



FINAL REPORT

OF COMMUNITY COORDINATOR AGREEMENT #12769725



Employment and
Social Development Canada

Emploi et
Développement social Canada

From April 1, 2014 to March 31, 2016, for a span of 24 months, the RCD had delivered services to 98 unemployed people with disabilities by giving them the opportunity to benefit from interventions, enabling them to develop their skills and employability in order to prepare them to obtain and keep employment.

This report outlines the best practices, outcomes, performance measures, impacts, and identified gaps that are learned and observed, or arising during implementation of the project.

Submitted by **Richmond Centre for Disability (RCD)**

October 2016



FINAL REPORT

OF COMMUNITY COORDINATOR AGREEMENT #12769725

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Richmond Centre for Disability (RCD) has learned a lot from operating the Resources for Career Development Project (“rcd” Project) funded by ESDC’s Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities. Employment is a valuable goal for many people living with a disability; it helps to build their self-worth and confidence. However we need to remember that the process is as important as the outcomes; especially when the outcomes were subject to many external factors such as social-economical influences, labour market trends, scope of service of social service agencies, empathy and experience of service providers, and more. In light of all these, we feel that the “rcd” Project has been successful in its own right, both in the outcomes and process of its operation.

In this Final Report, we attempt to highlight the actions of the past 2 years during the administration and implementation of this project. We prepared for the launch and kick-off of the initiative and also witnessed the conclusion of this endeavour. The same two full-time staff members, Career Development Facilitators, worked the entire project; they were instrumental to the programming design, encountered challenges and obstacles along the way, resolved difficulties together, and finally saw the wrapping up of the whole project. They and their support team have developed a wealth of knowledge, resources and networks that would benefit their careers as well as the service provision of the organization.

It was sad that the “rcd” Project did not have continual stable funding; and the changes in funding guidelines with the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities were not working in the favour of a lot of local non-profit social service delivery organizations like the RCD. Nonetheless we are thankful for the support of the past 2 years, and we hope that people with disabilities continue to be supported for their employment initiatives and have sustainable positive impact on their lives to lead a fully participatory community life.

Ella Huang
Executive Director, RCD

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- The objective of the Opportunities Fund (OF) program is to assist individuals with disabilities who have little or no labour force attachment to prepare for and obtain employment or self-employment, and to develop the skills necessary to maintain that new employment.
- The fund enhances the economic and social well-being of persons with disabilities, their families and communities by helping them improve their employability, by increasing and facilitating access to job opportunities and ultimately by enabling their labour market integration.
- In addition to employment-related services such as needs assessments, counselling and case management, the program also supports program interventions tailored to meet individual needs, including those that enhance the skills of participants, provide them with work experience or enable them to start their own business.

The “rcd” Project aimed to provide services to individuals with disabilities, over a project span of 2 years from April 2014 to March 2016, using "Participation Model" as the service delivery model which had been proven to be effective in improving and sustaining participation of persons with disabilities.

The objectives of the Project were in line with the OF Program, as clearly shown in the following 3 key project objectives:

Objective 1 – Reduction or elimination of obstacles to employment through skills development and self determination

Objective 2 – Boost opportunities to participate in the labour market

Objective 3 – Cost effective model to promote labour market efficiency that nurtures economic participation and independence of target group

Expected Project Results (from April 1, 2014 to March 31, 2016)

- 140 (100%) participants will be served
- 90 (64%) participants will enhance their employability
- 40 (29%) participants will be employed or self-employed
- 8 (6%) participants will return to school
- 2 (1%) participants will neither be employed nor return to school

PROJECT OUTCOMES

| Indicators | Expected Results | Year 1 Outcomes | Year 2 Outcomes | Total | % of Target |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------|-------------|
| # of Participants Served | 140 | 52 | 46 | 98 | 70% |
| # Achieved Enhanced Employability | 90 | 33 | 27 | 60 | 67% |
| # Employed/ Self-Employed | 40 | 13 | 16 | 29 | 72.5% |
| # Returned to School | 8 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 62.5% |
| # Not Employed or Returned to School | 2 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 200% |

The project outcomes are falling short of the expected results as set out in the contribution agreement by about 30%. The key factor affecting the outcomes of the project was indeed the number of participants recruited, which we would expand further in next section under “Performance Measures”. However, if we just use the actual number of participants recruited as the baseline; the % of success was comparable to the expected targets (with baseline of 140 participants).

For example, among the 98 participants, we had 30% of participants gained employment (29% with expected target); 5 % returned to school (6% with expected target) and 61% with enhanced employability (64% with expected target). Therefore it was proven that the outcomes were achievable if we could recruit more participants, based on the same percentage indicators. We fell short in the recruitment department because we scaled down the recruiting effort and stepped up the end-of-project services when we were approaching the project closure.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

It is clear that we have not met the expected results in the Funding Agreement. We were falling short of target in the number of participants recruited in both years of the project span; this might be the major issue that influenced the success of the project. We shall attempt to analyze the issue here.

In the beginning of the first year (April 2014 to March 2015), we were unsure if the project was going to survive with continual contribution agreement and for how long. At very late stage we received words that the project would be extended for one more transitional year; at that time the transition was not smooth because of the high level of uncertainty. In summary, we were on a rocky start; and it resulted in falling behind targets after the first year of the project.

At the second year for which we were granted an extension of one more year, we were informed that we had to go through an application process all over again with a new system and consequently our proposal was not successful because we did not meet the National Scope criteria. Hence we started our winding down process as the end of project was imminent. We scaled down our recruitment effort in the last 6 months of the project. We felt that we could not do justice for participants if they joined us at this stage without fully understanding our limited shelf life. A few people decided not to join the project and some were referred to other service agencies upon their requests. Consequently we only attained 70% of the target of participant recruitment.

It was also a stressful two-year for the project staff who were anxious about losing their jobs and worrisome for the people to whom they were providing services. At our monthly project meetings, it had been brought up numerous times that many participants were concerned what would happen to them after the closure of the project; and our staff had to calm them, comfort them and reassure them, instead of spending time on usual employment-related activities.

Additionally, it seemed like job opportunities were not abundant in the labour market for the past several years and it was especially challenging for persons with disabilities. Recently with the gas price plummeting, the labour market has been very competitive with out-of-province workers from Alberta. Moreover, the increase in minimum wage in the province of BC, in some strange way, affected the likelihood of employment opportunities for our target group; for instance we heard employers saying that they wanted to hire more “qualified” people now because they were paying higher wages.

For financial reporting, in the 2-year project span from April 2014 to March 2016, we saw the following figures:

| | Apr 2014 to Mar 2015 | Apr 2015 to Mar 2016 | Total |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| Agreement Budget | \$176,770 | \$176,768 | \$353,538 |
| Expenditure | \$137,775.42 (78%) | \$135,264.52 (77%) | \$273,039.94 (77%) |

It was apparent that we were short of the planned budget by slightly over 20%. When we looked at the financial control we conducted every month, we were aware that the great variance arose from the Participant Costs which were comprised of wage subsidy, tuition costs as well as various disability-related support costs. These were what we termed as uncontrollable costs which were only applicable when a participant applied for or had a need for it.

On our part we exercised stringent protocols to ensure the application of related Participant Costs were eligible costs and they were legitimate as well as the right choice for advancing the employment goals of project participants. Because of this shortfall of expenditure in the category of Participant Costs, the project administrative cost and project cost were less as they were calculated based on this category of spending.

On a positive note, we were happy to observe that we did not need to utilize additional spending on participants, and the project outcomes were still satisfactory. Indeed we had clearly demonstrated that the Project was operated on an intrinsically cost-effective model structure that would nurture economic participation and independence of persons with disabilities to obtain gainful employment or engagement with the labour market. This fulfilled one of the project objectives that were laid out at the on-set of the Project.

IMPACTS

In order to analyze the impact of the “rcd” Project results having on the lives of Canadians as well as measuring the effectiveness of the Project, we had conducted an end-of-project participant survey in February 2016. We sent the survey out, mostly by email and some by mail or fax, to 46 persons who registered with the project between April 2015 and March 2016; we got 5 completed survey back (11% response) which was considered as good response rate. However, as the survey base was really small, the pattern might not be a significant one for analysis and interpretation.

In the survey outcomes, Ease of Access, Project Efficiency and Project Effectiveness mostly recorded on the positive side, showing that the project was well received and accessible. The Project Effectiveness sometimes would rely on the individual outcomes or goal attainment, and can be very subjective as well as influenced by external factors. Anyway the following survey outcomes illustrated the background of the Project under which the participants were receiving their support and assistance.

A. Ease of Access

1. Was it easy to find out about the project (i.e. online, brochure, from RCD staff)?
2. Was it easy to register with the project?
3. Did you find the location easy to get to?
4. Were the computers in the CASS area easy to use ?

| | YES | NO | N/A | Total |
|---|-----|----|-----|-------|
| 1. Was it easy to find out about the project (i.e. online, brochure, from RCD staff)? | 5 | | | 5 |
| 2. Was it easy to register with the project? | 4 | 1 | | 5 |
| 3. Did you find the location easy to get to? | 5 | | | 5 |
| 4. Were the computers in the CASS area easy to use ? | 3 | | 2 | 5 |

B. Project Efficiency

1. Was it easy to make appointments with your Career Development Facilitator?
2. I was able to reach my Facilitator between appointments with question or to get other help.
3. My Facilitator submitted all important paperwork on time (i.e.: funding requests, wage subsidy forms).

| | YES | NO | N/A | Total |
|---|-----|----|-----|-------|
| 1. Was it easy to make appointments with your Career Development Facilitator? | 5 | | | 5 |
| 2. I was able to reach my Facilitator between appointments with question or to get other help. | 4 | 1 | | 5 |
| 3. My Facilitator submitted all important paperwork on time (i.e.: funding requests, wage subsidy forms). | 4 | | 1 | 5 |

C. Project Effectiveness

| | YES | NO | N/A | Total |
|---|-----|----|-----|-------|
| 1. My regular appointments with my facilitator helped me to identify and move toward my employment goals. | 4 | 1 | | 5 |
| 2. I learned new things in Peer Circle. | 2 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| 3. I learned new things in Job Club. | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| 4. The availability of a wage subsidy helped me to move toward my employment goal. | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| 5. The availability of education funding helped me to move toward my employment goal. | 1 | 3 | 1 | 5 |
| 6. Participation in a Work Experience was a good experience for me. | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 |

The Employment Goal Outcomes shed more light on the impact of the project on the lives of people in the project. This section hinted the skills that participants developed as well as different avenues that were used to attain various employment goals. Consequently majority of participants were able to maintain their employment goal since achieving it; and same proportion of people was happy with the results from joining the project.

D. Employment Goal Outcomes

| | YES | NO | N/A | Total |
|--|-----|----|-----|-------|
| 1. I was able to achieve my employment goal of: | | | | |
| a) Identifying my career path | 3 | | 2 | 5 |
| b) Updating my resume and cover letter | 4 | | 1 | 5 |
| c) Volunteering in the community | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| d) Returning to school | | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| e) Participating in a work experience | 3 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| f) Finding seasonal work | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| g) Finding part-time paid employment | 3 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| h) Finding full-time paid employment | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| i) Starting to set-up my own business | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| j) Launching my own business | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| 2. I have been able to maintain my goal since achieving it. | 3 | 2 | | 5 |
| 3. I am happy with my results from participating in the “rcd” Project. | 3 | 2 | | 5 |

Other comments from participants are recorded herewith:

1. If you answered “No” to any of the above questions would you like to tell us why?

- Career Development Facilitator (CDF) was very clear during the appointments. I didn't need to get extra help. I didn't join peer circle or job club; and I couldn't find education program suitable for me.
- Return to school with funding not available with recognized facility or no program available @ VCC.
- Because I only worked in retail, I don't have what the employers are looking for.
- Course started after the funding cut off date and no financial help was given.

2. Do you have any other comments that you would like to share with us?

- I find the length of appointments is a little short. If we can have half an hour more it would be better.
- Feel very supported.
- More hands on experience.
- CDF is a very nice lady to work with and she knows her stuff.
- CDF taught me a lot. She made me happy and she was a good help in finding a job.

The project was designed as a goal-oriented model from the on-set when the participants were asked to complete their Personal Employment Support Plan in which employment goals were identified. The participants were also well-informed that they were to take charge of updating and/or changing their employment goals, thus amending the employment plan. When people have ownership of their present and future, they are more likely to get more informed, to organize for short-term and long-term goals, and to identify barriers and find options. The process may be longer and require more support, but it has been proven that for people with disabilities, this is a more effective approach for their employment initiative. The most important of all, the benefits spill onto the life of the individuals who are likely to build self-esteem, skills and resiliency.

BEST PRACTICES

The utilization of “Participation Model” to support persons with disabilities in preparing for, obtaining and maintaining employment, thereby increasing their economic participation and independence, is the specific outcome that has been achieved through this Project. The ultimate achievements have successfully increased labour market participation, enhanced inclusiveness and improved economic efficiency.

Participation Model describes a process that begins with the individual with disabilities, and it moves from “planning for” to “planning with” to “planning by” persons with disabilities. “Choice” is a key word here because “Nothing is about us without us”, but being involved must be a free choice. “Empowerment” is another key element because not one model can fit all, and only someone who is empowered will develop resiliency and ownership. Finally “Support” is equally crucial because this is the most cost effective way to bring along changes.

Participation Model was the mainstay of the Project for employment and career development. The framework provided information and resources, assistance with making plans, skills training, career options, peer support, peer mentoring, financial support to eligible activities; as well as access to Career Development Facilitators with one-to-one support, all in the context of employment and labour market participation. This is the vision of RCD that all service provision is under one unifying delivery philosophy – Independent Living Philosophy.

Other positive outcomes related to the project activities included:

- Participants were empowered and supported to overcome hurdles arising in their employment journey due to low skill level and/or limited work experience; they were provided with opportunities to build an effective network through enhanced self-esteem, knowledge transfer and end isolation. Consequently they were able to make transition into labour market with more ease.
- The skills inventories of unemployed persons with disabilities were marketed to employers experiencing labour shortages; thus encouraging employers to consider hiring persons with disabilities.
- The myths of hiring persons with disabilities were effectively dispelled, leading to a more inclusive society and improved labour market efficiency by addressing employability gaps.

SUCCESS STORIES

- Almost all of the project participants went through the Career Cruising on-line software system got an updated resume, cover letter and some employment goals set up. This was a huge step for some participants to develop their own resume, and they had ownership of their work.
- We have established a good relationship with Taymor Manufacturing, and they provided piecework opportunities to our participants. Because the arrangement was for piecework agreement, the participants were given a certain amount, which had been mutually agreed with, to finish the whole job, regardless of the time they spent in doing that. Usually they would get minimum wage, but gradually with cumulative experience they were earning higher hourly rate.
- Job Skills Club was held 3 times a year during the project span, and on average we had 7 attendees for each term. The classes were held twice a week, on Monday and Thursday morning, with afternoon available to assist individuals in the actual job search. The attendance was satisfactory, and participants worked well independently as well as in a team. It has proven to be a very effective networking, resource sharing and socializing opportunities for participants.
- We have organized a total of 6 Empowerment Peer Circle meetings for project participants, which were usually well attended, with average 10 attendees at each meeting. Some of the topics for discussion included “30 Seconds Speech and Communication Techniques” and “Understanding Today’s Job Market” were particularly popular; it targeted to address the need when one has to present themselves to potential employers within a very limited timeframe. All participants indicated that they enjoyed the presentations and discussion, and most said they had learned a lot how to present themselves at a Job Fair meeting with potential employers. This was an extra component to the Job Skills Club, with more flexible approach and aim to address current trend or gaps in knowledge and skills. We were also aware that participants are more comfortable to be with their peers, it helped with networking and social skills.

END OF REPORT