

YOUTH TRAINING & EDUCATION

KNOWLEDGE BRIEF

WINTER 2016



Youth are increasingly at a disadvantage in today's labour market due to an increased emphasis on experience^{1,2}. In rural areas there can be even fewer opportunities for youth and those opportunities that are available can be undesirable (e.g., fewer opportunities, short term contracts, no benefits, low wages), impacting the ability for youth to stay or return²⁻⁶. Additionally, inaccessible services and few youth specific services can amplify challenges, as can out-of-date marketing of job opportunities, negative perceptions of youth, and logistical challenges (e.g., transportation)^{2,3,5,7}. The impact of these challenges go beyond economics as the inability for youth to successfully engage in the labour force can impact their overall well-being and lead to negative behavior and isolation from the community⁸.

However the challenges youth face surrounding employment occur alongside a shortage of skilled people to fill employment vacancies⁹. The challenge finding the skilled worker is not uncommon. Within the Columbia

Basin Boundary region there is a disconnect between those that are underemployed and/or unskilled and those jobs that exist or are emerging¹⁰. While there is an identified need in the Columbia Basin Boundary region for well paying, skilled jobs, these jobs are coming and in order for the region to take advantage of up and coming economic opportunities these labour needs must be addressed¹⁰. The question then becomes one of how to facilitate youth to be able to fill these positions. As a result, actions and opportunities related to training and education are critical in rural areas¹¹. For the purposes of this knowledge brief youth related training and education are any initiatives that enhance the skills base, employability, and quality of life of youth.

A wide range of programs and initiatives exist. These can be categorized and described in different ways. Who is offering the program? For example, school programs can offer help with academic performance, work oriented curriculum, pre-employment training, and so on¹. Alternately, employers can offer on the job training, and youth an employers can both access third party programs (e.g., wage subsidy, training programs, job search assistance, counselling, self-employment assistance, return to school, work experience)^{1,12}. Another option is to consider the end goal. Initiatives can be targeted specifically toward recruitment, retention, specific skills development, the transition to workforce, mentorship, and so on^{1,13-15}. There are also active (e.g., skills training) and passive (e.g., wage subsidies) programs.

From multiple examples of youth training and education initiatives it is possible to identify common success factors. These include:

- Early intervention and sustained access^{1,2,5,10}
- Working with youth^{1,2,10,16-19}
- Financial support^{1-3,10,20}
- Training that is responsive to the needs of students and industry²¹
- Having specific participation guidelines and eligibility criteria²²
- Multiple efforts, but coordination to avoid duplication and overlap^{2,9,19,22}
- Monitoring and evaluation of programs^{1,22}
- Marrying challenges in order to create solutions^{2,8}

Of these success factors, the need for collaborative efforts stands out in the literature. Increasing access and awareness of

education and training opportunities requires government, school districts, and employers (business and industry) to work together^{13,23,24}.

Active post-secondary institutions are key to training new workers²⁵. Additionally, potential partnerships between colleges and employers can improve workforce related curriculum and can help students gain exposure to local industries^{25,26}. The Kindergarten to Grade 12 school system also plays a role in workforce development, influencing whether students leave or stay, as well as the career paths they follow²⁷. One document reviewed highlighted the need for government to develop connections between high schools and government employment programs². Another demonstrated collaborative efforts within the education system using the example of high schools in rural BC that have experimented with web courses and video conferencing in partnership with urban schools⁸.

There are many examples of connecting the workplace and the classroom. Bringing the workplace to the school can be done via the use of technology in more remote areas (e.g., partnering rural schools with urban employers)⁷. Examples of entrepreneurship and education linking together were found in campus business accelerators and other entrepreneurial activities for all levels of youth^{2,12}. Entrepreneurship training can help youth start local businesses, something seen in the Youth Ventures business start-up program in Newfoundland (e.g., 200 youth businesses started per year) and the Youth Mean Business program that exists within the Central Kootenays, providing financial support and mentorship for youth to start and run a business^{5,28,29}.

Beyond partnering with the education system, business and industry can also play many roles such as providing mentorship, apprenticeships, the designation of 'youth only' positions, and many other examples^{2,5}. Municipal governments can form youth advisory committees or councils that work alongside local government, providing youth input into their local community as well as transferable experience².

The above highlights the particular importance of collaborative efforts. It is important to recognize and acknowledge that collaboration can be a challenge. However, there is a clear need for a coordinated and responsible approach to training and education – not only within a region but linking with provincial initiatives and organizations¹⁰.

The economy is changing and will continue to do so. This means that labour requirements will continue to change as well, necessitating a range of approaches to the training and education of youth. Better preparation for youth entering the labour market increases the probability that youth will obtain and retain employment¹. Rural places need to more aggressively and comprehensively focus on building skills, providing the right kind of training, and ensuring access to a broad range of skills development opportunities^{10,30}.

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