



**Wood Buffalo Map of Youth Employment
Assets and Opportunities 2006-2008**

Executive Summary

Prepared for:

Youth Employment Coordinated Services Steering Committee

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In order to facilitate the collaboration and coordination of services for youth and young adults in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, representatives from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Alberta Human Resources and Employment, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, the Athabasca Tribal Council (ATC), and the Métis Nation of Alberta (Labour Market Development Unit) formed the Youth Employment Coordinated Services Steering Committee. The Committee's goal was to determine the challenges youth in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB) face in accessing employment. This Committee led a Community Engagement Process, which resulted in the creation of this report, the *Wood Buffalo Map of Youth Employment Assets and Opportunities 2006-2008*.

Findings contained in this report were derived from an extensive community consultation process, as well as a review of relevant literature and statistics. Consultations were undertaken with a range of key informants, including:

- Youth and young adults between the ages of 15 and 30 residing in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo;
- Service providers that provide relevant programs and services for youth and young adults;
- Local employers and stakeholders in the local industry; and
- Other relevant stakeholders.

Consultations with key informants and information collected during the literature review indicated that youth and young adults face a number of challenges in terms of finding and maintaining employment in the Wood Buffalo region. The major issues identified, in order of importance, are:

- Affordable and available housing;
- Access to childcare services;
- Education or training;
- Access to transportation;
- Access to employment and career-related services for rural and Aboriginal youth; and
- Work ethic, attitudes and personal attributes of youth and young adults.

Affordable and Available Housing

Throughout the community consultations, stakeholders repeatedly noted the lack of available, affordable housing in the region. Vacancy rates have been near 0% for over a year, and housing prices continue to climb monthly. Due to the high cost of housing in the region it is often only those people with higher paying jobs, or couples with dual incomes, who can afford accommodations.

Recommendations

1. The Alberta Social Housing Corporation needs to develop an organized, coordinated approach to selling its remaining parcels of land in order to meet the housing demands of

the region. Any future land development must make accommodations for low-income or affordable living units.

2. The Homelessness Initiatives Steering Committee should consider the development of a youth hostel/shelter for youth under the age of 18.
3. The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, the City of Fort McMurray, and employers recruiting staff from outside of the region should clearly communicate the difficulties and challenges related to housing in the region.

Access To Childcare Services

There are several childcare providers in the region, though the ever-growing population of the region means there is competition for the limited number of childcare spaces available. Further, most of the childcare providers are in Fort McMurray with only a few services available in the smaller communities of the Wood Buffalo region. Coupled with the high cost of housing, many youth/young adults find it difficult to afford necessary childcare services. Individuals who work evening hours or shift work face the additional barrier that most childcare services operate during “regular business hours”, that is from approximately 6:30 AM to 6:30 PM.

Recommendations

1. Childcare providers should examine the feasibility of expanding their operating hours in order to accommodate parents who work shift work or in the evening.
2. Employers should consider providing childcare spaces on site, or partnering with local childcare facilities.
3. Alberta Children’s Services should consider expanding the eligibility requirements and stipulations for the Child Care Subsidy Program to allow parents to provide reimbursements to family members for providing childcare.

Education Or Training

A commonly identified issue acting as a barrier to youth and young adults finding or maintaining employment was a lack of sufficient education or training. This issue included the lack of employability skills, lack of life skills training, lack of a high school diploma, and limited access to certification training, trades/apprenticeship training and post-secondary degree programs.

Recommendations

1. Emphasize the increasing educational expectations of employers and the workforce/employability skills required by employers in existing programs aimed at communicating workforce expectation to Wood Buffalo youth, including Career and Life Management (CALM), Career and Technology Studies (CTS), Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP), and work experience.
2. Local employers should examine the possibility of partnering with Keyano College to deliver safety certification and work site preparation courses.

3. Keyano College should partner with institutions such as Athabasca University or eCampusAlberta to facilitate distance education for university degree programs.
4. Increase promotion of the ATC's University and College Entrance Preparation Program (UCEP) and Post-Secondary Student Support Program as well as the Alberta Aboriginal Apprenticeship Project (AAP) for First Nations youth to encourage them to go on to post-secondary training.
5. Rural school curricula should be expanded to include work experience/work placement opportunities for all students, including access to the RAP.
6. Schools in Wood Buffalo should partner with industry to expand students' opportunities to participate in work placement/work experience opportunities, not only for the trades but also for all occupations.
7. Schools should increase their amount of student wellness programs and services. As schools have limited budgets, one possible solution to provide more programming on limited funding amounts is by partnering with Some Other Solutions (SOS), who provides several wellness programs.
8. At-risk high school students should be encouraged to complete their high school diploma through existing and potential initiatives (e.g. Second Chance school, "Accumulated Credits" option through Alberta Education, etc.).

Access To Transportation

Key informants reported that the differences between work and transit schedules made it difficult for youth/young adults to rely on the transit system, as buses often stop running prior to them being off work. Further, the transit system is only available to youth living in the City of Fort McMurray, thus youth living outside of the city face additional challenges accessing transportation. The high cost associated with using a taxi on a regular basis makes this a non-viable source of transportation for most rural and urban youth/young adults.

Recommendations

1. Organize community car pools, both in rural regions and within the city.
2. Employers should also organize workplace car pools.
3. Rural communities and First Nations reserves should examine the feasibility of developing affordable shuttle systems, similar to the Fort McKay Transportation system.
4. Employers in the oil and gas and oilsands industries should provide work site shuttles for their employees, especially rural employees.
5. The Fort McMurray Public Transit System and the RMWB Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) should consider expanding their hours of operation to include more evening/late night service.

Access To Employment And Career-Related Services For Rural And Aboriginal Youth

While services exist for career and education planning and job search skills in the City of Fort McMurray, a gap was identified in the provision of these services in rural communities. Aside

from CALM classes, rural and rural Aboriginal youth have few employment and job search resources available to them. Though urban youth were aware of several resources available to them, they still expressed an interest for various additional programs or services.

Recommendations

1. Service providers should consider the development of a “one-stop-shop” of services for youth that could act as the hub of a service delivery network. Further, to serve the needs of rural and rural Aboriginal youth, satellite locations or a “roaming” career and job search training counselor position should be developed.
2. Service providers should look for ways to increase awareness of existing programs for both rural and urban youth.
3. More “real life” presentations by local employers should be integrated into existing school programs, such as CALM.

Work Ethic, Attitudes And Personal Attributes Of Youth And Young Adults

There is the perception that many youth and young adults lack work ethic and motivation, and hold unrealistic expectations of obtaining high paying, professional jobs directly following school. Service providers, employers and youth also commented that youth lack responsibility, accountability and the ability to communicate and market themselves. Further, employers and service providers felt that youth/young adults lacked a clear understanding of what is expected of them in the labour force.

Recommendations

1. Increase promotion of services and programs available to youth and young adults that help them improve their interpersonal/communication skills.
2. Employment programs currently available in the community could be expanded to include more one-on-one counseling (through increased staff/resources).
3. Employability skills and employer expectations should be emphasized in existing programs, such as CALM classes.
4. The importance of long-term labour force attachment should be emphasized in existing career and employment programs, both from service providers (e.g. Youth Connections) and in schools (e.g. CALM classes). Programs should emphasize the Wood Buffalo region’s uniqueness in terms of the labour market, while stressing the importance of long-term career planning.

Other potential barriers youth and young adults face when looking for employment include drug and alcohol use, lack of recreation services, lack of support services for out-of-town youth, and employer attitudes and behaviours.

In order to provide the Youth Employment Coordinated Services Steering Committee with possible next steps, the Consultant has developed an Implementation Strategy, a Communication Strategy and an Evaluation Strategy.

Recommendations for an Implementation Strategy include the following:

1. The Youth Employment Coordinated Services Steering Committee could be used as a basis for the development of a coordinating body to implement the recommendations of this report. Members of existing committees and agencies in the RMWB could be approached to join as members to cooperatively address and implement the recommendations from the final report.
2. The coordinating body should receive input on programs and services from a Youth and Young Adult Advisory Committee.
3. The youth employment coordinating body should obtain input from local communities.
4. The inventory of programs offered for youth in the RMWB should be updated on an annual basis.
5. Service providers in the RMWB should examine the possibility of developing a “one-stop-shop” of services for youth/young adults, which would address not only employment-related issues but secondary issues as well (e.g. drug/alcohol use, housing, etc.). This one-stop-shop could include an assessment and case management component for at-risk youth.

Recommendations for a Communication Strategy include the following:

1. Present key research findings to the public.
2. Disseminate findings among stakeholders.
3. Provide public accessibility to the report or a summary report.
4. The Steering Committee should publicize its response to the report, including next steps.
5. Communicate several potential key messages to stakeholders.

Recommendations for an Evaluation Strategy include the following:

1. Develop a logic model in consultation with the steering committee, and other stakeholders as necessary.
2. Develop an evaluation framework based on the program logic model.
3. Develop appropriate data collection tools.
4. Analyze data collected and report on evaluation findings.