

HAMILTON JOB
HJAC
ACTION CENTRE

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The Value of Employment-Related Training in Hamilton

Summary Report - March 2011

In June 2009, a partnership between the United Way of Burlington and Greater Hamilton, the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities (MTCU), and the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (SPRC) launched the creation of the Hamilton Jobs Action Centre (HJAC).

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Aimed at supporting groups of less than 50 laid off workers from the area, HJAC opened its doors in Fall 2009.

The purposes of this research are:

- to determine the value of short-term employment related workshops accessed by laid off workers at HJAC
- to explore options for maximizing these benefits to these workers and to the wider unemployed/underemployed population
- to explore the best venues for providing this type of training

Assessing the value of this kind of training in helping workers reconnect with the labour market offers a fuller understanding of how best to support groups of laid off workers. This evaluation focuses on the HJAC as a site in which to explore this important issue.

This summary outlines recent trends in Hamilton's labour market, a brief profile of HJAC clients, and highlights eight conclusions and recommendations from the study.

The full report is available on the SPRC website at:
www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca

Labour Market Trends

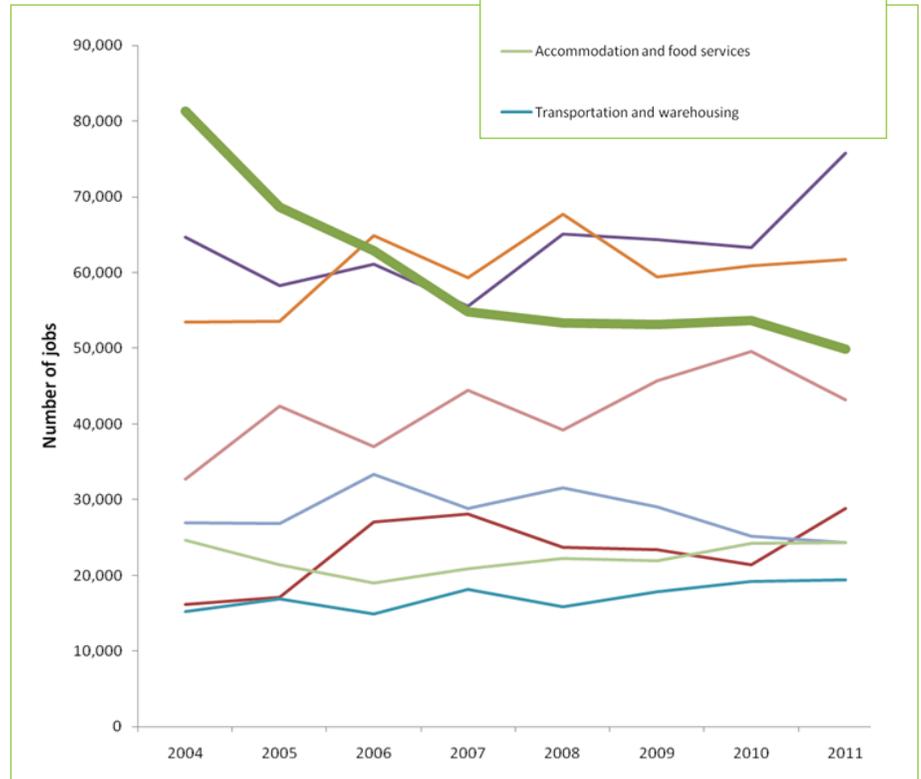
Taking 2008 to be the height of the recent recession, this graph shows that the manufacturing sector had been employing fewer and fewer workers since 2004 and in fact only declined slightly from 2008 to 2009. As an important source of employment in Hamilton, this steady decline in manufacturing jobs has effects throughout the community.

Comparing Employment Insurance (EI) recipients with the Ontario Works (OW) caseload for Hamilton over the last four years (2007-2010), we see that the number of total EI recipients nearly doubled between December 2008 and March 2009 to 16,908, while OW caseloads have grown more gradually. While the decrease in EI recipients in 2010 seems promising, this may be because some recipients are exhausting the maximum period of benefits, have not yet found work, and are not yet eligible to apply for Ontario Works. People cannot apply for Ontario Works after exhausting EI benefits until they also deplete any savings they may have. Because of this, there may be many people who are not receiving government financial assistance and are gradually using up their savings as they search for employment.

Together, these two graphs suggest that there continues to be need for employment related supports in Hamilton, despite some signs of the national economy starting to recover slowly from the recession.

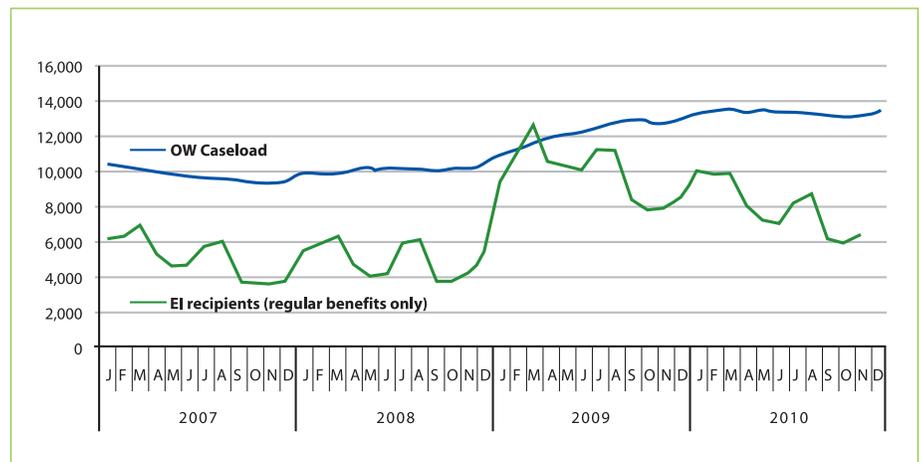
Estimated employment by industry (selected industries), Hamilton CMA, 2004-2011 (January of each year).

Source: Statistics Canada.
Graph prepared by Sara Mayo, SPRC, 2011.



Ontario Works caseload and Employment Insurance beneficiaries, Hamilton, 2007-2010.

Sources: Statistics Canada and City of Hamilton. Graph prepared by Sara Mayo, SPRC, 2011.



Conclusions and Recommendations

1. HJAC serves an under-served group, particularly older workers who may be uncomfortable with mainstream employment services.

Older laid off workers often face a number of barriers to re-entry into the labour market, including a lack of job search skills, lack of skills in growing industries, relatively low educational attainment, less willingness to relocate, discrimination against older workers, fewer opportunities for retraining, and training programs that are not designed to meet needs of older learners. Older workers who have been laid off have lower levels of reintegration into the labour market after being displaced.

Recommendation: A diverse range of employment services should be available in the community in order to effectively reach groups with different needs and preferences.

2. The peer support model is a key component of what is valuable at HJAC.

Clients surveyed described staff, who have personally experienced a layoff or shutdown, as being “friendly”, “caring”, “flexible”, “easy to talk to” and “motivating”. Peer helpers were perceived as having created a welcoming environment where the employment needs of clients were a top priority, even though clients and

peer helpers may not have worked at the same place in the past. Clients felt that they could relate well to the peer helpers at the centre because “they know what you are going through.” Some clients felt that mainstream employment agencies did not always offer the same welcoming environment:

..... “
Like when you go to a lot of those other government agencies...if they've never been laid off and all they see are people that are laid off, they don't treat you the same. I get the feeling that they think we're failures or something but it's not our fault that the economy went to crap.
– HJAC Client

..... ”
Recommendation: Employment services in Hamilton should include opportunities for peer support.

3. Connecting small groups to employment services is challenging.

Finding groups of 2-49 of laid off workers has been challenging for HJAC. Part of this challenge exists because some employers do not want to give out information about upcoming layoffs. That means that there is no opportunity to let workers know about supports available to them as a group while they are easier to contact because of being at one location (the workplace). At the same time, there are few places where groups of unemployed/underemployed workers can get services or support each other as a group.

Recommendation: Employment services for smaller groups of dislocated workers should be made available in the community. The employment service community should strengthen networks to identify and outreach to smaller groups of laid off workers. Connecting

with individuals laid off from a workplace and then connecting with their former co-workers is another important method of reaching these groups.

4. Temp work is growing, and often affects workers negatively in terms of wages, benefits, stability, and health.

The reality that many dislocated workers of all ages face today is the growing proportion of precarious work. ‘Precarious work’ means employment with some combination of little security, low wages, and few if any benefits. Over half (53%) of all jobs that clients had worked since first coming to HJAC were precarious (temporary, contract, or casual work).

..... “
You get the one guy beside you making \$18 an hour and you're getting \$11... and they're getting benefits and you're not for the exact same work.
– HJAC Client

..... ”
You know what? These temp agencies have to go – that's why we can't get full time jobs.
– HJAC Client

..... ”
Some workers face barriers beyond their control to moving from temporary to permanent employment. In the words of one client:

..... “
I was told I had to work 6 months to get full time employment. Well, 5 months and 2 weeks into it, before my probationary period was done with the company, they had transferred me down to [another site] to work one week down there with their plant manager's office, just general maintenance there, and they transferred me back to [the first site] the week afterwards and I had to start all over again from Day 1.
..... ”

Profile of clients

Of the 652 clients who came to HJAC for support, only 270 (41%) took training courses. Of clients who took courses, 152 clients were surveyed. Of clients surveyed:

- 69% are male and 31% are female
- Half are older workers (45 years of age or more)
- 23% do not have a high school diploma
- 84% took between 1 and 4 short-term employment related workshops

Conclusions and Recommendations *(continued)*

Temporary work has also been associated with worse health outcomes than for workers with more stable employment arrangements. This issue was raised by one participant who spoke about temp work and his health, citing serious dental concerns that, with no benefits and inadequate income, he has not been able to address.

Recommendation: All levels of government should consider the full impacts of temp work in general – and temp agencies in specific – on workers in Hamilton. Governments should consider looking to other models of casual or labour force coordination, such as that used in the former Canada Manpower Office.

5. Short-term employment related courses are useful mostly because they enhance clients' confidence in their ability to find work. Training and credentials must be complemented by experience.

Overall, clients who took more workshops had had better chances of getting jobs.

- Clients who took 1 workshop had a 50% rate of finding employment.
- Clients who took 4 workshops had a 71% rate of finding employment.
- Clients who took 7 or 8 workshops had a 100% rate of finding employment.

While we cannot say for sure that taking these workshops caused clients to get these jobs, it does suggest that the completing workshops is part of what leads clients to find work.

Mostly [I] updated and recertified for stuff I had already, but I didn't have the certificates and it was really important to have those.
– HJAC Client

"It gives you training that the employer doesn't have to spend time on." – HJAC Client

Some clients took workshops in several different fields in order to qualify for a wider range of jobs to help find work. This can be seen as a response to changing – and often temporary – employment opportunities, where workers may need to be prepared to change sectors.

Recommendation: These short-term employment related workshops should be available in the community.

6. Education is a key credential for finding employment.

Basic education is an important factor in employability. Almost a quarter (23%) of HJAC clients surveyed do not have a high school diploma.

"[Employers] can be picky, so if you don't have your high school, your resume is going in that dumpster."
– HJAC Staff

Recommendation: Local agencies and the community in general should support adults seeking employment to obtain their high school diplomas or equivalency certificates.

7. Clients want direct links with employers.

Many clients tell staff that they want the centre to connect them with employers. This essentially amounts to the role of a temp agency, except that the centre would not be the employer or receive payment from employers.

Recommendation: Action centres and employment service agencies should work more closely together to connect clients with employers, possibly through job developers. This could involve developing better referral mechanisms for clients in order to tap into existing relationships between employment service providers and employers.

8. Transportation is a barrier to accessing employment.

The cost of transportation is a barrier to clients in job searching activities, which limits their success in finding employment.

Recommendation: Community partners, possibly including the Hamilton Street Railway, the City of Hamilton, and other agencies, should collaborate to improve access to affordable transportation for job seekers. This could entail increased funding for bus tickets or changes to eligibility requirements for the affordable transit pass.

