

October 20th “Tackling Youth Unemployment and Underemployment” de-brief:

Youth Leadership for Change’s event “Tackling Youth Unemployment and Underemployment” took place on Monday October 20th from 2-6pm at Richelieu-Vanier Community Centre. Over 20 participants including employment services, economic development workers, social service providers and others with an interest in the topic came. The first presentation positioned alarming Ottawa youth employment statistics in the context of a splintered economy where employers are having difficulty hiring and are unable to effectively communicate just-in-time needs. This hurts both Ottawa youth who are unable to gain early career-track experience and smaller Ottawa employers who want added value when attending to business needs.



The first break-out group discussed the following 3 questions:

1. As youth who have recently completed school with little or no career-path job experience, how would you try to tap into the hidden job market?
2. Generally, how could the voluntary sector support networking and mentorship for youth?
3. What could the voluntary sector do to support today’s employment reality for employers to hire youth?

Participants stressed the importance of career-planning, suggesting that youth need to explore options as students and get as much experience in their field while completing their education. The second question saw conversation move towards what effective networking looks like today and how youth can make the most of opportunities. The third question took some attention away from the shortcomings of youth and got participants to grapple with the medium and long term implications of employer struggles. While folks were unsure exactly what they could or would have to do to support employers, there was a sense of needing to build robust relationships with employers in the city to better serve youth. Ottawa youth will continue to struggle with employment if local employers are unable to transparently provide career-oriented opportunities.

The second presentation was a roundtable with a group of research interns who mapped employment services available to youth over the summer. They examined the services available and compared youth versus service provider analysis of the reasons for youth unemployment and steps that could be taken to mitigate it. One of the reasons agencies believed youth were having difficulty with employment was under-utilization of available services. Youth were frustrated with the difficulty of finding services that met their needs, suggesting a centralized hub could better direct youth and serve as a way for agencies to communicate with one another. The goal is to efficiently direct youth to the appropriate services regardless of what their point of entry to employment services in Ottawa is. In general, youth need to be a part of service planning to help ensure their needs are being adequately addressed.



The second break-out group discussed the following 3 questions:

1. How can we come together to create a range of supports throughout the year?
2. How can we come together to create career based opportunities?
3. How can we come together to create professional networking and mentorship opportunities?

The second set of break-out groups moved the discussion to the role of employers and the challenges of more directly integrating them into services and programming.



Creating supports for youth throughout the year is a challenge. There were suggestions to connect with diverse groups that could provide longer opportunities such as universities (that operate on a similar timeline) and industry associations. Industry associations were perceived to contain career-relevant opportunities and a realistic source of information on career trajectories in today's economy. Participants expressed interest in the idea of a hub for opportunities and as a central point from which youth could be directed to appropriate services but few knew what practical steps could be taken to help build it. Funding needs to be sought out every few years, leaving little time or flexible resources to set up new infrastructure that would exist outside of current mandates – even if it would synergize individual efforts. Service providers have a slightly different conception of good mentorship, seeing mentors as primarily a source of positive mental stimulation. Youth researchers and youths interviewed for research also see mentors as a source of career guidance, with knowledge of how to land jobs in today's fragmented economy.



Moving forward:

It is clear from the interest expressed on October 20th that improving Ottawa youth employment outcomes is a topic of importance to everyone. We have disagreements about what we think the causes are and how we can best channel our energies to make an impact, but we set aside differences when we come together for serious discussion on how to make things better. In the coming months, the Social Planning Council of Ottawa will hold a variety of stakeholder meetings on the ways we can move forward on alleviating youth employment struggles. To get involved or to provide input, please send us an email to CEDcoordinator@spcottawa.on.ca.



Work done by Youth Leadership for change from last year's report on youth unemployment and under-employment to this year's presentations for the October 20th meeting are available on the Social Planning Council of Ottawa's website at the following link: <http://www.spcottawa.on.ca/ced/youth-leadership-change>.

Stay tuned for 2014 reports that will incorporate findings from the October 20th meeting!