



Youth Employment in Canada

About Us

The Joint Economic Development Initiative (JEDI) works with partners to foster economic and workforce development for Aboriginal people and communities in New Brunswick.

JEDI is an Aboriginal not-for-profit organization created from a tripartite agreement between the Government of Canada, the Government of New Brunswick and Aboriginal people in New Brunswick. The organization works closely with its many partners in Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal organizations, various levels of government, the public sector and the private sector to help Aboriginal clients in business development, community economic development, workforce development and securing partnerships.

JEDI is very active in areas focused on youth employment. This includes programs such as our:

- New Brunswick Aboriginal Information and Communications Technology (NBAICT) training-to-employment project
- New Brunswick Aboriginal Mining, Energy and Trades (NBAMET) training-to-employment project
- Aboriginal Internship Program
- JEDI-BrunWay Bursary
- Aboriginal Apprenticeship and Adult Learning Coordinator
- Provincial Aboriginal Employment Coordinator

These programs have helped many Aboriginal young people pursue career ambitions over the years. In addition, our partners play a key role in administering the programs.

JEDI receives funding from Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC), the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), the New Brunswick Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat (AAS) and the New Brunswick Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour (DPETL).

Recommendations

Workplace Essential Skills

Canadian youth today are facing a significant challenge. Statistics Canada tells us that the youth unemployment for people aged 15 to 24 in our country is almost double the national jobless rate. The lack of opportunity to gain work experience is robbing these young Canadians of the ability to gain valuable workplace essential skills. The situation is even more pronounced for young Aboriginal people in Canada who often live in communities with chronic unemployment despite being the youngest and fastest-growing segment of the Canadian population. New Brunswick is no different.

Aboriginals in New Brunswick are very young. According to Statistics Canada, there are 22,615 people in the province who identify as Aboriginal and the average age of the population is 28 compared to 44 for all New Brunswickers. There are 9,580 Aboriginal people in New Brunswick under the age of 25. Like other young people across Canada, they share many similar challenges such as the need for mentorship, role models, better career counselling earlier and more co-op opportunities from the private sector but they also have many unique barriers. I'd like to highlight some today and provide some possible solutions.

Research by a well-respected New Brunswick academic, who happens to be a member of the JEDI board of directors, identifies that 85% of Aboriginal high school students in New Brunswick are graduating without the prerequisites they need for post-secondary education success. Absenteeism is through the roof and most students are settling for accommodated level 3 coursework. Many of these students are dealing with challenging situations at home, stereotypes and less than ideal health and wellness. If that is not bad enough, their school also lacks the funding and resources it needs to properly support these learners. The result is that these students will become new unemployment statistics and new challenges we will have to address unless we do something to turn the tide.

Aboriginal youth want good, rewarding careers that showcase their potential and they need our support along every step of their journey towards their career. Workplace Essential Skills (WES) is a solution.

WES provides individuals with important skills that will help them secure a job. This can range from the ability to communicate well with others to how to manage multiple tasks at a job. JEDI launched the New Brunswick Aboriginal Workplace Essential Skills (NBAWES) program in 2010 to meet the WES needs of Mi'kmaq and Maliseet learners. The program was overseen by a steering committee consisting of representatives from Aboriginal communities, educational institutions, the private sector and various levels of government. The focus of the program was to help unemployed and underemployed adult learners increase literacy levels from a level 2 to a level 3 to prepare them for additional training, post-secondary education, or employment. Along with this unique Aboriginal-focused WES training, the program included a work placement. The pilot saw 20 of the 30 people registered in the program successfully complete it with many finding employment after completion.

The NBAWES curriculum, the first of its kind in New Brunswick, is now part of WES delivery by the Government of New Brunswick and part of all training efforts administered by JEDI. Another result of its success was the creation of the Aboriginal Adult Learning and Apprenticeship Coordinator position that coordinates Aboriginal adult learning and apprenticeship opportunities in New Brunswick. The work done in this position has opened the door to learning opportunities for almost 750 Aboriginal people since its creation a few years ago.

The challenge is that collaboration is not always consistent and funding is year-to-year because of the project nature of the support.

JEDI recommends that the Government of Canada continue to support WES across the country with long-term funding and other resources. In addition, all efforts should be made to bring together partners to address unique needs in a collaborative fashion.

Mentorship and Internships

Young people are also looking for opportunities to receive mentorship and work experience.

The advice that comes from a mentor can have a huge impact not only on employment outcomes but life in general.

The right internships and mentorship opportunities can provide a real solution. The JEDI Aboriginal Internship Program (AIP) has been providing both work experience and mentorship to young Aboriginal people who have graduated from university within the last three years. Placements are made with identified partners in either the public or private sector depending on the interest of the candidate and the need of the partner. AIP participants gain the opportunity to showcase their skills, gain valuable work experience and mentorship. This empowers them to pursue long-term career opportunities with confidence.

JEDI also works with partners to provide seasonal internship opportunities such as those that were achieved with private sector partners in the summer of 2013 through the New Brunswick Aboriginal Information and Communications Technology (NBAICT) training-to-employment project. Students in that program were placed with a variety of employers ranging from large firms such as NB Power to smaller companies. The work experience and mentorship they received during their time with these businesses opened doors to new opportunities and equipped the individuals with skills they need to succeed once they complete the training program.

JEDI also had tremendous success in its Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership (ASEP) training-to-employment program. A major reason why was the personal coaching students had throughout the training process. This included a personal success plan a JEDI staff member developed and implemented with the program participant. The ASEP program exceeded employment targets.

The challenge is that collaboration is not always consistent and a willingness by employers to place interns in their organizations is not always there.

JEDI recommends that the Government of Canada continue to support internship and mentorship opportunities. The Government of Canada should also consult and collaborate with Aboriginal partners, the private sector and provincial governments when developing any new solutions. Moreover, the Government of Canada must do all that it can to assist with bringing key partners together to collaborate on tailored solutions to needs. This includes encouraging the private sector to provide internship opportunities.

Pre-Employment Training

JEDI has many years of success in pre-employment training. Our organization has many examples of how it works well. One is our Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership (ASEP) project that exceeded funder targets and assisted 120 people with finding employment in the forestry, energy and natural resources sectors. A big reason for ASEP's success was that it worked on a collaborative approach to pre-employment training. In other words, all partners in the project worked together on the training, recruitment and support for clients. The program was also properly resourced.

A more recent example is the Mobile Application Development program offered through JEDI's New Brunswick Aboriginal Information and Communications Technology (NBAICT) project. This is Canada's first Aboriginal-focused mobile application development program and it responds to industry need while opening new career doors to Aboriginal people. It's a partnership between

the Aboriginal people of New Brunswick, the Government of Canada, the Government of New Brunswick, the New Brunswick ICT industry and JEDI. The first cohort of students graduate on April 25th and many have already had interest from employers.

The challenge is that collaboration is not always consistent and funding is year-to-year because of the project nature of the support.

JEDI recommends that the Government of Canada collaborate closely with partners such as Aboriginal organizations, Aboriginal communities and the private sector on an ongoing basis to solicit current labour needs and innovative solutions. Moreover, the Government of Canada should provide long-term support to empower not-for-profit organizations to craft long-term solutions for its clients.