

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN RURAL ONTARIO

EXPLORATION, DISCUSSION, INSIGHT



FORUM PROCEEDINGS 2014



Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie
Commission de planification de la main-d'œuvre de Grand Erie



RURAL ONTARIO
INSTITUTE



YOUTH CENTRES CANADA
CENTRES DES JEUNES CANADA



Ontario

For contributing to the success of these forums, thank you to Jill Halyk and the staff at the Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie; Art Lawson and Kimberly Earls with the South Central Ontario Region Economic Development Corporation; Nicole Drake with the City of Brantford; Rob Hunter with the Township of North Dundas; Eric Duncan, Mayor of the Township of North Dundas and Warden for the United Counties of Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry; Les Voakes with Youth Centres Canada; and all of our speakers, panelists and participants.

Published by:
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The Rural Ontario Institute gratefully acknowledges funding support for this project provided by the Government of Ontario.



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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In February 2014, in partnership with local leading organizations, the Rural Ontario Institute co-hosted forums in the communities of Brantford and Chesterville to explore the issue of youth unemployment in rural Ontario. In total, 85 participants from 37 organizations attended and shared their perspectives in a facilitated discussion. These stakeholders represented municipalities, employment service agencies, social service providers, government staff and parents.

This report presents the ideas collected from forum presenters, panelists and participant conversations surrounding youth unemployment in rural Ontario. Broadly, forum participants at both events discussed the most promising ideas for increasing the impact of youth employment programs in their communities, the barriers to implementing these ideas, and potential solutions to overcome these barriers. This report may serve to reinforce or support existing program and policy directions of organizations and leaders tackling the youth unemployment problem in rural Ontario and/or it may serve as a source of ideas for innovation. It does not represent a thorough province-wide or regional analysis of these issues.

Brantford Forum Highlights

Jill Halyk, Executive Director with the Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie, provided a regional snapshot of the youth unemployment situation in the greater Brantford area. Brantford has been identified as a hotspot for youth unemployment with rates exceeding 20%.

Francis Fong, Senior Economist with TD Economics delivered an engaging presentation outlining the youth employment situation in Ontario using historical data. From his perspective, employers are no longer taking the lead in providing training and investing in new young employees, as had been the case in the past. This can be partly explained by the realities of a highly mobile workforce, the expectation that employees are “market ready on arrival,” and that older workers are remaining in the workforce longer or returning to occupy entry-level positions.

Illustrating that successful programs bridging the school-to-work transition do exist, Laura Overholt from HealthKick Huron presented its model for recruiting and training local youth to enter the healthcare field in their rural home communities.

As well, in Brantford, a youth entrepreneur panel comprised of three persevering young business operators shared their success stories including the barriers they encountered and lessons they learned along the way.

Chesterville Forum Highlights

Mike Marcolongo from the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment provided an up-to-date overview of Ontario’s Youth Jobs Strategy and its program components.

Mayor Eric Duncan gave an inspiring talk about his priorities for rural development in Eastern Ontario, and improving the youth employment situation. At 26 years of age, Mayor Duncan spoke from the perspective of both a young person transitioning into the workforce and a political leader working on this issue.

Les Voakes, Executive Director of Youth Centres Canada organized a youth panel consisting of eight young people (ages 13-23) who provided their insights into career planning and the information sources they rely on to make decisions.

2.0 ABOUT THE RURAL ONTARIO INSTITUTE

The Rural Ontario Institute (ROI) was established in 2010 through the merger of The Ontario Rural Council and The Centre for Rural Leadership. Reflecting the expertise and legacy of the founding organizations, ROI's mandate is to develop leaders, initiate dialogue, support collaboration and promote action on issues and opportunities facing rural Ontario. To this end, ROI seeks to provide a voice for stakeholders in rural and remote communities in the province.

3.0 THE FORUM PROGRAM

ROI's rural forum program strives to accomplish three goals:

- 1) Raise awareness generally of issues facing rural and remote communities
- 2) Connect rural practitioners from different parts of the province working on these issues to foster shared learning
- 3) Connect leaders from different sectors, including government around these issues so they can make more informed decisions

The three issues selected by the Rural Ontario Institute for 2013/14 were:

- 1) Rural health and aging;
- 2) Youth employment/unemployment; and
- 3) Transportation

One of the most pressing issues facing rural Ontario is high youth unemployment, which has serious negative economic and social effects on rural communities. Currently, the overall rate of unemployment for Ontario youth aged 15-24 is over 16%, which is the highest rate outside of Atlantic Canada. Rural-specific information on the barriers and potential solutions to improving youth employment is not readily available in Ontario. During the planning of these events, the Province introduced several new programs aimed at reducing youth employment challenges.

ROI organized two forums to gather observations from individuals and agencies working in Ontario's rural communities. The central question explored by forum participants was, "*How can rural communities increase the impact of youth employment programs?*" A third forum on this theme is being planned – the proceedings of which will be published under separate cover.

Each youth unemployment forum had two main components: a series of expert presentations highlighting current challenges and emerging initiatives regarding youth unemployment, followed by facilitated, small group discussions where participants shared their perspectives. ROI co-hosted these forums with partners in the community that helped form the agenda, enabling ROI to both further the local conversation and share this information with other jurisdictions across the province. Each full-day or half-day forum agenda had a unique "flavour" based on the input of the partnering organization.

The Rural Ontario Institute received funding support from the province, in part, to enable us to organize these events.

4.0 BRANTFORD FORUM PROCEEDINGS - February 11, 2014



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In partnership with the Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie and South Central Ontario Region Economic Development Corporation, the half-day forum on February 11, 2014 at the Best Western Hotel in Brantford explored the challenges and solutions to overcoming rural youth unemployment in the region. The central question posed to forum participants was “*How can community stakeholders collaborate to improve the impact and outcomes of youth employment programs?*”

In total, 53 stakeholders from across the region participated in the forum, including representatives from local municipalities, employment service agencies, social service providers and provincial ministry staff (for a complete list of organizations represented, see APPENDIX I). This report summarizes “what we heard” during the rural forum. It contains a brief overview of speaker presentations as well as the insights and observations from participants during facilitated table group discussions. It is intended to inform decision makers, including federal, provincial and municipal leaders, on the issues surrounding youth unemployment in rural communities.

4.1 KEY MESSAGES EMERGING FROM PRESENTATIONS

4.1.1 Jill Halyk, Executive Director, Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie

Notes from Halyk’s presentation

According to a report published by TD Economics, sustained high youth unemployment will cost the Canadian economy 23 billion dollars over the next 18 years. Young people who cannot find jobs or who are significantly underemployed will continually be at risk of earning lower incomes over the course of their careers. Youth unemployment impacts the individual, the community and the economy – young people without jobs do not have the resources to establish homes or purchase cars, etc.

Youth, particularly those that are well educated, are leaving small urban and rural areas where employment opportunities are scarce. Those that remain often depend on lower skilled, part-time or contract work. The longer it takes to enter their field of study, the greater the skill decline.

The loss of youth in the local labour force will have long-term impacts on industry and business. Diminished access to talent will contribute to skill shortages – and if those young people remaining in the community tend to be those with lower education and skills, a growing gap between demand and supply will persist.

Youth unemployment also impacts health. Growing student debt, lack of income, and the inability to establish independence is increasing the number of young people suffering from mental health challenges.

Youth, like all population groups, differ in their educational attainment, by gender, and by ethnicity. Youth also differ significantly in terms of social issues – life skills, peer group, family support, etc. Each group may require services and support specific to their needs. We shouldn't make any assumptions. It is important to listen and learn from what young people are telling us.

Ontario is experiencing the highest levels of youth unemployment outside of Atlantic Canada. In a recent report titled “The Young and the Jobless,” Brantford was identified as a hotspot for youth unemployment with rates exceeding 20%.

The majority of youth aged 15-24 who are actively participating in the local labour force have lower educational rates. They may be “early school leavers,” new graduates, or youth working while attending school. Regardless, educational attainment is a concern. Only 19-21% of this age group has completed an apprenticeship, college or university. For those youth aged 15-24 who are working, 80% are working in lower skilled jobs.

The local youth population is also diverse in terms of ethnicity. Six Nation’s of the Grand River is the largest First Nation’s reserve in Canada. Brant is also home to New Credit of the Mississauga’s. Aboriginal populations have the fastest growing youth population in the nation. Immigrant youth are also an important element of the local youth labour force. While the number of immigrants to Grand Erie is fairly small, those who do come are families with children.

One of the most important answers needed is “Whether or not young people are leaving local communities.” The story differs across the two census divisions. Brant is attracting more youth than it is losing, which may be a function of the post-secondary facilities within the community. In contrast, Haldimand-Norfolk is experiencing significant declines in youth at both the post-secondary school age and at the core working age of 25-44.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT FORUM

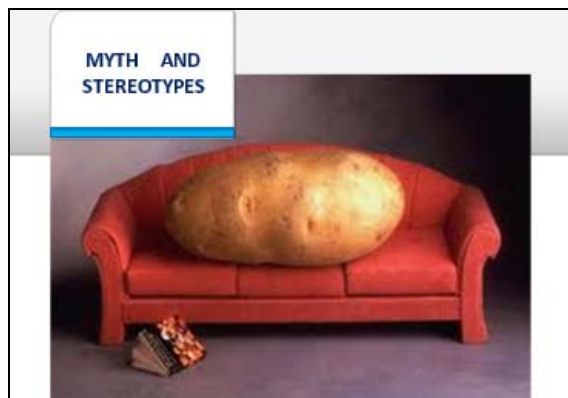
MIGRATION
Are they leaving?

Migration Characteristics 2006 – 2011 <small>Source: Statistics Canada, Taxfile</small>		Brant			Haldimand-Norfolk		
Age Group	In-migrants	Out-migrants	Net-migrants	In-migrants	Out-migrants	Net-migrants	
0 – 17	6,250	5,073	1,177	5,025	4,941	84	
18 – 24	3,209	3,644	-435	2,267	4,352	2,085	
25 – 44	9,803	8,467	1,336	6,889	7,476	-587	

Regional stakeholders have already taken the first steps towards identifying the challenges of the local labour market. In March 2013, the Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship Strategy was launched. From this process it was learned that local young people ranging from accomplished professionals to high school students to those at-risk shared the following:

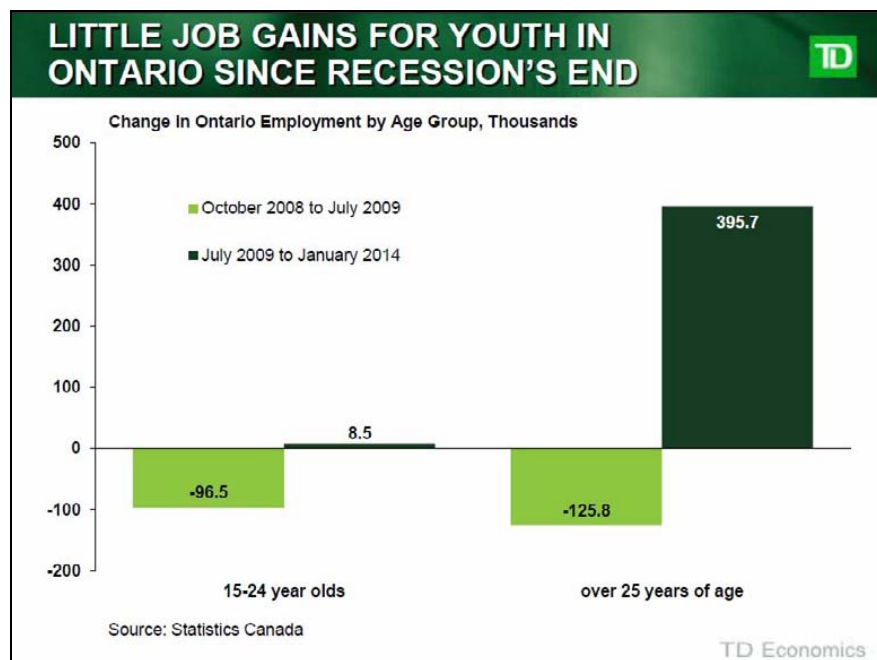
- There cannot be a “one-size fits all” solution. Everyone’s needs differ. But there are a significant number of youth who are educated and ready to work. These young people have completed their schooling and are seeking entry into employment in their field of study and expertise. A lack of job experience appears to be the biggest stumbling block and few volunteer or work experience opportunities appear to be available to help them overcome this gap.

Effective planning will require us to keep our minds and eyes open to the individual differences that youth are experiencing. As we all move forward it is important to get rid of vision-limiting stereotypes and myths about young workers. There is young talent - and lots of it - in our communities at all education, skill and ability levels. There are young people who want to be successful and to contribute to their community.



4.1.2 Francis Fong, TD Bank Senior Economist

Youth Unemployment Trends in Ontario



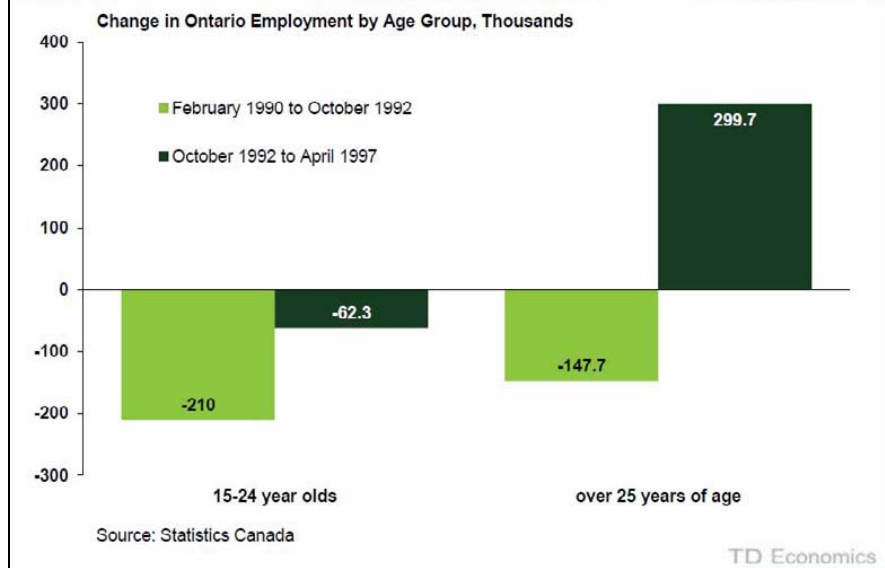
There have been little job gains for youth in Ontario since the recession ended in July of 2009. During this time, youth aged 15-24 have experienced only a small fraction of the job gains compared to the rest of the labour force.

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE MUCH HIGHER THAN NATIONAL AVERAGE

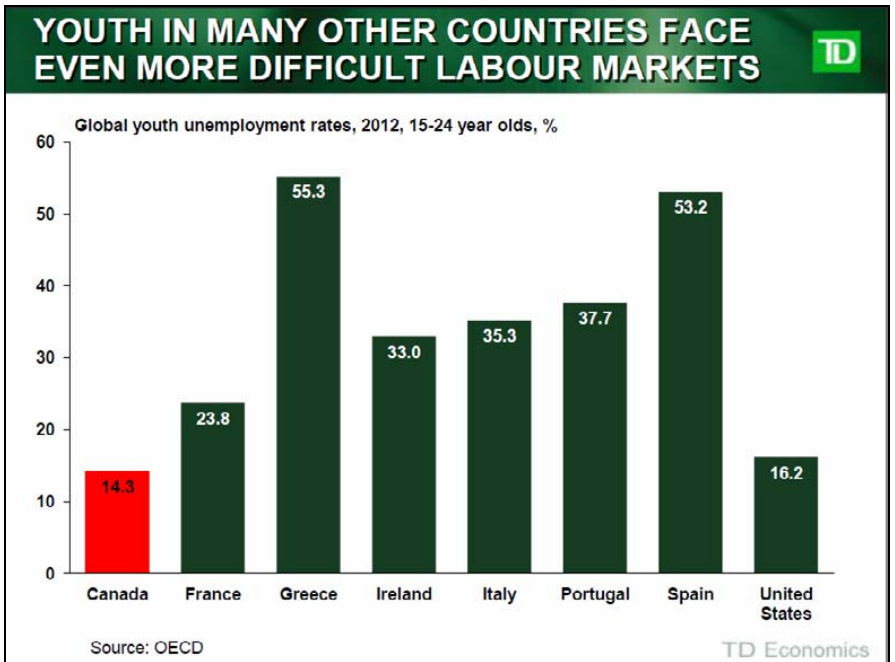


The rate of youth unemployment has always been higher than the national average. However, this gap is especially apparent during economic downturns. As an example, people aged 15-24 years old account for 15% of the workforce, and this group experienced 50% of the job losses during the last recession.

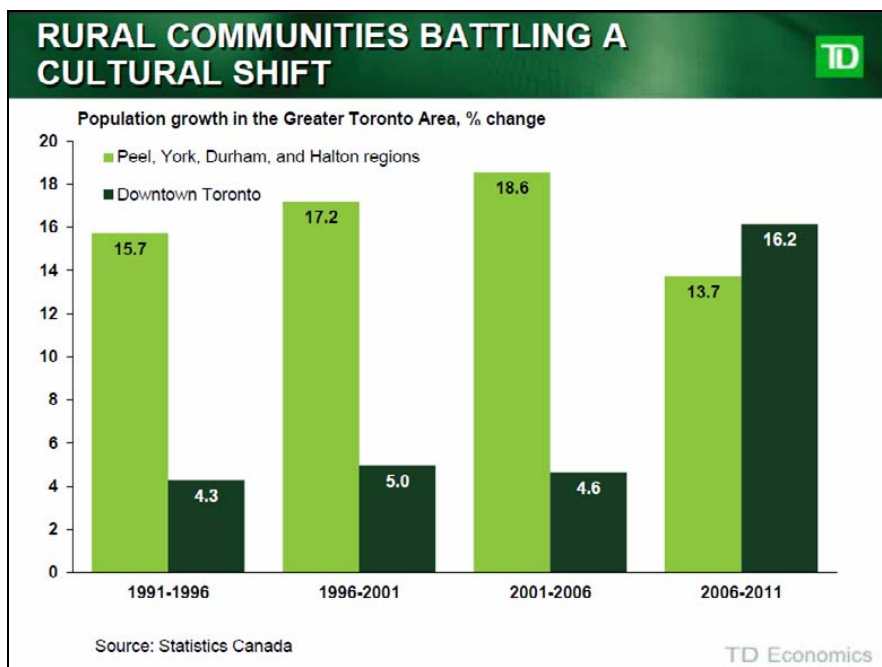
YOUTH ARE ALWAYS THE MOST VULNERABLE DURING A DOWNTURN



Employment rates among youth are also the last to recover after a recession. Historical data from the early to mid-1990's show that youth were still losing jobs while the rest of the labour force was gaining employment.



Putting the Ontario experience into context, there are other developed jurisdictions in the world with reported youth unemployment rates that far exceed Ontario's. These data are generated using different methodologies than Ontario and are not directly comparable; however, they do indicate that the youth unemployment situation is much more severe in parts of Europe.



The tough labour conditions faced by young people can be partly attributed to cyclical forces. For example, research has shown that every 1% drop in the employment rate represents a 6% drop in initial wages for young people.

However, there have also been structural changes to the economy that have affected job prospects for today's youth. For example, youth are competing against baby boomers for low wage or entry level jobs like never before.

One of the many reasons cited for the current unemployment and underemployment rates among youth is the skills mismatch that exists between those looking for work and the jobs that need filling. However, this answer masks an important shift where employers have dramatically reduced their investment in training new employees.

Traditionally, employers would provide on-the-job training for new recruits; however, now companies are spending 40% less per employee for job training than they did 20 years ago. Given the current market conditions, there is an expectation that new hires are job-ready on arrival and employers are not willing to invest due to the “risk of flight.”

There are broad solutions to reducing the youth unemployment rate, but they will each take time to implement, including:

- 1) Governments should implement tax credits and cost-sharing models to incentivize industries to hire young people and develop succession plans
- 2) We as Canadians need to change our belief that a University education is the preferred, default choice for post-secondary training. There is a negative perception/stigma around the value of our colleges and applied skills training programs and that needs to change
- 3) Our higher education curriculum needs to be adjusted to better reflect the real world needs of the job market
- 4) Entrepreneurism needs to be embedded and fostered within the secondary school curriculum.

4.1.3 Laura Overholt, Program Manager with HealthKick Huron

How HealthKick Huron attracts local rural youth back to their communities with meaningful work (notes from presentation)

Rural Ontario has an aging population, and the province also has an aging healthcare workforce – 50% of nurses are 55 years of age or older. Rural communities have greater challenges in recruiting workers to their communities, with many rural youth migrating to urban settings for education opportunities and not returning to practice.

HealthKick creates awareness of the need for healthcare workers, where the underlying emphasis is on addressing a problem through a local response by “growing our own.” The HealthKick model is a continuum of services to strengthen the healthcare workforce through career development, training and workforce development strategies. The program has four main areas starting with engaging youth through career exploration and then progressing to local training delivered by experienced healthcare providers through mentoring/teaching activities.

1. Career Exploration

MedQUEST Camp is one example of the activities under this part of the program. It is a five day camp for grade 10 and 11 high school students from rural communities who are at an important stage of their future career decision making process.

The goals are to:

- 1) Increase the number of successful rural applications to medical school and other healthcare courses of study
- 2) Increase the number of professionals who are willing to return to rural communities to practice

This is a long-term initiative with potential of addressing not just one, but many healthcare occupational shortages. Community involvement is critical to the success of the camp. Local healthcare facilities including hospitals, clinics, private practice and emergency services join the camp as guest speakers. This program is reliant on a significant commitment from a professional volunteer base.

2. Rural Work Experience Placements

The Rural Work Placements offer local students, already committed to a healthcare career, the chance to work in the healthcare environment and benefit from exposure to skill development opportunities, gain insights into rural practice and the benefit of connecting with employers. However, employers also benefit and feedback has been very positive about the quality of students applying for these jobs. Since 2005, HealthKick has arranged 109 placements in rural healthcare settings.

3. Training Close to Home

The Practical Nursing program, delivered by Georgian College in Seaforth, is helping to address the shortage of RPNs. These students are local residents looking to work in their communities. This is a relatively stable pool to draw on. Students do their clinical placements in local healthcare and long-term care facilities as well as with community healthcare providers. The instructors are, for the most part, local healthcare professionals who are all very well respected instructors and mentors for these programs.

Video conferencing technology is used to link multiple sites in order to establish classes with minimum numbers and keep the training accessible. Post-graduate courses are also offered in skill areas such as IV Therapy, Coronary care and Palliative care, etc.

4. Community Engagement in Retention

Working with the Human Resources Committee of the Huron Perth Providers Council has offered the opportunity for HealthKick to support many initiatives such as the Healthcare Inspiration Event held for the last three years. These activities are examples of organizations coming together to address common issues in a creative and meaningful way.

Project Roll Out

- Original Project : HealthKick Huron
 - started July 2005 - 2009
 - Focus on Huron County
- Second Phase: HealthKick
 - Started July 2008 – Dec 2011
 - Focus on South West LHIN – Huron, Perth, Bruce & Grey Counties
- Third Phase – HealthKick 2012– Sustainability
 - One year of funding to support strategic planning & activities in Huron County
- Forth Phase – HealthKick 2013 – 2015
 - Base funding from County of Huron

4.2 YOUNG ENTREPRENEUR PANEL DISCUSSION

Young entrepreneurs from the region shared their professional development stories



Shep Ysselstein (left), Christine Timon and Karl Szordykowski.

(Photo by Michelle Ruby, Brantford Expositor, published Tuesday, February 11, 2014)

Karl Szordykowski **Lime Tree Assembly** **Woodstock, ON**

Originally from Brantford, Karl graduated from St. John's College and has grown a bicycle assembly service into a successful business that assembles various products for commercial and retail businesses, and aims to put in place a consumer-level service soon. Karl worked for several different companies before deciding to be his own boss, and had to overcome several start up obstacles before achieving success.

“In 2010, with the help of OSEB (Ontario Self-Employment Benefit program) I had enough support to form LIME TREE ASSEMBLY. Today our company assembles for retailers in store including London, Brantford, Simcoe, Woodstock, Kitchener, Hamilton, and as far as Owen Sound. With continuing growth of this company we plan on having in-home assembly services and delivery services in place by the end of 2014.”

Christine Timon **CMT Design Shoppe** **Paris, ON**

Christine started her first job in a print shop as a co-op placement through school. Once the placement was up, she was hired on part-time while in college, then full time after completing her program. After working 10 years for this company, she suddenly found herself unemployed due to a shortage of work. With help from Enterprise Brant, which provides financial and consulting services to local businesses, she was able to establish her own graphic design business, CMT Design Shoppe.

“There are resources out there but you have to be willing to do the real work. If you're not sure, you're not ready.”

When asked about critical factors of her success, Christine identified believing in herself, having personal drive, and being able to cope with setbacks.

Shep Ysselstein
Gunn's Hill Artisan Cheese
Woodstock, ON

After graduating from university, Shep wanted to run his own business. He pursued his personal interest in producing artisanal cheese and in just over two years, his products are selling at 250 retail locations in Ontario.

Shep had to pave his own way to success, which was not easy. When he started out, formal training in artisanal cheese making was not offered in the province (Conestoga College now offers an eight-week course) and he had to find his own mentors. He travelled to Switzerland to trade his time and labour for learning experiences. On his return to Ontario, he was assisted by the Oxford Small Business Support Centre, which helped secure capital funding and business expertise - two things that are difficult to access if you are a young entrepreneur.

“It would have been nice to have someone to talk to who had gone through the same process. It could have saved at least a year of my time.”

When asked to identify factors of his success, he said that it is important to stay positive, family support was critical, and the local food movement has been beneficial from a marketing perspective.

4.3 ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS

The ideas captured in this section represent the thoughts of participants in the room and do not reflect any one organization's perspective. The information is based on what the Rural Ontario Institute heard from forum participants in discussions on the issues and possible solutions to improving the impact of youth employment programs in rural communities.

GROUP #1

A. What are the most promising ideas for increasing the impact of youth employment programs in your community?

- Focus on the youth demographic that best suits the program target
- To connect with the targeted demographic, identify and access the information networks they use
- Target and attract the youth that want to live in rural Ontario
- Build the case among the older generations of employers of the benefits of employing/engaging the younger generation

B. What are the barriers to implementing these ideas?

- Funding programs are often too restrictive (e.g. focused on summer job creation only) with resources aimed at small segments of the youth population (e.g. 'vulnerable' youth); many of the youth in our community do not qualify for these funding programs
- Regarding funding, there is a lack of information, or the programs are not promoted within youth networks
- Employers fear the "risk of flight" e.g. "if we train them, they leave"
- We need more silo-breaking partnerships between governments, training institutions and employers
- Who is in charge of this issue? There is no vision at any level
- Transportation is a limitation on accessing job opportunities
- Youth jobs are often short-term and task-oriented, when what they need is a longer-term training commitment from employers (e.g. 3-year term)

C. What are potential solutions to overcoming or shifting these barriers, and who can do what?

- Youth/young professionals need to develop solutions with support of existing organizations
- Support organization/partnerships need to be able to change depending on community (chamber, municipality, etc)

- We need to demand leadership/vision from government and industry

GROUP #2

A. What are the most promising ideas for increasing the impact of youth employment programs in your community?

- How do youth find out about a program? Where do they go for information? Youth need a one-stop information source
- Career resource centres were located in local high schools in Norfolk, but the funding was cut for that program; is there a way to re-establish these centres?
- One issue is youth having to pick an educational path in grade 8/9 and stick to that stream – are we screening too early?
- School curriculum focus should shift to skill set development, instead of academics always taking priority
- Government guidelines prohibit working with 14 year olds, can this be amended?
- Where is federal government money?

B. What are the barriers to implementing these ideas?

- Changing education system to become more responsive – it's too slow moving
- We need more employers mentoring youth, which means that we need to break down preconceived notions of young people
- We need better marketing campaigns for the money spent
- Co-ops programs in high school have a negative stigma e.g. co-op opportunities are often seen as not good enough for college/university bound students
- It can be hard for employers to find meaningful experiences to offer co-op students

C. What are potential solutions to overcoming or shifting these barriers, and who can do what?

- Shift from co-op education/training models to mentoring programs instead
- Replicate the Youth Fusion Centre model located in Ingersoll, in other communities
- Foster more educators/employers/artists working together
- Have municipalities contribute a small percentage of youth employment program budgets
- Focus on entrepreneurialism early in formal education system curriculum
- Establish young professional collaborative networks and link in mentors who can offer support (there is a successful model in Haliburton called Kawartha Youth Unlimited)



GROUP #3

A. What are the most promising ideas for increasing the impact of youth employment programs in your community?

- Employer involvement
- Youth getting experience through a more prescriptive pipeline helping with the school to work transition
- Address negative stereotypes surrounding young workers
- Encourage technology adoption by employers

B. What are the barriers to implementing these ideas?

- Improve rural transportation options; youth cannot get to country from city without a transportation service; as well, the cost of insurance on a car for travel is expensive for young people
- There is a vicious cycle at play: if there is no business demand for skilled workers, then skilled workers will not stay in rural Ontario; if there are no skilled workers, employers will not locate in rural Ontario
- Do young people have the right skills for today's labour market?
- We are currently asking 16 year olds to make career decisions, which can be very tough
- Youth often lack skills for face-to-face interaction and traditional networking

C. What are potential solutions to overcoming or shifting these barriers, and who can do what?

- Identify businesses who are successful with youth and celebrate these employers
- Smaller businesses in rural communities need support to keep going (e.g. owner may decide to sell business and retire with no succession plan), which presents opportunities for youth
- We need employers in the room discussing this – they are absent today!

GROUP #4

A. What are the most promising ideas for increasing the impact of youth employment programs in your community?

- The 'Sure Start' Program offered at Fusion Youth Centre in Ingersoll is an excellent example of an entrepreneurial youth training program that teaches young people marketable skills; it is delivered in partnership with Fanshawe College
- Integrated programming with local industry
- Identify and invest in rural youth who plan to remain in a rural community

B. What are the barriers to implementing these ideas?

- Student debt is a barrier to entrepreneurialism and self-employment
- There is a lack of access to 'angel' investors for entrepreneurial opportunities, particularly in rural communities
- There is a lack of access to facilities for youth
- We tend to put too much focus on the "best and brightest"

C. What are potential solutions to overcoming or shifting these barriers, and who can do what?

- How can we approach the implementation of effective delivery of programs to youth?
- There needs to be balance between centralization (small organizations visibility) & organization (Employment Ontario)

GROUP #5

A. What are the most promising ideas for increasing the impact of youth employment programs in your community?

- Ontario's Youth Employment Fund & Summer Jobs Service Program, both administered by MTCU
- Enhancing training incentives for employers who hire youth
- The Norfolk District Business Development Corporation (NDBDC) Youth Entrepreneur Program is a model example to follow
- Should spend more time appreciating co-op programs, college programs, apprenticeships, etc.

B. What are the barriers to implementing these ideas?

- Mindsets of parents, educators, employers, policy makers, etc. around "hands on" education
- We need to change the perception that we have about "youth"
- Retirees are returning to work and occupying jobs formerly held by youth

- Marketing and media – are we reaching our intended youth targets with our programs?
- There is not enough recognition about the importance of small business succession planning
- There are strict rules around government funding limiting how it can be used
- Rural transportation options are limited
- Often communities get “too comfortable” and limit economic development, therefore, zero jobs are available

C. What are potential solutions to overcoming or shifting these barriers, and who can do what?

- Our education system needs to include more emphasis on information sessions with the school guidance departments
- There needs to be more communication with employers about “what’s in it for them”
- Provide community resources to youth and employers and schools and parents, etc.
- Involve youth in the discussion on how to engage youth! Where are they today? e.g. What mediums are they using channels watching, websites visiting?

GROUP #6

A. What are the most promising ideas for increasing the impact of youth employment programs in your community?

- Replace local post-secondary opportunities for vulnerable youth
- Reach youth market so they understand services available (e.g. Employment Ontario, Youth Employment Fund)
- Increase partnerships at secondary school level and strengthen co-op program
- Create networking events

B. What are the barriers to implementing these ideas?

- Money and resources
- Buy-in among job seekers and employers
- Identify best practices for marketing services to engage youth
- Insurance liability to employers based on age

C. What are potential solutions to overcoming or shifting these barriers, and who can do what?

- Offer incentives to encourage youth to stay in rural areas; for example, offer a reduction in student debt, tax credits, etc

GROUP #7

A. What are the most promising ideas for increasing the impact of youth employment programs in your community?

- Building entrepreneurship into the high school core curriculum
- Training provided within rural communities about program options for youth as well as local assets
- Mentorship programs
- Accurate up-to-date labour market information so youth can make informed decisions about their future
- Transportation can make it difficult to keep a job, therefore, an inventory of organizations that have transportation services available
- Are there local opportunities among rural organizations to group money for a greater, collective impact?
- Conduct local research into the job market about youth employment – use this info to create specific strategies for local youth

B. What are the barriers to implementing these ideas?

- Regarding curriculum

- Change is a slow-moving process – decisions to change curriculum happen at a very high level
- School board agreements can limit a well-meaning organization's access to schools/students
- Getting youth interested and engaged early in their development
- Basic program awareness and access
- Regarding mentorship
 - Volunteers need to be provided with lots of training if they are going to interact with youth and vulnerable populations.

C. What are potential solutions to overcoming or shifting these barriers, and who can do what?

- Regarding curriculum
 - Awareness and understanding of other organizations and programs at the senior level, as change often comes from top-down
 - Money is provided for reports or studies but there is often no accountability to follow through; we need to use the information and act
 - Break down silos of provincial ministries speaking to other ministries
 - Leverage the voice of organizations like SCOR to advocate for change at regional level
 - Create more places like the Fusion Youth Centre (Ingersoll, ON) to engage youth holistically
 - Put money into enhancing existing programs or duplicating best practices vs creating new programs that struggle with sustainability
 - Money from workshops etc. used more effectively for meaningful activities (i.e. job placements)
 - Create more meaningful measures of program success, not just program statistics (e.g. the number of people who got jobs without any context)

5.0 CHESTERVILLE FORUM PROCEEDINGS - February 7, 2014



In partnership with the Township of North Dundas and Youth Centres Canada, a half-day forum was held on February 7, 2014 at The Gathering House in Chesterville to explore the challenges and solutions to overcoming rural youth unemployment in the region. The central question posed to forum participants was “*How can community stakeholders collaborate to improve the impact and outcomes of youth employment programs?*”

In total, 32 stakeholders from across the region participated in the forum, including representatives from three provincial ministries (MEDTE, MTCU and OMAFRA), local economic development officers, employment service organizations, as well as staff and youth from local youth centres (for a complete list of organizations represented, see APPENDIX II). This report summarizes “what we heard” during the rural forum. It contains a brief summary of speaker presentations as well as the insights and observations from participants during facilitated table group discussions. It is intended to inform decision makers, including federal, provincial and municipal leaders, on the issues surrounding youth unemployment in rural communities.



Chesterville, Ontario. From the Wikipedia Commons

5.1 KEY MESSAGES EMERGING FROM PRESENTATIONS

5.1.1 Mike Marcolongo, Outreach Lead – Youth Jobs Strategy Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment

Making an Impact: Youth Jobs Strategy

The average Ontario unemployment rate for youth aged 15-24 is between 16% and 17%, which is close to double the average employment rate of Ontario workers 25 and older. Youth facing multiple barriers to employment need more opportunities for training, work placements and mentorship.

In response to this work environment, the Premier of Ontario announced the Youth Jobs Strategy on April 29, 2013. From May 10 to July 25, 2013, 19 minister and MPP-led consultations were held across the province and included over 200 participants representing youth, employers, academia, industry, labour and not-for-profit organizations. Several key themes emerged for how the Youth Jobs Strategy can effectively serve the needs of young people and employers, which include:

- Foster collaboration
- Bring together economic development/entrepreneurship players with social service providers
- Encourage new models for addressing youth unemployment
- Make vulnerable youth populations a key priority
- Invest in programs that span the spectrum of job experience, employment skills and entrepreneurship opportunities

Distributed through four separate funds, the Youth Jobs Strategy is investing \$295 million over two years to provide tools and programs that create jobs for youth through employment or entrepreneurship.



5.1.2 Eric Duncan, Mayor of the Township of North Dundas and Warden for the United Counties of Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry

In 2010, at age 22, Eric became one of the youngest mayors elected in Canadian history. He understands the youth unemployment situation from both the perspective of an elected official and as a recent university graduate joining the workforce. He spoke about his recommendations for governments and the private sector to pursue to address the issue of youth unemployment and economic development in rural areas, including:

- 1) Develop high speed internet infrastructure (e.g. broadband, cellular, fibre optic, etc)
- 2) Partner with post-secondary institutions to deliver distance education
- 3) Private sector should offer education and mentoring opportunities, especially in marketing and product development

“Embracing technology is key to the future success of rural Ontario”

5.2 YOUTH PANEL DISCUSSION

Organized and moderated by Les Voakes, Executive Director of Youth Centres Canada, with the support of RDEE and the Places des Jeunes program, eight young people from the region, aged 13-23, shared their thoughts on career plans and identified important communication sources they use to access information.

Panelists aged 13 to 14 years

- No one is asking them about career or job aspirations at this age; they don't talk about jobs or careers in school
- They are exposed to their parent's occupations, and that is influencing their career plans
- School counselors and teachers were also identified as influential sources of information

Panelists aged 15 to 16 years

- There is a program offered through school called “Discovering the Workplace”
- Based on the advice of their parents, one student is leaning towards an occupation in the trades (e.g. mechanic, carpentry)
- For information, they use phones to access Facebook; and watch a lot of TV

Panelists aged 17 to 19 years

- One individual is not currently in school; his interests are making music and being an artist; his friends are the most influential factor in life
- He accesses music recording equipment and the internet at the youth centre
- These individuals learn by using Facebook and Google, and watching TV

Panelists aged 20 years and older

- One individual remembers being asked about careers in grade 9, but there was no follow up discussion during the rest of their schooling
- One individual currently works with a youth centre and wants to continue in this field
- Reflecting on her original home town in rural Newfoundland, one individual said that youth aspired to be pipefitters to work in Alberta
- Facebook, email, phone, Twitter were identified as important mediums for accessing information

All youth identified listening to radio and watching YouTube for entertainment. When polled about their intentions, only three of the eight youth wanted to stay in their communities. The reasons for staying included family and lifestyle options. The main reason for leaving was that their career choice required them to leave rural Ontario. Specific answers given were:

- Wants to operate heavy equipment and believes there are no opportunities in rural Ontario for this
- Wants to travel
- Wants to be a musician

When asked if they were confident about starting their own business, most said that they weren't. One young person said that running your own business was "too much work." However, another individual said that they were learning entrepreneurial skills from their parents, and that they expected to learn more through the formal school curriculum.



5.3 ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS

The ideas expressed in this section present the thoughts in the room and do not reflect any one organization's perspective. The information below is based on what was captured on flip charts and notes from table group discussion as forum participants discussed the issues and possible solutions to improving the impact of youth employment programs in rural communities.

IMPROVE PROGRAM MARKETING

There is a gap between marketing campaign design and youth audiences – with respect to provincial program outreach. Administrators need to improve how the programs are communicated and marketed to the intended target youth audience. Ideally, they can make more effective use of one-on-one communication or leverage awareness through peers, in order to effectively reach target audiences. This group would recommend reallocating marketing resources away from TV and towards social media, because TV ads do not reach youth audiences, they reach voters.

More effort needs to be spent identifying the ‘real’ youth needs, by talking directly with them. A key question is “How do you get the youth’s attention so that they can identify their needs and provide necessary input on program communication?” One method is to use online surveys that are distributed through the school system and parents to reach youth, but there should be an incentive to participate (e.g. enter for a chance to win a tablet or smart phone). A second method to get youth input is to create a ‘Sims’ videogame for jobs, whereby young people are able to learn about careers through play. A third method is to setup a YouTube channel showcasing a variety of jobs. This way, youth can get an idea of what they might like, and what they might not.

The economic development community should try to bridge the gap between youth and employers by identifying ‘Community Champions’ to promote awareness of youth employment programs. Regardless of the data collection methods chosen, they should be distributed through parents, school boards, youth centres and youth organizations (e.g. cadets), municipalities and membership organizations (e.g. ROI). Employers should initiate a ‘doors open’ or take a kid to work day to demonstrate the variety of careers and the pathway to get there. To ensure that programs are a success, youth must be part of the planning discussion.

INVEST IN APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS

There is a culture gap between youth and employers. Businesses should be encouraged to take on co-op students or youth placements, which can be accomplished by providing the proper incentives, marketing the benefits to employers, offering better prepared employees and network supports. An example of a network support is to have social services funding available to youth who need extra support in transitioning into the workplace. Second, the current college-of-trade apprentice/master ratio should be reviewed for ways to increase the rate of supplying qualified people to the job market, which would not only benefit youth but the broader economy as well.

Many employers past experiences with youth have been poor, so how do we produce better youth employees? One way is to foster more mentoring relationships between business and youth, so that young people learn quickly and know “what will make me successful.” Business champions of mentoring programs should be identified and celebrated by our political leaders. Another way is to recognize and retain within our school system the basic life skills that are transferrable to employers. Skills like home economics and industrial arts (e.g. shop class) should be developed early in a student’s life.

School council leadership can drive change - it shouldn’t always come from provincial Ministry directives. One area that school councils can provide leadership is providing coaching and training to employers about the ‘generational gaps’ that manifest themselves as prejudicial stereotypes. For example, while some older workers might regard texting as rude behavior, they need to realize that young people are not trying to be unprofessional. Texting is how youth communicate.

In an environment of scarce resources, school boards and teachers should cooperate to allow access of grade 7/8s to high school shop class. Given the positive social and skillful influences they have shown to have on young people, the youth centre movement should also be expanded and enhanced in Ontario.

PROVIDE HANDS-ON TRAINING IN SCHOOL

A shift in high school curriculum towards more hands-on, practical skill development is necessary to achieve better prepared young people for the workforce. Along with a greater emphasis on skill development, the curriculum should diversify to match the growing niche specialization that is occurring in the job market (e.g. music production).

A barrier to bringing about this shift in curriculum programming is that more partnerships with businesses will be required. One way to get buy-in from businesses is to communicate the benefits of their participation in these partnerships regarding succession planning and securing a long-term labour supply.

To overcome this barrier MTCU, school boards and industry need to work to increase the number of paid student co-op positions available in Ontario. More hands-on career fairs exposing youth to the jobs in the marketplace will also help them identify career fields. Establishing mentoring programs that link students with workforce contacts is critical. Given its prevalence in rural Ontario, job opportunities in the agriculture industry should be highlighted to improve rural youth retention.

**APPENDIX I – ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTED AT THE BRANTFORD FORUM ON
FEBRUARY 11, 2014**

University of Guelph

OMAF/MRA

4-H Ontario

Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie

Community Resource Service

Westfield Choice Group

Brant Skills Centre

Community Employment Services (Woodstock)

Town of Ingersoll

St. Leonard's Community Services (Brantford)

Haliburton Community Development Corporation

City of Brantford

Halidimand Norfolk Counties

Fanshawe College

YMCA

Crossing All Bridges Learning Centre

South Central Economic Development Corporation

TD Economics

Canadian Hearing Society

**APPENDIX II – ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTED AT THE CHESTERVILLE FORUM ON
FEBRUARY 7, 2014**

CSE Consulting
Township of North Glengarry
Upper Canada District School Board
United Counties of Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry
Job Zone D' Emploi
Township of North Stormont
City of Cornwall
My Community Futures (Cornwall)
Ohwistha (Aboriginal Capital Corporation)
Contact North
Village of Casselman
Town of Hawkesbury
Township of North Dundas
RDEE Ontario
Youth Centres Canada
MEDTE
MTCU
OMAF/MRA