



## **Submission to the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the Upcoming Federal Budget**

**By:**

**The Centre for Connected Communities\***

\*Centre for Connected Communities is a project on the MakeWay Shared Platform

**Recommendation 1.** The Government of Canada implement the Connected Community Works (CCW) approach to workforce development to ensure that people living in racialized and marginalized communities have the best chance possible to benefit from stimulus spending by optimizing infrastructure investments.

**Recommendation 2.** The Government of Canada provide funding in the amount of \$5 Million to facilitate the CCW approach to workforce development in eight marginalized/racialized urban communities

**Recommendation 3.** Designated infrastructure projects include Community Benefits Agreements specifications that compel contractors to work with local Integrators using the CCW, to ensure that qualified local candidates are hired locally.

Economic recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 will require new and innovative approaches to getting Canadians, particularly those on social benefits, back to work. Connected Communities Work (CCW) is one such innovative approach to workforce development that focuses on urban communities where there are concentrations of people on benefits or living below the Low Income Cut Off (LICO). CCW is designed to leverage all of the assets within current employment systems and in local communities. It takes a deliberate approach to align these assets so that Canadians get back to work in as short a time as possible.

CCW is a new, multi-stakeholder solution to the problem of siloed, programmatic responses to unemployment and the unnecessary disconnection that too frequently exists between jobs and job seekers. CCW simultaneously meets the skilled labour demands of local employers while improving results of the public investments designed to move people off of social assistance into employment.

CCW has been developed and tested by the Centre for Connected Communities (C3) in east Scarborough. C3 connects community builders with ideas, knowledge, research, tools and each other, translates knowledge across sectors and celebrates and elevates the work of community building as some of the most important work in our society so that communities can find collective solutions to complex social issues.

CCW's success has been demonstrated through pilots in:

- **Hospitality:** Leveraging the creation of the Guild Inn Event venue by Dynamic Entertainment, local Ontario Works (OW) recipients prepared for and secured employment
- **Social Services Sector:** demand-led and informed workforce pathways, local OW recipients prepared for and secured employment in social services organizations;
- **Construction:** Working in partnership with LiUNA and University of Toronto Scarborough Campus (UTSC), OW recipients are currently preparing for union apprenticeship training, to be qualified to work on construction of the student residence breaking ground December 2020. UTSC, unions and community partners are committed to continuing the CCW approach for the balance of the \$500 million campus expansion plan.

Thus, CCW is an approach to economic recovery in Canada that:

- Prioritizes racialized and low-income communities that are among the hardest hit by COVID;
- Is rooted in the real jobs being created in communities that need jobs;
- Focuses on a timely and detailed understanding of emerging employer demand;
- Integrates and aligns existing programs, training, services and supports; and
- Improves the effectiveness of those existing programs without creating any new programs.

## Shortening the Distance to Employment

As part of the economic recovery across the country, new employment opportunities will be created through Federal stimulus investment. Many of these investments will be in the same communities that have high social assistance rates or people living below LICO.

In urban centres across Canada, poverty is largely concentrated in inner suburban communities: underserved by higher order transit means that transportation can be a real barrier to employment. This significant problem can and will be met, in part, by investments in public transit. However, a complementary, and perhaps more sustainable approach, is to take advantage of instances where jobs are created virtually right next door to the workforce, i.e. in or near the very communities where poverty is concentrated, thereby overcoming the transportation barrier.

The close proximity of the labour force to these jobs brings the additional benefits of increased reliability of the workforce, pride that comes with working in one's own community and increased local purchasing power.

## Optimizing Existing Assets

The key to CCW is the integration of existing training, employment and service assets for a common purpose: preparing people on social assistance to be successful candidates for the *specific* local projects being funded by public dollars.

The only additional investment being recommended is in the role of a Community Integrator. The Community Integrator does not deliver programs or services, but rather leverages and aligns them to meet both the recruitment needs of the employer and training and support needs of people living on social assistance.

The Community Integrator follows the CCW approach, working in direct collaboration with companies undertaking the infrastructure projects, and government stakeholders responsible for those projects. With a clear understanding of the employment and training requirements for the specific jobs to be created, the Community Integrator then works with local, publicly funded employment and related skills training and support organizations to design custom workforce pathways directly related to the opportunities being created. CCW thereby optimizes the use of existing assets to ensure that people acquire the specific *in-demand* skills that employers are looking for.

Timing is critical in ensuring local people get these local jobs: as soon as large local infrastructure projects are in the planning stages, CCW is set in motion to ensure that:

- Local employment service providers have details of the actual nature of the jobs being created and the employer's/contractor's related hiring expectations;
- The relevant training is lined up so that the local latent labour force, currently on public benefits, acquires the right skills at the right time for the right jobs;
- People who enter the relevant training have a reasonable expectation of employment;

- People on social assistance are motivated to seek work as they will have a clear line of sight towards a tangible career objective, a realistic appreciation of both the time required to complete the appropriate training and the distinct characteristics of the job they are training for; and,
- As the employer and/or project requirements change, the training and wrap around supports can be adapted and be tailored to the jobs emerging and/or the emerging needs of the individual.

It is often assumed that knowledge of the particular requirements and timelines for emerging job demands are known by local agencies, but in practice, there is nothing built into the current systems that enables, supports or even recognizes this basic prerequisite to success.

### **Maximizing Service Value**

People on social assistance often need a complex array of supports with which they can succeed in training for, securing and retaining work. This array of services, paid for out of the public purse, often already exists locally. Inefficiencies are the inevitable result of each program or service working in isolation, not only of each other, but disconnected from the employer seeking the labour in the first place.

Through the alignment of existing programs, services and training with the actual job demands, each individual receives the appropriate and connected services from local programs and organizations. These supports are then integrated into an individual personal workforce pathway that may include:

- Housing support, childcare/elder care, mental health counseling, or legal support;
- Personal coaching to overcome confidence and motivation barriers to employment;
- Employment supports such as writing a resume, and interview skills;
- Skills upgrading in:
  - Essential skills: numeracy, literacy proficiency, problem solving, communication, digital literacy, etc.
  - Employability skills: stress management, punctuality, taking constructive criticism, understanding employer expectations, etc.
  - Sector specific skills, such as skilled trades training, as required by the infrastructure projects.

Too often critical local labour market information is not available to the very organizations that need it to effectively help people to prepare, in advance, to qualify for, secure and retain local jobs. This situation, which characterizes the workforce development pathways now is no one organization's "fault". It is the result of a focus on siloed programs to the exclusion of attention to the critical connections *between each* that **ultimately determine the success or failure of the system**. In short, local employers are unable to find local labour and *vice versa* even where both are keen to connect to the other.

Thus, a critical difference between the *status quo* and a CCW approach is that, in CCW, people are supported to prepare for specific jobs and each pathway is informed by the employer from beginning to end.

## **Making CCW Work**

A key factor to be considered by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance is that CCW a relatively small investment in a Community Integrator optimizes existing assets. The results of CCW are as follows:

- **Employers** have stronger confidence that the local employment system will meet their hiring and local corporate citizenship objectives;
- **Initial community outreach to job seekers** is better informed as it operates with more precise information about the nature of the jobs to be created, what qualities and qualifications they require, the training and the likely hiring timeframes, all of which makes for more concordant community outreach;
- **Wrap around supports directly** relevant to the to the individual and the training path are made available for people as they prepare for, secure and retain employment;
- **Essential skills upgrading and employability skills training** are tailored to the specific requirements of the specific job, in line with good practice in adult pedagogy;
- The work of publicly funded **employment** organizations is supported by the precise knowledge of local labour demand and supply which will allow them much greater return on the investment of their time and expertise; and
- **Training leads to access to specific jobs**, not general, 'destination-free' apprenticeships as is too often the case currently.

## **The Community Integrator**

At the core of CCW is the Community Integrator role, designed to apply specialized skills that are significantly different from program or service delivery. The role of the Community Integrator is to understand how the local system works, and optimize it by aligning opportunities, mandates and goals in ways that maximize potential. The role includes:

- Identifying and engaging **in high level discussions** with employers, building trade unions and government representatives, to simultaneously learn about their employment needs, barriers to local hiring inherent in the status quo, and acting as a trusted conduit between employers and community;
- **Facilitating collaborative on-the-ground strategies** that maximize the use of existing programs, services and training, identifying and filling any gaps required to meet employer demand;
- **Working with employment service providers** to design and operationalize a unique combination of services, programs and training interventions along one seamless pathway to employment; and

- **Coaching social assistance recipients** so that they can effectively navigate the workforce pathway to secure and retain jobs being created in their community through large scale public investment.

The role of Community Integrator is the key to unlocking the potential of existing programs, services and training to help local social assistance recipients prepare for local jobs. Publicly funded employment service providers are skilled at helping people to understand their own employment aspirations, to develop career goals, identify gaps in experience or education to meet those goals, to write resumes and put their best foot forward in interviews. The Community Integrator works closely with employment service providers to amplify and add value to their work by gathering and integrating knowledge, resources and opportunities about local labour demand and the network of supports in ways that work best for their clients.

CCW ensures that when the employer is ready to recruit, local social assistance recipients have already become qualified candidates, and thus have the best possible chance of being selected to fill local positions.

In closing, through CCW, employers are able to hire locally, skilled trades are able to recruit locally, and residents are able to get off of social assistance by securing local jobs. Taking the CCW approach to infrastructure investment in the rebuilding of our economy enables the Canadian Government to adopt an approach that optimizes public investments to get Canadians back to work and ensure post-COVID social and economic recovery.