



Thunder Bay Community Consultation Meeting
Job Connect
November 30, 2006

*A community discussion on workforce
Trends, Opportunities and Priorities in Thunder Bay.*

Facilitated by



The North Superior Training Board conducted a Trends, Opportunities and Priorities consultation at Confederation College on November 30, 2006 and invited personnel from the Job Connect offices in Thunder Bay, Dryden, Geraldton, Marathon and those who service isolated communities in Northern Ontario. The consultation commenced with an introduction on the mandate and work of the Local Board, its projects and partnerships.

Delegates were asked to identify local labour market issues that are raised in their day-to-day dealings with clients.

In remote areas there are challenges and gaps with literacy levels and building transferable skills for Aboriginal people. While the target age group for Job Connect is between ages 16-24 there is a growing demand to expand their services to older adults. More services for adults are required with employment information, training and resources available to address education and job skill gaps. Clients are requesting that training opportunities and resources be available within their communities so that they are not required to travel extensive distances to access training. There are shortages of opportunities for women to access training who are now faced with the necessity of seeking employment to support families that have experienced layoffs due to mill/mine closures. With new technology and broadband expansion, opportunities are available for on-line access to training and the need for communities to acquire these was seen as a viable option to provide training locally and to open the door to creating training centres.

The group identified the need to have Job Connect become more involved as a resource for labour adjustment initiatives particularly for the older worker aged 25-50. Seasonal workers also require assistance in bridging skills to increase employability options throughout the year. There is a need for companies and employees to proactively address the implications of plant closures and layoffs and undertake skills assessments and action plans long before closures take place.

As communities diversify and new businesses are created, the need for expanded support for these businesses was identified. Business owners often need on-going support to strengthen their skills as their businesses grow and develop. The need for more economic development to support this diversification was seen as a positive initiative to help communities grow and expand.

The dynamics of the workforce is changing with the increase of older workers and the growth of the Aboriginal workforce and communities and businesses need to prepare to meet their needs. The need for literacy programs, skills training and cultural sensitivity are areas that businesses and communities are going to be looking for to build a strong employee base.

The following points represent employment development strategies and recommendations by the Job Connect staff that would serve to assist their client base:

- An incentive program to reward Job Connect and other employment agencies for their programs' positive outcomes should be created.
- The need for more financial support for the start-up for local businesses is increasing. Resources need to be extended to include on-going support for training and problem solving for businesses beyond their first few years to contribute to their sustainability.
- Communities need to start acting like a 'business' by shifting attitudes and marketing efforts to attract 'clients' to their respective towns and cities. Our "lifestyle" in one of the best in the world and we need to tell people how great it is to live in this region.
- There needs to be more regional marketing to attract industry and trade to Northwestern Ontario to diversify the economy beyond primary resource extraction. Local communities such as Manitouwadge are working on "age appropriate" marketing as a retirement community modelled after Elliott Lake which has been successful in this attempt.
- The need for more economic development in the area was seen as an opportunity to create jobs for Job Connect clients.
- Job Connect should be included as a resource for adjustment initiatives in communities. There needs to be support for a campaign to help workers who need to prepare themselves for adjustment. These programs should support the worker to do self-assessment and create a plan for re-training or job searching. With advance notice and the cooperation and commitment of the major employer in communities, much can be done to plan for and ameliorate the impacts of closures and to facilitate community adjustment. Several mills in the District and the region remain at risk of downsizing or closure.
- The idea that education is an industry until itself needs to be expanded to offer local training opportunities for workers within Northwestern Ontario and attract others here to the area for training. The creation of a mining training centre in our area was cited as an excellent example of this.
- There is a need for cultural training for businesses to accommodate the distinctive workforces that are seeking employment opportunities including Aboriginal workers.

- Youth are migrating to Alberta where there are many job opportunities but many of them are returning to this area due to the high cost of living and shortage of rental space. Local contracting firms are now establishing local work forces that are being employed on jobs they are doing in Alberta.
- There needs to be strategies and resources to retain and retrain older workers who are laid off, youth who lack experience and Aboriginal people.
- There are currently few opportunities for employment that offer levels of wages that workers want and need and the gap between high paying jobs and those that aren't is growing.
- There are gaps in the trades; highly educated people are returning to school to obtain trade skills; people with the education but no experience have to leave the area to obtain this experience to complete their apprenticeships. While the number of skilled workers leaving the area is on the rise, the number of businesses prepared to take on apprenticeships has decreased.
- It is the younger, better educated and highly skilled residents who are leaving to accept or seek work outside the region. The occurrence of 'doughnut communities' is increasing, where families in their mid-30's are leaving and the very young and old are staying behind. Health and social service organizations have or anticipate the loss of hard-to-replace professionals when whole families relocate.
- There needs to be a streamlining and seamless delivery of the processes for people looking for work to access information and referrals. Service delivery for employment and training has a variety of pathways that are often confusing for clients and there is little integration of service channels.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the North Superior Training Board I would like to extend our appreciation to all those who attended the consultation at the College. The feedback received was very positive and all found it a useful event in which to bring Job Connect personnel to discuss labour market development needs.

Marg Scott
Executive Director