



An Employment Action Plan for Persons with a Disability in New Brunswick

2012-2017

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A Message from the Co-Chairs of the Employment Action Plan Steering Committee

We are pleased to present the Employment Action Plan for Persons with a Disability in New Brunswick.

We would like to thank the many individuals and organizations who took part in the development of the plan from Steering Committee and Working Group members to all those who made submissions or participated in the public consultations.

The Employment Action Plan for Persons with a Disability is an ambitious five year plan. It will require a shift in the way we have designed policies and delivered programs and services in New Brunswick. It will also require a shift in our way of thinking to ensure the first objective of policies and programs will be to support persons with a disability to work to their fullest potential. It will require us to work more efficiently and focus on the needs of New Brunswickers with a disability in the areas of literacy, training, education and employment. We must also keep in mind the importance of providing disability-related supports for other life goals and activities.

We have made some significant progress in the employment of persons with disabilities in New Brunswick. But we have a long road ahead to realize the goals identified in this plan. Some initiatives will be possible in the short-term and within existing resources. Other initiatives may take a longer time to implement and may require new investments. Progress will take time but with a high level of commitment from persons with a disability, community, government and employers, we will achieve our vision of New Brunswick as a leader in the employment of persons with a disability.

Sincerely,



Danny Soucy, MLA
Co-Chair



Jonathan Davenport, Employer Representative
Co-Chair

Introduction

New Brunswick has the second highest rate of disability in Canada at 17.2% (Statistics Canada, 2008) of the population and our employment rates and employment participation rates for persons with a disability continue to be below the National average. Lived experience, community-based experience and research tell us that with access to education, literacy, training, adequate support and employment opportunities many persons with a disability can work and lead productive lives.

In 2005, consultations were held and a Ministerial Employ-Ability Action Plan for 2005-2008 was created. This plan was effective in identifying priorities and spearheading improvements such as extension of Health Card benefits for individuals leaving Social Assistance, the realization of the New Brunswick Employer Support Services and changes to the Training & Employment Support Services (TESS) program. The changes to TESS included the expansion of the program to include supports for individuals age 16 to 18.

When the implementation period for the plan had expired, the New Brunswick Disability Executives' Network requested that Government prioritize the development of a new employment action plan. During the 2011 Legislative Breakfast held in recognition of Disability Awareness Week, Premier David Alward and the Honourable Martine Couombe, Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training & Labour launched an initiative to develop a new Employment Action Plan for persons with a disability. Grand Falls-Drummond-Saint-André MLA Danny Soucy and employer representative Jonathan Davenport, of UPS Canada, were named co-chairs of the steering committee for the action plan.

A consultation and engagement process was initiated and a diverse Steering Committee and Working Group were formed (see Appendix A & B for lists of members). A high level of involvement from the Working Group to the consultation sessions reflected a significant interest and a commitment to develop a proactive plan. The resulting plan is multi-faceted and includes initiatives to change and build policies, enhance services, build a culture of true collaboration, engage employers and fundamentally shift how we address disability and employment. The resulting action plan includes a range of initiatives that collectively present an opportunity for real change.

This plan provides some important background information that highlights the current employment situation for persons with a disability, why an action plan is necessary and what programs and benefits are currently in place to support the education, training and employment of persons with a disability. The plan establishes a clear vision and a set of goals for the Employment Action Plan (along with key indicators for measuring successful implementation and achievement of results). Recommendations for actions are provided under a number of areas that were highlighted during the public consultations and Working Group discussions. For a glossary of key terms related to this plan, please refer to Appendix C. Please note that no definition of disability is provided in this plan given the varied definitions utilized by levels of government and in different policies and programs in New Brunswick.

Background

Developing an effective Employment Action Plan requires a strong understanding of a number of key issues, including:

- The current employment picture for persons with a disability, and its relationship with literacy, poverty and broader economic and labour market trends;
- The policies and programs that we already have to promote employment opportunities;
- The current problems and barriers faced by people as they try to prepare for and enter the workforce, and what needs to change;
- Knowledge of some current best practices in the field of training and employment for persons with a disability; and
- Government and society's responsibilities arising from human rights treaties and legislation and from existing policy commitments for developing an inclusive province.

Drawing on research, a review of the human rights obligations and existing policies, and rich discussions held at the consultations and within the Action Plan Working Group, this background information sets the stage for the change that needs to happen in order to significantly improve employment outcomes for persons with a disability.

Where We Are Today

According to Statistics Canada and the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey conducted in 2006, New Brunswick has the second highest rate of disability in Canada at 17.2% of the population. Of working age people (ages 15 to 64), 14.3% have a disability (compared with the national average of 11.5%). National employment participation figures clearly demonstrate that persons with a disability lack opportunities for employment compared to the general population. The most recent data from 2006 indicates that:

- Employment rates for working age persons with a disability are significantly lower than those without a disability – 49.8% of persons with a disability were employed in New Brunswick in 2006 compared to 71.9% of people without a disability (comparative national figures are 53.5% and 75.1%). This rate had not significantly changed from 2001 data (Statistics Canada, 2008).
- Employment participation rates (people working or actively looking for work) show similar disparities on a National level with only 59.6% of persons with a disability participating compared to 80.2% of people without a disability (Statistics Canada, 2008).
- The employment and labour market participation rates for some populations of persons with a disability are even lower. For example, the national employment rate for working age people with a developmental disability is only 27.8% (Statistics Canada, 2008). A 1998 study by the by Canadian Association of the Deaf indicated that 20.6% of Deaf Canadians were fully employed. There are other populations that experience similar low employment rates; however, detailed data is limited.

- The gap in employment rates between people with and without a disability is higher among older age groups, and is somewhat higher among women than among men (Statistics Canada, 2008).

The lack of attachment to the labour market has a significant impact on poverty for persons with a disability. According to the Institute for Research and Development on Inclusion and Society (2012), we know that:

- Working age persons with a disability are approximately twice as likely to live on low incomes compared to people without a disability.
- Persons with a disability are more likely to be receiving provincial social assistance benefits compared to those without a disability.
- A higher percentage of Aboriginal persons with a disability live on low incomes compared to Aboriginal people without a disability.
- The chances of living in poverty increases with the significance of a person's disability.

According to a recent Social Development Annual Report (2010-2011), in New Brunswick, nearly 6,000 persons with a disability received social assistance benefits as individuals who are either certified as disabled, Deaf or blind. According to the Department, there are approximately 3,500 additional individuals who receive Social Assistance under the Transitional Assistance Program who are recognized as having 'long term needs' (often related to a disability of some kind). Benefits received by these individuals and families are significantly lower than most recognized poverty measures.

Persons with a disability also face serious disadvantages in the area of education and training. National statistics indicate persons with a disability are more likely to leave school without a diploma compared to students who do not have a disability (28% versus 19%), and that only 13.2% of persons with a disability have a university degree or certificate. Participation in post-secondary education (as well as apprenticeship programs) remains low for persons with a disability and those that do participate often need more time to complete their education or training program (Statistics cited in *Disability and Inclusion Based Policy Analysis*, IRIS, 2012). There is also a lack of alternative job training options for those who do not attend formal post-secondary education or training programs.

Against this backdrop, our workforce is aging and trends indicate that some sectors of our economy are or will soon be experiencing labour shortages. Some of these shortages are in higher skilled occupations; other shortages are or will be in moderate or lower skilled occupations. For example, according to the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council (2010), the potential demand for tourism labour in New Brunswick is expected to grow from about 34,200 full-year jobs in 2007 to over 36,600 in 2025. However, the potential supply of labour in the tourism sector is projected to shrink over this period, from the equivalent of about 33,800 full-year jobs in 2007, to just fewer than 30,400 in 2025. Within New Brunswick, some employers are already

looking to fill positions by importing workers from other countries because they cannot fill positions within their businesses.

Given the fact that many persons with a disability have skills, a desire to work and the need for human resources to sustain our economy, a logical assumption would be that employers are openly welcoming persons with a disability into their workforce. While some clearly are, many employers are still reluctant to recruit and employ persons with a disability. The Public Service Commission of Canada's *Equity and Diversity Directorate* (May 2011) highlighted the challenges faced by persons with a disability in a number of western countries, including Canada:

- Negative attitudes, fears, misperceptions, false assumptions, myths and stereotypes about persons with a disability held by employers, managers and supervisors.
- Lack of knowledge by employers about disability issues, the duty to accommodate and how to set up a structured recruitment program for persons with a disability.
- Inaccessible websites, including tools and applications that are not usable and/or user-friendly for persons with a disability (as well the lack of computer access).
- Inadequate recruitment and outreach strategies as well as the lack of employer collaboration with organizations that support persons with a disability to achieve employment.
- Employers' lack of knowledge about how to implement retention strategies for persons with a disability.
- The perception that today's workers must be able to 'multitask' and juggle multiple roles along with the corresponding belief that persons with a disability will not be able to handle these expectations.
- Employment agencies that do not fully understand employer needs.

While the economic case for facilitating labour market participation for persons with a disability is compelling, there is a clear disconnect between the willingness of people to work and the willingness of employers to recruit and hire. With looming demographic changes about to affect the availability of labour, the time is right to change the relationship between persons with a disability and New Brunswick employers.

Beyond the Economic Case: Legal and Other Commitments That Require Attention and Action

While there is a clear economic and social case to be made for enhancing employment opportunities for persons with a disability, there are other compelling reasons for taking steps to end economic exclusion faced by many people. Chief among these are obligations arising from international treaties, as well as national and provincial human rights legislation.

In March 2010, Canada (with the consent of provincial and territorial governments) ratified the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD). The general principles of this Convention support "full and effective participation and inclusion in society" (CRPD, Article 3). Through the Convention "states parties" have agreed to "ensure and promote the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all persons with disabilities"

(CRPD, Article 4). Article 27 of the Convention specifically addresses the right to “work and employment” and provides that:

States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and in a work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities. (Underlining added)

Article 27 also provides that states parties shall “safeguard and promote the realization of the right to work” through a number of measures including prohibiting discrimination, enabling people to have access to ‘vocational guidance programs’ and training, promoting employment within the public sector, private sector as well as self-employment opportunities, and ensuring that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with a disability in the workplace.

The CRPD encourages governments to take proactive measures to facilitate employment for persons with a disability. Nationally, our Constitution guarantees equality rights that are designed to redress historical disadvantages faced by certain groups within society.

Outside of laws and treaties, the New Brunswick Government has made strong commitments for developing an inclusive province. In the education context, there has been a commitment to inclusive education for over 25 years. The provincial Disability Support Program is based on principles of participation, equality and access to the community (Department of Social Development, *New Brunswick Disability Support Program Policy Manual*, 2010). The current Government's agenda recognizes the value of persons with a disability and commits to action to improve the lives of people through a number of concrete measures including employment related actions.

Current Programs and Services

While much must be done to significantly improve employment outcomes, there are currently a number of programs and services that support persons with a disability. Some of these programs and services are geared toward supporting persons with a disability to work, while others have broader purposes or serve broader populations. It should be noted that Francophone persons with a disability may have difficulty accessing some of these programs. Below is a brief summary of these programs:

Training and Employment Support Services (TESS)

This Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour (PETL) program provides funding for persons with a disability for a variety of services or supports, including:

- Employment training – includes tuition, books, tutors, living expenses, and training supplies (some of these items are only covered if they have a disability-related component – for example, converting text to Braille).

- Employment support – includes job search, job coaching, support workers, counselling, entrepreneurial planning, and work-site modifications.
- Adaptive and assistive – includes technologies, tools and equipment, ergonomic aids, specialized transportation, and assessment.
- Job crisis – includes various job crisis intervention services.

To be eligible for this program an individual must be 18 or over and have a permanent or long term physical, intellectual, psychiatric, or cognitive disability. They must also have an employment action plan. A recent change has seen the program expand to include youth with a disability who are 16 or over and still attending high school. For example, TESS may provide employment supports required for summer employment.

The funding available under the TESS program is time limited. For example, a person who requires on the job support, such as a job coach, interpreter or employment support worker, can receive up to 600 hours of support for up to 52 weeks. Currently, there is no on-going job support funded under this program.

In 2010-2011, the TESS Program provided financial support to 404 individuals (compared with 462 in 2009-2010).

Transition from School to Work or Post-Secondary Education

There are a number of supports that youth with a disability may receive to help make the transition from high school to work or post-secondary education.

- As part of their high school education, some students participate in co-operative education programs that involve work experience in the community. Other students have ‘work experience’ that takes place within the school.
- In the Francophone education sector, students with a “programme d’adaptation scolaire” have access to a new program called “trousses d’exploration de métiers semi-spécialisés”, which provide kits for learning about different types of work found in the community (e.g. worker in a pet store or flower shop) and for preparing students for a work experience placement in the field.
- APSEA (Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority) is involved with students who have a sensory disability in the Anglophone sector to provide assistance with career exploration, transition planning and access to post- secondary education. The service is contracted and funded by the Department of Education & Early Childhood Development. In the Francophone sector, students who have a sensory disability receive very similar services directly from the Department of Education & Early Childhood Development.
- The New Brunswick Association for Community Living (NBACL) is involved with a pilot initiative funded by the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour to provide support to high school students with an intellectual disability to plan for the transition to work or community college and to learn work preparation skills.

- Many school personnel in both the Anglophone and Francophone education sectors have been trained in the use of the PATH (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope) planning process to help guide transition planning for students with a disability.

Post-Secondary Education Financial Aid

Students with a disability may be eligible for a Canada Study Grant of up to \$8,000 per year from the Federal government to cover exceptional education related costs associated with certain permanent disabilities. To apply, a person must first apply to the provincial student financial services office for a full-time or part-time Canada Student Loan in order to establish need. Students with a disability may also be eligible for a Canada Access Grant of up to \$2,000 per loan year to assist with covering the costs of accommodation, tuition, books and other education-related expenses. To be eligible, all students must have a permanent disability, not be restricted from further Canada Student Loans, maintain a satisfactory scholastic standard, and have an assessed need. Students who are participating in a modified post-secondary program and who will not receive a regular diploma or certificate are not eligible for student financial aid and these grants.

In 2010-2011, 439 individuals in New Brunswick received the Canada Study Grant (compared with 365 in 2009-2010) and 239 individuals received the Canada Access Grant (compared with 250 in 2009-2010).

Other Post-Secondary Education Programming

Post-secondary institutions provide accommodations for students with learning and other disabilities to pursue degree and certificate programs. The TESS program is available to cover the cost of some accommodations and supports.

NBCC/CCNB campuses in New Brunswick offer various services to persons with a disability including verification of accessibility, academic accommodations, note takers, test accommodations, assistive technology, alternative format documentation and tutoring services. A special admissions process is in place for students who do not meet the entrance criteria because they were on a modified high school program. Between 25 and 30 students are admitted into NBCC/CCNB programs each year through this process.

Public universities in New Brunswick also offer accessibility services or centres that provide a range of accommodations or services for students with a disability. Some private colleges and training centres also provide accommodations.

Employment Assistance Services (EAS)

The Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training & Labour (DPETL) often provides employment services to persons with a disability through third party service providers. These agencies are typically non-profit organizations or community agencies already offering services to persons with a disability. Services include, but are not limited to:

- One on one employment counselling
- Career decision making strategies and support
- Job search assistance
- Resume writing
- Assessments for work accommodations
- Facilitation of TESS proposals
- Skill enhancement
- Information and support to employers who hire persons with a disability
- Employment maintenance support

In New Brunswick, there are 23 agencies that provide Employment Assistance Services exclusively to persons with a disability and an additional 7 agencies that provide Employment Assistance Services to broader populations including persons with a disability. A new Contract Management process is being implemented that will use a request for proposal or tendering process depending on the amount of the contract. This process may impact EAS services for persons with a disability starting in 2013.

Work Ability Wage Subsidy Program

This DPETL program provides a short term wage subsidy to employers to allow people to explore employment options, gain work experience and/or develop work skills. Eligible individuals are people who have been out of an education institution for at least six months and who have developed an employment action plan. (This program is not available to students who are seeking a summer work experience). A wage subsidy can be paid for up to 40 hours of work per week. An employer must agree to participate in the wage subsidy program. Employers are responsible for paying worker's compensation premiums and must agree to complete an employee evaluation.

In 2010-2011, 634 individuals were supported under the Work Ability Program. Fifty-three (53) individuals (8% of the total) were persons with a disability.

Employer Wage Subsidy - Workforce Expansion Program

This DPETL program utilizes temporary wage reimbursements to help establish permanent employment or annually recurring seasonal jobs. A wage subsidy is available to an employer at a rate and duration that depend on the type of employment that is created and the individual employed.

In 2010-2011, 1,981 individuals were hired through the Workforce Expansion Program. Thirty-two (32) individuals (1.6% of the total) were persons with a disability.

Student Employment and Experience Development Program (SEED)

This DPETL Program provides post-secondary students with employment experience through summer jobs, co-operative placements, and self-employment opportunities. The program objectives are to:

- Provide students with employment experience related to their skills or education; and
- Provide students with an entrepreneurship experience.

In 2010-2011, 1,610 post-secondary students benefited from a summer employment experience through the SEED Program. Fourteen (14) students (0.8% of the total) were persons with a disability.

Social Assistance Programming for Employment and Education

The Department of Social Development has a number of policies and benefits that are designed to help people receiving social assistance to find work or to further their education. People who find work and no longer need income benefits are allowed keep their Health Card for 3 years. People are also allowed to earn income each month before their income benefits are reduced (currently \$250/month for people on Extended Benefits and \$150/month for people on Transitional Assistance benefits). There are other benefits that may be obtained such as a clothing allowance, school supplies, transportation assistance and child care assistance.

Most persons with a disability are on what is known as the “basic caseload”. This means that there is little or no active planning to help people to find work or access further education/training. Under the basic caseload, the ratio of case managers to people on social assistance is very high (1 case manager for every 200-300 people in less populated regions and 1 case manager for every 500-700 people in more populated regions). Persons with a disability can ask to participate in “career development” but most persons with a disability are not involved in career development, and therefore receive their monthly cheque and health benefits.

Equal Employment Opportunity Program (EEO)

This program is managed by the Office of Human Resources. It is designed to provide employment opportunities in the provincial public service to people from three designated groups: visible minorities, Aboriginal people, and persons with a disability.

Through the EEO program, the Office of Human Resources provides funding to provincial government departments and school districts who agree to hire EEO candidates. Two funding options are available:

- The EEO program can contribute up to 50% of the salary to a maximum of \$15,000 a year for a maximum of two years.
- The EEO program can contribute \$250 a month to a department who has hired an EEO candidate that receives a disability benefit or who can only work limited hours per week due to their health condition for a maximum of five years.

In 2010-2011, 52 people were placed in term positions with the provincial public service. Eleven (11) individuals (21% of the total) were persons with a disability. The Office of Human Resources held a consultation in 2011 to review the EEO program and to gain input into the

development of a workplace equity and diversity policy. The Department is currently reviewing the results of the consultations to determine a next step plan.

Disability Support Program

The Disability Support Program has been available province-wide since July 2010 and serves adults aged 19 to 64 who have a long term disability. The program provides disability-related supports to eligible individuals in order to facilitate their personal development and their participation and inclusion in the community. The program involves person-centered and flexible approaches to planning, which means that supports are based on each person's own goals and needs. Some types of support for which individuals may be eligible include:

- Personal care assistance within or outside the home (such as help with dressing, bathing, grooming and toileting);
- Support for community involvement and participation;
- Personal living skills training;
- Home support (including cleaning, laundry, meal preparation and other household tasks);
- Assistance with transportation that is "disability specific"; and
- Technical aids and devices that are not covered under other programs.

The DSP person-centred planning process and application form encourages goal setting in many areas including training, skill development and employment. Generally, however, supports for training and employment are not covered under the DSP program, "except if provided through ADAPT agencies and funded by the Department of Social Development" (Disability Support Program Policy Manual, 2010).

Visual Language Interpreter Services

Through an agreement with the Departments of Social Development and Post- Secondary Education, Training and Labour, two organizations (South East Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services and Saint John Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services) coordinate the provision of qualified Visual Language Interpreter Services for the province. These services are provided throughout New Brunswick for a variety of needs, including employment related needs. These services are contracted on a fee for service basis. There are currently 6 qualified Visual Language Interpreters available under this service for the province.

Community Mental Health Services

The Community Mental Health Centres (CMHCs) are a key component in the mental health service delivery system in New Brunswick. The CMHCs are located throughout the province and provide a variety of prevention, intervention, and postvention services for New Brunswickers.

Clients are assessed individually by mental health clinicians to identify a mental health diagnosis. When employment is a key factor in addressing a client's mental diagnosis, appropriate services are offered. Employment-focused services are provided through the 13 CMHCs.

Activity Centres are located throughout the province and run by, and for, persons living with mental illness. Activity Centres have a focus on prevention and promotion. Their self-help programs are varied and are based according to local needs and interests. These centres promote community integration by providing social, vocational, recreational and advocacy activities. They help people become more independent of formal services by means of peer support, education, and mutual aid. Some Activity Centres focus on rehabilitation and have a vocational component.

Addiction Services

The Department of Health operates seven regional addiction centres through the Regional Health Authority. Addictions Services receives funding from the Labour Market Agreement for Persons with Disabilities. Services within each zone include detoxification, out-patient services and community prevention services. Two short-term residential services (Saint John-Ridgewood and Campbellton) and one long-term residential service (Saint John-Lonewater) are also available to all zones.

In addition, the Youth Addiction Outpatient Service (YAOS), an outpatient service designed specifically for youth, is in place in all zones in the province. The YAOS uses outcome indicators to evaluate its effectiveness and provides services in the middle and high schools. An in-patient residential program for more severe situations is available at Cassidy Lake (Norton, NB), through a contract with Portage Atlantic.

Canadian Mental Health Association Programming

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is funded by the Department of Health to provide programming and services. CMHA promotes the mental health of all New Brunswickers and supports the resilience and recovery of people who experience mental illness. Workshops and training are provided on a variety of topics including assertiveness, self-esteem, panic and anxiety, anger, stress and mental health in the workplace. Some CMHA Branches are also contracted to provide EAS services.

Health Services Program

Under this program a number of benefits and services are available for people who are eligible. Health Services are typically provided to people who qualify for a Health Card from the Department of Social Development. Health Cards may provide different benefits depending on the person's situation and needs. Most provide for prescription drug coverage, as well as dental and vision coverage. There are many other types of benefits that can be provided. The approval process for equipment and technical aids can take from 3 to 6 months (unless there is an immediate risk).

Adult Developmental Activities, Programs and Training (ADAPT) Program

This program is operated and funded by the Department of Social Development and is provided through 38 community agencies that contract with the Department. Each agency is provided an annual grant for a specific number of "seats", which varies from agency to agency (from as low as 8 to as high as 127). The standardized provincial rate for a "seat" is \$33 per day. There are

approximately 1200 individuals served by the ADAPT program, with two-thirds of those served having an intellectual disability. Some ADAPT agencies receive funding from other programs to provide additional services.

The ADAPT program focuses on the development and provision of valued activities and training for adults with disabilities. The encouragement of appropriate behavior, respect of daily schedules, social habits and other expectations placed on an adult are part of individual support plans and help participants and their families with life in general, as well as in employment and volunteer activities. Activities include vocational training, academics, life management skills, communication and health & physical development.

These agencies are largely facility-based where people spend part or all of their day. Some agencies operate social enterprises through which they sell their products or services in the local community. Some agencies also pay their participants a small stipend for the tasks that they perform (although a small number of people are paid minimum wage). Some agencies support people with more individualized community activities such as work, volunteer or recreational pursuits.

New Brunswick Employer Support Services (NBESS)

NBESS supports employers throughout New Brunswick with the hiring of persons with various types of disabilities, and advancing diversity in the workplace. NBESS is funded through the Department of Post-Secondary Education Training and Labour and receives advice from a Voluntary Advisory Committee (VAC). The VAC includes representation from the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, the New Brunswick Disability Executives' Network and New Brunswick employers.

Employers can call a toll-free line to receive free consultation. This consultation provides the individual with support, tools, information, access to training and linkages to increase opportunities for hiring and retaining skilled employees who are persons with a disability.

Issues and Themes Emerging from the Public Consultations

During the period of December 2011 to January 2012, a call for submissions to the employment action plan and a series of consultations were held in various regions of the province. One hundred and thirty-one (131) submissions were received. Public Dialogue Sessions were held in the following nine locations: Campbellton, Dieppe, Edmundston, Tracadie-Sheila, Richibucto, Saint John, Moncton, Miramichi and Fredericton. Three-hundred and three (303) participants registered in the public dialogue sessions; however, there were in excess of 400 participants in the sessions. An employer targeted survey was also issued and 94 employers responded.

A number of key issues emerged from the consultation process and they are discussed in the following themes in the recommendations for action:

- Adopting an Enabling Policy Framework to Support the Employment Action Plan's Vision, Goals and Recommendations
- Preparing Youth with a Disability for Employment
- Accessing Post-Secondary Education and Training
- Providing Other Pre-Employment Supports
- Removing Significant Barriers to Employment
- Strengthening the Community (Disability) Employment Support Sector
- Providing Adequate and Timely Disability Supports for Training and Employment
- Encouraging and Supporting Employers to Hire and Retain Employees with a Disability
- Facilitating Self-Employment Options
- Enhancing Public Awareness and Promoting 'Best Practices'
- Implementing the Plan

Current Research and Knowledge on 'Best Practices'

In the development of a new Employment Action Plan an environmental scan of current national and international research on 'best practices' was undertaken to guide future action. Below is a summary of some of the key practices and/or recommendations that have emerged in recent years:

- *Employment First policies.* These are policies that are based on the belief or presumption that persons with a disability are employable and that the primary focus of government programs for working age persons with a disability should be on supporting people to work to their fullest potential.
- *Effective transition to work strategies for youth with a disability.* This practice recognizes the importance and value of investing in preparing young people to work (or to seek further education) before they leave high school. Particular attention is paid to early literacy skills, effective transition planning, work preparation, the development of essential skills for employment, positive mental health and resiliency, and quality community work experience programming for high school students. Effective practices are also based on a collaborative model of support for students and involve active partnerships with community organizations and employers.
- *Expansion of individualized employment supports and services.* This practice acknowledges that persons with a disability have unique and individual needs for support for employment. It involves a shift from current policy that strictly limits the number of weeks that support can be provided in favour of addressing the need for support that may exist both in the short term and in the long term. Supports and services that are particular to specific disabilities (such as interpreters for people who are Deaf) are also provided.
- *Social Assistance Reform.* Social Assistance reform has focused on removing disincentives for people who want to work. Key practices have included enhancing wage exemptions and providing persons with a disability with long term access to health and other benefits even if they leave social assistance for paid work. Pro-active approaches that are based on an assumption of employability are also a key feature of social assistance reform.

- *Inclusive post-secondary education and training.* Post-secondary education and training is recognized as a key determinant of employment success. Measures are undertaken to ensure that persons with a disability have support to access and participate in post-secondary programs. Access to apprenticeship and intern programs are also provided.
- *Proactive recruitment of persons with a disability by employers.* This involves senior managers and human resource managers making a conscious commitment to hire persons with a disability within businesses and organizations. It also involves a focus on training and awareness, an understating of the 'business case' for hiring persons with a disability, an active recruitment strategy that is integrated within both human resource and business plans, and an 'outreach' strategy focused on persons with a disability. Proactive recruitment happens with both public sector and private sector employers. For example, the Government of Australia has recently embarked on a recruitment and retention strategy as part of a broader policy on diversity in the public sector.
- *Assisting people participating in developmental day programs/workshops to move to community employment.* Consistent with 'Employment First' policies, there are a number of practices and strategies that are designed to assist people who attend day programs/workshops to make a transition to paid employment in regular community workplaces.

The Strategic Plan: Our Vision, Guiding Principles, Goals

This employment action plan recognizes that it will take some time to achieve the vision and goals, and implement the recommendations. The plan is established as a five-year plan and it will require a process for monitoring and evaluating results.

Vision

We envision New Brunswick as a leader in the employment of persons with a disability where people are recognized for their skills and potential, have access to the services and supports they need to secure sustainable employment and are valued members of the labour force on an equal basis with others.

Guiding Principles

The following principles of the employment action plan were highlighted in the employment action plan process:

- Consultation, engagement and collaboration with persons with a disability, disability organizations and employers are fundamental to the successful implementation of the Employment Action Plan;
- Consultation, engagement and collaboration with diverse populations such as First Nations people, the Deaf community, newcomers and official language populations are fundamental to the successful implementation of the Employment Action Plan;
- Government has a responsibility to be a leader in the employment of persons with a disability;

- Persons with a disability have employment potential and are a valuable human resource to New Brunswick's economy and society;
- Full or partial participation of persons with a disability in the labour force are recognized as valuable avenues to economic participation and income security;
- Policies and programs must enhance opportunities and empower persons with a disability to participate in the labour force;
- Persons with a disability have the responsibility to develop skills and to work to the extent of their abilities and opportunities;
- Programs and services must be:
 - Person-centred and respect individual goals and aspirations;
 - Easily accessible for individuals (and their supporters) and must be simple to administer, explain and understand;
 - Fair and transparent in its administrative and decision making processes;
 - Flexible and recognize that every individual has a unique way of learning and developing skills;
 - Aligned with other supports and services that are designed to assist persons with a disability to participate in their communities;
 - Designed to ensure job maintenance supports are available once an individual begins employment;
 - Designed to ensure supports and services are available for individuals who acquire disabilities later in life;
 - Designed and delivered in a way that respects a person's dignity and minimizes the government's interference in a person's life; and
 - Designed and delivered in a way that integrates empowerment, planning, monitoring, interdepartmental and community partnerships, navigation of resources, follow up support and program evaluation.

Goals

While clear goals have been established for the Employment Action Plan for Persons with a Disability, it must be noted that there is a significant lack of baseline data available in many of the goal areas. In the goals listed below, the only baseline data that currently exists is the employment rates of persons with a disability and in fact, this data may become difficult to track due to the suspension of the long-form census questionnaire. As part of the implementation and evaluation plan, it will be essential to establish baseline data to ensure data is tracked and monitored.

The goals of the Employment Action Plan are:

- To increase the participation of persons with a disability in post-secondary education and training by 40%.
- To increase employment rates of persons with a disability from 49.8% to 65%.

- To enhance experiential workplace learning programs and reach a participation rate of 90% of high school students with a disability engaged in community co-operative education placements.
- To enhance pre-employment and income support policies and initiatives to actively encourage and facilitate access to employment for persons with a disability.
- To build a defined and coordinated program of pre-employment services and benefits.
- To improve access to services and supports and ensure that within two years of graduation, 70% of youth with a disability are participating in post-secondary education, training or are employed.
- To strengthen the engagement of employers in activities to increase their recruitment and retention of persons with a disability and to become disability confident employers.

Recommendations for action

Throughout the Employment Action Plan development process many ideas were shared on ways to improve employment outcomes for persons with a disability. The ideas and issues had many dimensions. What became clear is that one or two changes would not significantly change the current lack of opportunity, but that a multi-faceted approach would be necessary. This requires an action plan that encompasses the bigger picture and which is based on an overall framework (see the vision, goals and principles outlined earlier). It also requires coherent policy and program development that links efforts being led and implemented by multiple government departments as well as community partners. A “silo” approach to government and community action will not be effective.

Participants in the Employment Action Plan Working Group process were also mindful of the province’s current fiscal situation. While some new investments will be necessary over the coming years, progress can still be accomplished using the resources that we currently have. Ultimately, however, it will cost more to leave persons with a disability out of the labour force than it will to implement policies and programs that will improve long term employment outcomes.

Recent U.S. research has demonstrated the cost effectiveness of investing in supporting persons with a disability to work (see Robert Cimera, Supported Employment’s Cost Efficiency to Taxpayers: 2002 to 2007, *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, Vol. 34, 2009). Results from the research found that “supported employees returned an average monthly net benefit to taxpayers of \$251.34 (i.e., an annual net benefit of \$3,016.08 per supported employee) and generated a benefit-cost ratio of 1.46” (ratios above 1.00 indicate that a decision is cost-efficient). A positive benefit-cost ratio was recorded for all disability groups including people with an intellectual disability (benefit-cost ratio of 1.22) and traumatic brain injury (benefit-cost ratio of 1.14). Working aged people with autism had a benefit-cost ratio of 1.62. The researchers concluded:

Taken together, the findings from this study provide ample economic validation for policies and procedures promoting inclusive employment options within the community for individual with even the severest of disabilities. More precisely, this study determined that funding supported employees, regardless of their disability or number of disabling conditions, was an economically appropriate decision from the taxpayers' perspective. The significance of these findings for both individuals with disabilities and the taxpayers in general cannot be understated.

The following recommendations cover key themes that emerged during the public consultation and Working Group process. The recommendations are not listed in order of priority. While the themes address distinct requirements for change they are inter-connected and are key pieces of the overall plan for ensuring that persons with a disability have real opportunities to work and contribute to the economy of the province.

Adopting an Enabling Policy Framework to Support the Employment Action Plan's Vision, Goals and Recommendations

The Employment Action Plan must include an enabling and supportive policy framework that will guide government action across departments. It will be crucial that government action is coordinated and coherent, as multiple departments will be involved. Government must be willing to give the Employment Action Plan both priority and visibility within its day to day operations.

Recommendation # 1: The Government of New Brunswick adopt and implement a government-wide "Employment First" policy that:

- Reflects that every working aged New Brunswicker with a disability is presumed to be employable;
- Provides that the first objective of government policies and programs will be to support persons with a disability to work to their fullest potential;
- Acknowledges that persons with a disability have opportunities to plan careers and enjoy employment opportunities beyond entry level types of occupations; and
- Acknowledges that persons with a disability may still need access to disability-related supports for goals and activities that fall outside of employment.

Government lead: Office of Human Resources

Community partner: New Brunswick Disability Executives' Network

Recommendation # 2: The Government of New Brunswick appoint a key point of responsibility within government for overseeing the development, implementation and coordination of all employment oriented policies for persons with a disability.

Government leads: Premier's Office; Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons

Community partner: New Brunswick Disability Executives' Network

Preparing Youth with a Disability for Employment

Both the public consultations and the Working Group discussions highlighted the critical importance of strong policies and programs for supporting youth with a disability to make successful transitions from school to employment or further education/training. Currently, approaches to transition vary from district to district and often from school to school. There is a strong need for a guiding policy on transition for youth with a disability. The policy needs to include clear standards of practice with particular focus on transition planning and guidance, work preparation, and experiential workplace learning opportunities.

Recommendation # 3: The Government of New Brunswick, in consultation with other government, private sector and community partners, develop, adopt and begin implementation of a provincial policy on transition from high school for youth with a disability, with a particular focus on assisting youth make a successful transition from school to employment or post-secondary education or training. This policy must address:

- Standards of practice for New Brunswick schools and school districts, such as standards of practice relating to transition planning that should start no later than grade 8;
- The need for transition programs and practices to be guided by an 'Employment First' approach;
- The roles of Guidance programs in supporting students with a disability and requirements for ratios of guidance counsellors to students using ratios supported by current best practice research (research suggests an optimal ratio of 1:350);
- The roles of schools and school districts in supporting students with a disability to apply for and access post-secondary education and training;
- Follow up surveys with students with a disability two years after leaving high school to determine their participation in post-secondary education or training and employment; and
- A clear description of the partnership between government departments and community organizations and the respective roles and responsibilities.

Government lead: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development; with involvement from the Departments of Social Development & Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour
Community partner: New Brunswick Disability Executives' Network

Recommendation # 4: Develop and implement formal partnerships (including funding partnerships) with community organizations that have experience with supporting persons with a disability to achieve transition and employment goals. Such partnerships may be designed to provide assistance with career exploration, transition to work planning and work preparation strategies.

Government leads: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development; Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour
Community partner: Employment Assistance Services agencies

Recommendation # 5: Review and make necessary changes to experiential workplace programs (such as Co-Operative Education in the Anglophone sector or Éducation cooperative in the Francophone sector) to ensure that:

- All students with a disability have access to community workplace learning opportunities in regular workplaces (and baseline data and rates of participation in these opportunities are determined and kept);
- Community workplace learning opportunities match student strengths and career/employment goals;
- Appropriate workplace supports and accommodations are provided;
- Job coaching and mentoring support is provided by people who have been trained in providing this support;
- Transportation needs to community workplaces are addressed; and
- Specific learning and skill development goals are developed and employers are engaged as partners in the evaluation of experiential workplace learning.

Government lead: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

Community partners: New Brunswick Disability Executives' Network; enterprise support networks; Economic & Social Inclusion Corporation

Recommendation # 6: Develop and provide high school students with a disability, who have completed grade 11, with structured summer “intern” work opportunities (see Recommendation # 9 for further details).

Government lead: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development; Department of Post-Secondary Education Training and Labour

Community partners: Employment Assistance Services agencies; enterprise support networks

Accessing Post-Secondary Education and Training

Access to post-secondary education and training will improve successful employment outcomes for persons with a disability. Post-secondary education and training can take many forms. Attending university or community college are obvious important avenues, but there are others that could provide valuable post-secondary learning and skill development opportunities. These include formal apprenticeship training; “intern” training opportunities; targeted skills training within an occupation or sector; and private training operations. Currently access to post-secondary education and training opportunities is limited. Providing greater access to these opportunities to persons with a disability will be a necessary component of the Employment Action Plan.

There are a number of issues that the consultation process and Working Group identified that create barriers to accessing post-secondary education and training. These include difficulties with documentation required for applying to post-secondary education, limitations on accessing

NBCC/CCNB programs through special admissions processes and difficulties with TESS funding and accessing student financial aid (such as the time delays in approval for funding).

Recommendation # 7: The Government of New Brunswick commit to increasing participation of persons with a disability in post-secondary education by undertaking the following measures:

- a) Establishing benchmark data on the number of students with a disability currently attending post-secondary institutions and then establishing targets for increasing participation rates over the next 5 years.

Government leads: Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission.

Community partners: Post-Secondary Institutions

- b) Establishing a consultation process to develop clear guidelines for requirement of a psycho-educational assessment (e.g., who requires one, who is responsible for coordination and payment).

Government lead: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development; Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training & Labour

Community partner: New Brunswick Disability Executives' Network

- c) Following a review of the current process for New Brunswick school districts, establish consistent guidelines for providing complete documentation required for students to apply for entrance into post-secondary institutions. This should include psycho-educational assessments for students with a learning disability and documentation of accommodations that a student received during high school and establishing consistent guidelines for documentation. This requirement should be included in the proposed policy on transition for students with a disability (see Recommendation # 3).

Government leads: Department of Education & Early Childhood Development; Post-Secondary Education, Training & Labour; Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission.

Community partner: New Brunswick Disability Executives' Network

- d) Working with NBCC and CCNB to review and expand special admissions processes for students who do not meet the regular entrance criteria. This expansion should be aimed at:

- Increasing the number of students admitted to NBCC/CCNB through special admissions processes so that a minimum of 40 students are participating in NBCC and CCNB programs by 2015 (currently admissions are between 25 and 30 per year);

- Ensuring that special admissions is available to all students with disability who have had a modified high school program and who cannot apply through the regular admissions process;
- Providing access to NBCC and CCNB programs for working age adults with a disability who are out of high school;
- Increasing the number of seats per program; and
- Ensuring that adequate navigational and planning supports are in place to assist youth with a disability to apply to NBCC and CCNB and to have success within their chosen college program.

Government lead: Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour

Community partners: Post-Secondary Institutions; New Brunswick Disability Executives' Network

e) Modifying the TESS program guidelines to allow for:

- 'Bridge funding' for students who enter post-secondary education on a modified program but who later transfer to a regular education program. Funding should be maintained until applications for student loans and grants have been completed and approved; and
- An increase in the additional time allowed to complete a program from the current 30% to 50% to better support students who have been accommodated through a reduced course load or extended program length.

Government lead: Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour

Community partners: New Brunswick Disability Executives' Network; Post-Secondary Institutions

f) Improving the Canada Study Grant approval process as follows:

- Establishing a 10 working day standard for approving applications for student financial aid so that needed supports are in place for students with a disability at the beginning of the post-secondary program; and
- Should CSG funding be approved but not be in place at the beginning of the academic year/term, providing provisional support funding through post-secondary institutions subject to repayment once the CSG funding is received.

Government lead: Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour – Student Financial Services

Community partners: Post-Secondary Institutions: Employment Assistance Services agencies

g) Developing and implementing an education/professional development program aimed at post-secondary education administrators and instructors on the requirements to provide reasonable accommodations, Universal Design for Learning strategies and inclusive practices.

Government leads: Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Department of Education & Early Childhood Development

Community partners: Post-Secondary Institutions; New Brunswick Disability Executives' Network

Recommendation # 8: Review the current support provided to students with a disability attending post-secondary education to engage in and complete career exploration and decision making activities. Through the review, conduct research on models of support in other jurisdictions, identify any current gaps in support in New Brunswick and establish a plan for addressing these gaps.

Government lead: Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour

Community partners: Post-Secondary Institutions; Employment Assistance Services agencies

Recommendation # 9: The Government of New Brunswick, in partnership with private and public sector employers and community stakeholders, design, develop and implement a structured Intern Program for persons with a disability that would have the following features:

- The development of a concrete and time limited skill development and learning plan for interns with a disability;
- The use of current Work Ability Program funding to provide a participation salary to interns to allow for a maximum of a 6 month paid internship;
- The involvement of employers in the design and evaluation of the intern's skill development and learning plan;
- The provision of job coach/mentor or other necessary supports and accommodations through the TESS program;
- The provision of a certificate of participation for interns with an accompanying skills profile for interns who complete the program;
- The active promotion of the Intern program to persons with a disability and New Brunswick employers; and
- The provision of support and information to employers to successfully hire an intern.

Government lead: Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour

Community partners: New Brunswick Executives' Network; enterprise support networks

Providing Other Pre-Employment Supports

An effective approach at preparing youth with a disability in high school, as well as improved access to post-secondary education and training should be cornerstones of the "pre-employment" part of the Employment Action Plan. There are, however, other pre-employment pieces that are critical if youth and adults with a disability are to have successful employment outcomes.

Currently, there is no formal structure (with designated points of responsibility) around the provision of pre-employment supports and services. Programs can be accessed that attempt to assess employment 'readiness' and assist people to gain skills. There is, however, little focus on

pre-employment planning and navigation as well as coordination between programs. It is an area that needs some clear definition and direction, and a process for ensuring in-depth and meaningful planning is available for people who need pre-employment supports. There are also gaps in the access to supports that need to be addressed. Persons with a disability who need pre-employment supports must also be aware of the supports that are available and how they can be accessed.

Recommendation # 10: An ad hoc government/community working group be established as quickly as possible to:

- a) Conduct a short-term review of existing pre-employment services, identify gaps in services and develop a plan to address the gaps; and
- b) Make a recommendation to the Government of New Brunswick regarding the designation of one or more Department(s) that will take the lead for the development, coordination and funding of the following “pre-employment services” for persons with a disability:
 - Literacy education and training, including Deaf literacy;
 - Social and independent living skills training and support (including skills to address workplace stress, anger management, and empowerment);
 - Work preparation learning on employer expectations, interviewing, and proper behaviour within the workplace;
 - Mental health and resiliency;
 - Discovering and determining personal interests and skills to support job matching;
 - Support for volunteer activities;
 - Computer skills training;
 - GED training;
 - First Aid & CPR training;
 - Career exploration assistance (including job shadowing);
 - Workplace Essential Skills training such as writing, numeracy, communication skills, and working with others; and
 - Complementary support (such as attendant support, transportation and childcare).

Government leads: Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training & Labour; Department of Education & Early Childhood Development; Department of Health; Department of Social Development; Premier’s Council on the Status of Disabled Persons;

Community partners: New Brunswick Disability Executives’ Network; New Brunswick Association for Supported Services and Employment; Employment Assistance Services agencies

Recommendation # 11: The Government of New Brunswick adopt a person-centred pre-employment model that will include a protocol and template for developing an individualized pre-employment plan to guide planning and decision making. The protocol should at the very minimum:

- Establish who can provide planning assistance;

- Require the provision of information about prior learning;
- Require that specific pre-employment services and benefits be identified;
- Require information to demonstrate how pre-employment activities and services will support general or specific employment goals and outcomes;
- Require the establishment of a time-frame for pre-employment services as well as a plan to “exit” pre-employment and move to employment search and employment; and
- Require that the proposed cost of pre-employment services be identified.

Government leads: Department of Social Development; Department of Post-Secondary Education Training and Labour; Premier’s Council on the Status of Disabled Persons

Community partners: Employment Assistance Services agencies; New Brunswick Disability Executives’ Network

Recommendation # 12: A program of awareness and promotion be developed that will inform persons with a disability of all employment supports that are available and how these can be applied for and accessed. This promotion should be multi-faceted and be provided in a variety of accessible formats.

Government leads: Department of Social Development; Department of Post-secondary Education, Training and Labour; Department of Health; Department of Education & Early Childhood Development; Premier’s Council on the Status of Disabled Persons

Community partners: Employment Assistance Services agencies; New Brunswick Disability Executives’ Network

Removing Significant Barriers to Employment

Persons with a disability have identified a number of significant barriers that they face when trying to find and maintain employment. Current research supports what people said about some of the main barriers that they face. These include:

- The prospect of losing some or all of current income
- Inadequate training and lack of opportunity for training
- The prospect of losing some or all of the additional supports or benefits that people receive (e.g., health benefits)
- Lack of transportation, including accessible transportation
- Lack of support (e.g., attendant care, job coaches) for training and employment

The barriers of inadequate training and lack of supports are dealt with in other parts of this report. It is clear, however, that progress on addressing access to transportation and reform of social assistance policies and programs are crucial aspects of an Employment Action Plan. Reform of Social Assistance must address the current disincentives for achieving employment outcomes including for youth who currently access Social Assistance before they leave high school. Efforts at reform must also include actions to address current lack of planning and access to employment programming for Social Assistance recipients with a disability. Fortunately,

government has made clear commitments to introduce a new and distinct income program for persons with a disability (as part of the broader social assistance reform initiative) and has committed to developing a provincial transportation strategy that will include improved access for persons with a disability.

Recommendation # 13: As part of its social assistance reform initiative, the Government of New Brunswick will ensure that new social assistance policies and programs for persons with a disability reflect and actively support the belief that people are employable and:

- Provide for wage exemptions that will encourage people to work and retain income from employment such that people are able to have incomes that more closely approximate recognized poverty measures;
- Allow for persons with a disability to retain access to health related benefits even if they are employed and leave social assistance (if they do not have access to employer sponsored health benefits and if their incomes fall below a determined yearly amount);
- Ensure that people's needs for pre-employment supports (including support for transportation) are addressed through active employment planning and the integration of pre-employment support programs and funding;
- Provide training for government employees to ensure that there is adequate understanding of the goals, policies and benefits of the new program as well as strategies for effectively communicating eligibility for benefits and how people can access community service providers;
- Provide for a new approach for addressing the needs of youth with a disability who are still in high school; and
- Involve the development of a new service delivery model for proactive pre-employment and employment planning.

Government leads: Department of Social Development; Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation

Community partners: Social Assistance Reform Advisory Committee; New Brunswick Disability Executives' Network

Recommendation # 14: No later than the fall of 2012, establish a joint government/community working group to develop a strategy to ensure that accessible and affordable transportation is available throughout New Brunswick, with a focus on ensuring access to transportation for persons with a disability for the purposes of pre-employment activities, as well as post-secondary education, training and employment. The transportation strategy will address:

- The possible creation and subsidization of accessible transportation services in rural areas of the province;
- Access to funding support for transportation for people to access pre-employment activities, as well as post-secondary education and training opportunities;

- Access to funding support for transportation for people to participate in employment opportunities where public forms of transportation are not available or are not accessible, suitable or affordable for specific persons with a disability.

Government leads: Department of Transportation with collaboration from the Department of Social Development, the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation; Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons.
Community partner: New Brunswick Disability Executives' Network

Strengthening the Community (Disability) Employment Support Sector

Community agencies and the individuals that provide employment counselling and other support roles are vital to persons with a disability achieving successful employment outcomes. Going forward, it will be important to have a vital network of community organizations with skilled professionals and support workers who are committed to helping people prepare for work, as well as find and maintain employment where work opportunities are available. Currently, there is no mechanism for networking and collaboration between the organizations that are assigned responsibility for supporting persons with a disability to achieve employment goals.

There are issues around government's contracting process with employment agencies that still need to be addressed. Also, to ensure high quality supports and services are being provided attention must be paid to professional development and education for employment counsellors and support workers who work in the disability sector. Practice and remuneration standards for job coaches also need to be established.

The consultation and Working Group process highlighted several underserved populations and a geographic area in New Brunswick with respect to employment assistance services for persons with a disability. These included persons who are Deaf and hard of hearing, persons with an intellectual disability, persons with learning disabilities, persons with autism, and the Miramichi region. There may be other underserved populations that were not highlighted during this process.

During the consultation phase and the Working Group process there was considerable discussion about the future role of ADAPT agencies in assisting the people they serve to achieve employment outcomes (a summary of the ADAPT program is provided in the background section). A number of ideas were discussed but concerns were expressed about the supports that would be available to people who may not be employed (in the short or long term) – particularly if expectations to facilitate employment for people being served by ADAPT programs were strengthened. It was acknowledged (and will be important for the government to acknowledge) that people who may not be working will not lose support for daytime activities as a result of a stronger emphasis being placed on employment outcomes.

However, evidence from New Brunswick and other jurisdictions is clear that many people who have traditionally attended day programs/workshops are capable (with the right support) of

working at regular jobs in the community. Thirty-one (31) of 37 ADAPT agencies indicated in a recent research project that they are willing to make change and are open to the concept of 'conversion' or transitioning to community based options for the people they serve (A. Holland, *Who are We? An Examination of Adult Developmental Activities, Programs and Training Agencies in New Brunswick*, June 2009). Given the strong body of knowledge on supported employment strategies (including strategies for assisting day programs/workshops to make a shift to an employment mandate), as well as obligations to promote and facilitate rights to employment, it is imperative and timely to design and implement reforms to the current ADAPT program.

Recommendation # 15: Prior to the implementation of a new contract management framework for Employment Assistance Services for persons with a disability, hold immediate consultations with community stakeholders to develop an appropriate employment service delivery and funding model for persons with a disability. As part of this proposed consultation, the following issues need to be addressed:

- Ensuring equal access to EAS services for people with all types of disability;
- Ensuring equal access to EAS services within all geographical areas of the province; and
- The corresponding competency of contracting agencies to address a variety of disabilities, varying needs for support, and communication, linguistic and cultural requirements.

Government leads: Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Department of Supply and Services

Community partners: Employment Assistance Services agencies

Recommendation # 16: Review current Employment Assistance Services for Persons with a disability with a focus on identified underserved populations and geographic disparities with the goal of (a) identifying regions where additional services are required to assist such persons to transition to employment; and (b) establishing additional services that may be required.

Government lead: Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour

Community partner: New Brunswick Disability Executives' Network

Recommendation # 17: As part of the new contract management framework for Employment Assistance Services for serving persons with a disability, initiate a longer term (minimum three-year) contracting process to assist agencies to (a) hire and retain qualified and experienced staff; (b) engage in longer term planning; and (c) provide consistent quality services for persons with a disability.

Government leads: Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Department of Supply and Services

Community partner: Employment Assistance Services agencies

Recommendation # 18: To ensure on-going education on achieving successful employment outcomes for working age persons with a disability, develop and implement a mechanism for funding, providing and coordinating access to professional development opportunities for staff who provide services under EAS contracts.

Government lead: Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour

Community partner: Employment Assistance Services agencies

Recommendation # 19: Improve the provision of job coach/mentor supports throughout New Brunswick by:

- a) Initiating a Request for Proposals to develop and implement a provincial Job Coach/Mentor Training Program. The training program should run initially for a minimum of three years, include an evaluation component, and be renewed thereafter based on further identified training needs.
- b) Undertaking discussions with NBCC and CCNB on modifying curriculum within human services programs to ensure the inclusion of a learning module(s) on job coaching/mentoring strategies.
- c) Establishing a salary standard range for Job Coaches who have successfully completed a training program in job coaching.

Government lead: Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour

Community partners: NBCC; CCNB; New Brunswick Disability Executives' Network; Employment Assistance Services agencies

Recommendation # 20: Establish an active formal network of employment agencies serving persons with a disability to share knowledge and collaborate on training, promotion and addressing barriers faced by persons with a disability.

Government lead: Department of Post-Secondary Education Training and Labour

Community partner: Employment Assistance Services agencies

Recommendation # 21: In consultation with community partners, program participants and their families, undertake a comprehensive review of the Adult Development Activities, Programs and Training (ADAPT) program with the goal of building capacity within program agencies to facilitate community employment outcomes for people being served by the program. The review must include:

- a) An update of program standards and standards of practice consistent with current evidence on best practices for supporting people to make the transition to paid employment in the community;

- b) The development and implementation of a training initiative for agencies and their staff on effective practices and strategies for transition to work planning, employment counselling and job coaching;
- c) A review of the requirements necessary for ADAPT program agencies to develop and submit TESS funding applications for the people they serve, and how these requirements will be addressed and met; and
- d) The development of a demonstration initiative with a small number of willing agencies to test the implementation of identified strategies and supports to assist people obtain paid employment in the community.

Government leads: Department of Social Development; Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour

Community partners: New Brunswick Disability Executives' Network; New Brunswick Association of Support Services and Employment

Providing Adequate and Timely Disability Supports for Training and Employment

Disability supports are important tools for enhancing independence and enabling people to participate in training and work opportunities. The nature of the supports needed and provided will depend on the unique needs and situations of each person. Some supports may be needed for a short time while others may be required on an on-going basis. Without supports, many people will be excluded from participating in the labour force.

While a number of support programs exist (see the summary provided in the Background section), we heard from many people that supports were not always available or adequate. They were either not available because of funding restrictions, eligibility criteria, unavailable professionals, or other reasons; or if they were available, they were not provided for as long as they are needed or in a way that made sense for the person. Issues were also raised about the time it took to get approval for disability-related support funding, which often creates difficulties for starting education programs, or even a job that had been offered.

Recommendation # 22: Review and reform the Training and Employment Support Services (TESS) Program and guidelines with a particular focus on:

- a) Through a phasing in process, increasing the hours of support available from the current maximum of 600 hours over 52 weeks to a minimum of 1200 hours over 52 weeks within 4 years;
- b) Providing enhanced training for TESS Coordinators on:
 - The potential of persons with a disability to work and help address current and future labour market needs;
 - The types of supports by persons with a disability to successfully move to sustainable long term employment;

- The supports need by persons with a disability to participate in post- secondary education and training, and why the supports are necessary; and
 - How to review and interpret documentation, including assessments.
- c) Providing access to support funding for more than one degree program;
 - d) Providing access to support funding when an individual changes jobs and requires support to be successful in the new job;
 - e) Providing access to support funding for required continuing education or accreditation maintenance when funding for disability supports is not provided by the employer or if a person's disability requires new or additional supports (e.g., technical aids);
 - f) Providing clear criteria and an application process for agencies supporting individuals with TESS applications; and
 - g) Establishing a reasonable timeline for approving TESS funding applications (for example, 5 working days).

Government lead: Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour

Community partners: New Brunswick Disability Executives' Network; TESS Referral Agents.

Recommendation # 23: Review and revise policies and criteria for the Disability Support Program so that adults under age 65 with more significant disabilities who require longer term disability-related supports for training and employment (e.g., an attendant or support worker) can apply for and receive funding for such supports after they have exhausted available TESS funding.

Government leads: Department of Social Development; Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training & Labour

Community partner: Disability Support Program Working Group

Recommendation # 24: Recruit, mentor and retain an additional six qualified interpreters so that the number of available qualified interpreters increases from six to twelve within three years. Additional interpreters must meet the requirements to provide services on behalf of the Departments of Social Development and Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour as well as employers.

Government leads: Department of Social Development; Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour

Community partners: Saint John Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services; South-East Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services

Recommendation # 25: Adopt a ten-day approval standard for equipment and technical aid applications under the Health Services Program to ensure more timely disability-related supports for persons with a disability to transition to training and employment opportunities.

Government leads: Department of Social Development with involvement from the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training & Labour

Community partner: New Brunswick Disability Executives' Network

Encouraging and Supporting Employers to Hire and Retain Employees with a Disability

Employers, both public and private sector, are the gatekeepers of opportunity for most persons with a disability who want to work. While we heard about some employers who have demonstrated great capacity in diversifying their workforce, we also heard about the difficulties that many people face when trying to 'get in the door'. Consultation and Working Group participants talked about the need to educate, motivate and support employers to act and tap into the human resource potential represented by persons with a disability.

At the same time, it is clear that government must be prepared to 'walk the walk' and demonstrate leadership in hiring persons with a disability. Government cannot expect the private sector to do something unless it is prepared to lead by example and become a 'model employer'. An important first step will be to determine the percentage of persons with a disability employed in the provincial public service.

Recommendation # 26: The Government of New Brunswick take concrete measures to increase the number and percentage of persons with a disability in the provincial public service by:

- a) Developing and enacting provincial employment equity legislation;
- b) Establishing a provincial public service diversity and inclusion policy and a public service human resource recruitment strategy aimed at increasing the representation of persons with a disability; and
- c) Reforming the *Equal Employment Opportunities* Program to provide more effective support for facilitating participation of persons with a disability in the public service.

Government leads: Office of Human Resources; Department of Justice; Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons

Community partner: New Brunswick Disability Executives' Network

Recommendation # 27: Review and revise the New Brunswick Opportunities Network (NBON) bidding and tendering process with the goal of implementing requirements for bidders on provincial contracts to demonstrate (a) how they currently include persons with a disability in their workforce; and (b) what measures they will take to hire persons with a disability if they are a successful bidder.

Government leads: Department of Supply and Services; Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons

Community partner: New Brunswick Executives' Network

Recommendation # 28: Conduct a review of the *New Brunswick Employer Support Service* and develop a renewal plan for the service that will include:

- a) An enhanced communications strategy to highlight the employability of persons with a disability and to recognize ‘champion’ employers;
- b) Enhanced awareness activities highlighting the services and supports available to employers; and
- c) Assistance to employers for determining and enhancing their capacity to be ‘disability confident’ employers (research models such as the U.K. Employers’ Forum on Disability).

Government lead: Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training & Labour

Community partners: New Brunswick Employer Support Services; New Brunswick Disability Executives’ Network; New Brunswick Social Policy Research Network

Recommendation # 29: Institute incentive measures for private sector employers to hire persons with a disability by:

- a) Developing and implementing a provincial tax credit (similar to the U.S. Work Opportunity Tax Credit);
- b) Providing wage subsidies and supports for employers that participate in the proposed Intern Program for Persons with a disability (see Recommendation # 9);
- c) Providing ‘rebate grants’ to employers that hire persons with a disability to cover the cost of Mandatory Employment Related Costs; and
- d) Developing an effective communication strategy to build awareness amongst employers of the incentives and to simplify the application process.

Government leads: Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training & Labour; Department of Finance

Community partners: New Brunswick Employer Support Service; enterprise support networks

Facilitating Self-Employment Options

In discussions about improving employment opportunities for persons with a disability, self-employment is often over-looked as a viable option. Yet, for some people self-employment may be the best option available. For some people, it may mean working from home because getting out is problematic. For others, it may involve starting a business to meet a local need because other employment options are scarce or unavailable. Starting and running a business requires good planning and often access to the right support (e.g., financial, technical). Persons with a disability may need other types of assistance to successfully create their own employment opportunities.

Recommendation # 30: Establish a self-employment development initiative for persons with a disability that will include:

- a) A short-term research project on current Canadian and international best practices for supporting self-employment opportunities for persons with a disability;
- b) A review of ways in which the current network of enterprise agencies can support persons with a disability in developing and implementing self-employment options. This will include requirement for training for Community Economic Development agencies (Enterprise Network) on the unique needs of persons with a disability;
- c) An investigation on how financial support can be provided to persons with a disability who are interested in self-employment, including the use of current programs such as Workforce Expansion;
- d) A review of current Social Assistance policies and how they may be improved to support persons with a disability who want to explore and undertake self-employment opportunities.

Government leads: Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Department Economic Development; Department of Social Development

Community partners: enterprise support networks; New Brunswick Social Policy Research Network

Enhancing Public Awareness and Promoting 'Best Practices'

Generating awareness within the broader public, and especially with employers, about the potential of persons with a disability will be needed to bring some much needed attention to issues raised in this plan. People with disabilities will also need a source of up-to-date information about benefits and services that can help them achieve their education and employment goals.

It will also be necessary to ensure that government departments, the public and post-secondary education systems, and community agencies serving persons with a disability have access to information and knowledge about innovative and effective practices that will help lead to greater inclusion within the labour market. This must be an on-going process rather than one-time endeavours.

Recommendation # 31: Develop and implement a new communications plan to improve the visibility of the Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons as a central information and referral resource for people seeking services and assistance with employment goals.

Government lead: Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons

Community partner: Members of the Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons

Recommendation # 32: Hold a *Premier's Forum on Employment for Persons with a disability* with a particular focus on engaging employers in order to generate interest in hiring people and to promote awareness of and interest in the Employment Action Plan. Consideration should be given to holding a follow up forum every two years to review progress and renew interest and motivation for achieving employment outcomes for persons with a disability.

Government leads: Premier's Office; Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons
Community partner: enterprise support networks

Recommendation # 33: Hold an annual provincial conference on employment for persons with a disability to share knowledge and best practices. The conference could be held in conjunction with another key event (e.g., enterprise support network event, Disability Awareness Week). The conference should be a learning opportunity for people who work within the education, training and employment sector who also support employment goals for persons with a disability. It should also have some capacity to bring in experts from the field from outside of New Brunswick.

Government lead: Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour
Community partner: Participants in the recommended Employment Assistance Services network (see recommendation #20).

Recommendation # 34: (a) Hold discussions between university representatives, government representatives and community stakeholders on creating interest and capacity with the New Brunswick academic and research community to conduct research on policy and best practices for employment of persons with a disability; (b) Establish a research agenda and a plan for addressing the research needs identified.

Government leads: Department of Post-Secondary Education Training and Labour; Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons
Community partners: New Brunswick Social Policy Research Network; New Brunswick universities

Implementing, Monitoring and Evaluating the Plan

The Employment Action Plan will require effective implementation and accountability processes. These processes must involve government representatives who occupy senior positions, as well as community stakeholders. They will also require methods for collecting data and information to measure outcomes and a commitment to report on the progress of the plan on a regular basis.

Recommendation # 35: Establish baseline data, including record-keeping mechanisms, for all recommendations to allow for measurement of progress.

Government leads: Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons; Department of Education & Early Childhood Development; Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training & Labour; Department of Social Development; Department of Health

Recommendation #36: An *Employment Action Plan Implementation and Monitoring Group* be established to oversee the on-going implementation and monitoring of the Action Plan. A chairperson must be designated for the implementation group and membership should include senior civil servants of lead Government Departments as well as appointed community partners, including representation from First Nations communities, and a private sector employer. The Group shall meet on a predetermined schedule and will be responsible for the following:

- Establishing time frames for implementing the Action Plan recommendations and identifying first steps;
- Establishing committees/working groups identified in the Action Plan to undertake and implement specific recommendations;
- Overseeing research required by the Action Plan;
- Undertaking reviews of policies as needed to ensure compliance with the Action Plan recommendations;
- Overseeing the collection of data and other information to measure results consistent with the key indicators outlined in the Action Plan; and
- Providing progress updates to the Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons.

Government lead: Premier's office

Recommendation # 37: An annual report on the implementation of the Employment Action Plan, including information on the impact of the plan, be prepared and released publicly during Disability Awareness Week.

Government leads: Employment Action Plan Implementation & Monitoring Group; Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons

Recommendation # 38: An annual meeting between community partners, Ministers and deputy ministers of lead departments, and the Premier be held to discuss progress, issues and challenges.

Government leads: Premier's Office; Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons

Evaluation Plan and Key Indicators

Evaluation is an integral component of this plan and must be integrated into the operationalization of this plan from the onset. A number of actions are identified in this plan to meet the issues and challenges identified in the Employment Action Plan process. To measure the effectiveness of the actions in this plan, indicators have been developed that align with the vision and goals of this plan. We recognize that there are existing challenges to capturing baseline data in some areas including the reality that the long form Census questionnaire is no longer mandatory. However, efforts must be made to identify ways to further capture baseline data related to the employment of persons with a disability early on in this five-year plan. High level indicators for measuring the success of this plan are:

Implementation of the actions (or recommendations) developed in this plan and their outcomes.
Participation rates of persons with a disability in post-secondary education and training.
Employment rates of persons with a disability in New Brunswick compared by disability type and compared to National rates.

Additional indicators were also identified through the consultation process. It should be noted that due to a significant lack of baseline data in many of these areas, specific targets have not been set. As part of the implementation and evaluation plan, it will be essential to develop mechanisms for collecting baseline data in these areas. These indicators are categorized by the key themes in the plan and they include:

Adopting an Enabling Policy Framework to Support the Employment Action Plan's Vision, Goals and Recommendations

- An "Employment First" policy is in place.
- An evaluation and monitoring framework is established.

Preparing Youth with a Disability for Employment

- Increased participation rates of students with a disability in community experiential workplace learning, compared with the previous year.
- Increased number of persons with a disability benefitting from summer employment opportunities under the SEED program, compared with the previous year.

Accessing Post-Secondary Education and Training

- Increased number of students accessing post-secondary education through special admissions processes, compared with the previous year.
- Increased number of persons with a disability accessing Canada Study Grant, compared to previous year.
- Increased number of people with disabilities accessing TESS supports, compared with the previous year.
- Increased number of people participating in Intern training programs.

Providing Other Pre-Employment Supports

- Proactive service delivery model is in place to support planning to access pre-employment services and achieve employment goals.
- Increased number of people accessing pre-employment services and programs and transitioning to employment.

Removing Significant Barriers to Employment

- Increased percentage of individuals with disabilities who transition from Social Assistance to employment, compared with the previous year.
- Individuals who exit the Social Assistance System have access to health benefits.

Strengthening the Community (Disability) Employment Support Sector

- Increased number of ADAPT participants who have transitioned to paid employment in the community.
- Increased number of people participating in a provincial job coach training program.

Providing Adequate and Timely Disability Supports for Training and Employment

- Increased number of qualified interpreters in New Brunswick (target: 12).
- Average number of days for approvals for benefits under the Health Services Program, TESS, student financial aid.
- Increased number of people accessing services and supports under the TESS program, compared to the previous year.
- Increased number of persons with a disability accessing disability-related services under the Disability Support Program to support and sustain longer-term employment.

Encouraging and Supporting Employers to Hire and Retain Employees with a Disability

- Increased number of employers taking advantage of hiring incentive programs for persons with a disability, compared to the previous year.
- Increased number of persons with a disability hired through the Workforce Expansion program, compared to the previous year.
- Increased number of persons with a disability in the provincial public service, compared to the previous year.
- Increased number of persons with a disability hired under the EEO program, compared to the previous year (target: from 21% to 33% of all participants).
- Increased number of persons with a disability employed by contractors with the Government of New Brunswick as a result of contracting process.

Facilitating Self-Employment Options

- Increased number of persons with a disability who are self-employed.
- Individuals who exit the Social Assistance System have access to health benefits.

Enhancing Public Awareness and Promoting 'Best Practices'

- Increased number of referrals to employment-related programs, services and benefits reported by the PCSDP.
- Number of participants in Premier's Forum and degree of participant satisfaction with the Forum (see recommendation #32).
- Number of participants in an annual employment conference and degree of participant satisfaction with the conference.

Implementing, Monitoring and Evaluating the Plan

- High degree of involvement of community organization in committees processes and other activities around the implementation of the action plan.

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Appendix A

Employment Action Plan for Persons with a Disability Steering Committee Members

Co-Chairs

Jonathan Davenport, UPS Canada

Danny Soucy, MLA

Additional members

Christyne Allain, Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons

Hélène Bouchard, Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour

Amélie Deschênes, Department of Social Development

Haley Flaro, Ability NB (NBDEN Representative)

Diana Hall, Neil Squire Society (NBDEN Representative)

Heather Hughes, Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons

Brian Kelly, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Anglophone Sector)

Cindy Lanteigne, Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour

Lynn LeBlanc, Saint John Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Inc. (NBDEN Representative)

Sylvie Martin, Department of Health

Jeff Sparks, Muscular Dystrophy Canada, Certified Human Resources professional and a person with a disability

Gina St-Laurent, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Francophone Sector)

Appendix B

Employment Action Plan for Persons with a Disability Working Group Members

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Christyne Allain, Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons
Tracey Biggar, Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority
Krista Carr, New Brunswick Association for Community Living
Andrew Daley, UNB Libraries Disability Services
Jonathan Davenport, UPS Canada (Co-Chair)
Jeanne Duquette, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Francophone Sector)
Christine Evans, Key Industries
Haley Flaro, Ability New Brunswick
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Jody Gorham, Student Accessibility Centre, UNB
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David Richard, Moncton Employment & Training Services Inc.
Norma Ricker, Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work
Jennelle Sobey, New Brunswick Business Council
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Tammy Strong, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Anglophone Sector)
Elizabeth Tait, Fredericton Works

Appendix C

Glossary of Terms

An understanding of the following terms is key to the Employment Action Plan for Persons with a disability.

Disability supports – Supports needed to increase the independence of persons with a disability and/or to enable people to participate and be included in their communities. Disability supports may include but are not limited to supports such as financial, transportation, equipment, educational assistant, attendant, augmentative device, assistive technology, job coaches/mentors, or interpreters. Some disability supports are paid for while others may be provided naturally in the context of people’s relationships at home, work or in the community.

Employment – Real work for real pay where people with disabilities have the right to be paid industry standard wages and benefits associated with their position and have the same protections and benefits that are available to the general population. Employment also includes self-employment options in which people run and maintain their own businesses for the purpose of earning income.

Employment First – “Employment First” is a concept or approach that incorporates both philosophy and policy and reinforces that employment is the first priority and preferred outcome of people with disabilities. It also recognizes that persons with a disability may require supports to achieve the preferred outcomes.

Enterprise Support Networks – Enterprise support networks refers to the informal network of agencies, centres, institutions, or non-profit organizations working to support enterprises and entrepreneurs in New Brunswick.

Post-secondary Education – Post-secondary education refers to the stage of learning that occurs at universities, academies, colleges, seminaries, and institutes of technology. It may also include certain collegiate-level institutions, such as vocational schools or trade schools that award academic degrees or professional certifications.

Pre-employment – Pre-employment means any service or intervention that provides individuals with disabilities with the opportunity to gain skills and experiences to prepare them for future education or employment. Pre-employment supports may include, but are not limited to independent living skills (life skills), literacy training, computer skill training, job shadowing or volunteer work experiences.

Transition – Successful transition planning begins at the earliest age possible. Transition planning identifies any difficulties that an individual may face and prepares the individual to address difficulties successfully. Transition is a coordinated set of activities which promote

movement from school to post-school activities. Post-school activities include post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation.

Youth- for the purposes of this document, we have utilized the United Nations definition of youth which corresponds with the Statistics Canada definition. Youth are defined as young people from the age of 15 to 24 years.