

ACCESSING EMPLOYMENT AND EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS



Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries

December 2005

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the 2005 *Accessing Employment and Employment Supports* issue paper. This paper is part of a series of four issue-specific documents that synthesize and reflect upon research related to key topics in our communities. While this paper looks at employment and employment supports, other papers will explore the nonprofit sector in Cambridge, important local issues in North Dumfries, and sustainable growth management concerns in our community.¹

These papers fall on the heels of a community-wide initiative called Moving Forward Together (MFT). Moving Forward Together was implemented by three local agencies: the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries (SPC), Volunteer and Information Cambridge and the United Way of Cambridge and North Dumfries. One of the objectives of the project was to identify community priorities. To gather this information, project staff collected data from people that lived and worked in Cambridge and North Dumfries concerning the strengths and challenges in their communities. To date, seven reports have been published that summarize what was learned.²

Findings discussed in this paper are derived from several reports written for the MFT project. Sources include a resident survey, focus group discussions with residents and stakeholders (with additional interviews with some stakeholders) as well as a research scan. Wherever appropriate, information found in the SPC 2005 Trends Report may also be cited to give a broader perspective of issues, emerging trends, and initiatives currently underway.

It is important to note that during the collection phase of the project, there were challenges in obtaining sufficient response levels and participation rates.³ Therefore findings reported in this paper are limited, but are nevertheless valuable in that they provide us with a current 'snap-shot' of what people feel are some of the current strengths and challenges in our community. We consider MFT to be an exploratory project and invite further research to confirm and/or clarify any trends that have been found.

For the purpose of this paper, we are interested in learning not only how residents and other stakeholders view employment and employment supports in our communities, but also how this perception may vary according to one's level of income, educational status and/or ethnicity.⁴ We believe that these elements are key factors in the ability to access employment supports.

We've identified several important aspects of accessibility⁵ that form our framework for discussing this issue:

1. the **physical connection** between people and community-based resources (the ability to access resources through public, private or other transportation options),
2. the **availability** of community-based resources (what levels of resources exist),
3. the **affordability** of community-based resources (can residents afford the transit options or resources that exist), and
4. the **sufficiency** of community-based resources (do the resources meet diverse needs). The following discussion is organized by three key issues that have been noted through analysis of

common themes between our local social policy initiatives and community-based research:

- education,
- training, and
- transportation.

Throughout the paper, we reflect on the various aspects of accessibility listed above, and conclude with recommendations and an outline of what we envision our next steps to be surrounding this issue.

EDUCATION RELATED TO GENERAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Educational attainment has a direct bearing on a person's ability to develop appropriate and marketable skills that are important components to finding and securing employment.

Findings documented in several MFT reports call attention to the strengths, challenges and concerns that residents and stakeholders express surrounding education and skill development in the community.

One asset noted by both residents and stakeholders is the strong educational foundation that has come to define this community.⁶ Three universities and one community college are located in close proximity to Cambridge, fostering possible academic-employment interchanges.⁷ Focus group discussions also reveal that residents value the City's public libraries and local school systems and that the relocation of the School of Architecture to downtown Galt is seen as a significant benefit to the City.⁸

Stated challenges relate not to the availability of educational supports, but rather the cost, sufficiency, and to some, the quality of education in the community. For example, both residents and stakeholders mentioned the need for educational alternatives to post secondary institutions such as good technical schools that are affordable as well as less structured special interest programs.

Quantitative results from resident surveys are generally reflective of focus group findings. For example, out of forty (40) diverse community challenges that residents were asked about, issues of the **cost** and **quality** of education ranked in the top ten considered to be of major importance. Further, it is clear, that members of ethnic groups were more likely than non-ethnic residents to be concerned specifically about the quality of education that exists in the community. And to be expected, persons with lower levels of household income and educational attainment were more likely to be concerned with the cost of education. An issue such as low literacy skills did not register high as a community challenge, and was found to be of only a marginal concern to residents [Figure 1].⁹

Due to technological developments, work organizational changes, and globalization, there is an increased demand for a highly educated workforce, and/or higher skilled labour in Canada. Employment growth has notably increased in white-collared/high skill occupations such as professional, technical, administrative, and managerial occupations. Unemployment rates are higher and growing more rapidly for people with low educational qualifications. (from SPC 2005 trends report, *Community Trends in Cambridge and North Dumfries*, p. 38; see note 8)

Findings from the MFT research scan point to the issue of high illiteracy rates in the Region and the impact on employment opportunities. Approximately 50% of the adult population functions at the lowest 2 levels (out of 5 levels).¹⁰ Cambridge in particular has a higher percentage of the population at the lowest 2 literacy levels than the rest of the province or country; this may be attributed to a predominant industrial employment base related to manufacturing—attracting workers who may tend to have lower literacy levels.¹¹ Literacy programs in Cambridge are also not meeting community

demands and do not appear to be successful in garnering the attention of those most in need.¹²

Significant Differences in Perception Among Community Members							
↑ increase ranking of concern	challenge item	variable					
		↑ age	gender (F)	ethnic group	↑ length of residency	↑ income	↑ educational attainment
	cost of education	+	+		+	+	-
	quality of education	-		+			
	low literacy		+				

- indicates significant negative relationship between variables (see note 9)
 + indicates significant positive relationship between variables (see note 9)

Figure 1 Significant differences in perception among community members: education related to skill development

GENERAL EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SUPPORTS

Gaining a university or college degree is one way that people are able to obtain the necessary background and specific skills to become employed. Outside this formal educational system though, there exists a multitude of training programs that people can utilize to either enhance or keep existing skills current, or to gain entirely new skill-sets.

The topic of training and skills development is documented in several MFT reports, and findings call attention to the concerns that both residents and stakeholders identify in the community.

During focus group discussions held with stakeholders and residents, common assets noted are the strong economy and diversity of employment

opportunities and the potential for high paying jobs in the community. Challenges cited by stakeholders and residents point to the reduced 'quality of employment' with dependency on low-waged or part time jobs with limited benefits.¹³

Low income trends mainly appear in the following five groups: single parents, recent immigrants, people with work disabilities, unattached people between 45 and 64, and Aboriginal people. (from SPC 2005 trends report, *Community Trends in Cambridge and North Dumfries*, p. 33; see note 13)

It is important to stress that distinct differences in residents' priorities become apparent along socio-demographic lines—what we have termed either 'mainstream' or 'minority' voices which relate to residents' 'profiles'.¹⁴ Whereas stakeholders and mainstream residents are concerned mainly with **utilization**—that is making better use of human resources or human capital in the community—the 'minority' resident voice is focused more on **increasing accessibility**—that is developing supports and programs for people to obtain employment or elevate or increase employment choices.

For example, stakeholders and mainstream residents describe Cambridge as a 'blue-collar' town and point out that there are limited opportunities specifically for highly-educated individuals.¹⁵ Related comments also include concerns surrounding general unemployment, undervaluing the skills that immigrants have, and generally the need to diversify the employment pool to attract professional-type jobs to the community.¹⁶

On the other hand, the minority 'voice' in the community is decidedly concerned with obtaining and securing employment and the supports and training programs associated with this task. Residents that reflect this 'voice' do recognize the strengths that already exist in the community but cite that more needs to be done to overcome a complicated web of barriers that visible minorities,

immigrants and women can encounter towards gaining full and equitable employment.¹⁷

Comments by residents during focus group discussions describe these barriers in general terms such as exclusion from higher paying work because of gender, or limited employment opportunities for residents with various disabilities and people from ethnic backgrounds. Language was also identified as a barrier in the area of employment.

Comments about barriers also relate particularly to the availability and sufficiency of supports and training programs aimed at improving people's skills. Comments for example point to the need for interpretation supports for persons with disabilities and programs for mentally challenged people. Additional programs were cited as being needed— firstly to enhance older workers' skills to make them more employable in the current marketplace, and secondly to help people re-enter the workforce, particularly for professionals.¹⁸

Just as critical, residents mentioned the need for better promotion of training programs and new immigrant services; this relates to the issue of 'accessibility' in general—that is, making the public aware of what kinds of supports exist in the community.¹⁹

There is a significant gap between the skills and abilities of those receiving Ontario Works and the demands of the labour markets. (from SPC 2005 trends report, *Community Trends in Cambridge and North Dumfries*, p. 37; see note 17)

Quantitative results from resident surveys reported that employment and training issues did not register high as community challenges and were only of marginal concern to residents. For example, out of forty (40) diverse community challenges, issues such as low wages and helping people to improve job skills ranked 19th and 20th respectively; unemployment ranked 29th. There is some indication that the 'minority' resident voice in the community was more likely than mainstream

residents to be concerned with low wages and unemployment. Women as well appear to be more concerned with these same issues. To be expected, older residents and those with more income and higher educational attainment were not as likely to be concerned with any of these issues.²⁰

Significant Differences in Perception Among Community Members							
↑ increase ranking of concern	challenge item	variable					
		↑ age	gender (F)	ethnic group	↑ length of residency	↑ income	↑ educational attainment
	low wages	-	+			-	-
	helping people to improve job skills				+		
	unemployment	-	+			-	-

- indicates significant negative relationship between variables (see note 9)
+ indicates significant positive relationship between variables (see note 9)

Figure 2 Significant differences in perception among community members: general employment and training supports

Findings from the MFT research scan point to several issues relating to employment: general training, ethnic diversity and multiculturalism, and diversification and labour market participation.

Firstly, training services in general have been criticized as being inadequate and inaccessible in the community, and more promotion is needed to educate the public about what services are available.²¹

Secondly, recent immigrants to Canada, face unique employment challenges and barriers. These can include training and information transfer gaps, language barriers, accessibility to transportation, difficulty navigating mainstream institutions, and

challenges in transferring qualifications and experience to a Canadian work context.²²

Finally, critical gaps in the employment continuum have been recognized; between the types of work opportunities that exist, the skills that the labour force possesses, and the skills needed by industry and businesses in Cambridge.²³ In order to ensure a skilled workforce, there is a need to increase employment opportunities and address the shortage of professionals and workers in key sectors. Approaches to addressing shortages include increasing labour market participation of 'equity groups' (i.e. immigrants, persons with disabilities, and women), and making better use of their existing education, skills, and qualifications.²⁴

TRANSPORTATION CHOICES, COMMUTING AND ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORTS

There exists a strong connection between transportation affordability, accessibility and the availability of service, and the overall quality of life that people experience.²⁵ 'Transportation' can also be seen as a social equity issue.²⁶ The very lack of adequate, affordable transportation choices greatly impacts the most vulnerable people in our community, and can actually be a barrier to residents' abilities to access jobs and training supports to improve their lives. Therefore, what can findings from MFT tell us about residents' attitudes and perceptions about transportation in general, and whether the diverse needs of the population are being met?

To begin with, it is important to note that challenges mentioned during focus group discussions far outweigh assets mentioned; and this is across the diverse voices in the community including stakeholders, mainstream residents and the minority resident voice. The few assets that are reported relate mainly to Cambridge's central location—with good access to other communities and major highways—and general improvements made

recently to the public transit system (e.g. shuttle buses and lowering fares).²⁷

Broad challenges however are noted by both stakeholders and residents and pertain mainly to the availability and sufficiency of transportation in general, and more specifically, local public transit. Comments relate on the macro-level to the negative impacts of high levels of dependency on private car use and at the micro-level, to the desire to make schools more accessible (i.e. within walking distance).²⁸

Since 2000, transit ridership in Cambridge has risen over 50%, while the population has increased only by 8% suggesting that more people are using public transportation than ever before. (from SPC 2005 trends report, *Community Trends in Cambridge and North Dumfries*, p. 16)

There appears to be some consensus among stakeholders and both mainstream and minority resident voices alike that the public transit system in Cambridge needs improvement. Stakeholders mention for example that buses are inconvenient with long rides and insufficient routes, and that better connections are needed with other communities. Mainstream residents further mention that better and more frequent bus stop shelters are needed and that transit accessibility for older adults and persons with disabilities requires improvement. In addition, because of reliance on public transit for commuting to jobs and social services, the minority voice in the community stresses the need for express routes and later hour runs for those employed in shift work.²⁹

Quantitative results from resident surveys indicate that issues related to transportation and physical accessibility do not register high as community challenges and are only of marginal concern to residents. For example, out of forty (40) diverse community challenges, issues such as access to schools and public transportation ranked 35th and 37th respectively. Further, it is clear, that members of ethnic groups were more likely than non-ethnic

residents to be concerned specifically about access to public transportation [Figure 3].³⁰ It is not surprising that findings also point out that full-time employees (as opposed to retired, part time, or not working) and high-income earners use private transportation more often than low-income earners who rely more on public transit.³¹

Significant Differences in Perception Among Community Members							
↑ increase ranking of concern	challenge item	variable					
		↑ age	gender (F)	ethnic group	↑ length of residency	↑ income	↑ educational attainment
	access to schools	-					
	access to public transportation			+			

- indicates significant negative relationship between variables (see note 9)
+ indicates significant positive relationship between variables (see note 9)

Figure 3 Significant differences in perception among community members: transportation and access to employment and supports

Findings from the MFT research scan highlight the close relationship between transportation services and the needs of vulnerable populations in our community (e.g. single parent families, immigrants, seniors and homeless); without safe and reliable service, these groups can find accessing community supports (such as programs associated with employment training), especially difficult.³²

It is important to note as well that currently with the development of its growth management strategy, the Region has identified the need to provide greater transportation choices as a way to improve access to jobs and services for people in our community.³³ An environmental assessment for the development

of rapid transit service linking Waterloo, through Kitchener and Cambridge, is underway.³⁴

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

- Access to Cambridge's growing economy is easier for some than others; the ones left out are often the most vulnerable population groups who sometimes have challenges obtaining supports needed to become employed.
- In order to sustain a healthy community, there is a need to create varied employment opportunities for the increasingly diverse population in Cambridge.
- Employment challenges in Cambridge are more significant for those with lower income, less education, and for persons from different ethnic backgrounds.
- Educational barriers and low levels of literacy are contributing factors that exclude people from accessing the jobs that do exist in the community.
- Training programs need to more aggressively engage those who are under-employed and under-skilled.
- As Cambridge becomes more ethnically and culturally diverse, the community should continue to increase its capacity to respond effectively and sensitively to employment challenges encounter by vulnerable population groups.
- The issues identified in this paper are complex and have been recognized in previous research, but require a multi-pronged approach to be effectively addressed.

Low job security, inadequate benefits, under-employment and/or self-employment, are issues [in Cambridge] that are part of the current reality in the employment market. (from SPC Trends at the Turn of the 21st Century, p. 9)

OUR NEXT STEPS

Based on the information in this paper, the Social Planning Council will forward copies of this paper to appropriate governing, policy and funding bodies for use in their planning and programming decisions.

These include:

- Human Resources Development Canada,
- the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities,
- the Regional Municipality of Waterloo's Employment and Social Services Departments,
- the City of Cambridge,
- the Waterloo Wellington Training and Adjustment Board,
- as well as other local employment and training organizations, such as the employment facilitation group-Cambridge and North Dumfries.

¹ The paper that features North Dumfries (planned for release in March 2006) will provide an in-depth analysis of the rural community.

² These reports can be downloaded from the Moving Forward Together website: www.movingforwardtogether.ca.

³ See the following: Pye, A. (2005, May). *Moving Forward Together: Resident discussion groups: A report on the strengths and challenges of Cambridge and North Dumfries*, pp. 5-7; 25-35. Cambridge: Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries, Volunteer/Information Cambridge, & United Way of Cambridge and North Dumfries; Pye, A. (2005, May). *Moving Forward Together: Stakeholder perspectives on the strengths and challenges of Cambridge and North Dumfries*, pp. 5-6; 16-18. Cambridge: Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries, Volunteer/Information Cambridge, & United Way of Cambridge and North Dumfries; and, Pye, A. (2005, May). *Moving Forward Together: A description of community life from residents of Cambridge and North Dumfries*, pp. 5-6; 19-31. Cambridge: Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries, Volunteer/Information Cambridge & United Way of Cambridge and North Dumfries.

⁴ Additional barriers may include factors of gender or age, for example.

⁵ Accessibility encompasses the capability to identify and obtain supports in a timely and convenient way. It can also apply to the physical location of resources, such that they are easily reached by all residents in the community. In sum, accessibility relates to how easy it is to *get, use and understand* employment supports. The term accessibility can

also relate to the degree to which a building or site allows access to people with disabilities, as in 'barrier-free', 'universal' or 'adaptable' environment design. Please note that this paper will not be exploring accessibility in this way.

⁶ Pye, *Resident discussion groups*, op. cit., pp. 8, 36-37.

⁷ Corporation of the City of Cambridge. (2004, January).

Community profile: Economic and social features, p. 35.

⁸ Pye, *Resident discussion groups*, op. cit., pp. 8, 36-37.

Reference for text box is the following: Organization for economic co-operation and development statistics Canada. (2000) *Literacy in the information age: Final report of the International adult literacy survey*. Minister of Industry: Canada

⁹ Pye, *A description of community life*, pp. 34-38. A negative relationship means that as one variable increases in value, the other decreases in value and vice versa. A positive relationship means that as one variable increases or decreases in value, so does the other.

¹⁰ Regional Municipality of Waterloo, (2003, June). *Healthy communities report: The health of the Region of Waterloo*, pp. 3, 18. Waterloo: Public Health.

¹¹ Cheng, P. and Pye, A. (2005, June). *Community trends in Cambridge and North Dumfries*, pp. 39-40. Cambridge: Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries.

¹² Vandebelt, D. et. al. (2002, January). *Social issues and trends in Cambridge: A preliminary update*, p. 13. Cambridge: Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries.

¹³ See Pye, *Stakeholder perspectives*, op. cit., p. 8. See as well, Pye, *Resident discussion groups*, op. cit., pp. 8, 11.

Reference for text box see the following: Statistics Canada. (2004, February 10). Study: Trends in income inequality in Canada from an international perspective. *Daily*.

¹⁴ Non-mainstream or the 'minority voice' encompasses the following groups: cultural/ethnic groups; youth, seniors, low income residents; and, people with physical and intellectual disabilities.

¹⁵ Pye, *Resident discussion groups*, op. cit., p. 11.

¹⁶ Pye, *Resident discussion groups*, op. cit., pp. 13, 41, and Pye, *Stakeholder perspectives*, op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁷ Pye, *Resident discussion groups*, op. cit., pp. 8, 11.

Reference for text box is the following: Region of Waterloo. (2005). Information: Social assistance costs – 2005 budget. Retrieved May 26, 2005 from

[http://www.region.waterloo.on.ca/web/region.nsf/0/1b7dcfdcc7fe217785256f9a006f707d/\\$file/socass.pdf?openelement](http://www.region.waterloo.on.ca/web/region.nsf/0/1b7dcfdcc7fe217785256f9a006f707d/$file/socass.pdf?openelement)

¹⁸ Pye, *Resident discussion groups*, op. cit., pp. 8, 11.

¹⁹ Pye, *Resident discussion groups*, op. cit., pp. 7, 8.

²⁰ Pye, *A description of community life*, op. cit., pp. 34-38.

²¹ Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries. (2003). *2003 Social issues and trends*, p. 12. Cambridge: Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries.

²² See Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries. (2003). *2003 Social issues and trends*, p. 12. Cambridge: Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries; and, Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries. (2003). *Multiculturalism in Cambridge and North Dumfries*, p. 1. Cambridge: Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries.

²³ Dent, L. (2005, May). *Moving Forward Together: Research scan: A review of key issues in Cambridge and North Dumfries from 1999-2004*, p. 6. Cambridge: Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries, Volunteer/Information Cambridge, & United Way of Cambridge and North Dumfries.

- ²⁴ Vandebelt, D. and DeSantis, G. (2000, February). *Cambridge and North Dumfries community trends at the turn of the 21st Century, Cambridge ethnocultural diversity report*, p. 4. Cambridge: Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries.
- ²⁵ Tucs, E., Dempster, B., and Franklin, C. (2004, November). *Transit affordability: A study focused on persons with low incomes in the Region of Waterloo*, p. iii. Kitchener: Civics Research Co-operative.
- ²⁶ See the American Planning Association website for proceedings from the 2001 annual conference, *Fair growth: Connecting sprawl, smart growth and social equity*. See the following page which was retrieved for use September 2005. www.asu.edu/caed/proceedings01/FAIRGRTH/index.htm
- ²⁷ Pye, *Resident discussion groups*, op. cit., p. 10, and Pye, *Stakeholder perspectives*, op. cit., p. 7.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Pye, *A description of community life*, pp. 34-38.
- ³¹ Additional statistical correlation analysis not reported in MFT reports indicates that higher incomes correlate with greater use of private transportation and lower incomes correlate with greater public transit use. As well, people that work full time are significantly more likely to use private transportation than any other employment status group (i.e. retired, part time, not working).
- ³² Vandebelt, D. et. al., op. cit., p. 18.
- ³³ Region of Waterloo (2003, July). *Regional growth management strategy*, pp. 12-13. Waterloo: author.
- ³⁴ Cumming + Company. (2005, June). *Rapid transit environmental assessment: Region of Waterloo, June 2005-stakeholder meeting, summary feedback report*, p.2. Waterloo: Region of Waterloo.

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For more information about this paper or about related research, please contact:

**Social Planning Council of Cambridge
and North Dumfries**

150 Main Street (2nd floor), Cambridge, ON N1R 6P9
519-623-1713 info@socialplanningcouncil-cnd.org
visit our website at:
www.socialplanningcouncil-cnd.org

We actively and impartially participate in building and strengthening our community through social change, innovation, research, analysis, and facilitation.