

1000 Islands Region Workforce Development Board - Newsletter 2017-2018

Final Report – March 12, 2018

Information. Everywhere.

There's no question, we live in an exciting, fast-paced time. But, very often, it's hard not to feel overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of information we are bombarded with daily. In the workplace, we're fed analytics - sales figures, client data, monthly targets, growth projections, etc. etc. And, let's not forget all the information we're consuming as part of our social interconnectedness.

Between our social feeds, data feeds and feeding the kids, we can be torn between Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and the Joy of Missing Out (JOMO)!

It is within this environment of information overload, that the 1000 Islands Region Workforce Development Board decided to re-introduce their 2013 newsletter. Why? Why become just another source of information? The answer is simple. We believe that by gathering together information from a variety of sources, we are offering educators, employment counsellors, economic developers, labour and the business community with a single source of locally important information that is substantiated, analyzed and summarized into one easily accessible source delivered directly to your inbox.

Each issue offers updated local business information, the resulting impact on labour market activity, upcoming events, introductions to individuals embarking on appointments or new challenges within our region and links to local services.

Another important addition to the revised newsletter is the inclusion of a feature article digging deeper into important topics of interest to both the business community and supporting services. Here's a summary of those four feature articles:

1. And the Survey Says

The initial feature article examined the results of the 1000 Islands Region Workforce Development outreach to local employment service providers to obtain their insights into the skills most in demand and the challenges faced by those looking for work in the area. Through close to 40 responses from

local employment counsellors, educators and job developers, we learned that service providers found the greatest challenge to employment for local jobseekers are mental health challenges, financial management barriers, lack of work experience and a lack of Essential Skills valued by employer. In fact, more than half of the service providers do not believe that their clients have the knowledge, skills and experience necessary to obtain the employment they are looking for. This view was validated by local employers who confirmed that “there are ample candidates for openings, however applicants do not have the required skills we are looking for and/or their wage expectations are unreasonable” (Local Labour Market Planning Report 2016). The feature article concluded by aligning this local feedback with the recommendations made within two broader provincial studies: Building the Workforce of Tomorrow: A Shared Responsibility (2015) authored by the Premier’s Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel and Conversations with Employment Ontario Service Providers (2016) prepared by the Ontario Centre of Workforce Innovation. When asked for solutions, stakeholders locally and provincially focused on collaboration between services and the availability of unique services necessary to meet the most acute barriers faced by jobseekers; strengthening career counselling for youth and adults through the integration of local labour market information; and better engagement with employers including increasing the opportunity for experiential learning.

2. Automation and its impact on the Kingston, Frontenac and Leeds and Grenville Workforce

With the rapid evolution of advanced robotics, artificial intelligence and machine learning, this feature article was particularly timely. The article took a look at some of the ground breaking research including Frey and Osborne’s 2013 work examining the probability of occupations in the U.S. being impacted by automation as well as McKinsey and Company’s 2015 follow-up analysis of the proportion of tasks within each occupation likely to be automated. However, it was Brookfield Institute’s research of the Canadian context of automation at the occupational level that allowed us to analyze the impact in Frontenac and Leeds and Grenville Counties. In their 2016 report, “The Talented Mr. Robot – The impact of automation on Canada’s workforce”, researcher Creig Lamb used National Household Survey (2011) data to assess the composition of Canada’s labour force based on future risk of automation. His research showed that “approximately 42% of work activities that Canadians are paid for can be automated using existing technologies [and that] nearly 18% of occupations could have 70% or more of their work activities currently automated”. However, the report also emphasized that that while these specific occupations may be more likely to be automated, 36% of Canada’s employed labour force is at

low risk of being affected and less than one per cent of jobs in the Canadian labour market are fully automatable.

This feature article looked at the 25 occupations employing the greatest number of people in Frontenac and Leeds and Grenville Counties, the number of people employed per occupation, the probability that occupation would be affected by automation in the next 10 to 20 years and the proportion of tasks within that occupation that are automatable. It also highlighted the number of people employed by occupation under the age of 34 and, therefore, very likely to be impacted. Despite this bearing on the local labour market, the Brookfield Institute researchers, in a subsequent article, “Automation Across the Nation: Understanding the potential impacts of technological trends across Canada”, pointed out that the Kingston Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) ranked 17th on a list of the Top 20 CMAs and Census Agglomerations with the lowest susceptibility to automation.

The article concluded with some calls for action including further investigation into those occupations at high-risk of technological impact; supporting innovators and entrepreneurs to take advantage of the business opportunity automation offers to create jobs; and to begin the education and training process necessary to transition affected workers and prepare new workers for the jobs of the future.

3. A Conversation with Labour

One of the 1000 Islands Region Workforce Development Board mandates in providing local labour market information is to engage with employers. However, we have long held that organized labour would be an important source of local labour market information. With the help of the Kingston and District Labour Council, our third feature article summarized an open and honest conversation with Francis Bedell, Treasurer for Unifor Local 31; Briana Broderick, President, United Steelworkers Local 2010; Martin Santyr, Chief Steward, Ontario Public Service Employees Union Local 468 and Debi Wells, President of the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario, Limestone Union.

In response to our first question about the evolving role of organized labour since the Great Recession of 2008, we received a bit of a history lesson on labour relations. Prior to 2008, there had been a steady, slow erosion of wages, benefits, health and safety standards and job security. The recession of 2008 brought a drastic economic decline felt across the full spectrum of the economy. However, in the recovery since, the benefits of economic growth have been felt largely by the wealthiest 1 per cent of

the population. This has led to economic and wealth inequality. The role of labour has always been one of education, but more and more people are recognizing labour unions as a strong advocate against this growing inequality.

We also asked how unions are responding to the rise of contract, precarious work, or what is often called the 'gig economy'. They admitted that labour unions can become like institutions themselves and sometimes face barriers to being as responsive as they should. Working as contract workers can be very isolating, however, unions know how to bargain collectively. Movements like "Unite Here" in the United States is a good example of the role unions can play across a sector rather than within an individual company.

When it comes to workforce development, these labour leaders raised their concern that employers no longer feel it is their responsibility to train workers as they have in the past. Business owners and managers expect their new employees to begin their job ready-trained with the specific knowledge and certifications required in their workplace. Employers fear that if they train, the employee will leave. Yet, investing in their employees demonstrates to the worker the employers' commitment and builds job satisfaction.

Our local labour leaders spoke about the role of organized labour in protecting public-sector jobs. They feel that public services are under attack today more than ever before. The push to privatize is stronger than ever. Unions are working hard to oppose this trend, not just to save jobs, but to serve the community at large. In their view, privatized services are less reliable and more costly to operate. This is bad for the worker and bad for the taxpayer.

One of the concerns these labour reps had was the inability for labour unions keep the public informed about what they do particularly how they contribute to their community. They acknowledged that labour unions do not promote their community involvement as much as they should.

We wrapped up with a plea from the labour leaders for employers to come to the table and be open and listen. No worker wants to go on strike. Just come and talk to us, they stated. Understand why we are asking for something. This would lead to a more harmonious and productive workplace.

4. What's New at the Ontario Centre for Workforce Innovation?

The Ontario Centre for Workforce Innovation (OCWI) was launched in 2016 at Ryerson University with the goal of providing a single coordinated access point for research on evidence-based employment and training approaches. As we flipped the calendar page to 2018, our final feature article sought to learn more about what's new at OCWI.

In an interview with Wendy Vuyk, OCWI Associate Director and the Regional Coordinator for Eastern Ontario, she confirmed that their focus continues to be innovative, evidence-based research to build capacity throughout Ontario's network of service providers, educator and business. They seek out solutions that result in jobs for people and people for jobs. OCWI would like to be the connective tissue between literacy providers, employment services, workforce development boards and employers. Service providers in Ontario are passionate about what they do and OCWI wants to support that passion with new ideas. Wendy spoke about Design Projects, Demonstration Projects and Exploration Projects now underway. The results or evidence produced by these projects will start to become available in September, 2018.

For example, two projects currently underway in Eastern Ontario include 1. Working with employers in the manufacturing sector to modernize their job postings to achieve greater success in attracting workers with the skills they require as well consider prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) and 2. Recruiters for the armed forces in Petawawa are referring candidates who do not score well on academic assessments to Literacy and Basic Skills. Post-participation, candidates' scores improved to meet the requirements of the armed forces. "These and other Research Projects, whether Design, Demonstration or Exploration, the Learning Opportunities and the Case Studies will all contribute to our priorities of research, knowledge sharing and capacity building", stated Wendy, "We are so excited to learn the results and then move forward to pilot successful projects in other communities or regions."

And What's Next?

We've heard from our readers that they are finding the quarterly newsletters to be a valuable source of local labour market information. It's a handy way to keep track of local labour market activity, events taking place in our region and new faces or appointments in the area. The feature articles are viewed as highly informative on relevant topics of interest.

For this reason, the 1000 Islands Regional Workforce Development Board, with the support of the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, has decided to continue to publish the newsletter. Please watch for it in your inbox throughout 2018 and into 2019. Also, if you have any comments about the content, additions to the sections on labour market activity or events or would like to make a suggestion for a feature article topic, please do not hesitate to contact us. The full version of all past newsletters are available on our website.