Tackling the ‘talent disconnect’

Need for job talent strategy discussed

Moncton professionals discuss collaboration for job situation in province during travelling roundtable discussions

BY ALLISON TOOGOOD

A group of Moncton professionals representing various industry sectors collaborated yesterday to discuss strategies to fix the problem of “talent disconnect.”

This threatening disconnect drew high school and post-secondary counsellors, human resources co-ordinators, headhunters, municipal representatives, career development officers and many others together — they hope to do something about it.

About 30 vested individuals participated in a travelling roundtable series at the Delta Beauséjour in an attempt to get ahead of the ever-changing job market and economy in Canada.

Because of New Brunswick’s higher than national average unemployment rate, the exodus of young people and the skilled trade jobs gap, the Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling approach is facilitating the conversation about how to “develop, connect and retain the best of our talent.”

A common thread through the morning talks was instilling much more responsibility in the provincial government and industry in connecting their employment needs and programs with the education system.

For a Bernice MacNaughton High School guidance counsellor, future prosperity and a lower unemployment level means listening to the old adage; it takes a community to raise a child. “We’re talking about schools, community, industry and government,” Stephen Harris said. “We all play a part. But how do we get them all to care?”

A finding echoed from one group’s discussion to the next is missed outreach opportunities about certain programs that could help match a student with an employer before they even graduate. “It needs to start earlier and a student’s transition out of the education system and into post-secondary, training and labour needs to be smoother,” Harris said, referring to the province’s two separate departments of the same names.

As one community engagement officer explained an IT-focused career matching program, with employer incentives, those at the table said they’d never heard of it but went on to explain another program offered in their field.

Jessica Kennedy with TECH Southeast said people need to know about the jobs available and the fact that only 30 to 50 per cent of vacant positions are posted, there are numerous lost connections.

For many smaller companies, start-ups and non-profits, the funds to engage potential employees just aren’t there, said Enterprise Greater Moncton’s youth entrepreneurship development officer.

Sarah Short, who’s currently leading a career development pilot project with local Grade 7 students, said the collaborative approach, with government supporting the education system, and the industry, needs to start from a nurturing place; a place that supports trial and error.

“Nothing is really linear anymore,” she said about education and career paths. “People need the freedom to explore, to fail, but to also get back on their feet.”

The local facilitator of the roundtable session, l’Université de Moncton’s Robert Baudouin, agreed the people looking for work need to be supported but it’s beneficial to have short-term and long-term career goals. He said people he works with are amazed at the amount of transferable skills built from the minimum wage or entry-level jobs.

“We call it a career project,” the professor and the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association president said. “To work in a call centre, that may not be the long-term goal but that’s the way to finance getting there.

“Another thing is many students don’t perceive what a job at McDonald’s could give them in terms of soft skills. What you learn at McDonald’s can be transferred to what human resources, communications, organizational management does.”

The conversations from the cross-country roundtables, including the ones in Moncton, will be heard at a special Cannoexus14 (a national career development conference) Plenary Panel in January with high-profile panellists, including the deputy minister of Employment and Social Development Canada.