



Group-based employment assistance benefits

Final report

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Introduction

Group activities are a common facet of every-day life. From an early age, we join groups at school, in the workplace, in the community, or in our leisure to help us learn, work, and play and to fulfill a basic human need to socialize and interact with other people. As a natural extension to other work-related activities, group-based programs have also played an important role in providing employment supports to people who are looking to upgrade their skills and find better employment.

In Canada, eligibility for support programs under Employment Insurance (EI) has been individually-based; while unemployment claimants may have been placed in group-based training programs for skills upgrading, the criteria for receiving supports and the delivery of the supports themselves are focused on the individual claimant. In recent years, however, employment support programs at the federal and provincial levels have begun to include group-based features in their programming requirements. For instance, the federal Targeted Initiative for Older Workers (TIOW) that was introduced in 2006 required that any projects funded under the program include group-based approaches in the delivery of employment support services.

In addition to providing employment supports to older workers, group-based approaches are also a common feature of services targeted at youth. For instance, Service Canada's Skills Link program funds community organizations that assist youth between ages of 15 and 30 who are facing barriers to employment. These programs are designed to help youth develop the broad range of skills, knowledge and work experience they need to participate in the job market. The programs offer a wide range of activities that can be tailored to meet individual needs and provide more intensive assistance over longer periods of time.

Group-based interventions are one of the eligible employment support activities available to youth through Skills Link. Group interventions can include workshops to learn or enhance skills transferable to the workplace, such as leadership, teamwork and communication skills, as well as develop personal qualities, including self-esteem and self-reliance. The group-based interventions are restricted to helping participants prepare for future work or career decisions, or to support them in finding or maintaining employment. They cannot include occupation-specific skills development or accreditation.

Canadian provinces and territories have been exploring the use of group-based approaches under the Labour Market Agreements (LMAs) they have signed with the federal government. These agreements fund provincial and territorial labour market programs and services for low-skilled workers who would not otherwise received services under the Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs). The LMAs allow provinces and territories to determine their own priorities for funding and decide how the funding is allocated in order to meet the needs of their particular labour markets. This flexibility has permitted the provincial and territorial governments to explore other delivery formats, including group-based approaches. The Canada-British Columbia LMA is funding the province's new Job Options BC program which features group activities to support employment and skills training for its clients.

While group-based approaches appear to be gaining traction as a viable alternative to individual-based approaches to service delivery, the relative effectiveness of this approach remains as yet uncertain. This report will provide an assessment of the state of the literature on the subject, identifying any

studies that can demonstrate the relative merits of this approach. Where such evidence is lacking, it will draw on lessons from other literatures that may shed light on whether the federal government should explore expanding the eligibility criteria for its funding requirements to include group-based approaches. In addition to highlighting insights from the literature, the report will also profile promising domestic and international experiences with group-based initiatives to provide a better understanding of the nature of group-based initiatives as well as the populations they serve.

The report begins with a review of the theoretical importance of group-based activities. It surveys literature from a number of disciplines — in particular psychology and economics — that assess the relative merits of group-based approaches. It will examine theories of social interdependence, self-efficacy and peer effects, highlighting what we do (and do not know) about group behaviours and processes. The review also includes profiles of ten notable initiatives in Canada and abroad that are utilizing group-based approaches to support the employability and skills development of their clientele. It concludes with a summary of the lessons learned from the review of group-based strategies and their implications for future employment policy development.

Evidence from the literature on the importance and effectiveness of group-based activities

The provision of group-based employment supports would appear to be a natural extension of the widespread use of group activities in other domains. The education system relies on group-based methods extensively to support learning in an efficient manner. Workplaces are often divided into teams, where co-workers divide tasks and responsibilities and benefit from the variety of skills, experience and perspectives that each team member can offer to assist in the completion of given tasks. Addiction and other types of counselling support programs often rely on a group format to reinforce learning and promote individual accountability. This review examines a series of literatures to gain a better understanding of the benefits of providing services in a group-based format, the mechanism by which such benefits may arise, and the relative effectiveness of this approach over individually-based programs.

Benefits of groups

Trenholm (2007) defines a group as “a special kind of entity. It is a collection of individuals who, as a result of interacting with one another over time, become interdependent, developing shared patterns of behaviour and a collective identity.” Group-based activities are at times a financial necessity and at times a preferred method for completing a task or delivering a service. When operating effectively, they can support the completion of a task in a manner that is more efficient or effective than when individuals tackle it on their own. They also provide supports and interpersonal interactions with other group members that can increase motivation through greater involvement and participation.

Group members benefit from the synergy that arises when members work together. “Synergy occurs when the group’s performance or accomplishments surpass the capabilities of the individual group members.”¹ Another way to describe this concept is to borrow a concept from Gestalt psychology which conjectures that a group represents more than the sum of its component parts.² Synergy arises when group members are able to draw on each member’s unique talents, knowledge and experience to develop ideas or solutions that would not have been possible in isolation to one another. Given an effective distribution of skills and responsibilities, the synergy of a group can enable it to take on larger projects than what individual group members would be able to accomplish on their own.³

¹ www.henmanperformancegroup.com/articles/group-systems.pdf.

² “The fundamental ‘formula’ of Gestalt theory might be expressed in this way. There are wholes, the behaviour of which is not determined by that of their individual elements, but where the part-processes are themselves determined by the intrinsic nature of the whole. It is the hope of Gestalt theory to determine the nature of such wholes.” (M. Wertheimer, in Ellis, 1938).

³ For a better understanding of group performance, see the 1972 publication by Ivan Steiner, *Group Process and Productivity*, which moves beyond the issue of the relative differences in productivity between individuals and groups and instead examines how groups utilize their combined knowledge, skills and abilities to achieve a group product in the most efficient manner. In his research — which set the stage for much of the research on group processes to follow — Steiner found that groups fall short of

Another important function of groups is the level of support and commitment that members can provide each other. In systems theory, this concept is referred to as interdependence.⁴ Groups that achieve an effective level of interdependence are ones where individuals can rely on other group members to help them achieve their particular responsibilities. In addition to its increased ability to perform work by dividing tasks, the group can provide encouragement and support to its members while working on a big project. Given an effective level of support within a group, members are able to draw on the energy and motivation that exists within the group to achieve tasks more quickly.⁵

For many people, groups fulfill a basic need to interact and engage with other individuals through interpersonal connections. In the 1950s, William Schutz conducted observations of group behaviour and postulated three fundamental issues that he perceived to be predominant in interpersonal relations, whether in the context of individual personality dynamics or in a group setting: inclusion, control and affection. Schutz (1958) defined “inclusion” as the need to establish identity with others, “control” as the need to exercise leadership and prove one's abilities, and “affection” as the need to develop relationships with people. As three elements that Schutz postulated as being necessary and sufficient to explain most human interaction, these dimensions have been used to assess group dynamics and have been found to closely correspond with other prominent theories of group development (Doherty and Colangelo, 1984).

Social interdependence theory

A major contribution of psychological research in recent decades is its contribution to our understanding of cooperative learning. According to Johnson and Johnson (1998), the research on cooperative learning can be categorized into three broad themes: cognitive-development, behavioural, and social interdependence. The cognitive development perspective is based on the idea that “knowledge is social, constructed from cooperative efforts to learn, understand, and solve problems.” Behavioural theory, on the other hand, focuses on the group’s impact on reinforcing and rewarding learning. While Johnson and Johnson note that these two fields have a following in the psychological community, it is social interdependence theory that is gaining the most traction in the field.

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achieving their potential when they either fail to optimally coordinate their efforts or suffer from suboptimal motivation (Kerr 2010).

⁴ www.henmanperformancegroup.com/articles/group-systems.pdf.

⁵ Gestalt therapy is one field of therapy that has made group dynamics an integral part of the personal development process. In this model, the group provides participants with an opportunity to interact with others in a continuous, give-and-take environment that closely approximates society. “Through a supportive climate that only the group can offer, each member works at growth, while dealing with those behavioral patterns which hinder development.”
(<http://education2.uvic.ca/Faculty/hfrance/gestaltprocess.htm>)

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Social interdependence theory focuses on the extent to which a group's dynamics rely on the interdependence of its members. Social interdependence exists when individuals of a group share common goals and each individual's outcomes are affected by the actions of other group members. As such, an individual group member's actions may promote the success of others, obstruct the success of others or have no effect at all. How individual actions affect others in the group depends on how the group is structured. If the situation is structured cooperatively, group members work together to accomplish shared goals. If the situation is structured competitively, group members work against each other to achieve a goal that only one or a few in the group can attain. When the situation is structured individualistically, each person works by oneself to accomplish goals unrelated to the goals of others.

When social interdependence theory is applied to group learning, positive interactions within a cooperative group tend to result in positive relationships and a better psychological health of the group, while contributing to greater efforts to achieve the group's goals. For instance, the field of group psychotherapy has found that measures of group cohesion are associated with productivity, group participation, self-disclosure, and attendance (Rose, 1990). On the other hand, oppositional interactions within a competitive group can result in negative relationships between group members and lower efforts to achieve the group's goals. In their review of studies on group behaviour, Johnson and Johnson (1998) find that members of cooperative groups are able to achieve higher performance levels than individuals in groups that can be described as competitive or individualistic. Much of this work can be traced back to the seminal laboratory research undertaken by Morton Deutsch in the 1940s, who found that competitiveness in groups undermined group harmony and effectiveness, and that "greater group or organizational productivity will result when the members or subunits are co-operative rather than competitive in their interrelationships" (Deutsch, 1949).

The social interdependence literature demonstrates that the nature and dynamics of a group matter; putting people together in group learning setting does not automatically generate positive benefits and that group learning is most effective when it is structured cooperatively. Johnson and Johnson (1998) identify several factors that contribute to a cooperative group dynamic, including positive interdependence, individual and group accountability, face-to-face promotive interaction, appropriate use of social skills, and group processing. They argue that positive interdependence exists when each group member perceives that they cannot succeed independently and that they must coordinate each others' efforts to complete a task. A sense of personal responsibility for completing one's share of the work and facilitating the work of other members is another key factor for effective cooperation, while face-to-face promotive interaction represents group members' actions to encourage and support other members' efforts. The authors also find that it is important to ensure that group members have adequate social skills to know and trust each other, communicate accurately and unambiguously, accept and support each other, and resolve conflicts constructively.

Self-efficacy theory

Another important contribution from the field of psychology is the insight that an individual's confidence or level of empowerment can be linked to his or her decision to act. This concept, referred to as "self-efficacy", represents the link between one's own evaluation of what he or she is capable of doing and any subsequent behaviour. The construct of self-efficacy was pioneered by Albert Bandura (1977), who postulated that self-efficacy expectations — our beliefs in our capabilities to engage successfully in a given task or behaviour — are a major mediator of both behaviour and behaviour change. Individuals who have a strong sense of self-efficacy will devote more attention and effort towards resolving a particular situation while exhibiting greater confidence and persistence in seeing a task completed. Conversely, low self-efficacy expectations regarding a behaviour (or behavioural domain) are postulated to lead to avoidance of those behaviours, poorer performance, and a tendency to give up when faced with discouragement or failure. In formulating the theory, Bandura argued that an individual's degree of self-efficacy will determine whether or not certain behaviours will be attempted, the amount of effort the individual will expend, and the length of time the behaviour will be sustained, even when faced with obstacles.

The concept of self-efficacy has been applied to a variety of domains, particularly in the field of health and addiction counselling. It has also gained traction in the field of employment counselling, where it has been demonstrated to play an important role in determining the effectiveness of career interventions on subsequent career and job-search decision-making behaviours. Since the concept of self-efficacy can have important implications for field practitioners, those whose goal it is to change behaviour of individuals, Sterrett (1998) evaluated its role in assessing the effective performance of one group-based approach, job search clubs.

Job clubs, alternatively known as employment or job networks or job search workshops, are small groups of job seekers — with or without the guidance of a trained facilitator — who come together to support each other in their job search. The job club model has a long-standing tradition in Canada and around the world of providing unemployed or underemployed people with an informal support group, skills workshop, and job leads generator as they seek to find a better job or re-enter the workforce. Typical activities include networking, information-sharing, coaching, training, and cheerleading.

The job club model (discussed in further detail below) contains all the elements postulated by Bandura as supporting self-efficacy expectations. Due to the similarity of participants, a participant can model behaviour based on other members' participation. The facilitator or club leader sets the positive tone of the group and promotes praise and encouragement among group members on their performance. In turn, the positive feedback helps participants develop into positive and confident job seekers.

Sterrett conducted a case study of the job club model and observed that self-efficacy beliefs can be successfully enhanced within the context of this type of program. Using a very small sample of participants, Sterrett found that pre-post outcomes on participants show a significant increase in self-efficacy, and that these higher levels of confidence were associated with positive employment outcomes. While his research was limited in terms of its scope and methodology, it provides preliminary insights into how small group interventions can influence the cognitive state of participants, empowering them to make a successful transition to the labour market.

Peer effects

There is a well-developed literature in the field of economics examining the importance of peers in determining outcomes of individuals within a group context. Economists view the “peer effect” as a form of social network effect, or what is often termed “social capital.” A stylized observation is that many social networks exhibit “small world” properties, where people are clustered into social groups where there is only a small degree of separation between them. Economic models of the social network formation suggest that networks or peer groups are the result of rational strategic choices of people; that is, people derive some benefit of the network (or peer) and links are formed at the discretion of the agents.

An important facet of the peer effect model is its role in individual behaviour. The most cited application of this type of economic model is the sharing of job information among peers. Calvó-Armengol and Jackson (2004) examined a model where people receive job information and lose jobs in a non-deterministic fashion and where employed people pass job information to their peers only. Their model suggests that individuals’ employment and wages over time depend on their position in their social network, the size of their social network, and how well-employed their peers are. The model results in a contagion effect where if the neighbours of an agent drop out of the labour force, then that increases the likelihood that the agent will drop out, and so forth.

More recently, Mas and Moretti (2009) have investigated how peer effects can influence behaviour in the workplace. Using data from a large supermarket chain, they find strong evidence of “positive productivity from the introduction of highly productive personnel into a shift.” These effects are highly dependent on proximity, suggesting that interpersonal connections are necessary for facilitating positive peer effects. They also find that low-skilled workers benefit the most from peer interactions, particularly when they are paired with higher skilled workers. However, the productivity of higher-skilled workers is not adversely affected through their interactions with lower-skilled colleagues.

These results are supported by experimental work undertaken by Falk (2003). In the experiment, Falk compares the effects of two treatments:

In the “pair” treatment two subjects work at the same time in the same room. Peer effects are possible in this situation and imply that outputs within pairs should be similar. In the “single” treatment, which serves as a control, subjects work alone in a room and peer effects are ruled out by design.

The researchers find “clear and unambiguous” evidence for the existence of peer effects when participants are paired. They find that the effects increase work productivity by a significant amount. Similar to the Mas and Moretti study, they observe that the peer effects are greatest for low productivity workers, but that they do not in turn negatively influence higher productivity workers. “In other words, ‘bad apples,’ far from damaging ‘good apples,’ seem instead to gain in quality when paired with these latter” (Falk, 2003). Both studies are part of a growing body of evidence that is demonstrating the powerful effect that one worker can have on his or her co-workers. As such, it demonstrates how a peer effect can be positively generated by one worker increasing the productivity of other workers, rather than working through other, more negative behavioural channels such as peer pressure, shame, guilt, etc. (Gould and Kaplan, 2008).

Although there are some credible econometric evidence of “peer effects,” as well as a growing understanding of the way peer effects can influence behaviour and outcomes (Bhattacharya, 2009), facilitating the application of acquired knowledge to desired behavioural outcomes is very difficult, as shown in the research undertaken by Carrell et al. (2011). In their experiment, they randomly assigned incoming United States Air Force Academy students into a treatment group, where high ability students were selectively placed with either middle or low ability students, and a control group, where squadron members were evenly distributed according to their ability.

Contrary to the initial expectation of a positive peer effect, the bottom third students in the treatment group did worse academically than their control group counterparts. The impact on the middle third group of students was positive. The authors suggest that unexpected changes in peer group dynamics in the treatment group led to the unexpected results. They found evidence that low ability students within the treatment squadrons opted to study with other low ability students rather than high ability students as initially expected.

The theoretical literature on peer effects points to the important role that groups can play in facilitating the transmission and retention of information in an employment training setting. It also provides some insight into the mechanisms by which group members’ can influence their peers’ positive employment outcomes. However, it should be noted that while there does appear to be strong evidence that peers can play an important role in contributing to positive individual outcomes in a variety of contexts, studies that try to encourage this effect, such as the experiment by Carrell et al., suggest that positive peer effects are difficult to induce in a controlled environment. This research provides caution that while peer effects may play an important role in group-based outcomes, much has yet to be learned about successfully facilitating such approaches in policy.

Evidence from job club interventions

As noted above, the job clubs model is one type of group-based approach that is providing concrete evidence on the importance of group-based approaches in employment programming. While job clubs have been in existence for a few decades, it was the work of Dr. Nathan Azrin, a clinical psychologist, who co-authored a series of publications on the approach in the 1970s, providing a formalized model of how the job club model worked and identifying what factors made it successful. According to his research, job clubs provide a behaviourally-based model that uses coaching, modeling, behaviour rehearsal, and reinforcement procedures to teach a variety of job-finding skills to unemployed participants. Azrin et al. (1975) argue that job club programs are best suited to “populations of marginal employability,” providing job seekers with additional attention and support that they would not normally receive from a traditional job support program in a cost-effective manner for service providers.

The job club model presents some of the most compelling evidence that the group dynamic is creating a supportive environment for job seekers to gain confidence in using the information and resources they are receiving to conduct a successful job search. For instance, in addition to the case study evaluation conducted by Sterrett (1998) highlighted above, a variety of evaluations have found that this form of support and service delivery enhanced the employment rate of welfare recipients (Azrin, Philip, Thienes-Hontos, and Besalel, 1981 and Stidham and Remley, 1992). Controlled experiments conducted

by Gray (1983) and Rife and Belchar (1994) found that job search clubs were very effective in helping older workers find employment. Other studies also found that job search clubs performed well among particular target groups, such as the deaf (Amrine and Bullis, 1985), unemployed workers (van Ryn and Vinokur, 1992), people with psychiatric disabilities (Corbiere, Mercier, and Lesage, 2004), and international students (Bikos and Furry, 1999).

One of the major — if not only — experimental evaluations of the job club model was the WIN (Work Incentive) Job Finding Clubs experiment that was conducted in five US states from 1976 to 1978 among unemployment insurance (UI) recipients. It found that the addition of daily group job search training and supervised job search led to large and significant increases in employment rates across all sites when compared to comparison group members who were given access to regular WIN programming (which included counselling, training, subsidized job placement and referrals to agency employment listings). The effects of the program were sustained over the longer term, with program group members more likely to be working in permanent positions and three times less likely to be receiving UI benefits six months later. Due to the success of this experiment, the job club component was made a mandatory requirement of the WIN program and was included in some welfare-to-work programs (Greenberg and Shroder, 2004).

Since the 1970s, the job club model has spread to various fields of employment supports in Canada and abroad. They can now be found in many cities across the country, initiated and supported through either volunteer efforts or public funding sources. One example is the Scarborough Job Finding Club, which is one of the longest-standing job clubs in the country, originally started in 1987 through the support of the federal government and now being funded by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. The program offers participants a three-week program where they can benefit from coaching of experienced facilitators through workshops and hands-on job search activities. To be eligible, applicants must be unemployed or working less than 20 hours per week.⁶

While the job club model has long been a part of many community- and private-sector employment supports initiatives, it is beginning to gain traction in government programming as well. The US government, for instance, provides job club services for individuals who are eligible to receive Trade Adjustment Assistance as a result of losing their jobs due to trade with foreign countries. Employers and unions representing displaced workers can file a petition with the Department of Labor to have their employees TAA-certified, making them eligible to receive an income supplement as well as employability services, including assistance in skill assessment, job search workshops, job development or referral, and job placements.⁷

Very recently, the Department for Work and Pensions in the United Kingdom launched its “Work Clubs” initiative to support the local job club movement. Launched in 35 communities across Great Britain, this program is designed to encourage local volunteer efforts to assist unemployed community members find work by networking with their community peers. Work Clubs are part of the new set of initiatives the UK government is implementing to place greater emphasis on working in partnership

⁶ www.scarboroughjobfindingclub.com.

⁷ See www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=185763,00.html for more information.

between government job assistance centres, employability service providers, local authorities, employers, and jobseekers.⁸

The cost-effectiveness of group-based activities — Evidence from the substance abuse literature

In spite of the limited amount of evidence as to their effectiveness, group-based programs are worthy of further exploration due to the cost advantages they can offer in comparison to individual-based programs. Group-based programs can take advantage of economies of scale and more effective resource allocations, since any fixed costs can be spread over a larger pool of participants. These cost efficiencies can often outweigh any advantages that individual-based delivery may present. One field of research that has examined the relative effectiveness of group-based approaches is the substance use disorders (SUD) literature.

Weiss et al. (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of 24 SUD treatment outcome studies comparing group therapy to other treatment conditions, and found few differences between group and individual therapy. They conclude: “given the presumed cost-effectiveness of group therapy, this result appears to be a promising outcome for that modality — which may, in part, justify the common use of group therapy in treatment programs throughout the country.” They caution, however, that given the limited amount of research, “it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions about what content, intensity, or duration of treatment is most effective with particular populations.”

More recently, Sobell and Sobell (2009) conducted a randomized clinical trial in Toronto, Ontario comparing the delivery of a similar substance abuse treatment in a group versus individual format. They find no significant differences in the post-treatment effects between the two delivery methods and that the group-based approach required 41 per cent less therapist time. Beyond cost considerations, the research also provides some indication that group-based programs can offer advantages over individual-based delivery. The researchers found that the group-based approach engendered high feelings of cohesiveness and engagement, little interpersonal conflict, and low avoidance of group work among group members. Given effective group programming, this research indicates that social interactions and cohesion among group members can augment the effects of the program.

⁸ www.dwp.gov.uk/adviser/updates/work-clubs. See appendix for more details and discussion on this initiative.

Scan of group-based activities in Canada and abroad

Based on a scan of group-based employment assistance programs in Canada and around the world, profiles of 10 programs that are considered to be representative of the different types of group-based services are presented in the Appendix to this report. As a representative sample of a much broader range of available programs, these programs highlight the range of populations served and the different jurisdictions in which group-based programs can be found. Based on the information that was available at the time of the scan, the profiles provide a description of the program, its funding arrangements, its location, its target population and the nature of the group-based activities it provides. Unfortunately, detailed information on the specific nature of the group-based activities is generally unavailable from program descriptions, and a more thorough qualitative review would be required to analyze the range and scope of approaches being used and how such programming can be differentiated from individually-based programs targeted at the same populations. As well, any information as to the effectiveness of the program is also included; although in most cases this information was limited or non-existent.

The profiles of the group-based initiatives reveal several key factors in the overall development of group-based programming. Firstly, the use of group-based programming appears to be a more recent and growing trend in employment programs in Canada and abroad. Apart from job clubs which date back to the 1970s, the majority of programs identified were implemented within the past 10 years, with some still at the pilot stage of development. For example, the BC Job Options program was only initiated in November 2010 after the success of the recent group-based activities of the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers (TIOW) and the Return to Work Employability Pilot Program. Although based on the decades-old job club model, the Work Clubs program in the United Kingdom was only introduced in the past few months as part of the government's strategy on harnessing community partnerships and resources in supporting the unemployed. Similarly, the Australian government is transitioning to group-based approaches in a workshop format for its most job-ready population serviced by the Job Services Australia (JSA) program.

The most consistent and apparent aspect of group-based employment programs is their targeting of specific demographic groups. The majority of programs identified were targeted in some fashion, including: older workers, youth, immigrants, women, persons with disabilities, and aboriginals, with youth-based programming featuring heavily in the number of group-based programs that were identified in the scan.⁹ However, group-based initiatives are increasingly being used to provide tailored supports within a larger program that services a mix of demographic groups. For instance, service providers in the JSA are using group-based supports to separate groups of job seekers in a workshop format, giving the providers flexibility in supporting a wide range of needs and abilities.

⁹ The federal government's Skills Link program is funding a number of group-based programs for youth across Canada, of which only two programs — one for youth in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and one for immigrant youth in Calgary, Alberta — are profiled here.

The group-based programs that were included in the profiles include both community-based and government programs.¹⁰ However, the majority of community-based programs identified in the scan were supported through funding from various levels of government. The overall structure of this relationship, for both domestic and international governments, has program services delivered through local community organizations based on specific funding requirements that can dictate the nature and scope of program activities to be offered. Most of the new initiatives established in the past few years follow this funding model. As can be seen in many of the profiled programs, group-based approaches are often being justified on a cost-effectiveness basis, but they are also being positioned as important methods for harnessing community and peer-based resources for supporting the jobless in their search for stable employment.

The programming scan shed light on the importance of the variety of services provided in group-based employment programs, including focus groups, workshops and classroom training. It is important to note that the vast majority of group-based employment programs also include a variety of other service delivery methods, with group activities commonly supplemented with individual learning sessions, work placements, apprenticeships, workplace mentoring and other employment-related activities. In some cases, the group aspect of the program played a supporting role to a more dominant work-based activity. For service providers in the Australian JSA and in other programs where they have programming discretion, group-based approaches are being used to support job-ready clients, freeing up staff resources to provide focused one-on-one supports for their harder-to-employ population, enabling the service providers to support a broader population. In these cases, the increasing variety of program activities appears to allow community organizations greater flexibility in meeting the needs of their participants.

The scan also provides some insight into the length of group-based program activities and their relative intensity levels. The majority of programs with emphasis on group-based activities are relatively short, lasting from four to eight weeks, and often serving as the introductory activity before clients move into employment placements or other types of services. However, the length of the group-based component can vary based on the types of other activities in the program. For instance, the group-based activity can last for several months in cases where it provides support for work-based activity, as is the case for the Youth Possibilities Program in Calgary, Alberta. It is important to note that even though government funding requirements are not specific on the time length of implementation, the identified employment programs tend to keep a short-term focus for group-based activities.

Due to the recent implementation of most group-based employment programs, only a small amount of documentation on program evaluation is readily available. Even in cases where evaluations are being conducted, such as the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers (TIOW), little information is currently available on the relative effectiveness of the group- versus individual-based programming activities.¹¹ In most cases, the strength of the group-based approach is being evaluated on the basis of the

¹⁰ A review of the TIOW, however, was deemed to be outside the scope of this paper.

¹¹ It should be noted that new programs, such as the UK's Work Clubs initiative, include a formal evaluation component; however, these evaluations are not due to be released within the timeframe of this paper.

program's ability to achieve similar or better outcomes than alternate approaches. In Australia, for instance, the government reports that its new JSA program — which features group-based approaches in much of its programming, particularly for job-ready clients — has achieved a significant increase in the number of placements in its first two years when compared to the programs it replaced. The Region of Waterloo links the low cost per successful outcome of its government-funded Employment Options program to its ability to receive funding renewals every year since 1987. Unfortunately, these types of evaluations do not provide strong evidence as to the relative merits of the group-based approaches themselves, as other, more important factors may be playing a role in the success of a particular program.

Lessons learned on the knowledge gaps and limitations of group-based interventions in employment programming

Research on groups to date has typically focused on group dynamics and the identification of factors that contribute to (or detract from) group effectiveness. As such, the focus of much of the research highlighted in the review above is aimed at providing a better understanding of what contributes to effective group behaviours, as opposed to the relative merits of providing group-based activities over other, individually-based approaches. Much of this research is also very focused, with researchers often working within their own disciplines and in isolation of one another. This fragmented approach has hindered the development of a unified and comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness group-based approaches. It is only recently that researchers have begun to develop an integrated group theory, giving researchers hope that this development will create the “critical mass” necessary for advancing the state of group behaviour research (Poole et al., 2004).

A limitation of the group-based literature is that it typically assumes that the group format is the most appropriate (or reasonable) delivery method for providing training or other employment supports. For instance, group-based approaches have a long history in the field of adult education, dating back to discipline’s origins in the 20th century. As Imel (1999) notes, however, that while the emphasis of group learning has long been a part of adult education, there is little direct evidence to support this approach in the literature. Much of the supporting evidence is derived from cooperative learning initiatives in the formal education sector. In these domains, which include elementary, secondary and higher education, research has consistently shown that group learning facilitates involvement and engagement with the learning process. While recognizing the limitations of the research, Imel argues that “it can be assumed, however, that adults, too, will benefit from the type of learning that more actively engages them and learning groups can be one method of accomplishing that goal.”

Despite these limitations, the research highlighted in the preceding literature review provides some strong indications that group-based approaches may serve an important role in enhancing the effectiveness of individual group members. For instance, the review examined how researchers have used the construct of self-efficacy to evaluate how the job club model — a long-standing method for providing group-based employment supports — contributes to the state of mind of job seekers when undertaking a job search. The research showed — albeit in a preliminary fashion due to the limited nature of the methodology — that the job club model can provide important supports to job members, making them feel more confident and empowered to make a successful transition to the labour market. This finding is supported by evidence from the Work Incentive Job Finding Clubs evaluation that occurred in the 1970s, which demonstrated that the job club approach contributed to better employment outcomes and less unemployment insurance dependency when compared to more traditional employment supports programming.

The review also surveyed more recent and rigorous testing of the relative effectiveness of group dynamics in the substance abuse literature. Although this field of study is quite different from that of employment supports, these studies represent the strongest indications of how group-based approaches can compare to individual approaches. The survey of a number of treatment studies —

many of which were conducted as randomized trials — shows that there are often insignificant differences in the post-treatment effects between group versus individual therapy, and that group-based approaches require much less therapist time on a per-client basis. Given these results, researchers in this field are concluding that group therapy can lead to similar outcomes as individual approaches at a substantial cost savings.

Two separate areas of research were examined to gain insight into how group-based supports can provide unique benefits for job seekers. One body of research, social interdependence theory, has provided a great deal of insight into how groups can generate benefits for group members, how effective groups can achieve higher performance levels than the individual members on their own, and what factors contribute to a group's effectiveness. This literature also provides important lessons on the nature and dynamics that must exist for a group-based approach to work effectively. It shows that effective group learning does not occur automatically and that group-based approaches need to be structured specifically to facilitate a cooperative group dynamic where members feel a sense of responsibility for the success of each member of the group.

Another growing field of inquiry into group dynamics is the peer effects literature, where researchers are examining how social networks can transmit information and influence individual behaviour. A number of studies have examined peer effects in the workplace setting, and they are demonstrating the positive nature of peer influences on employment behaviour, particularly where individuals of differing ability levels are placed together. These results are echoed in the findings from the formative evaluation of the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers (TIOW), which reported that the group-based approach “proved effective in creating a supportive environment for learning as a result of the group dynamics and peer support.”

Based on the analysis of recent developments in group-based programming in Canada and abroad, group-based approaches are seen as most appropriate when they are designed and delivered in a local context. For the TIOW as well as the Australian JSA and UK Work Clubs, a key feature of each of these programs is that local organizations and/or community groups are given the discretion to develop their programming, however, such programming must include group-based elements in their service offerings. The UK government is positioning their Work Clubs program as a way to encourage greater social innovation at the community level, where the government partners with local service providers and community organizations to develop employment supports that reflect local labour market needs. As such, group-based approaches are being positioned as a method to facilitate social innovation at the local level by taking advantage of local communities and resources to provide better supports to job seekers and find new solutions for unemployment.

The UK's Work Clubs initiative is one approach (among a series of measures) designed to facilitate a partnership between the government, providers, local authorities, employers, and jobseekers to find new solutions to unemployment. Another partnership model that is included in the group-based program profiles of this report is the Canadian-American Plant Closing Demonstration Project (CAPCDP), a program that ran from 1986 to 1989 in the United States. Although not strictly a group-based employment supports initiative, the CAPCDP is an example of how groups of workers can work together in partnership with government and/or industry leaders to develop and deliver employment assistance that is tailored to the needs of their fellow job seekers. This approach extends the group-

based model from a delivery approach to one where group members are involved in identifying the group's needs and designing services that will best meet those needs.

When examining the target populations of programs identified in the scan, it would appear there are few limitations in terms of the range of demographic groups that can be served through group-based approaches. Service organizations, such as the IAM Cares Society in Surrey, British Columbia, have relied on the job club model to address the needs of specific populations — in their case, persons with disabilities or chronic conditions. The new Aboriginal Training for Employment Program in British Columbia is using group activities as a basis for providing job supports for the aboriginal community across the province. We also identified many youth programs across the country that included group-based elements in their employment service programs, of which two are included in this report. The Canadian TIOW program and the American Aging Worker Initiative have embraced group-based approaches to provide supports for older workers. Some jurisdictions such as Australia are looking to group-based programs — including job clubs, workshops and support groups — as an opportunity to provide more cost-effective services for their job-ready clientele, allowing them to target more resource intensive one-on-one programs to disadvantaged clients. From these examples, it would appear that the strength of the group-based approach is that it can facilitate connections and supports among groups of clients facing similar needs, providing further support to the theories highlighted above that group-based approaches can engender a sense of common purpose among group members in similar circumstances and be an effective means for giving them the unique support and encouragement they need to overcome their barriers to employment.

While group-based initiatives appear to be gaining popularity as a method for providing employment supports to job seekers, particularly job-ready clientele, there is limited rigorous evidence to demonstrate conclusively the relative effectiveness of this approach over more traditional, individually-based programs. The literature highlighted in this report provides some indication that, in many cases, group-based approaches may be equally — or more — effective when compared to individual approaches, with potential for cost-savings over individual programming. Given the popularity of group-based approaches in new policy initiatives, further research will provide a timely understanding of whether such a difference exists, how large the cost savings may be, and what populations are best served by this type of approach.

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Appendix: Scan of group-based programs

Job Options BC

Location:

Residents in and near selected communities across British Columbia

Description:

Job Options BC is a new employment and skills training program introduced in November 2010 to help unemployed British Columbians to find employment. The program offers group and individual programming, short-term training and work experience that prepares participants for new employment or further training. Groups consist of 10 to 12 participants and group activities include assessment, life skills, job-finding clubs, and employability skills training. Further skills training or work experience follow group participation.

The design for Job Options BC was based on two programs: the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers and the Return to Work Employment Program pilot.

Programming length is up to 10 weeks of group and individual programming, including:

- Four to six weeks of group activities, including assessment, life skills, job-finding clubs and employability skills, including job search, basic skills upgrading, computer training, and short term skill training.
- Further skills training and/or work experience for the remainder of the program involving employer, community-based or volunteer work experience.
- When needed, clients may access up to six months of follow-up support in finding and maintaining employment or regaining employment if they lose their job.

Target population:

18 years of age or older, unemployed, legally entitled to work in Canada, living in BC, not a student, not an Employment Insurance client and not participating in another LMA-funded program.

Funder:

Canada/BC Labour Market Agreement, \$15-million each fiscal year until March 31, 2012. The Province has the option to renew the program for two consecutive one-year terms through to March 31, 2014, depending on its success.

Program website: www.aved.gov.bc.ca/job_options_bc.

Employment Options

Location:

Region of Waterloo (cities of Kitchener, Waterloo and Cambridge), Ontario

Description:

The region of Waterloo, through Social Services, Employment and Income has provided group-based pre-employment programs through its Employment Options program since 1987. In 2010, the province invited the Region to transition the Employment Options clientele to the Employment Ontario service model.

Employment Options consisted of a seven-week in-class component which focused on pre-employment, communication and job search skills followed by a two-week job shadow. Group members were also given computer training to develop their computer-based job search skills. This computer job search component was also provided in a workshop format for individuals who were not involved in the longer term program but wished to learn how to conduct a computer-based job search.

Under Employment Ontario programming, the Region is currently providing assisted services that consist of assessment, one-to-one employment counselling, referrals to community agencies, case management and employment/training follow up. Clients will also be offered job retention services to assist them in retaining employment longer. Clients are also linked to skills training and the Employment Ontario Second Career Program. Participants are also being helped through the use of both short term workshops and longer term groups for those who require more intensive programming.

For clients who are job-ready, the Region will provide resources such as computer access, fax, telephone, resume writing software, as well as short term workshops.

Although no formal program evaluations are identified on the Region's website, the success of the program in assisting its clientele with finding employment, as well as its cost per successful outcome are cited as reasons for the federal (and later provincial) government's repeated funding of the program (see link to the Region's "2003/2004 Employment Options Program Submission" below).

Target population:

Originally targeted individuals with significant barriers to employment; more recently, it provided assistance to new Canadians, Ontario Works recipients, Employment Insurance recipients and job-seekers living in the region.

In 2002-2003, the Region reported that the nine-week program provided direct programming to 186 participants, helping an estimated 178 participants secure employment.

In 2010, the Region was anticipating providing assisted services to 113 clients in each of the three communities, and unassisted services to a total of 4,499 job-ready clients across the entire region.

Funder:

The program was originally funded by Service Canada and continued under a cost-sharing arrangement between the Region and the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities before transitioning to Employment Ontario services in 2010. According to the program submission in 2003, the program cost approximately \$500,000 per year, of which nearly 80 per cent was contributed by the federal government.

More information on the Region of Waterloo's Employment Ontario services can be found in the Region's most recent "Submission of Employment Ontario Business Plans":

[www.region.waterloo.on.ca/web/region.nsf/8ef02c0fded0c82a85256e590071a3ce/F45243B56C4ADB43852577380051E199/\\$file/SS-10-029.pdf](http://www.region.waterloo.on.ca/web/region.nsf/8ef02c0fded0c82a85256e590071a3ce/F45243B56C4ADB43852577380051E199/$file/SS-10-029.pdf)

For information on the Employment Options program services, funding and target clientele, see the Region's "2003/2004 Employment Options Program Submission":

[www.region.waterloo.on.ca/web/Region.nsf/8f9c046037662cd985256af000711418/445C46358C04DF9D85256CF70053E48A/\\$file/SS-03-028.pdf](http://www.region.waterloo.on.ca/web/Region.nsf/8f9c046037662cd985256af000711418/445C46358C04DF9D85256CF70053E48A/$file/SS-03-028.pdf)

Work Clubs

Location:

United Kingdom

Description:

In April 2011 the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) launched a national network of Work Clubs at 35 of the DWP Jobcentre Plus locations across Great Britain. An initiative being led by the Exchange Group, one of the UK's leading training providers, Work Clubs are designed to be locally led, community-based support initiatives set up and run by voluntary organizations and community groups with the support of local businesses. The government's local Jobcentre Plus offices will support the development of Work Clubs, providing practical advice and guidance, working with interested parties to develop proposals and ultimately referring Jobcentre Plus customers.

Based heavily on the job club model, Work Clubs provide participants with a place to meet and exchange skills, find opportunities, make contacts, share experiences and receive support. In addition, the Jobcentre Plus locations offer participants with a range of free employability and skills development services and training, as well as access to job search resources such as computer software and Internet access.

Work Clubs are one of a series of new welfare to work measures in the "Get Britain Working" program. Underlying this initiative is a move by the DWP to replace an array of employment schemes, pilots and projects and give more freedom and responsibility to local service providers in supporting jobseekers. The initiative also places a greater emphasis on partnerships between the public, private and third sectors, including social enterprises. There is also a greater emphasis on cost-effective solutions, relying on low-cost programs such as Work Clubs for the unemployed and Enterprise Clubs for young people interested in self-employment, as well as introducing financial incentives that compensate providers according to results and encourage them to provide services for the harder-to-employ.

The UK has an extensive history with job clubs, and although the DWP does not cite any formal evaluations as to the effectiveness of the Work Club model, they do include a series of case studies on their website the suggest that the job club model is a very cost effective way of supporting higher skilled unemployed people, potentially over lengthy periods of time.¹² The DWP has noted in its Business Plan for 2011-2015 that it will be completing a preliminary evaluation of Work Clubs in August 2011.¹³

Target population:

Unemployed people in the local Jobcentre Plus community.

¹² www.50plusworks.com/setting-up-work-clubs-and-group-activities/.

¹³ www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/dwp-business-plan-2011-2015.pdf.

Funder:

Work Clubs are being set up through the Department for Work and Pensions' Jobcentre Plus program, which provides a limited amount of start-up funding to community groups who are interested in starting a Work Club.

For information on the initiative: www.dwp.gov.uk/adviser/updates/work-clubs/.

Job Services Australia

Location:

Australia

Description:

Launched in July 2009, Job Services Australia (JSA) is funded by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to provide free services to job seekers and employers across Australia. The program provides funding to local employment services organizations to provide localized employment and training programs in more than 2000 towns, cities and rural sites. JSA is designed to provide support for all job seekers, including those who have recently lost their job, remote and disadvantaged job seekers. The DEEWR reports that “on any given day JSA provides tailored and flexible employment assistance to three quarters of a million people.”¹⁴

JSA folded seven separate employment services programs into a one-stop, streamlined service. It is designed to link job seekers to a provider of their choosing, who in many cases will work with them throughout the duration of re-employment process rather than have them move in and out of different programs, or from one provider to another. These services offer job seekers skills and more purposeful assistance through flexible and tailored services to suit their individual needs. Job Services Australia also aims to reduce administration costs and red tape for providers and focuses on addressing skills that are in demand through greater involvement with employers.

Depending on the offerings of a particular service provider, JSA-funded programs can provide one to one or group based assistance in prevocational skilling, overcoming barriers to employment, job search and limited post placement support for job seekers and a job matching service for employers with job vacancies. In order to target its one-on-one services for the most disadvantaged groups, the DEEWR has announced that it is reducing its services to its job-ready clientele, consolidating services into a group workshop format in order to “enable current services to job ready job seekers to be better targeted.”¹⁵

Although no formal evaluations on JSA are available, the DEEWR reports it undertook a nationwide consultation process with community organisations, representative bodies and employment services providers prior to the 2011/2012 budget and found that the JSA is achieving strong results. For instance, the Department reported in its budget report that JSA providers increased the number of job placements by 10 per cent in the program’s first 20 months of operation, compared to previous arrangements. The JSA is also reportedly achieving up to 50 per cent better employment outcomes for the most disadvantaged populations.

¹⁴ www.deewr.gov.au/Department/Budget/Documents/20112012/Future_Arrangements_For_Job_Services_Australia.pdf.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Target population:

Individuals aged 15+, with specific programs also designed for targeted groups (i.e., 50+, youth, indigenous and other disadvantaged populations).

Funder:

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). The Department is investing more than \$3.8 billion in JSA over the next four years.

For more information, see the DEEWR's report, "Building Australia's Future Workforce."
([www.deewr.gov.au/Department/Budget/Documents/20112012/Future Arrangements For DES Purchasing.pdf](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Department/Budget/Documents/20112012/Future%20Arrangements%20For%20DES%20Purchasing.pdf))

Transition Program: Phoenix Learning and Employment Centre

Location:

Halifax, Nova Scotia

Description:

Phoenix Learning and Employment Centre (PLEC) opened in May 2000. The goal of the program is to provide youth with support and learning opportunities for skill development so that they are able to make a successful transition to school or meaningful employment.

Clients are provided services within a case management model with much of the training and support provided through facilitated workshops. These small groups help participants develop and practice skills in a supportive environment. Some of the topics include communication, problem solving, personal management skills, and teamwork skills. In addition to group-based programming, youth are able to work one-on-one with a Career Counsellor or Job Developer to develop an action plan.

Phoenix also runs the Transition Program to support higher needs youth develop life and employment skills through facilitated workshops, individual support and a gradual transition into a work placement. The Transition Program is a 16-week paid program, involving 4 weeks of training and 12 weeks of on-the-job experience. It provides training in career development and job search, time and financial management, interpersonal skills and conflict resolution, and teamwork. It also offers certification in such areas as safety orientation, Whims and First Aid, computer skills and customer service.

Youth are eligible for the Transition Program if they are 16 to 24 years of age, not in or returning to school, not working and have minimal or no work experience, and are not eligible for EI and have not collected EI in the past three years.

No formal evaluations of the Phoenix Learning and Employment Centre programs were readily available.

Target population:

Unemployed youth aged 16 to 24 and not currently working or in school.

Funder:

Skills Link, Government of Canada.

Youth Possibilities Program

Location:

Calgary, Alberta

Description:

This project provides employability skills and life skills workshops to youth immigrants. These workshops focus on social, information and leadership skills, as well as target team work, self-improvement skills and career exploration. They are followed by a three-day job shadow in an employment related field of interest for each participant. Participants earn an hourly wage while participating in the program.

Two full-time, 12-week modules:

- Module 1: Learn valuable life and employment skills. Participate in outdoor challenges that develop teamwork skills and build self confidence.
- Module 2: Get involved in community service projects, learn job search skills. Continue to take part in outdoor challenges and team-building experiences.

Intended client outcomes include:

- Participation in a work experience program (programs offered by other agencies funded by Service Canada).
- Employment.
- Registration in a training or education program.

The program serves 80 clients per year. Clients are referred to the program through the centralized service in Calgary-BGS Youth Ventures, which is also funded by Service Canada.

No evaluation of the program's effectiveness is readily available.

Target population:

Immigrant youth aged 17-27 years old, Canadian citizens or permanent residents, out of school, unemployed or underemployed and not in receipt of Employment Insurance.

Funder:

Skills Link, Government of Canada. According to a 2008 consultant's report to Alberta Employment and Immigration, the program receives \$500,000 in funding per year.¹⁶

¹⁶ www.isccalgary.ca/carestrategy/082809%20Inventory%20of%20Immigrant%20and%20Refugee%20Child%20and%20Youth%20Programs%20and%20Services%20Alberta.pdf.

For more information, see the program website:
www.centrefornewcomers.ca/youth_possibilities.shtml.

Aboriginal Training for Employment Program

Location:

60-plus aboriginal communities in British Columbia

Description:

The Aboriginal Training for Employment Pilot (ATEP) is being developed and delivered in conjunction with BC post-secondary education partners to deliver job-related training in essential skills and introductory trades training, coupled with mentoring, coaching and other retention tools through public, private and Aboriginal-controlled training organizations around the province. As one of the initiatives under the “New Relationships with Aboriginal People and Communities in British Columbia” program, ATEP activities are designed to be reflective of Aboriginal perspectives, values and beliefs. ATEP services include both group and individual programming.

Group activities include assessment, life skills, and employability skills (job search, basic skills upgrading, computer training, and short-term skill training). Further skills training and/or work experience during the remainder of the program includes employer, community-based or volunteer work experience to assist participants in conducting a successful search for paid employment. Participants who need help finding and maintaining employment are offered up to six months of follow-up support.

There are currently 17 Aboriginal organizations providing training and employment opportunities for approximately 600 Aboriginal people in the fields of culinary arts, tourism, health care, social services, mining, and the construction trades. All programs will be put in place by October 2011.

This is a new pilot project and no program evaluation is currently available.

Target population:

Programming is offered to Aboriginal individuals who are either unemployed and not an Employment Insurance client or employed but low skilled.

Funder:

The government is investing approximately \$4 million in the program through the Canada/BC Labour Market Agreement.¹⁷

For more information, see the program website: www.aved.gov.bc.ca/atep/welcome.htm.

¹⁷ www.newrelationship.gov.bc.ca/shared/downloads/annual_report_2009_10.pdf.

Aging Worker Initiative

Location:

Organizations in 10 states across the United States

Description:

The Aging Worker Initiative (AWI) seeks to expand the workforce investment system's understanding about how to best serve the older worker population and develop models to share with all local workforce investment areas. Its ultimate goal is to provide better, more expansive services to older Americans for many years to come. Grants awarded under the AWI focus on providing training and related services for individuals age 55 and older that result in employment and advancement opportunities in high-growth sectors.

Industries that grantees have chosen to focus on include: Healthcare, Energy, Advanced Manufacturing, Specialized Construction/Skilled Labour, Green Construction, Engineering, Architecture, Transportation, Information Technology, Accounting and Financial Services, and Administrative Support Services.

Funded services involve individual and group-based activities, including classroom training, on-the-job training, job services, and job forums.

ETA has funded a forthcoming process evaluation that will provide detailed information on how grants were used and identify key issues for future policy, administrative guidance, and technical assistance. The evaluation will examine the types of training and services offered; number of older workers served; types of employers involved; integration with regional economic development; relationships among partnering organizations; measurement systems; and the sustainability of demonstration activities after the grants expire.

Target population:

Targeted towards specific industries and communities for participants aged 55 and older who have been laid off and are seeking reemployment; who need to stay in the workforce beyond the traditional retirement age but need training to increase their skills; and who face other barriers to employment such as disabilities or low levels of English proficiency.

Funder:

A public-private initiative lead by the Employment and Training Administration (Department of Labor). Ten awards of approximately \$1 million each were made to organizations in Indiana, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Texas, Vermont, Washington and Wisconsin. In addition, The Atlantic Philanthropies contributed an additional \$3.6 million for technical assistance to grant winners. Other project partners include the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning and the Council for Competitiveness.

For more information, see: www.doleta.gov/brg/indprof/AWI/overview.pdf.

Vancouver Edge Job Club Program

Location:

Surrey and Vancouver, British Columbia

Description:

A free job club program that was run by the IAM Cares Society, a non-profit organization providing free employment assistance and support services to people with disabilities and/or chronic conditions in the Lower Mainland and Greater Vancouver regions of BC. The EDGE program was in operation for four years until January 31, 2011 and provided a job search skills club for unemployed or underemployed individuals with persistent health issues and/or disabilities under the direction of an Employment Specialist.

The program focused on employment issues specific to persons with a disability and/or chronic conditions, including assistance with disclosure and accommodations issues. Participants were given training on conducting a self-directed job-search, preparing for and undertaking interviews, as-needed basic computer training for job search purposes, and access to IT resources. Participants who were job ready could receive up to 12 weeks of additional support in their job search from a Professional Marketing Specialist.

Clients could be referred to the program by IAM Cares Society Employment Specialists, other service providers, or Service Canada Employment Resource Centres.

No evaluation of the Edge program was readily available.

Target population:

People with a disability and/or persistent health condition that impacts their employment choices or daily living activities.

Funder:

The Canada-British Columbia Labour Market Development Agreement

Program website: www.iamcares.ca/jsVanEJCOOnline.htm

Canadian-American Plant Closing Demonstration Project

Location:

Four projects in Idaho, Michigan, New Jersey, and Vermont, United States

Description:

Running from 1986 to 1989, the Canadian-American Plant Closing Demonstration Project (CAPCDP) established labour management committees which were composed of employer and employee representatives and an independent chairperson to help devise and implement a strategy for helping dislocated workers find new jobs. It helped plan, implement, and monitor service delivery. In each of the four projects, committees gathered information on workers' skills and interests, and then used this information to match jobs and training to individual worker needs. Committees also worked with service providers, such as the Employment Service and educational institutions, to determine when and where services would be offered, and monitored worker participation and their success in finding jobs. When workers encountered problems, committees intervened to expand or add services, speed up worker enrolment in training, or resolve complaints about service quality. Committees also helped tailor assistance to worker needs by sponsoring orientation sessions and talking to workers to acquaint them with services and promote participation in the project. Labour-management committees drew their membership from persons employed at the plant who were dislocated workers themselves.

The length of the program varied, with three projects helping workers for many months after layoff.

A study¹⁸ that examined the effectiveness of CAPCDP found that the labour-management committees enhanced the ability of the four dislocated worker projects to help workers cope with job loss and find employment. According to the study, the committees were effective at

1. Tailoring assistance strategies to meet worker needs through their involvement in project planning, oversight of worker progress, and direct assistance to individual workers;
2. Facilitating early intervention by informing workers of their reemployment assistance options before layoff;
3. Coordinating project activities by serving as a focal point for planning and monitoring service delivery and providing a communication link between workers and service providers;
4. Supporting and encouraging worker adjustment efforts by establishing on-site assistance centers, maintaining personal contact with workers, and sponsoring other supportive activities.

Although the CAPCDP was not strictly a group-based employment services model, it demonstrates how forming groups of worker representatives can be instrumental in providing tailored employment supports to their fellow workers facing layoff and/or seeking re-employment.

¹⁸ www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED313576.pdf.

Target population:

Dislocated workers in the four project locations.

Funder:

US Department of Labor