

BC Skills Force Initiative

Summary of Focus Group Session

May 25, 2005

Princeton, BC

AGENDA

1. Introduction of facilitators Paul Wiest & Ron Trepanier
2. Introduced the BC Skills Gap Initiative
3. Introduction of participants
4. Overview of project
5. Background Research
6. Focus Group Discussion
7. Next steps
8. Wrap Up

Comments & Discussion

Employer Labour Needs:

- There is a general shortage of people who want to work
- Lack of trades people
- Can not find highly skilled workers
- Employers need trades people with a variety of skills - not just one trade but "generalists". Cross trades people and multi-taskers are needed - electricians/welder/millwright
- Many people choose not to work, which means a lower labour force participation rate
- Older workers lack the computer skills and younger workers lack the people skills
- It is hard to attract skilled employees to the area. The area attracts a transient population
- The area does not have a large employer to attract people to the area
- Over the years the area has lost much of its younger population (the 25 to 40 year olds have moved away)
- Lack of trades people requires the training of unskilled employees
- Employers in the area need individuals with care aid certificates
- Princeton has an older work force in comparison to other communities
- Difficult to recruit pharmacists
- There is tight competition for a small labour pool

Attitudes:

- It is difficult finding motivated employees that have a good work ethic and a positive attitude
- Employees need a better appreciation of what the employer has invested in them
- There is a general lack of work ethic among younger workers
- The area has attracted a segment of the unemployed population who are not interested in finding work
- There is no push from parents to get their kids out of the home and working
- A number of young adults are at home with no motivation to find a job
- Employers are finding an increasing incidence of drugs/alcohol problems

- Lots of younger population who moved away in the 1990s would love to move home, but can not get a comparable paying job to what they have in larger urban centres
- How do we change the work ethic of younger workers
- There is a general lack of respect by students of teachers in school system
- Need to start in schools at a an earlier age to create an attitude where youth want to achieve excellence
- Need to encourage youth to take career path training
- Employees with high skills levels know they are in demand, and it is hard to retain these workers

Hiring Practices/HR Strategies:

- Many employers rely on word of mouth for finding employees
- Small business employers need to find ways to compete with wages offered by large industry (such as saw mills) otherwise they can not attract new employees
- With the need for families to have dual incomes, often when recruiting employees, employers need to help find a job for the spouse
- Need to recruit primarily from outside the community
- Attracting workers to small communities is difficult
- Employers have tried a variety of ways to advertise for vacant positions, but it often comes down to personal networks for finding employees
- Local IWA has helped screen employees
- Princeton has a number of semi-retired people who have recently moved to the area. They represent a potential source of employees
- Work ethic is a key element that needs to be instilled in young workers (i.e., instilling pride at the workplace)
- Employers need to treat employees professionally, which is not always the case

Skills and Education

- Employers believe the school system puts too much emphasis on university education rather than trades
- Reality is that only a small minority of youth will go on to university
- There is a lack of local trades training
- Schools are not producing graduates with the skills employers need
- Too much emphasis is placed on computer skills, not enough on metal working and wood shop

- CAP program could be improved. It is too easy for kids to accumulate the necessary hours with no accountability to the employer
- There are liability issues (WCB) for taking on CAP students in the workplace
- Schools need to connect local industry to relevant school projects that employ trade skills training
- There needs to be more incentives to attract youth to trades. They are not seen as appealing career options
- Profile of trades needs to be increased. (i.e., use young adult trades persons to promote trades in the media)
- Need for a work force liaison in the school system
- Even those in high school who want to go into trades find it difficult to enter programs
- Colleges are not providing enough spots for students to pursue trades training; there are multi-year waiting lists for some trades
- There is a difficulty in finding instructors to teach trades in local colleges
- Social skills training is needed for unskilled workers
- Many employers provide on-the-job training to develop the skills of their employees
- Employers are willing to provide this training but it is a very expensive investment
- Older worker mentoring of younger workers is an option to consider. Older workers have a wealth of knowledge they can pass on to younger workers
- A major issue with on-the-job training is employers losing those employees once they have trained them. Many employers fear investing time and money in training their employees so they can then move on to higher paying jobs

Infrastructure:

- There is a lack of affordable rental housing
- Smaller, more remote communities lack the necessary amenities to attract workers
- Princeton does not have shopping centres - it needs to offer something else
- The community needs a community centre as an attraction - to offer citizens activities to do in the winter months, a place to gather and connect with the community
- Need to find ways of getting immigrants to move from Lower Mainland to rural communities (i.e., need an immigrant attraction program - possibly a referral bonus)
- Need for orientation of immigrants to small centres to adapt to the change in lifestyle

- There is a difficulty in attracting professionals to smaller communities
- Existing dentists and doctors can not find replacements
- The community needs these professionals to attract new residents

Succession Planning:

- Many employers are looking to family members to take over their business
- If the owner can not find a buyer, they will shut the business down and call Ritchie Brothers to sell off the equipment
- Challenge is where new owners will get financing to purchase these businesses
- New owners often lack the necessary business skills
- Need to look at how we can provide a method to simplify the transfer of ownership
- Many business owners have no formal strategy around owner succession planning
- Employers have brought back older workers to teach new employees
- Need to consider extending the age for retirement

Final Comments

- There is a need for younger worker strategies:
 - o teach them to be entrepreneurs, with real life business experience
 - o teach people skills/financial skills in entrepreneurial setting
 - o start a junior achievement program
 - o need to provide more work experience training at business locations
- Need for special training in rural communities (i.e., basic skills training)
- Need to increase funding to create rural educational campuses rather than losing youth to larger centres for training
- Worker participation -
 - o offer flexibility in the workplace
 - o improve the work ethic among younger workers
 - o need to find out why people are choosing not to participate in the work force - these are questions that HRDC needs to survey
- Promotion of rural centres as a place to work (i.e., smaller communities need to find ways of attracting workers to their communities)