

Older workers get a second chance



Newfoundland and Labrador's aging population has been identified as a significant factor in labour market shortages. Even in areas where unemployment exists, many positions cannot be filled because the appropriate skills are not available. Communities across the province have been looking to address this challenge by keeping workers in the work force longer.

Programs aimed at re-training workers and preparing them for jobs later in life are helping with this process. Individuals who have been displaced by closures or layoffs can be among the most vulnerable, as they often encounter difficulty transferring their specialized skills and experience to new areas of employment. Communities across the province have been identifying labour needs and working with the private sector and academic institutions to develop training solutions and employment opportunities.

The Port Aux Basques Chamber of Commerce, for example, availed of the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers program (TIOW) which provides support to unemployed workers aged 55-64 who live in communities affected by significant downsizing or closures or those with continuously high levels of unemployment. The town partnered with the College of the North Atlantic (CNA) to provide employment support activities such as counseling, assistance with resume writing and interview techniques. The project also included employability improvement activities and opportunities for new work experiences created by wage subsidies provided to the employers.

Jan Peddle, Port Aux Basques CNA campus administrator, says the first offering of the program was a great success. Half of the 14 participants received job training with the town of Port Aux Basques on construction infrastructure projects, while the rest worked in customer service positions throughout the community. Seven participants secured full-time employment immediately upon completion of the program. All participants now have enhanced skills and the ability to secure meaningful employment.

"A lot of this has to do with getting people back out there and boosting their confidence," says Peddle. "It gives people the opportunity to re-evaluate themselves, to know they're of value and in demand."



The town of Englee undertook a similar initiative that focused on skills training in the areas of crafts and heritage carpentry skills. Supervised by the town council, the carpentry work provided an opportunity to restore heritage buildings in the community, thereby enhancing the tourism sector. Those completing the heritage carpentry basics are now qualified to seek employment with construction companies or to become self-employed.

The craft component included traditional rug hooking, thrum knitting, silk painting and embroidery. The crafts produced during the training and work terms were given to the town for sale in its craft shop. The proceeds help fund the town's Heritage House.



In Shoal Cove East, the Straits Development Corporation spearheaded a program which saw people trained in heritage carpentry, seal skin crafts and social research methods and interviewing skills. Carpentry participants built a replica stage as the focal point for a tourism interpretation centre, while the oral history of the area was collected by those learning about social research methods and interviewing skills. The remaining students learned to produce a wide variety of seal skin products.

Joan Kinden, business development officer with the St. Anthony CNA campus, says the program benefits both the participants and sponsors: the proponent benefits by getting product developed and important work completed, while the worker receives valuable training and experience.

Recognizing a future need for carpentry skills for upcoming projects in the region, the town of Harbour Breton also sponsored a successful TIOW project. CNA business development officer, Ruth Penton, says the students benefited in many areas, from life skills such as numeracy, literacy and computer training, to skills training in carpentry, painting and plastering.

Initiatives such as these help ease the transition of older workers into a new career and may help delay the retirement of many people who still have valuable skills and assets to offer their communities.