

**Assessment of the  
Employment Services System  
in Hamilton**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## ASSESSMENT OF THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICES SYSTEM IN HAMILTON

In July of 2003, the City of Hamilton's Public Health and Community Services Department contracted the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (SPRC) to conduct an assessment of local employment services. Funding for this assessment was provided through both the City of Hamilton's Public Health and Community Services Department and the Government of Canada.

The purpose of the study was to assess the local employment services sector and identify strategies that would ultimately enhance client services. Specific areas of research and examination included:

- Identification of gaps in employment service provision
- Client knowledge of employment and training services
- The effectiveness of meeting the unique support needs of diverse client groups
- The case management processes used by employment and training agencies
- Identify and examine the present system of integrating and tracking of services the client receives between agencies.

The study incorporated six distinct methods of research, to ensure a comprehensive analysis that considers a range of perspectives. Specific methods included a review of relevant literature and demographic information, surveys of local employment service providers and clients of employment services; key informant interviews with local service providers; a roundtable meeting with local employment service providers, and; an assessment of an alternative service delivery model.

While the full report includes much more detail, the executive summary focuses on key findings that emerged through the course of the study. Key findings are organized under the specific research methods employed.

Following a summary and discussion of findings, the report concludes with a list of recommendations based on a synthesis of findings from each phase of our research. In some cases recommendations are broad, as they would still require extensive planning to implement. In these cases, provisions have been included to guide the course of implementation, based on findings from the study.

### A. Local Demographics

This section of the report considers local demographic trends that will ultimately impact on Hamilton's labour force in the coming years. To better understand the diversity of experiences in connecting with the local labour force, we consider three specific populations, including youth, new Canadians, and persons with disabilities.

Following are the key findings from this section of the report:

- Hamilton is facing an aging population and slow population growth, which will continue to affect the local labour force over the next three decades.
- Projections indicated that any future population growth will become totally dependant on immigration, yet Hamilton's immigration has dropped significantly in the past ten years.
- The highest proportions of unemployed individuals in Hamilton are found in the lower city, primarily North of Main Street.
- the majority of employment service agencies are located in Hamilton's downtown core.
- Unemployment rates are disproportionately high among new Canadians, youth and persons with disabilities than the general population

## **B. Local Employment Trends**

This section of the report provides an overview of three specific documents and plans, including the HTAB Local Area Plan, 2002, the City of Hamilton's *HR Matters* report, and the *Social Vision for Hamilton* report (Caledon Institute, 2002). Each of these documents and their recommendations are considered as part of local decision making, and have direct implications on the delivery of local employment services.

Following are the key findings from this section of the report:

- The HTAB Local Area Plan identifies access to apprenticeship opportunities as a barrier to employment in the skilled trades.
- With respect to school-to-work transitions, there is a need to provide more experiential learning opportunities for in school youth, and to address the needs of work bound youth as well as those pursuing post-secondary education.
- Many new Canadians in Hamilton require support in achieving licensing requirements and gaining recognition of their credentials. There is also a need for occupational specific language training.
- Many persons with disabilities in Hamilton require continued support in the transition to employment, and flexible work environments.
- Youth in Hamilton require more on-the-job training opportunities. High-skilled youth are out-migrating to other regions/cities, and employers need enhanced

incentives to hire and train youth. High school students who are unable to achieve success with the new Ontario

- curriculum will leave school and enter the workforce without a Grade 12 diploma. This group needs enhanced employment support services.
- The HTAB Local Area Plan recommends an impartial "one-stop" information, assessment and referral centre in Hamilton, and for services that provide a range of supports and interventions for disadvantaged clients (i.e. life-skills, training, and enhanced employment supports)
- With respect to school-to-work transition, the *HR Matters* Business Plan recommends strategies to attract and retain graduates, provide more work experience programs, and to educate youth around the "world of work" during elementary and middle school.
- The *Social Vision of Hamilton* (Caledon Institute, 2003) is based on the premise that economic progress is not possible unless we deal with skills development, social needs and quality of life. . It also focuses on minimizing duplication by integrating and coordinating various service sectors.

### **C. Existing Research on Local Employment Services**

Over the years the SPRC has been extensively involved in studying and addressing local employment issues. Considering only the past five years, the SPRC has produced a number of reports that highlight issues and barriers to employment and access to employment services in Hamilton.

While some of our work in this area considered employment issues generally, many of our completed reports and ongoing research relates to a number of special client groups, including: internationally trained professionals and trades people, persons with disabilities, and youth (including in school and at-risk youth).

Following is a summary of key findings, based on an analysis of previous SPRC research related to employment and employment services in Hamilton:

- In each of the five studies conducted by the SPRC, access to comprehensive and up-to-date information on local employment services was identified as a gap in local services.
- In local research focused on youth, new Canadians, persons with disabilities as well as the general population, a lack of work experience was identified as a gap in the local employment services system.

- A key theme throughout previous research on local employment services is the need for a more coordinated model of service delivery. The most recent study considering the needs of internationally-trained professionals and trades people recommended that Hamilton adopt a service delivery model similar to that in the neighbouring community of Kitchener-Waterloo.
- A key theme throughout previous research is that more coordination is required between the local employment service sector and other systems and institutions. Specifically identified were school boards, local employers, and various levels of government.

#### **D. Alternative Models of Service Delivery**

This section of the report examines an alternative model of employment service delivery to what currently exists locally. Hamilton currently maintains a fragmented approach to delivering employment services. While a range of services and service types are provided locally, there is no formal coordination of services.

In efforts to understand the respective benefits and drawbacks of alternative service delivery models, we compare Hamilton with the neighbouring region of Kitchener-Waterloo. In December 2002, with funding through the Kitchener Human Resource Centre of Canada, the YMCA launched the Employment Assistance Services (EAS). Essentially, the EAS provides centralized assessment of employment service needs, and referrals to the most appropriate local services.

Following is a summary of key findings from an analysis of alternative service delivery models:

- By tracking client progress through a case management approach, the EAS model provides accurate and reliable data on both the success of and demand for specific services and service types. This will ultimately create a feedback loop, informing the local employment service system of its strengths and needs for change in service delivery.
- By reducing or eliminating "bad fits" between clients and services, this model provides a cost savings to both clients and service providers, in terms of time and resources.
- The EAS system eliminates the need for service providers to conduct internal assessment of clients. Client data is also managed by the EAS, and is no longer collected by individual agencies.
- Currently, the EAS model in Kitchener-Waterloo only incorporates HRCC funded programs and services. While this includes approximately twenty local programs, it means that the local employment service system is only partly coordinated.

## **E. Survey of Employment Service Users**

This section of the report highlights findings from our survey of clients of local employment agencies. In total, one hundred and one (T = 101) surveys were conducted. Surveys were conducted through a one-on-one interview format, in five local employment service agencies.

In efforts to reflect the diversity in Hamilton and more accurately reflect the employment needs of specific populations, surveys were conducted in agencies which serve youth, persons with disabilities, newcomers to Canada, as well as the general population.

The following points represent a summary of key findings from the survey of local service users:

- Among the clients surveyed (T = 101), the level of awareness of service types was low. The average level of awareness across the nine specific service types was thirty-two percent (32%), ranging from fifty-seven percent (57%) awareness of "job bank kiosks", to twenty-six percent (26%) awareness of "self-employment assistance".
- The majority of respondents had visited more than one local employment agency as part of their job-search. When asked why, respondents most often identified "exploring", to see what other agencies had to offer, and collecting information from as many sources as possible to increase their opportunities to find employment.
- Consistent with findings from previous research, transportation was also identified as a barrier to employment by a number of respondents (31%).
- Clients were asked "what skills, experience or training would help you to get a job?" Thirty-nine percent (39%) identified "work experience", while thirty-eight percent (38%) identified "job-skills training".
- When asked "what type of employment service would be most valuable in helping someone find work in Hamilton?" respondents suggested the need for more one-on-one individualized service, more emphasis on job-search training, and by connecting or referring clients directly to employers.

## **F. Survey of Local Employment Service Providers**

This section of the report provides an overview of findings from our survey of local employment service providers. Surveys were sent by fax to seventy (70) employment service agencies in Hamilton. In total, forty-four (T = 44) surveys were returned, representing a response rate of sixty-three percent (63%).

The survey was designed to collect information and the perspectives of local employment service providers on their client population and services they provide, trends in local

employment services identified through previous research, and approaches to service coordination and case management.

Following is a list of key findings from the survey of local employment service providers:

- For each of ten specific service types, more than half of all service providers surveyed required specific qualification to participate, ranging from fifty percent (50%) to eighty percent (80%) for specific services. Those services most often requiring qualifications were "mentoring programs" (80%) and "co-op programs" (80%).
- Thirty-two percent of service providers surveyed identified recipients of specific income maintenance programs (EI, OW and ODSP) as their primary target population. Youth were the second most common target population identified.
- In terms of increasing their clients' competitiveness in the local labour market", "job-search skills (50%), "awareness of employment opportunities" (46%) and "work experience" (46%) were the needs most often identified.
- Service providers surveyed most often identified "lack of transportation" (57%), and "costs associated with work" (29%) as circumstances that affect the employability of their clients. Additional comments provided by service providers further suggested that financial circumstances may be a barrier for some clients, identifying poverty and housing as issues.
- Ninety-three percent (93%) of respondents felt that "a system that maintained comprehensive and up-to-date information on all local services and programs" would be "a benefit to local service providers".
- One stop access to information would cut down on the resources required by service providers to understand what other local employment programs are available. Also, easy access to information would increase an agency's capacity to make more accurate referrals to other local agencies.
- Seventy-five percent (75%) of respondents felt that a lack of appropriate job search skills is still an issue among their clients today.
- Seventy four percent (74%) felt that a lack of work experience programs still represents a gap in employment service today. Based on a four-point scale, ninety-three percent of respondents felt that work experience programs were either "Valuable" or "Very Valuable" in increasing the employability of their clients.
- While eighty-one percent (81%) of respondents conducted a standard intake form with new clients, an ninety-one percent (91%) completed both a needs assessments and record of service use and outcomes, only 38% of these agencies share records with other employment service providers.

- Seventy-four percent (74%) of those surveyed were part of a local network of local employment service providers.
- Eighty-one percent (81%) of respondents felt that the current employment service sector requires more coordination. When asked why, respondents identified the need to avoid duplication by assuring the best client/service match. Also, that information shared through existing networks and groups is not always shared with front-line staff.
- Interviews with Local Employment Service Providers

As part of the research, in-depth interviews were conducted with five local employment service providers. Key informants were selected to represent services for new Canadians (1), youth (1), persons with disabilities (1), as well as mainstream services (2).

The interview format was designed to add depth to some of the key findings from both the client and employment service provider surveys. Specifically, the interviews focused on the coordination of information on local employment services, job-search skills, client case management, and the coordination of local employment services. The following sections in this chapter of the report identify key themes that emerged from an analysis of interview transcripts.

Following is a list of key findings from interviews with local service providers:

- All responses from key informants suggested a web-based model of coordinating information on local employment programs and services, but cautioned that funding must be maintained, as updating ever-changing information is a labour intensive process.
- There was a sense that there may be reluctance on the part of some local agencies to share information through a central system, suggesting that some agencies are territorial. Any attempts at coordination within the employment services sector may be seen by some as a threat of reduced autonomy.
- There was consensus among key informants that even if a centralized information system was in place and accessible to clients, they would require support in identifying appropriate programs and services.
- Key informants identified a range of personal and social issues that affect ones ability to effectively job-search. These issues include poverty, homelessness, education level, literacy, childcare, and self-confidence.
- Some generic job-search training programs do not assess or address individual needs. This is most evident with specific populations such as new Canadians and youth, who are new to the Canadian and local labour market.

- There was consensus among service providers that a record of service use would be a definite asset to service providers, citing that it would help to reduce overlap in service use.
- The key informants interviewed felt that a coordinated employment system should establish standard approaches to record keeping and staff training.
- that any move towards a more coordinated system must involve input from all stakeholder groups, including employers, service providers and clients of employment services.
- Service Provider Roundtable Meeting

As part of the research design, a roundtable session for employment service providers was held on Wednesday, October 8, 2003 at the Ancaster Old Town Hall. Personal invitations were sent to selected service providers, with an attempt to target all special needs groups. A total of thirteen participants attended.

Participants were provided with two broad questions for discussion. The purpose of the discussion was to clarify and add depth to our understanding of some of the themes emerging from our research. Although broad in their implications, the questions focused on pre-employment supports and client case management.

The following points represent a summary of key findings or themes that emerged through the roundtable discussion:

- All of the roundtable participants agreed that pre-employment programs are often crucial to a client's success in the labour market.
- Clients may be facing a variety of issues that affects their employability and potential for job retention. These issues may include poverty, homelessness, mental or physical health issues, addictions, legal issues and family stresses.
- Participants agreed that venue or system for co-ordinating services across service sectors would be a great benefit to their clients. Currently, clients often have a series of "case managers" all developing separate service plans that often conflict with each other.
- Longer programs and more one-on-one opportunities were recommended to ensure that individual needs are identified and addressed.
- Lack of transportation was also raised as a barrier for many clients of employment services. Without a vehicle, many employment opportunities are inaccessible. As suggested by roundtable participants, public transportation simply does not get people to where many new jobs are.

- Total commitment of the funding agencies must be present before any type of coordinated case management system will work. At the moment many service providers risk losing funding if they work with others.
- Alternative models of service delivery were discussed, with specific reference to Work Way in the Halton-Peel Region, and EAS in Kitchener-Waterloo. These systems include a central assessment and referral service. The central agency maintains contact with service providers to monitor client outcomes, and conducts any follow-ups, eliminating much of the administration at the agency level.
- Providing adequate and respectful client service was a reoccurring concern amongst the participants. An effective case management system must keep people as the focus not just administrative outcomes.
- It was strongly recommended that any move toward a coordinated or centralized model of service delivery should involve extensive consultations with key stakeholders, including clients, service providers and local employers.

### **Recommendations:**

Based on a synthesis of key findings from each phase of our research, the following recommendations were developed. In some cases recommendations are broad, as they would still require extensive planning to implement. In these cases, provisions have been included to guide the course of implementation, based on findings from the study.

Based on findings from this study, it is recommended:

- 1. That a coordinated system of maintaining comprehensive and up-to-date information on local employment programs and services be developed in Hamilton.**

Provision:

- The development of a coordinated information system must include consultations with local employment service providers, through existing networks including EARN and YEN. An infrastructure of information sharing does currently exist within the local employment services sector, which should be considered as the foundation for further development.

- 2. That a coordinated assessment and referral model of employment services be implemented in Hamilton, based on models existing in other jurisdictions.**

Provision:

- Implementing a new model of employment service delivery in Hamilton must include consultations with local employment service providers, through existing networks including EARN and YEN. A new model of service delivery should consider the existing structure of the employment services sector as the foundation for development.

- 3. That funders of employment programs and services reinvest in pre-employment supports, including housing, income and health service supports, that address individual needs and circumstances which may effect an individual's ability to secure or maintain employment.**

Provision:

- Service providers consulted during this study suggested that some generic programs and services do not meet the individual needs of many clients. Programs and services must be flexible, with the capacity to assess and respond to individual needs.
- **That funders of employment programs and services direct more resources toward developing and providing work experience opportunities in Hamilton.**

Provision:

- Developing work experience programs (i.e., apprenticeship and co-op placements, job shadowing, mentoring, etc.) requires extensive networking and liaising with local employers. Service providers consulted during this study cautioned that process of developing work experience programs must be well coordinated, so that local employers are not being approached by a number of employment service providers.

- 4. That the employment services sector be coordinated with other service sectors (including housing, health-care, corrections, and income maintenance) so that the system can effectively identify and respond to a range of issues and circumstances which may affect a client's employability.**

Provision:

- Findings from the study suggest a multi-disciplinary case management approach, where case managers from different service sectors coordinate the development of a client's return-to-work plan.

- 5. That an analysis of public transportation system planning and HSR routing in particular, be conducted to determine the accessibility of industrial areas or other areas with opportunities for employment and that long range planning for the City of Hamilton provide clear consideration of the public transportation needs of the labour force.**

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