

resumes, accessing employment counsellors, reviewing job boards, and participating in job preparedness programs/workshops. The job preparedness programs/workshops have the added benefit of helping some youth develop their people skills and bring structure/routine into their life.

A substantial number of youth are also going door to door and directly inquiring if businesses are hiring and handing out their resumes. Youth are also reviewing job listings in local newspapers.



Youth have had mixed experiences at job fairs. Some youth find them to be helpful while others find that the events are often overcrowded and some employers are unable to provide specific details on job opportunities and/or fail to follow-up with inquiries that are made.

Some youth have participated in school co-operative education (co-op) programs and have found this to be a good way to gain work experience. Co-op programs in high schools need to help youth address transportation challenges to enable more youth to participate. Very few use social media (e.g. Facebook, MySpace) as part of their job search strategy.

Some youth expressed their dissatisfaction with the online job applications that some employers are now using. Online applications are viewed as being lengthy and difficult to complete and sometimes feature time

limit math questions. Youth view this form of engagement with employers as too impersonal. It also limits the job applicant from demonstrating other skills including interpersonal skills and it restricts the applicant from asking questions.

Youth with disabilities are using all the job search techniques noted above. The Internet is an especially convenient way for youth with disabilities to search for job opportunities from home or at an employment service agency.

Some youth with disabilities are also using the door to door approach to inquire about job opportunities and to determine if the work environment is suitable.

Youth with disabilities are concerned that many employers continue to ignore the opportunities for hiring youth with disabilities in their workplace and believe that more needs to be done to educate employers and their staff about Ontario employment laws and the advantages of hiring people with disabilities and how the workplace and work activities can be changed to facilitate this.

Youth in general recognize that many employers are looking for employees who can be flexible (e.g. change their schedule to respond to the needs of the job). This poses significant challenges for youth with disabilities who depend on transportation that can not be arranged on short notice. They are also concerned that inadequate job orientation and training is contributing to poor relations between employees and employers.

Youth who are born outside Canada appear to be experiencing more difficulty finding work than youth born in Canada.*

* Note: this finding needs to be viewed with caution as the survey has a small number of respondents born outside Canada (n=21) – further research is needed to validate this finding.

Access to employment service agencies can be challenging for youth who live in rural areas and/or have limited access to transportation.

- This can also be the case in urban settings where public transit is available but the cost of transit and the length of the bus route make it difficult for youth to utilize.



Acquiring life skills is a key factor for youth with disabilities in becoming more independent and prepared for the workplace experience.

BUSINESS / EMPLOYER

Business / Employer Key Informant Interviews

In general, the businesses that participated in this study are interested in hiring locally as much as possible. Local hiring practices are viewed by businesses as an important way of supporting the local community.

The businesses are using a variety of techniques to promote job positions including posting job positions on their business websites and using Internet job search engines (e.g. Workopolis, Job Bank – Service Canada).

Although some businesses continue to promote job positions through newspapers, one business noted that newspapers have become increasingly ineffective as a way to promote job positions as job searchers are increasingly relying on electronic formats (Internet) for the convenience they offer. The businesses using Internet job search engines are generally satisfied with this approach.

Advantages of hiring youth:

- Bring in new ideas and recent academic knowledge
- Enthusiasm
- Eager to learn and take direction well
- Fewer bad work habits
- Willing to work part time
- Flexible – able to work short notice / short shifts
- High comfort level working with computers
- Cost savings – able to pay minimum wage

programs and the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP). Recruiting for co-op positions through high schools and colleges is viewed as very effective as is posting job opportunities on job boards at college and university campuses. Most of the businesses reported good experiences with their high school / college co-op placements. In general, it was noted that the students coming through OYAP are more dedicated and professional.

Some of the businesses have participated in a government wage assistance / subsidy program but the amount of paperwork that has to be completed under these programs has turned some businesses off the programs.

A small number of businesses have used temporary staffing agencies to hire general labourers or when they need to hire workers on short notice.

Most of the businesses are engaging directly with youth through school co-op

In general, the participating businesses are not taking any special measures to inform youth with disabilities about job opportunities. In some businesses, certain job demands (e.g. physical mobility and strength) limit the opportunities for those with disabilities.

Several of the businesses reported that they offer incentives to try and retain youth in their workforce. These measures include offering opportunities for youth to further their education and training, offering regular salary increases, and job promotions. Several of the businesses are interested in hiring more youth in the next few years depending on market conditions and the available skill sets of the job applicants.

Disadvantages of hiring youth:

- Lack work experience
- Limited level of commitment to the organization
- Lack direction and career focus
- High turnover and loss of investment in training
- Unable / unwilling to commit to demanding hours
- Unable / unwilling to take responsibility
- Expect a higher wage than employer willing/able to provide
- Difficult to understand what youth expectations/motivations



TRAINING/EDUCATION



The service agencies also identified the ongoing need to change the negative or indifferent attitude that many employers have about people with disabilities and educate employers about how to integrate people with disabilities in their workforce

The service agencies have extensive networks with a variety of different community service agencies and advocacy groups and agency representatives often sit on multiple committees. This networking activity is crucial for understanding available resources, finding current information and making referrals. However, the activity is also time consuming and many agencies believe it is underappreciated and undervalued by the government.

All of the agencies engage with employers to some extent. Some of the more common activities include offering a free job posting service at the agency; providing guidance in recruiting, training and hiring young people; providing resources and information for accommodating employees with disabilities; providing information on apprenticeships, education/training and certification programs; identifying training support subsidies; collecting feedback from employers on economic conditions and their needs and expectations; using job developers to provide job monitoring, job trials, and on the job training and supervision; and facilitating the Employment Ontario Summer Jobs Service Program.

Training/Education Agency Key Informant Interviews

Educators/trainers are experiencing a number of challenges in providing employment services and supports to youth.

Some of the challenges are directly related to service provision while others reflect factors that are impacting the demand for services and supports (e.g. school drop out rates, changes occurring in the labour market).

The most common challenge relates to funding and resource shortages which are impacting the capacity of service agencies

to provide programs – resulting in reduced scope of programs, reduced program frequency, and waiting lists.

Funding shortages are also impacting the ability of service agencies to provide one-on-one support and counselling which is especially important when working with youth at risk and youth with disabilities.

Other notable service provision challenges include the following:

- Services and resources need to respond to a wide variety of education levels – one-on-one counselling is more appropriate for some youth, especially when youth do not want to use print/hard copy self-help resources
- Some youth need emotional counselling in addition to employment counselling and some agencies have more resources than others to respond but are still limited in ability
- Youth in rural areas and youth with disabilities have greater challenges accessing the service agencies due to limited transportation options
- Although some agencies have satellite offices in rural areas, the hours of service and the availability and scope of services and supports is sometimes more limited compared to the urban location
- Building and maintaining relations with employers is very important but can be time consuming and it draws resources away from other activities

Youth view employment counsellors as playing a critical role in helping them prepare for entry into the workforce.

Youth at risk are better able to participate in job search workshops and programs if costs are subsidized and/or they can be paid an allowance or wage during their participation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

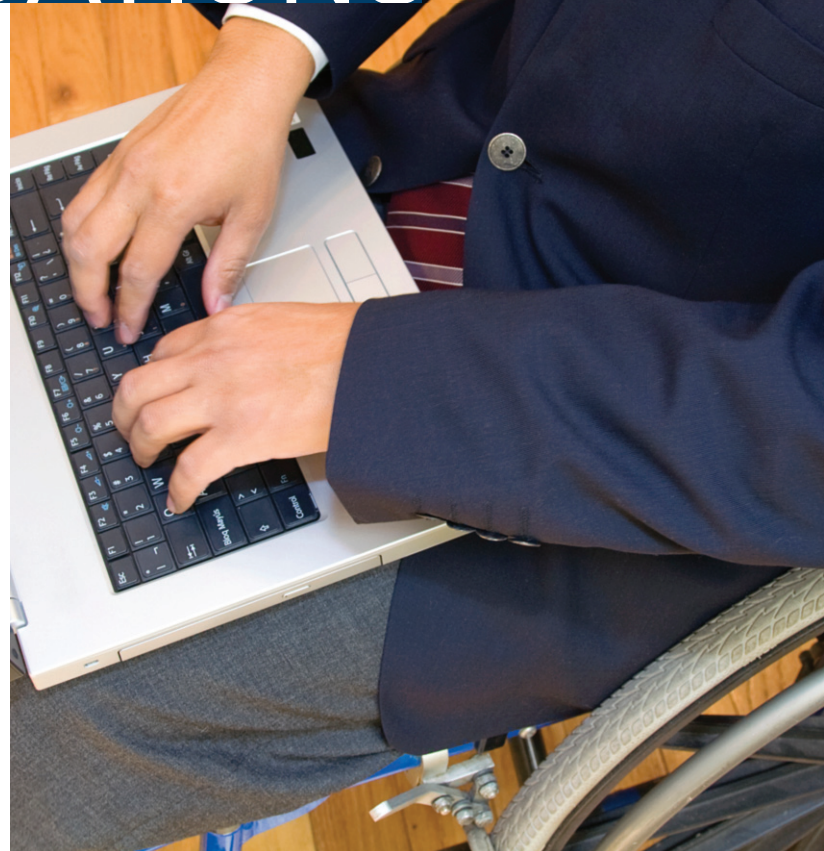
Recommendations

The following recommendations respond to the more common issues and challenges identified by the different stakeholder groups that participated in this study.

- Facilitate greater accessibility to programs by relaxing/removing some of the program entry requirements. For example, remove the Grade 12 diploma entry requirements for programs or at least remove the requirement for youth with disabilities.
- Facilitate greater accessibility to the service agency by exploring and supporting different transportation options for youth (e.g. providing bus tokens or gas vouchers, coordinating car pooling, etc.).
- Facilitate greater accessibility to services by partnering with other existing service agencies in small communities and offer select employment service programming through their facility.
- Support one-on-one counselling activities in employment service agencies including counselling to help youth deal with life skills development and emotional issues.
- Help to educate employers and youth about each others needs and expectations.
- Work with employers to educate them about the importance of providing adequate job orientation and training for youth as a way of fostering good

relations and ensuring that employer/employee workplace expectations are communicated and understood.

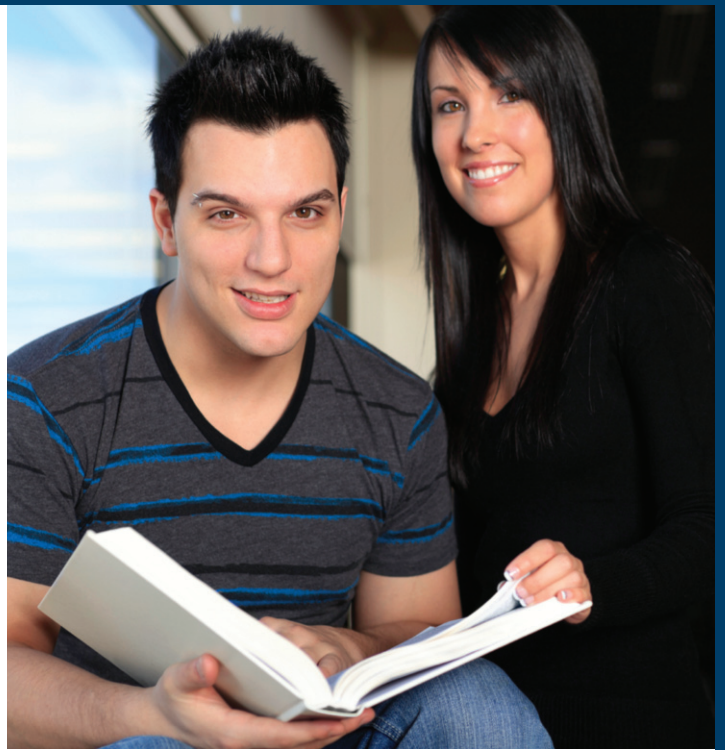
Computer and Internet access provided by employment service agencies is crucially important for youth who do not have access to a computer from home.



- Work with employers to encourage the use of more user-friendly job posting and recruitment practices.
- Work with employers to educate them about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities and how to integrate people with disabilities in their workforce. Provide employers with support in developing/enhancing their human resource skills to interact with youth.
- Encourage job fair coordinators to host the events in spacious settings to facilitate better access and mobility for the attendants. Encourage business representatives at job fairs to have detailed information available on the work duties and activities associated with the positions they are hiring for.

Staff flexibility is a key service requirement when working with youth.

- Whereas adults may be accustomed to waiting for service and having to make an appointment, youth are less patient and will not wait. The key to successfully engaging youth is to "get to them when they enter the door."



Workforce Planning Board
of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin

218 Boida Ave., Unit 5
Ayr, Ontario, N0B 1E0
tel: 519-622-7122
fax: 519-622-7260
info@workforceplanningboard.com
www.workforceplanningboard.com

Canada

Project funded by Service Canada

