

Submission to Nova Scotia Career Services Discussion

March 2013

FEED NOVA SCOTIA is pleased to submit this document for consideration during the consultation process, and we look forward to continued participation as the strategy develops.

Introduction and background

FEED NOVA SCOTIA has a membership network of over 150 agencies throughout the province. Our immediate goal is to feed hungry people and our ultimate goal is to eliminate chronic hunger and alleviate poverty.

Our positions and comments draw upon:

- Statistical information that identifies the realities of families living with hunger and poverty.
- First-person experiences shared with our client support staff and Helpline workers.
- Experiences from operating our Learning Kitchen, a 16-week employment training program that prepares participants for a job in the food service industry.
- A wide variety of experiences shared by our member food banks and meal programs across the province.

Current challenges faced by Nova Scotians

The announcement that Nova Scotia will be coordinating employment services and supports is welcome news as statistics illustrate the increasing pressures Nova Scotians experience to keep pace with the cost of living:

- The number of Nova Scotians being assisted by food banks each month has grown from 20,345 in 2008 to 23,561 in 2012.¹
- 56% of food banks in Nova Scotia reported an increase in assistance provided in 2012 compared to 2011, up from 41% in 2011 compared to 2010.
- Although there are regional differences in the yearly increase/decrease of individuals assisted by food banks (see appendix A), all regions have experienced a significant increase in 2012 compared to 2008, coinciding with Nova Scotia's changing economy and demographics.
- Historically, food banks in each of FEED NOVA SCOTIA's six member regions across the province support households which have employment income. In 2012, HungerCount revealed an increase in the percentage of households with employment-related income turning to food banks for support. Of particular note is that 19% of households receiving support from food banks in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) reported current employment as their primary source of income in March 2012.
- Regardless of their source of income, increases in living expenses have a disproportionately negative affect on people living in low income. This population includes families with children where at least one parent works full time all year long. In 2007, 59% of Nova Scotian children living below the Low Income Cut Off (LICO) belonged to families where at least one person worked full time, all year long.²

¹ The annual HungerCount survey is conducted each March throughout Canada. Results of the research provide a snapshot of assistance provided through food assistance programs including food banks, soup kitchens and shelters. FEED NOVA SCOTIA is proud to coordinate this research in, and provide analysis of survey results for, Nova Scotia.

² The Nova Scotia Child Poverty Report Card. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Nova Scotia (2010).

Do you agree that existing employment and career services need to change? What do you think are the key reasons for this change?

We believe that many Nova Scotians will benefit from a person-centred approach to providing employment and career services, particularly workers who are disadvantaged; those who find themselves in precarious employment situations; and those who have been unable to obtain or maintain employment. We support Food Bank Canada's position³ that current employment and training supports primarily target unemployed workers, and provide insufficient training for real career advancement or skill development. At the same time, there is little support for employed workers to source and obtain new opportunities that might also be accompanied by extended employee benefits, better pay, and career advancement.

The experiences we've had with our Learning Kitchen confirm that many factors can impact a person's ability to enter and remain in the job market, and success often hinges on individuals having personal support, accurate information, and acknowledgement of their successful steps toward employment.

In the context of a rapidly changing labour market in Nova Scotia, does it make sense to you to provide enhanced career services to more Nova Scotians? Why?

Yes. Nova Scotia is changing, and so are the needs of employers and workers. The population shift from rural to urban centres will continue due to many factors, but in particular, the promise of lucrative employment opportunities associated with the ship building contract. This will bring many job seekers to HRM from numerous parts of Nova Scotia and beyond our provincial borders. The developing plan for employment and career services in Nova Scotia indicates that the province is preparing for this eventuality. In addition to providing support for job seekers, we urge the government to support employers to provide well-paying jobs of good quality that result in stable employment, sustainable communities, and healthy families.

We know that it is difficult for individuals to be informed of the current labour needs let alone those trades and opportunities that may be available three to five years in the future. In this rapidly-changing labour market it will be important for relevant and accurate information to be available regarding career choices as well as ensure the support is available to evaluate personal skills, aptitudes, capacities, and limitations.

What do you think of the overall planned vision of Careers Nova Scotia centres? Is it the right vision for Nova Scotia at this time? Do you have any suggestions for changes to the vision?

The stated vision for employment and career services can support great steps forward in the provision of service to Nova Scotians. We are particularly supportive of the concept of providing individual-centred employment and career services. We agree that much can be done to better support individuals who, for example, find themselves unable to obtain or maintain employment, and those receiving Income Assistance.

Given the changing reality that includes rising household debt, an aging population, and individuals needing to work later in life, we believe now is the time to develop employment and career services that meet future demands of Nova Scotians.

What suggestions would you make regarding how the services of Careers Nova Scotia could be organized to provide fair and equal access to all Nova Scotians?

Employment can be a key factor in breaking the cycle of poverty, but jobs without benefits, little opportunity for advancements, and low pay can make a family's financial and social situation worse. Insufficient income is the primary reason for families experiencing food insecurity. Successful career and transitional employment supports

³ Creating Quality Sustainable Jobs and a Resilient Work Force in Canada, Food Banks Canada (2011)

will ideally be surrounded by other programs and services aimed at improving the conditions that underlie poverty and food insecurity. This would include:

- The creation and maintenance of affordable housing options.
- Flexible and, where required, long-term person-centred support and training programs to facilitate employment prospects for the diverse population of hard to employ, unemployed, underemployed, and disadvantaged workers.
- The continuation of specialized employment-related service and support to persons with disabilities and members of the Deaf community.
- Family-centred, affordable child care options including those that meet varying work hours and non-traditional working arrangements such as working from home.
- Increasing Nova Scotia tax credits and benefits for families living in low income.

What can we do to get Nova Scotians to take proactive steps to prepare for jobs of the future?

Be bold, be creative, be inclusive, and demonstrate Government's belief in Nova Scotia's opportunity for prosperity.

We encourage the provision of career services and employment supports that are innovative. We can learn from other jurisdictions' experiences but Nova Scotia should also strive to be a leader. We should be confident in piloting strategies and approaches that other jurisdictions have not used, but support the unique strengths and limitations within our province. Elected officials and civil servants should nurture the sense of excitement for a better future, and acknowledge that excitement is often accompanied by fear, to encourage Nova Scotians to confidently take steps toward their own economic successes.

Government, academics, and members of the private sector need to identify long-term opportunities and make them known to the public through the public education system, traditional and social media, the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities, business associations, youth groups, and other relevant organizations. If research has determined where there will be a demand for jobs, that information must be shared widely.

Universities need to be challenged to be more creative and to expand options for co-ops, practical academic and work experiences, and partnerships with the private sector and trade institutions.

In your view, what are the key features of modern career services for Nova Scotians? What services need to be provided?

Our recommendations for strengthening support through Career Services include:

- Recognizing that an individual's needs and goals will differ, but also acknowledging that employment income is not enough for some families to avoid experiencing real hardship.
- Providing training initiatives, bursaries, and grants aimed at traditionally marginalized populations.
- Strengthening service models that have garnered success for vulnerable populations such as the specialized employment-related supports and service provided to members of the disability and Deaf communities.
- Extending hours of operation for employment support offices to meet the needs of a diverse population (e.g. availability to child care, transportation, shift work).
- Developing outcome measures to ensure consistency of service and supports provided across the province and to all clients.
- Ensuring equity in service delivery (e.g. sign language interpreters may not be available in small communities, but video conferencing technology can support an individual's independence and be respectful of the Deaf culture).
- Providing employment supports that honour a community's traditional industries, and understand the social and cultural disconnect that accompanies a changing economic reality.

- Being prepared to provide supports and services that recognize the diverse employment paths of many Nova Scotians.
- Working with employers to identify and accurately convey opportunities, desired skills, etc.
- Intentionally recognizing that not all Nova Scotians are able to maintain employment in the traditional sense, but that this does not negate their contributions to community and must not result in a lack of professional or personal development opportunities.
- Supporting a burgeoning body of older workers (including those over 70) who are becoming a larger part of Canada's labour force. This trend is predicted to continue given better health outcomes later in life, the need to fill the gap between retirement funds and cost of living, and more flexible working arrangements than experienced by previous generations.
- Including traditional communication tools and newer forms of communication such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn when developing programs for Career Centres.
- Recognizing that some individuals, regardless of training or ability, will never maintain continuous employment income (ie. persons with mental health challenges). These individuals must be supported when they do not have employment income so they can quickly regain a level of physical/mental well-being that will allow them to return to the work force (ie. minimize delay in renewing income assistance and associated supports).

Are there risks that you can see in this transition process? If so, what are these and what are your suggestions for reducing this risk?

There are risks associated with the direction of future career and employment services if it includes the dismantling of specialized supports and services currently available to target populations such as youth, African Nova Scotians and the disability and Deaf communities. A general unemployment rate of over 50% indicates that the disability and Deaf communities are at a distinct disadvantage when trying to obtain employment. The disadvantage will be magnified if the existing supports and programs targeted to meet the needs of these communities are lost.

There are also risks if government proceeds with policy and program development, goals and success indicators without the direct involvement of community. We encourage you to seek continued input and direction from individuals and cross-sectoral organizations as a means of mitigating this risk.

What do you see as the benefits of this new approach to providing access to career services for more Nova Scotians?

Benefits of the new approach could include:

- Increased recognition that employment services aren't just about resumes, job search, and interview skills, but that every individual searching for more secure and relevant employment has a different set of skills to offer, and challenges to overcome, that put them at different points of the continuum.
- Appropriate programs and services will provide the opportunity to develop life skills, self-esteem, employment maturity and employment goals in addition to the skills offered by traditional career services, therefore impacting a variety of social outcomes.
- A province-wide strategy exists and provides equal services and opportunities in every region of the province.

Are there leading practices that have been developed in Nova Scotia or elsewhere that you think should be incorporated into the new vision? If so, how would you incorporate these?

FEED NOVA SCOTIA's Learning Kitchen provides an opportunity for our organization to experience first-hand the personal situations, challenges, and bureaucracy that influence the choices and eventual success of those who are struggling to find their place in the work force. Over the past seven years this program has evolved to incorporate suggestions and experiences from students, community groups, and members of the food service industry.

Our Learning Kitchen recently adopted a new approach to support our job-search activities. We engaged an HR volunteer to meet regularly with the students over a six-week period. Not only did they develop resumes and job-search strategies but they also developed a trusting relationship and the students ultimately shared their concerns about body image, self worth and trust issues. Prior to a four-week work placement each student participated in an interview with the Head Chef at their chosen restaurant. Five of the six students interviewed were offered a full-time position if their work performance matched their presentation in the interview. We believe this holistic approach to the job search process resulted in a heightened level of confidence and self-awareness which ultimately led to a superior interview experience.

Some strategies that the Learning Kitchen has adopted:

- Increasing the students' awareness of, and possible reactions to, the fear of success.
- Engaging the individual sectors in the specific needs of their particular trade.
- Sharing and celebrating personal success stories that help foster an attitude of confidence, excellence, and possibility.
- Understanding the implications, challenges, barriers, and fears individuals have when transitioning from unemployment to employment or from Income Assistance to employment.
- There is a myriad of programs, supports, regulations, processes, penalties and consequences that can unnecessarily complicate decisions related to employment. Person-centered career services must consider the individual's career and lifestyle objectives; focus on the relevant considerations; and strategically work to achieve those goals.

For more information

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