**Local Labour Consultations Summary Report**

**Lanark and Renfrew County Labour Market Consultation – Community Input**

Revision: December 19th

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Location | Date | Participants |
| Renfrew County (Arnprior) | October 11th | 12 |
| Lanark County (Perth) | November 21st | 14 |
| Renfrew County (Pembroke) | November 28th | 21 |
| Virtual | December 5th | 14 |

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**Executive Summary**

The labour market is complex. While data can help identify trends in the labour market, such as what sectors are hiring or the impact of changing demographics on the availability of workers, it can’t identify the true impact of what is happening on the front line of today’s workforce. To dig deeper and to more broadly understand the trends, opportunities and threats facing a community’s labour market, spaces need to be created where community conversations can occur.

At the Labour Market Group of Lanark-Renfrew, we believe strongly that annual community consultations are needed to fully understand what’s happening in the local labour market. In the Fall of 2023, we held four community consultations. Three of them were offered in person (Arnprior, Perth and Pembroke) and a fourth session was facilitated virtually. More than 60 individuals participated, representing a wide spectrum of sectors from manufacturing to health care.

What we learned was that many employers were still struggling to both recruit and retain employees, but we also heard about creative solutions and pilot projects that were being driven by a new reality that both Renfrew and Lanark Counties are running out of workers. With both counties aging, there is a shortage of working-age people to fill vacancies, and so employers are opening up doors that were previously closed in their efforts to secure a workforce.

We heard from employers who were aggressively hiring foreign workers, we witnessed the use of robots to fill traditional jobs like cleaners and waiters, we learned about flexible parent scheduling to address shortages of daycare spaces and we listened as employers talked about how they were investing more in mental health services to support their employees.

Our focus was on four key themes: Employee recruitment, employee retention, the need for education and training within organizations and the impact of community factors that were making it more difficult for job seekers to accept some jobs. These factors included the rising cost of inflation, a lack of affordable housing, and challenges for parents to secure daycare. We even heard about the impact the shortage of bus drivers was having on families, curtailing the ability for some parents to take positions that didn’t afford them the ability to work from home.

The conversations were rich at our community consultations. They have helped us work with our community partners to develop strategies and an action plan to chip away at some of the short- term and long-term issues that are affecting our region’s prospects for a healthy labour market. Solving these issues takes time and there are many factors that will contribute to whether we are successful, but it is clear that the labour market warrants the attention of all community stakeholders.

We have included a summary of the notes that we captured during our consultations. By sharing them, we hope to add additional context to our Local Labour Market Planning process and the feedback that was provided from those who attended the sessions.

Community Responses Arnprior October 11th, 2023

**Recruitment**

* Employers want to offer co-op to youth and therefore we need to remove barriers to joining co-op programs
* Provide transportation for youth to attend co-op placements
* Encourage co-op in hard to fill positions like French education
* Encourage community buy-in of the importance of co-op especially with parents
* Create more opportunities for youth to experience work
* To attract Youth, we need to offer networking and social events. For example, make learning about employment fun by offering an event that is for socializing but then you can say, “oh by the way here are some employment opportunities.”
* Change strategies for the demographic, for example offering a coffee break to seniors for building community
* Having Youth friendly recruitment is a must. For example, marketing and application processes should be virtual and response times should be very quick. Youth are in a convenient and in-demand culture. Waiting two weeks for a response is not ideal.
* Be sure to offer flexible and part-time for seniors for recruitment and retention
* Make sure to recruit for traits vs. Skill. For example, identifying the traits or characteristics of your ideal employee. Pillar 5 is an example of where this is working well. They are willing to train the right people.
* Consider recruiting or repatriating locals who have moved out west for work. Or consider how to entice workers who are likely to move out west to remain here.
* Communicate the vision of the company. Communicate clearly the expectations of what this role looks like in 3 months, 6 months, 1 year. Amazon and Home Depot are doing this very well.
* We can remove barriers for newcomers by using language translation apps
* Our aging population is retiring, and the knowledge and skills are lost. Better jobs are poaching staff.
* Recruiting youth - In Europe, between grades 10 and 12, kids decide what to do - university or trade school. They have flexibility, and work in different sectors, never bored. Work with high schools to implement a new system. Train people to take the opportunities, pay them higher, partner with kids in secondary school who do not want to go to college, encourage them to see what happens in organizations, train them on different things, and increase their earning power. Companies could collaborate on this.
* Youth not coming through with work experience. Some 21-year-olds never had a job, which puts a lot of strain on employer whose expectation is that they hit the ground running. Employers need to realize that the youth group may not be workforce ready.
* Youth in school during covid did not gain onsite volunteer experience.
* Older folks are returning to the workforce, some out of boredom (choice), others as a necessity due to the cost of living. Employers need to realize they can be an asset because they do not leave, and althoFugh they can keep working, they may not be as productive as they used to be.
* Employers are recruiting people with the right skills, training them and managing them but end up doing the work themselves. The time and energy to bring someone on can be discouraging to the employers. Disconnect in values between employer and staff can be challenging.
* PSP (Pacific Safety Products) recruitment bonus of $250 incentives. If a new hire stays a duration of time (3 months) they can get the incentive.
* Job descriptions can be made less daunting. Dial back the descriptions of job roles, include availability of training if that will be provided. Include actual requirements, and soft skills. This will encourage more people to apply. The hiring process can be less rigid. Use videos to post job descriptions because more people (especially youth) are using videos more.
* Weekend shift can be recruited from high school.
* Get involved with local high school (not co-op).
* Recruit newcomers.
* Carve roles to meet strengths of employee.
* Educate employers on generational differences (preferred communication. Learning styles, feedback, etc.) and adapt approach.
* Have community promote employers who offer positive work environments/good benefits/living wages – “Employer champions”.
* Stronger Chamber of Commerce engagement.
* Employer education on hiring people with disabilities and job carving.
* Employer videos of job/business/environment/” perks” in job ads.
* Have existing employees write reviews (i.e., on Google).

**Retention**

* Employer pulse survey is great, but it may be worth creating an employee survey to ask employees what they need.
* Include Storytelling in your communication to employees. They need to understand the positive impact their work has in the community.
* Reaching out and providing support to employees including acknowledging employees who are struggling for example, difficult life situations
* Recognizing the impact that being short-staffed has on the other workers. Recognition from the employer to acknowledge the extra workload.
* The little things matter! Acknowledging good work when it happens.
* 360 feedback
* Provide Remote Work, Flexibility and sick benefits. Communicate that there is no shame in working from home if you are not feeling well.
* When most staff are onsite, no school bus drivers to transport staff kids and no daycare available causes many barriers. Make exceptions to allow people to work specific (parenting) shifts that are more convenient in order not to lose staff. The best employee based on performance is usually female in 30-40 age range with kids, they need the shift changes more than anyone else.
* Transportation is an issue when people are brought into the community, like newcomers. Cannot employ them, thought about carpooling, etc. but not working.
* PSP has had a parent shift for the past 6-7 years, it started as the mom shift and transitioned into other roles. Full-time hours are necessary to keep business rolling, parents cannot do it but are accommodated.
* Onboarding is critical in companies and can help with retention, simple show-arounds important. Kids are graduating without basic literacy skills and may not be able to read onboard literature.
* Variety/flexible incentives because of different generations in the workforce. For example, matching contributions to retirement fund for older folks, and matching contributions to travel for youth. Incentives should be based on the value system of the employee.
* Engagement survey: feedback loop of what employees want and consideration of how to implement them. This should be done annually, by communicating with staff. Listen to staff, not just on a professional front but on a personal level.
* Recognize and encourage staff who are doing well. Conduct exit interviews to understand why staff leave.
* A four-day work week is something employees are looking for now. By extension/implication, work-life balance.
* Storytelling: talk about the impact of the work the organization is doing.
* Low hiring rates (short-staffed) lead to burnout and ultimately this leads to resignations.
* Different onboarding learning options (written, video, experiential).
* Have big and small “celebration events”, i.e., staff lunch, holiday party à team building.
* Small businesses engage in Chamber of Commerce health plans.
* Talk with existing employees about what they like about working there, make a video and advertise on social media, build on the aspects they like to enhance them à work on improving areas of concern.
* Flexible/adaptable to alter job to meet employee strengths/needs/preferences.
* Building Community based activities - e.g., coffee group for older folks, video game challenge for youth, kahoot quizzes, etc.
* Storytelling: use product/service of facility and talk about its impact
* Flexibility and adaptability. New hires may not be best suited for the position they were initially hired, may need to carve new positions for them.
* Retention incentives like birthday off with pay, paid sick days off (was successful in covid times). Employers should show they care.

**Training**

* Employers need to act on AODA compliance, for example, making documents accessible, training not just on availability of program but also on practical steps on how to create accessible documents etc...
* Match training to the individual, for example choosing the best approach with older workers. This may mean offering online vs in-person training. Employers need to understand how people learn and adapt.
* Ensure there is cross training between positions within the organization
* Ensure you have succession planning in place to address retirements. Identifying your most experienced workers.
* Mental health awareness training.
* Pay employees to learn and upgrade
* Invest in training for employees to address skills gaps and improve retention
* If the Employer is investing in training, employees should commit to staying for a determined period.
* Have documentation to support training and review annually (i.e., policy and procedure manual).
* Offer different media to accommodate different learning styles (written, video, experiential).
* First-day orientation (paid).
* Offer pre-employment learning materials (paid).
* Apply for grants to invest in outside training.
* Partner with other businesses to bring in trainers for mutually beneficial skills training.
* Assign workplace mentors.

**Community Factors**

* Factors that affect labour shortages are access to affordable housing, day care ability, inflation, cost of living increases and access to transportation.
* School bus driver shortage is having an impact on the labor force
* CEO of Factor5, working on addressing rural challenges, targeting equity deserving groups. They are currently running a pilot program to support workers on things like childcare and transportation with funding. When there's money for childcare, there might be no space to take in the child. Factor5 is working on building a prototype program to incubate spaces in the next few months. Most challenging concern is communication within workforce in an organization.
* Exit of working class with more experience and skills without transmitting info to next generation is frustrating to employers. New recruits do not know what the expectations are, employers may not communicate these to them correctly, hence new hires do not come back.
* Transportation is a challenge. Transportation masterplan study reported that bus system is not feasible in Arnprior.
* Childcare is an issue; children may not get a spot immediately. Newcomers to the area are usually reaching out for information on where to get childcare, they may not be used to or comfortable with homecare/aftercare. Some unlicensed daycare spaces are available but no formal listing, so it can be difficult to find them, and some may not be comfortable with that. Discussions on getting them licensed so they can be listed.
* Sometimes it’s not worth going to work due to high childcare expenses, because you're giving almost all your earnings to babysitters.
* Large businesses can develop their own daycares for workers, with transportation organized by the organization. No example of that in Renfrew.
* Offering transportation pickup spots can be helpful for workers. Employers could pay a small percentage of the price to encourage staff.
* Transportation might not be feasible but will create a competitive advantage for employers.
* Housing is another issue that affects recruitment. Government incentives are available on paper but have not been implemented yet. Incentives to build affordable housing is not available anymore. The average house costs about $430k. Investors are coming in and converting single-family houses into multiplexes, which is good to increase availability of apartments (more housing).
* Transportation: conduct opportunity assessment, not government-initiated but social enterprise model where community stakeholders can come together to find solutions. The same can be applied to housing.
* Create a portal for unlicensed childcare facilities. Short programs on childcare can be offered to unlicensed providers.
* Bus drivers need more support and a safer work environment.
* Workshops on converting sections of homes to apartments.

Perth Community Responses November 21st, 2023

**Recruitment**

* Work with youth to open small businesses. For example, there is a huge shortage of construction cleanup crews. There could be collaboration with YAK and the small biz centre to help youth open small businesses.
* We need to educate youth on what opportunities are available, especially non-degree opportunities.
* We need to go to the youth instead of waiting for them to come to us. For example, engaging them with job shadow opportunities, apprenticeships, and informal interviews where they can gather information
* Job seekers need more education on what the job entails. For example, the job expectations but also what the job looks like practically.
* Employers should consider posting salaries to save time. Salary expectations need to be communicated to youth. For example, what is a reasonable salary expectation for an entry level position and what is the career pathway to higher salaries.
* We need to break down the myth that a university degree is better than trades school
* The province of Ontario needs to address problems with the apprenticeship program. This could mean offering more incentives for employers, helping candidates find placement, increasing the ratios or general policy change
* Apprenticeships are working well for Talmarnock. They have all their apprenticeships spaces filled. They have moved away from the fear of investing in apprenticeships. They do not require a contract because why would they want to force someone to stay working there if they don’t want to. Instead, they focus on building a positive work culture.
* Employers need to dispel the myth that the grass is greener. Workers may be enticed with an offer the is advertised with a higher per dollar amount. The employer needs to clearly communicate the other benefits they provide. For example, positive work environment or providing a company vehicle that saves money. Employers need to demonstrate non-monetary benefits.
* Employers need more education on the current labour market. They are too busy running their businesses, so we need to go to them
* Small businesses need an advocate or middleperson for HR
* Recruit from the Philippines like KI
* Consider housing/transportation/childcare availability when recruiting
* Employers, organizations, and communities need to address the lack of hope felt in the community
* Attract more non-traditional labour and underrepresented groups
* Where it’s working well – Lanark County/Healthcare has carved part-time casual on-call positions to attract seniors
* Offer positions with more flexibility
* Job postings should clearly describe the perks and benefits. They should advertise for the skills that are actually needed, not their unicorn employee.

**Retention**

* Middle management needs to do more self-reflection if they struggle with retention
* Managers need to be approachable and demonstrate they are on the same level as employees
* Middle managers need to listen to employees' needs and communicate those needs effectively to upper management. Large organizations need to increase bottom up and top-down communication streams.
* Management needs to ask employees what their values are and demonstrate that they actually care. We called this the “give a shit” factor
* Employers need to communicate non-monetary benefits. Especially, communicating the why or telling the story of how the employees work is benefiting the community
* Incentives need to match what the employee needs and values. Or allow the employee to choose. Some examples may be, gas cards vs. grocery cards, gym membership, education/training.
* Not just pizza, especially in large companies offering pizza every single time for recognition seems low effort
* One local manufacturer has implemented a points system. For example, if you stay late, you accumulate points that can be used to receive select items
* Employee Recognition is very important both on a short-term day to day basis and on a long-term basis
* We need to offer seniors or those leaving for retirement part-time and flexible work conditions
* For millennials/youth/Gen Z we need to clearly communicate the career pathway and what’s required to upskill. We need to provide a work environment that has a positive company culture and the feeling of flexibility or freedom
* Performance Appraisal should not be just once a year but an ongoing conversation. This way problems can be dealt with in real time instead of waiting for the worker to burn out or get fed up. Employees should receive constructive feedback and recognition on a regular basis.
* The mindset of employers needs to change. For example, they can’t believe that everyone is just “in it for the money” or that employees will care about the business in the same way the employer does. They need to be educated in maintaining employee relationships and educated on youth. They need to give support before problems snowball. They need to make sure people feel valued.
* Management needs to do exit interviews and more self-reflection. If they have a high attrition rate, they need to self-reflect.
* Where it’s working well – Ontrac has high retention rates
* Where it’s working well – Garden Market (local grocer), they treat their employees well and the employees feel valued. For example, he provided them with special vests for working with a built-in phone charger. He actively participates in the community encouraging local employment and educating employers
* We need more buy in from local employers like Garden Market
* Both employers and employees need proper training
* What’s working well – Implementing anonymous reviews of managers and then giving managers with challenges leadership training, conflict resolution training and feedback on emotional intelligence
* Provide flexible scheduling for parents
* Provide growth opportunities
* Offer shares as an incentive
* Invest in Leadership such as supervisor training
* Employers should invest in employee compensation. For example, by building benefits year over year
* Offer celebration dinners for employee recognition
* Provide basic training so every employee has a good foundation

**Training/Upskilling/Micro credentials**

* Employers need to see investing in training as the new normal
* The location of the training matters for employees. For example, driving to St. Lawrence college may not be feasible
* Employers need to ask, “can my employees afford it?” And if not, can we pay them or give financial support? For example, even if they can afford to pay for a course can they afford to take the time off?
* Some employers like Ontrac pay for training if the employee can demonstrate that it benefits their organization
* Training should be embedded into the work schedule. Training is not something that is outside work but part of work. Training is part or the culture or expectation
* Offer training that has different modalities, for example, repetition or practice, hands on or mentorship training. For example, an employee can take a virtual course on how to flip burgers, but they still need to have hands-on experience.
* Training should include job specific problem solving. For example, role playing
* Training should be included as part of the discussion for succession planning
* Employers need to determine what training is available in the area
* Employers need to strategically plan training for what they need
* Mindset shift that training is an investment
* Organizations need to reach employers with information on the training they offer
* Local Immigration Partnership – offers support for hiring newcomers and other free trainings
* Connect with your local Employment Service office

**Community Factors**

* Collaboration could include multiple employers working together to provide day care or transportation
* Employers could subsidize day care or subsidize spaces in an existing day care. Or employers could offer day care as an incentive
* Making day care as seamless and convenient as possible is important
* In the past Rideau Regional and Boys/Girls club offered onsite daycare and it was very effective
* Small businesses could create a co-op daycare or a co-op for housing
* We need an advocate or ringleader to initiate projects like these in our communities. Who is responsible? The Ontario government?
* Employers can subsidize housing especially in cases of relocation
* Employers could offer residences. There are local examples where employers have purchased whole apartment buildings
* We could include basic life skills into high school like obtaining your driver's license in high school and a basic vehicle maintenance course
* Communities need to work together to drive solutions
* Where it’s working well – Local Honda dealership offering transportation to staff when needed
* Where it’s working well – Local companies offering company vehicles for trades jobs is helpful for newcomers
* More addiction support is needed in our communities
* More mental health support is needed for employers and employees
* We need to maintain support for funding programs that already exist for food and shelter. For example, the food bank and the homelessness prevention program
* More life skills training needs to be offered

Pembroke Community Responses November 28th, 2023

**Opening Speaker** – Dan Mellen – KI Canada Inc

* It costs about 8000$/per staff member to sponsor immigration. That includes plane tickets, lawyers, a Labour Market Study etc... When KI did the math to sponsor someone after two years it adds up to about 2$/per hour
* A labour market study costs about 1000$ but it can cover multiple people. The study demonstrates that you are unable to find a comparable Canadian candidate
* There have been no issues with culture, but new staff need one-on-one support to settle in the community
* Employers need to keep track of what employees ask in interviews to determine what's important

**Recruitment**

* There is a strong potential for collaboration on public transportation including sharing resources and sharing solutions
* Daycare needs to address burn out so that there are leaders with the capacity to lead with empathy
* Can we tap into people that are moving into the area to take care of aging family members?
* Offer job sharing
* Can we make front facing jobs more appealing so that employees don’t have to deal with the angry public?
* Employees need to have the perception that their work has value
* Can we support sole proprietor business when they are struggling so that they don’t have to shut down and lose customers
* Increase youth attraction
* Break down the stigma of service jobs being considered degrading
* Employers need to demonstrate potential career progression
* Demonstrate to employees clearly what you’re looking for to have them progress
* Break down the elitist perception of post-secondary education
* Where it’s working well – Both Michaels and LCBO have implemented paid internships to allow those with disabilities to demonstrate their skills. Performance plus has said that LCBO had 20 successful hires in one year and has asked for more people. Can we use this success to recruit from other under-represented groups?
* Youth need to touch the labour market, for example, mentorships and the Canada summer jobs program. They need opportunities to experience the labour market at a young age, so they are not graduating high school and post-secondary with no experience
* We need to encourage Employer buy-in to new recruitment methods
* Educate youth – educate on career pathway, The career pathway is unfamiliar but needs to be communicated better, can we make it sexy?
* Transportation is an issue for connecting to youth. Employers need to arrange transportation to the workplace, or we need to host job fairs at the high school
* Have a traveling job fair
* Increase Flexibility in work by changing your mindset to think outside the box
* Employers need to be educated on the value of flexibility
* When recruiting can employers be more flexible to support workers in getting the required training and qualifications?
* Where it’s working well – the school board has a well-developed continuing education program that has helped internal recruitment
* You need to have a long-term plan for recruitment
* Make the recruitment/workplace accessible, for example, offer a walk-in Wednesday
* Where it’s working well - Mentorship offered by performance plus is working well for youth. These programs offer support to both the employees and the employer. It helps to address problems before they get worse
* Where it’s working well – Fieldless Farms (Cornwall) has had success with promoting from within through mentorship

**Retention**

* We need to recognize the difference between management and leadership
* Leaders need education, ops training
* To maintain the organizational culture, it’s important to let people go quickly if they are hindering that culture, “fire quickly”. The consequence of not letting people go is that the workplace is not appealing
* We need to help people learn soft skills and help them build resiliency
* Employers need to clearly communicate what employees are accountable for
* Management needs to support employees by “having their back”
* Employees need more mentorship especially in entry level positions
* When applicable communicate the package – full-time, benefits, set schedule, holidays and sick days
* As an added incentive pay out sick days opposed to people using them as “extra holidays”
* Ensure the workload is balanced so staff are not overloaded
* Employee trust of the company is important
* Succession planning is important
* Cross-training staff is important for retention
* Open communication and responding to emails are important
* Use technology to create hybrid work opportunities
* Employers need a mindset shift from task focused to people focused
* Employers need to drive engagement and promote community through events, pizza parties and they need to celebrate the success of team members. This should be done by HR and the Executive team as the new normal. For example, celebrating employee milestones through FB groups “Mark just got married”, “Katie finished her training”. People need to feel valued and feel that they are part of a bigger whole. Where it’s working well – CNL is a great example, they are visible in the community, they do give back events, they attend events in the community, and they clearly communicate their value of offering an inclusive workplace
* Management needs to be one-on-one to address problems sooner. They need to recognize mental health factors
* Large companies get perks for large purchasing, these benefits should be shared with the employees, for example, discounts on insurance or bonus office equipment being shared
* It’s helpful to have an HR person designated as a retention specialist. Ontrac has found that following/supporting employees longer, up to a whole year, helps with retention
* It’s helpful to have a Wellness Committee. They can drive focus groups, surveys, and professional development. They can ask the employees, “how do you want to be recognized?” For example, some people may like to be recognized publicly on social media and others are more private.
* Managers need to ask, “what do people actually need?”, having a one-on-one relationship helps managers to recognize problems sooner
* Employers need to communicate to managers the importance of being people focused
* If there is a high attrition rate, we need to get managers more training and do self-reflection
* Where it’s working well – The owner of Gananoque Boat lines has gotten involved with other local employers by giving workshops on retention
* Management needs to communicate the data to the top executives
* Changes in resources for municipal governments have made interesting issues. For example, often people will be working for two organizations at the same time, employed in Renfrew County but on contract to the town of Petawawa. Recent wage increase at Renfrew County has improved recruitment. Previously, understaffed positions were backfilled with temp workers which was very expensive. Where possible they have added bonuses, incentives, and flexibility. However, Renfrew County is running into issues with offering flexibility as many locations are physically separated and it can be hard for managers to control.
* Corporate culture is important. How do employees perceive staff shortfalls? Communication and interpersonal skills are important for buy-in from employees and employers

**Training/Upskilling**

* Onboarding can be overwhelming because so many trainings are required. We need to ensure they are always related to the job skill set
* It’s not easy to determine what strategic trainings to offer
* Offer distinctive and safe credentialling
* Soft skills training needs to be done in high schools
* Canadian Ontario Job Grant has been successful. Employers pay upfront and then they are reimbursed. The requirement is that training must advance the individual's career or advance the business. Employers may be reluctant because they must share financial information with the government
* Roseburg Forest products has been training managers to recognize mental health issues
* Mental health awareness training and mental health first aid should be provided by employers
* <https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/> can offer training
* Renfrew County District Health Unit does some education already could they expand to offer other mental health trainings for the community?
* All Employee Assistant programs are not created equal. Some are more successful. Unfortunately, there is a certain level of stigma and employees don’t see the value in EAPs.
* Where it’s working well - <https://ihealthox.com/> we have seen this EAP successfully move someone from crisis to health
* <https://contactnorth.ca/> is a great training resource

Virtual Community Responses December 5th, 2023

Please see meeting notes from our virtual consultation. Chat comments and links are conveniently integrated into the notes.

Lanark Renfrew Labour Market Planning Report from 2023. <https://labourmarketgroup.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/LMGRL-LLMP-Digital.pdf>

Here's the link to our 2023 Employer Pulse Survey. It is a 7-minute survey, and we value your responses: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/3GQFD76>

Please contact our Data Analyst, Chidimma Anyi for labour market information requests: [anyic@algonquincollege.com](mailto:anyic@algonquincollege.com)

**General round table**

* Challenging time recruiting especially tradespeople, sole proprietors (trades) of smaller stores are being purchased by bigger stores and absorbing their workforce. Smaller business owners are burnt out but still young and wanting to work. They are wanting to shift away from being subcontractors and business owners as the pandemic was difficult. These mergers are facilitated by community connection within ongoing work in developments.
* Specific to manufacturing, some employers are turning to foreign recruitment from the Philippines and Ukraine to fill in employment gaps. One example is KI.
* There is a severe shortage of day care spaces resulting from a shortage of ECE's seen in the Petawawa region. Many ECE’s are leaving registered care centers to open home daycare because they are able to command higher prices. They can charge 45-60$ per day which registered daycares can’t compete with causing recruitment and retention issues. Hiring people with higher degrees is also more challenging. Ontario raising minimum wage of ECEs to $22/hr starting Jan 2024. They can’t find a PhD or master’s degree to staff their mental health center as counselors.
* Algonquin College's Pembroke Campus is currently offering a dual credit ECE course to local senior high school students to increase enrolments in ECE college programs and to support the local labour market need.
* We often take on placement students from Algonquin and have had wonderful experiences. The college holds a large job/career fair each fall and spring for our students so local employers can promote job opportunities to recent grads. It was held last week with almost 60 employers on campus.
* Companies are buying other companies as a way of picking up talent. This is driven by high operational costs. ICT and manufacturing companies are investing in AI and automation, while retaining and retraining employees. The training is done internally, and many companies are re-teaming employees by retaining them and training them to move into higher positions. Most employers don’t feel there is enough support for upskilling. These employers are not hiring immigrants, not because they don’t want to but because they don’t have the training on how to do it. Most employers are not posting on JobBank and are not using the job match program. The federal government uses data on JobBank to inform policies but there will be gaps if employers don’t post or don’t post needed NOC codes. There are many express entry people simply waiting to match with an employer. Nobody is training employers to post jobs based on NOC codes. The gap is to train employers to take advantage of hiring newcomers.
* LIP has a great website with resources for both immigrants and employers: <https://liplanarkrenfrew.ca/community-resources/employers/>

**Recruitment**

* Recruitment leaders that can provide a link to local informational videos about the community, its services and its amenities are often effective in rural areas where newcomers or new hires might not know the area.
* Lanark county is developing its own immigration and retention strategy. It will help local Employment Services and economic development organizations to provide resources to help employers recruit newcomers. We need to make our rural areas more welcoming to newcomers.
* Local Immigration Partnership Eastern Ontario immigrant attraction and retention strategy. <https://liplanarkrenfrew.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Eastern-Ontario-Immigrant-Attraction-and-Retention-Strategy_EN.pdf>
* Make marketing resources available to encourage people to move to rural areas.
* Affordable accommodation is a challenge. Communities have to create ways of solving housing issues; they can look at other models that are small-scale, grassroot-focused to make the change. Engaging the right people makes for success. Some manufacturers are willing to build housing if their employees need it. Some employers take hotels for a year or thereabouts to house newcomer/immigrant employees. Not a perfect solution but it works.
* Encourage more retirees to stick around in companies and mentor new hires. There are no specific programs to support these part-time hires. Private funding is expensive right now which may prevent employers from investing in these positions or programs.

**Retention**

* A lot of burnouts were reported amongst employees post-covid. People want to do meaningful work. What’s working well? - their organization has drawn up a value statement with staff collaboration. Human connection piece seems to be important. Especially, important to the under 30 cohort and with more remote staff.
* Employers, especially small businesses, are unable to afford health benefits as costs have gone up. Large employers like RCDSB may draw job seekers because they can offer more benefits. It's important to note that Employment Insurance (EI) premium rates are set to increase in 2024, adding to the financial strain.
* Employers need to be more flexible to accommodate those who are willing to work but may not have adequate transportation, or childcare.
* They have seen an increase in sick leave and an increase in turnover, which has increased the burden on senior staff. They are a unionized workplace and therefore the pay scale is flat. This means senior staff will have to train younger staff with no extra pay. We have noticed many staff members opting out of the benefit plans to increase net take home pay.
* Employers are bringing people back to the office due to lack of productivity. Difficulty between at-home vs in office staff either feeling burnt out or creating conflict. Employers are still open to being flexible but prefer staff to be onsite. Employers were having trouble connecting with staff who were working virtually.
* In construction, unfortunately we cannot give a lot of flexibility. The sector is very busy, and we had to work 7 days a week throughout most of the summer. Due to the lack of employees we had to move many projects to 2024. We offer the best pay that we can afford and try our best not to burn out current employees. Giving a bonus is the one thing we can do as well as having appreciation parties.
* Some employers are sponsoring work events like celebrations for staff and appreciation parties. There is never going to be perfect retention but improved retention. More Employers should use exit surveys to help improve their employee-employer relationship.
* It seems that government grants and programs available are not well-aligned with actual business needs. For instance, many grants focus on job creation instead of retention, which doesn't align with current business priorities. With financial constraints already burdening businesses, investing in initiatives that don't directly support their immediate needs, such as employee retention, becomes particularly challenging. Many people have said they know of funding and grants available but there are barriers or limitations to access.

**Training**

* There should be training for employers, management, supervisors. Employers should move from a task-oriented approach to a people-oriented approach.
* In some workplaces it takes 4-6 weeks of training before the staff can take on clients. There is not enough grant support from the Ontario government to fund internal training programs.
* One manufacturer is willing to build a training center for his sector, he has the funds and land to do so but simply no time to organize a collaboration. Can we come up with a framework to build these types of partnerships.
* They ask employees what they need to feel supported in their roles. Doing a 3-month check-in, a 6-month check-in, and annual reviews helps to understand how staff are doing. They have a library of training courses available online, they find free training through community partners, and budget for employee training annually.
* MLITSD Skills Development Fund has a Training Stream of Funding, and a Capitol stream of funding. It does take someone (organization) to lead the process. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/skills-development-fund>

**Community factors**

* Older generations are returning to work. They organize training sessions for them to be able to use modern technology. Some employees can be overwhelmed by the number of training courses required. Some seniors may lack computer skills and soft skills. They notice a lack of DSW certifications and receive mostly PSW. They have to do a lot of internal training. And the training is mostly online. Many new recruits quit within two weeks. There are not enough staff to offer in-person training or to offer different modalities. In Pembroke, an existing workforce was burnt-out, and they were able to work with the union to offer outside contracts to bring back seniors to cover gaps in the health care sector.
* We need accessible and affordable housing for newcomers. Housing is costly now and in Arnprior there are not a lot of rentals or at least affordable rentals. To solve the lack of housing we need to think outside the box. We can’t always wait for municipalities to fund the housing. We need more grass roots, smaller projects, or more creative projects. For example, there is another small town where a developer was retrofitting schools and non-typical buildings to create more housing.
* United Way East Ontario has recently released a report re. affordable housing recommendations. <https://www.unitedwayeo.ca/news-and-stories/unlocking-affordable-housing-a-call-to-action/>
* Transportation in Lanark County is still a massive problem for training and employment.
* Employment agencies/adult education are working to bring training to the people, doing more collaboration and more outreach. Soft skills training is important especially for youth job seekers.
* The labour market group will be hosting a presentation on Monday, February 26th with technology journalist Jared Lindzon about the impact of Artificial Intelligence on the workforce. This will be a free event at 11 a.m. Please mark your calendar. Registration will open soon. This event will be available in person at Algonquin's Pembroke campus and online through streaming
* We have seen a robot taking orders in food service, and more automation robots in manufacturing which reflects labour shortages

**Participants**

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Dan Mellen- KI Canada

Brent Dick - Algonquin College Community Employment Services

Alex Harris - Renfrew County District School Board

Amy Desrochers – Community Living Upper Ottawa Valley

Siobhan McGarr – Canadian Armed Forces Transition Centre

Brettan Ingimundson - Kilmarnock

Chelsie Gordon – Ontrac Arnprior

Dawn Hanley – Ontrac

Karen-Anne Gilks – Gilks Sport & Promo

Erina Edwards – Pacific Safety Products

Kelly Lemenchick – Renfrew County Community Futures Development Corporation

Dana Doughty – Chickadee Business Services

Eric Burton – Factor 5 Group

Onyeka Ofunne – Arnprior Health Team

Randy Baker – Pillar 5 Pharma

Amber Coville – Valley Heartland

Linda Alexander – Lanark County

Karis Fredrick – Petawawa Military Family Resource Center

Sue Rupert – The Training and Learning Center

Susan Fournier – The Ontario Ministry for Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development

Cyndy Phillips – Renfrew County Community Development Corporation

Tracey Beckstead – Adult Learning and Training Center

Chris Grimshaw – SERCO

Janna Koopman – Petawawa Military Family Resource Center

Heather Sutherland – City of Pembroke

Hailey Watson – Renfrew County Catholic District School Board

Greg Belmore – The County of Renfrew

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Sara Ward – Renfrew County District School Board

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Melissa Friske – Renfrew County District School Board

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Gail Logan – Perth & District Chamber of Commerce

Isabel McRae – Councillor, Town of Perth

Davin Dossett – Dossett Financial Services

Rob Probert – Canadian Career Academy

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