



Appearance before the

Standing Committee on Finance

Study: Youth Employment in Canada

Chair: James Rajotte, MP
Clerk: Christine Lafrance

Thursday April 10, 2014
Room 268 – La Promenade Building
151 Sparks Street
Ottawa
3:30 to 5:30 pm

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Jerry Lucas – Vice President & Chief Operating Officer
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INTRODUCTION

March of Dimes Canada was established in 1951 and is one of Canada's largest service providers and advocates for people with disabilities. Last year, we delivered more than 2.25 million hours of service to over 60,000 Canadians with disabilities.

March of Dimes has been providing employment services for over 50 years, pre-dating the introduction of the Vocational Rehabilitation for Disabled Persons Act. Over the past half century, we have seen many improvements to the lives of people with disabilities, many as the result of legislation and programs that have enshrined rights, improved access to facilities and services, and promoted inclusion in education, employment and community life.

A recent report from TD Bank entitled, *Assessing the Impact of Youth Unemployment*, concludes that youth unemployment, if not addressed, will cost our country billions of dollars over the next two decades. The unemployment rate for the Canadian population is approximately 7.1%. The youth unemployment rate is doubled at just over 14% although this varies by region throughout the country.

March of Dimes Canada will address three areas pertaining to this issue:

1. Existing strategies which are currently addressing the problem and we believe the government should maintain;
2. Specific strategies to address youth unemployment; and
3. Additional strategies to improve employment rates for youth with disabilities.

1. Existing Strategies

1.1 Apprenticeship and Other Programs Based on the Needs of Business

Countries with lower youth unemployment have strong apprenticeship and work placement systems. Successful placement of youth in areas of labour need requires a strong understanding of the labour market gained through direct and ongoing dialogue with business. It also implies "selling" youth on the benefits of working within these sectors.

The Government of Canada's recent initiatives to promote and support the Apprenticeship programs in Canada should be maintained. Additionally, the "sell" to youth requires a marketing initiative that resonates with their sensibilities. However, demand for apprenticeships is limited, driven by the needs of the sectors which use this system. Although Canada is experiencing a "skill gap" in

many of the sectors which use apprenticeship, care must be taken not to oversubscribe its employment potential/capacity. It's a delicate balance.

Other planned initiatives such as the Canada Job Grant may be very valuable where a young person has shown work readiness though employment in an unrelated sector. Through a relatively small investment of time individuals may gain specific job related skills which have been developed by hiring employers. Youth that have shown motivation to work and additional impetus to gain relevant skills should be strong candidates to employers. This program should be promoted to young people who have stalled in the job search.

1.2 Community Based Youth Employment Services

Through funding from Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) March of Dimes has been able to support extremely challenged youth with barriers to employment through the Skills Link program. We see youth with significant issues including problems with the law, alcohol and drug abuse, problematic family life and undiagnosed mental health conditions. Working with motivational techniques we ensure these barriers are addressed and that the young person has the work readiness and life skills to secure entry level work.

These programs have had an excellent success rate meeting all the ESDC contracted expectations. Skills Link programs work with a small numbers of youth at one time. Thus our involvement with the business is very needs driven. We seek to clearly understand the needs of the employer and prepare our participants for intense on-the-job training. March of Dimes Canada has been providing this program for a number of years with consistently good outcomes. March of Dimes Canada would encourage the Government of Canada to continue and enhance this program when funding allows.

2. Strategies to Address Youth Unemployment

2.1 In-School Vocational Curriculum

As young people complete their secondary school education, they must decide whether to attend post-secondary education or directly enter the job market. Drivers of this decision are primarily grades, financial resources and personal motivation. To ensure that every student makes an informed decision March of Dimes Canada recommends that an in-school credit program be provided in career and technical education.

Components of this program must include:

- Career assessment – an exploration of the students preferences and interests;

- The labour market – an understanding of jobs available within their region and other opportunities across Canada including current labour market realities;
- Job pathways--this includes the education and training requirements for specific jobs, including grades required to enter specific programs (if appropriate); duties of the job, regional availability, wages and benefits;
- Job seeking skills training;
- Workplace visits or job shadowing in jobs of interest to the student;
- Mentoring programs by experienced workers to teach the realities of the workplace and to guide students; and
- Perhaps the most valuable yet difficult to administer, is the integration of a meaningful work experience.

Research has shown that participation in an in-school program and/or having a job while in high school significantly increases employment outcomes. This initiative is not the responsibility of the school boards alone but a coordinated and cooperative effort between government, local business, unions and the community. Government can provide the long-term cost benefit analysis of a program. School boards must integrate the mandatory nature of the program into the curriculum. Local business and unions must supply industry standards, job market projections and access to on-site paid and unpaid opportunities. Community based employment service providers should facilitate in-school programs. These agencies have core competencies in the program content and have active relationships with business.

2.2 Ensuring Post-Secondary Education Links to Needed Skills in the Labour Market

Young people rightly assume that attending post-secondary education enhances their opportunities to find work and greater economic rewards. To make this a reality there must be better coordination between business and post-secondary institutions, particularly colleges, to clearly define the skills and knowledge needed within the industry. Identified skills must be integrated into the curriculum. The addition of co-op placements within the academic program will greatly enhance the student's competency by providing real and relevant work experience. Even short-term employment such as a co-op program has a huge impact on a young person's employment outcome. It has been our experience that post-secondary institutions are equally concerned about the future of their graduates and work with business and labour organizations to understand and integrate their labour needs. This initiative must be encouraged and supported.

3. Strategies to Support Youth with Disabilities

March of Dimes Canada has been providing employment supports to persons with disabilities since the 1960's and are very aware of their significantly higher unemployment rate. As a sub-set, young people with disabilities are no different. What has changed over the last three decades is that more students with disabilities have access to post-secondary education. This is a testament to society's progress in the area of physical and academic inclusion. Although this is good news, young people with disabilities either entering the workforce directly from high school or after a post-secondary education face even more complex challenges than their non-disabled counterparts.

March of Dimes Canada has three recommendations specific to youth with disabilities:

3.1 Additional In-school Module

Youth with disabilities must have equal access to career and technical education classes provided through the school system. Youth with disabilities would be provided additional training on the following:

- How to communicate clearly and confidently about their accommodation needs and disability related supports as related to their preferred job;
- How to address these support with an employer;
- How to access and work with the Office of Disability Issues to secure on-campus supports; and
- How to access and use public transportation (both the accessible and regular system). This component is often overlooked but critical to further education and work success. Upon leaving school, the public transportation system is often critical for acquiring and maintaining employment. Students must be provided mobility training to ensure community access.

3.2 Development of a Vocational Transitional Plan

Most school systems develop specific individual education plans (IEPs) for students with disabilities. Vocational and career training goals should be clearly documented in the IEP. Prior to graduation, regardless of the student's decision to enter the workforce directly or attend post-secondary education, a transition plan must be developed between the student and the in-school vocational advisor. This plan should include the student vocational history, vocational options and provide a detailed road map should the requisite skill and/or experience still need to be gained. This should include access to the existing adult community based employment services system. This type of transitional planning happens in several US States. Yet, as a long time provider of adult vocational services, March of Dimes' staff rarely see this type of documentation

in Canada. Vocational transition plans would allow us to get the person into the workforce faster.

3.3 Transitional Life and Vocational Program for High-Needs Youth with Disabilities

Due to disability related issues and other social and economic factors some young people leave secondary school without achieving their Ontario Secondary School Diploma. These individuals lack critical life skills that are a precursor to decisions around job choices and independent living. To address this, March of Dimes Canada developed the LIFE program to assist youth with disability to develop the confidence, life experiences and decision-making skills required to live independently and make choices related to their future employment and related education and training.

Research has shown that early unemployment increases the likelihood of future unemployment, affects job satisfaction and future earnings. Youth unemployment is a stubborn problem which will require the full participation and collaboration of government (at all levels), the educational system, business and the community on a variety of solutions.

Summary of Recommendations

March of Dimes Canada recommends the following that feel will improve employment outcomes for young Canadians with disabilities:

1. Continue to support, enhance and promote programs that engage young people in the current labour market such as apprenticeship;
2. Continue to support community based employment services for young people who face other life challenges during secondary school and do not complete their education;
3. Develop an in-school vocational credit program which has an active on-the-job work component. Provide additional vocational information for youth with disabilities with the program to help them understand and advocate for their accommodation requirements;
4. Ensure post-secondary programs fill the skill requirements of business. This will require an understanding of the labour market today and as it evolves with changing technology.
5. Ensure young people with disabilities have a transitional vocational plan that can be shared with adult employment service providers.
6. For youth with complex and/or multiple disabilities offer a community based transition-to-work program which provides life, work and vocational related skills.

March of Dimes Canada

March of Dimes is one of Canada's largest service providers and a tireless advocate for people with disabilities, serving as a resource for all Canadians requiring disability supports.

With a wide range of programs and services offered, many of our consumers utilize more than one of our services to help them gain greater independence. Solutions for independence include employment services, attendance services, CanVet Vocational Services, financial support for assistive devices, home and vehicle modification funding, peer support for stroke and post-polio survivors, and much more.

Additional copies of this document may be at:

www.marchofdimes.ca/advocacy

General inquiries regarding this Submission should be directed the following:

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