

# **LOOKING BEYOND THE WANT ADS**

## **LABOUR MARKET DIALOGUES HIGHLIGHTS FROM PHASE I**

a report of



**COMMUNITY  
COUNCIL**

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# Acknowledgements

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## Section 1: Introduction

With a record low unemployment rate, how can employers in BC's Capital Region be better supported to hire and retain people with barriers to employment?

Approximately 75% of businesses in BC's Capital Region employ five or less employees. Many business owners do not have the time to invest heavily in human resources to attract and retain employees. At the same time, many unemployed people wish to work but face barriers such as poverty, homelessness, not speaking the language, illiteracy, not having work or life skills, and discrimination. With better supports for employers, many of these individuals could participate in the workforce.

Labour Market Dialogues is a project of the Community Council, designed to explore how employers in BC's Capital Region may be better supported to hire and retain people experiencing barriers to employment.

## Section 2: Phase I - Research Design

In the fall of 2006, in partnership with six local community service agencies, a community consultation process took place to explore these issues with employers, service providers and people experiencing barriers to employment first hand. The Community Council, using an appreciative inquiry model, conducted interviews with 60 employers, 42 clients and 10 community service agencies.

Altogether, more than 1,700 barriers to employment were named by participants. These barriers were separated into 32 distinct types of barriers and were grouped into two main categories: personal and external.

In addition to barriers to employment, participants named more than 1,000 existing supports for barriers as well as 200 ideas for addressing current gaps.

The information gathered in Phase I of the Labour Market Dialogues was used to identify the critical concerns of the community around these labour market issues and to develop the design for Labour Market Dialogues

Phase II: Research.

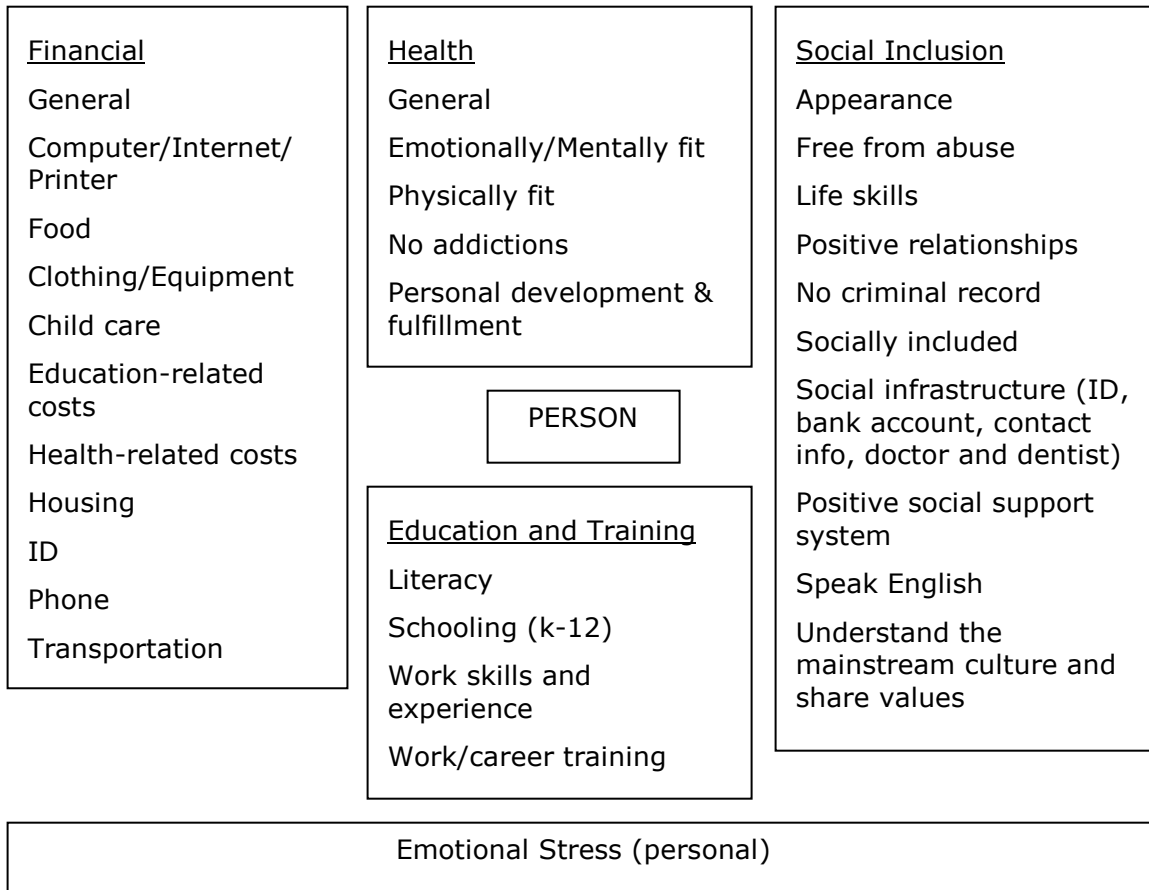
### **Phase I Partners**

Vancity Credit Union  
Cool Aid REES Network  
John Howard Society  
Prostitutes  
Empowerment  
Education and  
Resource Society  
Victoria READ Society  
Victoria Immigrant and  
Refugee Centre Society  
Victoria Native  
Friendship Centre

## Section 3: The Barriers

### *Personal Barriers*

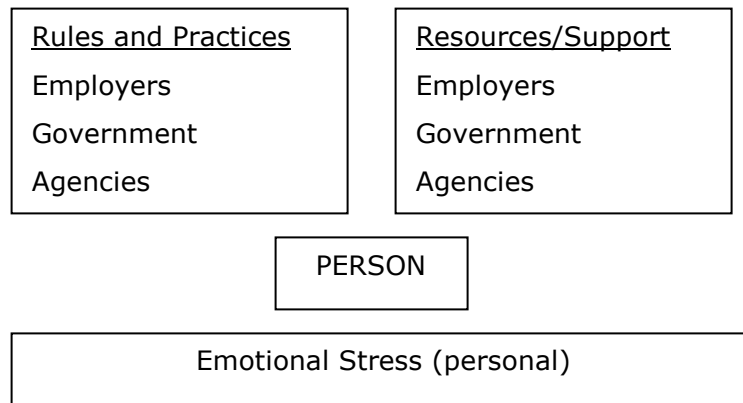
Personal barriers refer to facets of life which an adult in Canadian society is expected to manage for themselves: money to afford a phone, maintaining good health, finishing school, and having ID, for example. Missing any one of these supports can create a barrier to finding or keeping work.



The four main personal barrier categories shown above are largely self-explanatory. The financial category refers to the basic structures a person needs to have in place to be stably employed. The health category refers to the physical, emotional and mental capacity an individual requires to be stably employed. The education and training category refers to the formal knowledge, skills and training a person needs to have been schooled in to be stably employed. The social inclusion category relates to how integrated an individual is into our mainstream society, to the competencies that individuals are expected to absorb informally from the positive role models of their families and friends. Social inclusion forms a foundation for a person's life which is critical to being stably employed.

## **External Barriers**

External barriers are ones a person cannot reasonably be expected to influence: the rules governing eligibility for a publicly funded training program, an employer not having proper safety equipment, or discrimination based on visible differences, for example. Any one of these factors can create barriers to finding and keeping work.



Rules and Practices barriers are external barriers to employment that are created unintentionally by rules or systems laid out by organizing bodies, such as levels of government, service providing agencies, and businesses or business sectors. Likewise, such organizing bodies can unintentionally create barriers to employment through shortfalls in resources and the supports they put in place. Additionally, this second category of external barriers includes discrimination that individuals may face for one reason or another. Discrimination is the ultimate lack of support, where an individual is excluded based upon a perception of being socially unacceptable.

The two charts above show emotional stress linked to both personal and external categories. Missing some or even one of the supports listed above is compounded by an invisible barrier to work: the emotional stress that occurs when dealing with a barrier. A working mother who does not have adequate child care faces two problems. First, she does not have appropriate child care; second, she is worried about her child. Both the lack of care and the worry make it difficult to manage work.

## **Supports**

Participants in the community consultation named a number of existing supports already in place to address barriers to employment. For the purposes of this research, only the employer supports were analysed in detail.

The employer supports mentioned by participants were grouped into the following 13 types of support:

- Employer advocated to an outside agency on behalf of an employee;
- Employer changed business practices (such as hiring qualifications, for example) to remove barrier;
- Employer implemented flexible scheduling to accommodate employee;
- Employer made physical or structural changes to the work place to accommodate employee;
- Employer matched job description to employee's capacity;
- Employer paid personal living costs for employee;
- Employer paid decent/liveable wage;
- Employer provided personal financing for an employee;
- Employer provided personal goods and services for an employee;
- Employer provided peer mentoring;
- Employer provided training;
- Employer sought assistance from an outside agency to help accommodate employee, and;
- Employer was positive and supportive.

Of the supports mentioned, the vast majority of supports were put into place to deal with personal barriers. This is not surprising since employers would be less likely to be able to address external barriers faced by employees. Of the employer supports mentioned for both personal and external barriers, the main support named was that employers were positive and supportive.

## Section 4: Findings

The community consultation process brought to light a number of factors relating to barriers to employment, and helped point the way for research in the second phase.

- The category of barriers mentioned by the most participants is Social Inclusion (mentioned by 90% of participants), closely followed by Education and Training (mentioned by 82%). Social inclusion barriers appear to arise from long-term exclusion from mainstream society and from gaps in a person's social development. This suggests that simple, "one size fits all" solutions for groups of people currently excluded from the labour market will not be practical.
- Half of the people experiencing barriers to employment mentioned having barriers in all four personal

*She could have managed the mountain if somebody could have got the damned foothills out of the way. It's the little things that keep coming up first that are so difficult.*

Community service provider,  
speaking of a client with  
multiple barriers to  
employment.

categories and 100% mentioned having barriers in at least two personal categories. This suggests that barriers in one area tend to either create or compound barriers in another. Solutions for these barriers, therefore, will likely need to focus on addressing multiple issues and may require longer-term efforts to resolve them.

- Employers reported that they are already hiring people experiencing barriers to employment. However, employers indicated that they were more aware of behaviours resulting from barriers, than the barriers causing the behaviours. For example, a number of employers mentioned having hired an employee, the employee showing up for a few days to a few weeks, and then disappearing and not contacting the employer again. The employers had no sense of the barrier that caused the disappearance (which could range from child care issues, health-related appointments, transportation issues, dealing with an addiction to stress at re-entering the workforce). This suggests that labour market solutions for employers may need to include a strong awareness-raising component.
- Of the personal barriers mentioned by all participants, the main employer support named was being positive and supportive. This suggests that simply being encouraging and open and positive with employees who are struggling with barriers is in itself a quite significant support. The next most common employer support for personal barriers was changing the business practices to remove barriers. This suggests that, for employers wishing to better accommodate employees with barriers, examining how the structures of their business may be creating barriers and evaluating the opportunities to shift those structures may be a fruitful exercise.
- All participant groups felt that barriers to employment is a critical labour market issue that needs to be researched in detail.

## **Section 5: Next Steps**

The interest and rich detail shared by participants in Phase I of the Labour Market Dialogues is encouraging. While there are numerous barriers to employment and insufficient existing supports, participants offered valuable suggestions for research and ideas to address the gaps.

The goal of the Labour Market Dialogues Phase II will be to take the barriers, existing supports and gaps identified in Phase I by participants and, in dialogue with employers, community service providers, people with barriers to employment and others, research potential solutions which show the most promise to support employers to be able to hire and retain people with barriers to employment.