
FINAL REPORT
Advancing Referral Processes
A Commitment to Training and Employment for Women
and the Ontario Association of Youth Employment Centres

Date: June 12, 2008

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
INFORMATION ABOUT ACTEW AND OAYEC	3
1.1 A COMMITMENT TO TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT FOR WOMEN	3
1.2 THE ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT CENTRES	3
CONTEXT FOR THE RESEARCH	5
2.1 POLICY AND SERVICE DELIVERY CONTEXT	5
2.2 EMPLOYMENT ONTARIO NETWORK DEVELOPMENT FUND	5
2.3 DOCUMENT REVIEW	6
SCOPE AND FOCUS OF THE PROJECT	7
3.1 PROJECT PURPOSE	7
3.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTPUTS	7
3.3 PROJECT PARTNERS	8
METHODOLOGY	9
4.1 THE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PROCESS	9
4.2 THE STAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE	9
4.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	10
4.4 DESIGN AND METHODS	11
4.5 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION	11
KEY FINDINGS	12
5.1 STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTED	12
5.1.1 Participating Agencies and Practitioners	12
5.1.2 Characteristics of Clients Served	13
5.2 EXISTING REFERRAL NEEDS AND PROCESSES	13
5.2.1 Existing Client Referrals Process	13
5.2.2 Referral Policies and Practices in Place	15
5.2.3 Nature of Referrals Made	16
5.3 PROMISING PRACTICES	17
5.3.1 Successful Referral Strategies	18
5.3.2 Examples of Successful Experiences	19
5.3.3 Resources and Tools that Facilitate Appropriate Referrals	20
5.4 KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES	21
5.4.1 Most Significant Obstacles and Barriers	21
5.4.2 Impact on Women and Youth	25
5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE FUTURE REFERRAL PROCESSES	27

5.5.1	Streamline Employment Services/Supports and Referral Processes _____	27
5.5.2	Shift Service Priorities in Response to Client Needs _____	27
5.5.3	Convene Stakeholders _____	28
5.5.4	Conduct Further Research _____	29
5.6	CONCLUDING COMMENTS _____	29
	APPENDIX A: PARTICIPATING AGENCIES AND CLIENTS SERVED _____	31
	APPENDIX B: SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP RESULTS _____	33
	APPENDIX C: DOCUMENT REVIEW _____	36
	APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP GUIDE _____	37
	APPENDIX E: CHILD CARE - EMPLOYMENT FACTS FROM ACTEW _____	40
	APPENDIX F: EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE - EMPLOYMENT FACTS FROM ACTEW _____	43

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the period from March to May 2008, EVIDENCE Evaluation and Consulting facilitated research for the Advancing Referral Processes Project in partnership with A Commitment to Training and Education for Women (ACTEW) and the Ontario Association of Youth Employment Centres (OAYEC).

Practitioners that work in diverse agencies serving women and youth in urban and rural settings (from across the provincial service delivery network) were invited to participate in one of five focus groups. Twenty-nine participants shared their understanding of and experiences with existing referral processes for women and youth, highlighted some promising practices, and suggested future opportunities to enhance referral processes.

The findings reflected by practitioners working with women and youth across urban and rural settings reflect very common experiences. The vast majority of clients served experience significant and often multiple barriers to employment, including:

- lack of basic needs, such as unemployment, and lack of stable or affordable housing
- socioeconomic disadvantages, such as sole support parents, living in poverty, or being social assistance/Ontario Works clients
- low literacy levels
- lack of education, skills, and/or experience, such as being without high school diploma, having no Canadian experience, or returning to the workforce after many years
- geographic isolation, such as having difficulty access services, a lack of available services, or being without reliable means of transportation
- mental health and addictions issues.

(Refer to Appendix A for a more detailed summary of participating agencies and clients served.)

Additional systemic barriers make it challenging for clients to access the services they need. The following is a summary of these obstacles:

Employment and Training Services

- Lack of service continuity between assessment and employment programs/services (assessment centre model)
- Lack of training and upgrading options for clients
- Lack of subsidized child care for clients (including after hours support for non-traditional training/employment opportunities)
- Focus on short-term employment outcomes that may not address client needs
- Reluctance on the part of some employment agencies to refer clients in an increasingly competitive environment (issues of trust and territorialism)
- Rigid eligibility criteria for various government services/supports.

External Services (Beyond Employment)

- Long waiting lists (limited capacity) to access other required services such as affordable housing, mental health services and addiction treatment
- Lack of available services, and insufficient transportation, particularly in smaller, geographically remote/rural areas.

As a result of these barriers to employment, clients need to be referred to a broad range of services and agencies before they can be successful in achieving their employment goals. This creates significant challenges for employment counsellors/practitioners who have limited budgets, mandates and timelines within which to negotiate expected goals and outcomes. Practitioners report that they are being required to multi-task, and address a wide array of causes and barriers without sufficient human resources, or credentials.

Despite these challenges, practitioners identified promising practices that reflect a commitment to work collaboratively to address identified needs and opportunities, and ultimately, to ensure that the goals of clients are achieved. The most important strategy that all stakeholders pointed to was networking with a broad range of agencies and organizations in their community, and building personal relationships with the staff in those agencies. It was evident that a lot of time and energy is devoted to initiating, developing and sustaining these networks. The stories that practitioners shared regarding successful referrals emphasized the importance of working with clients across services, providers and agencies to ensure that they get access to the information, contacts and resources they need.

The recommendations highlighted by participants suggest that there are some tangible, system-wide opportunities to both increase the coordination of existing employment services and supports, and to shift the current service priorities and funding to better respond to identified client needs. The strategies that were identified to begin to advance these opportunities include calling on umbrella organizations like ACTEW and OAYEC to convene various stakeholders to address shared issues, needs and opportunities, and conducting research that will further examine the systemic barriers to employment – providing evidence based data on which to make future policy and practice decisions.

It is important to note that many of the challenges and recommendations that practitioners identified through their operational experience seem to affirm the findings of other reports that have examined similar questions in the policy context/environment¹.

¹ *Environmental Scan of Employment and Training Services for Women in Canada*, ACTEW (Submitted to the Canadian Women's Foundation), November 2007.

INFORMATION ABOUT ACTEW AND OAYEC

1.1 A COMMITMENT TO TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT FOR WOMEN

A Commitment to Training and Employment for Women (ACTEW) is a charitable umbrella network of 70 community-based organizations delivering employment and training services to women in Ontario. ACTEW promotes women's full economic and social participation in the Canadian labour force by supporting community-based training programs through:

- networking, information sharing, and professional development with members and within the community-based training sector
- capacity-building projects and sector development
- public education
- research and publications.

The women that member agencies work with, many of whom are older women, recent immigrants, women with disabilities, sole-support mothers, and/or women of colour, face systemic discrimination and remain disadvantaged by years of economic recession and severe employment displacement. ACTEW believes that education and training can be the bridge between poverty and economic independence. Member agencies' unique sensitivity to the access issues women face ensure the provision of holistic and comprehensive employment and training services that enable and empower women to gain and retain quality employment.

ACTEW has a proven track record in managing large-scale, multi-year community research and engagement projects with high quality results. ACTEW has been the lead of 12 partnering organizations for the award-winning *Content-Sharing Constellation* project since 2001, which combines content-sharing technology and community engagement across the province. They have successfully undertaken many research initiatives throughout their 20-year history. Some highlights include:

- *Making Connections* (2003) which addresses information needs of professionals working with immigrant women
- *Employment Perceptions of the Job Placement Process* (2004), which conducted research on employer experiences and perceptions of the job placement process with community agencies.
- *Putting Women in the Picture: A Portrait of Current Training and Employment Policy for Women in Ontario* (2006), a briefing paper labour development policy.
- *Patching It Together: Employment and Training Opportunities for Women in Ontario Pre-Ontario-Canada Labour Market Development Agreement* (2007), which compiled information on the services and programs for women prior to the implementation of the LMDA and Employment Ontario.

1.2 THE ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT CENTRES

OAYEC supports and advocates for a sustainable youth employment delivery network in Ontario. Through supporting the work of local youth employment centres across Ontario, OAYEC aims to help young people find and maintain

meaningful employment that will help improve the quality of their lives. Since 1988, the Ontario Association of Youth Employment Centres and its network of over 70 youth employment agencies have been committed to delivering accessible, high quality, outcomes-based employment services to young people to assist them in reaching their employment and life goals.

OAYEC supports Ontario youth employment centres in the following ways:

- **Knowledge Transfer:** OAYEC members benefit from a multidirectional exchange of information and expertise between communities, governments, organizations, academics, and individuals.
- **Public Policy:** OAYEC members benefit from information and action on provincial and federal policies that affect the youth employment sector.
- **Professional Development:** OAYEC members benefit from youth employment sector training and networking opportunities, including Canada's largest annual conference for youth employment sector professional development.
- **Strategic Communications:** OAYEC members benefit from our ability to go beyond simple information dissemination. OAYEC strives to build and maintain strong public relations focused on youth employment.

Its Futures Conference provides Canada's largest annual professional development opportunity for professionals working with young people seeking employment. The conference is a three-day event, attracting over 400 delegates from youth employment counselling centres, colleges, the private and public sectors, as well as other community-based organizations.

CONTEXT FOR THE RESEARCH

2.1 POLICY AND SERVICE DELIVERY CONTEXT

Under the terms of the recent Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA), the federal government transferred funding and resources linked to employment supports and benefits to the Ontario government. The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU), with its new Labour Market and Development Branch, accepted the transfer of these programs in January 2007. The establishment of Employment Ontario offers the promise of “a one-stop source of information and services for students, job seekers and employers.” However, research done by ACTEW suggests that the implementation of LMDAs in other provinces has not effectively addressed issues of fragmentation and the needs of diverse and high-need clients.²

Community-based employment and training services are effective because the agencies that deliver them provide comprehensive, holistic services to an increasingly diverse and multi-barriered clientele.³ However, the commitment to comprehensive services means that agencies have to patch together programs and funding because fractured government policy, programming and investments do not provide an integrated approach.⁴ Further, current program funding agreements and service delivery guidelines within the Ontario employment services sector do not adequately account for the amount of work required to help clients address the multiple barriers that many of their clients face with respect to securing employment.⁵ With limited time and resources, agencies are stretched as they try to co-ordinate referrals and services.

2.2 EMPLOYMENT ONTARIO NETWORK DEVELOPMENT FUND

Funding for the *Advancing Referral Processes* project is provided by MTCU through the Employment Ontario Network Development Fund (EONDF). The EONDF is an investment by the MTCU to support the development and capacity of the Employment Ontario third party service delivery network. The fund addresses the following priorities:

- provincial and/or regional delivery stakeholder conferences and training and development that measurably improve the management strength and organizational capacity of the service delivery network to achieve Employment Ontario objectives

² *Canada's Labour Market Development Agreements: A National Overview of Impacts to Women*, ACTEW, 2006, see <http://www.actew.org/projects/pwpsite/LMDA/impacts.html>

³ *Putting Women in the Picture: A Portrait of Current Training and Employment Policy for Women in Ontario*, ACTEW, 2006, see http://actew.org/projects/current/PWP_briefingpaper.pdf

⁴ *Patching It Together: Employment and Training Opportunities for Women in Ontario Pre-Ontario-Canada Labour Market Development Agreement*, ACTEW, 2007, see http://actew.org/projects/pwpsite/resources/ACTEW_Pre-LMDASurvey_Report.pdf

⁵ *Needs Assessment of Organizations that Deliver Employment Ontario Programs*, EVIDENCE Evaluation and Consulting, 2007

- building effective community Employment Ontario referral processes in an integrated employment and training system
- development of resources, tools and best practices that build the capacity to achieve Employment Ontario objectives, and
- improvement of communication and engagement within sectors and between sectors and government to support consistency and continuous improvement in the delivery of Employment Ontario services and programs.

2.3 DOCUMENT REVIEW

A brief document review was conducted, based on key documents identified by project partners, to provide additional contextual information that informed the research questions and stakeholder consultations. Refer to Appendix C for a listing of documents.

SCOPE AND FOCUS OF THE PROJECT

3.1 PROJECT PURPOSE

The overall purpose of the *Advancing Referral Processes* research initiative is to advance the referral process within the Employment Ontario service delivery network with attention to the diversity of client needs and programming within the system. This project will focus on the referral process for **women and youth in both urban and rural settings**. According to results of the research project, *Patching It Together: Employment and Training Opportunities for Women in Ontario Pre-Ontario-Canada Labour Market Development Agreement* (ACTEW, see http://actew.org/projects/pwpsite/resources/ACTEW_Pre-LMDASurvey_Report.pdf), service providers in urban settings had more referral options to offer clients, whereas service providers in rural settings were concerned that some referrals women were getting were not appropriate and were limited. With regard to these specific client groups, this project will:

- explore and determine current referral processes within the Employment Ontario service delivery network
- identify issues and challenges in the referral process
- discuss and determine innovations and promising practices towards enhancing referrals within a "no wrong door" delivery system
- provide recommendations to build on the sector's work in advancing referral processes.

This project involved a qualitative research study consisting of five focus groups held throughout the province. The focus groups brought front-line staff from different agencies across the service delivery network to the table, ensuring that diverse client needs and regional differences were captured in the discussion. This resulting report will be disseminated throughout the Employment Ontario network.

3.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTPUTS

The research objectives for the project are to:

- define referral issues and challenges for the service delivery network on a regional, local and provincial level
- identify gaps in information or resources needed by women and youth in both rural and urban settings
- identify effective referral practices, especially for these specific client groups
- identify ways to assess and improve referral procedures

The strategic objectives for the project are to:

- recommend opportunities for better integration of services and for enhancing information and referral processes within agencies
- recommend improvements to the assessment and referral processes that MTCU could implement across the Employment Ontario network
- disseminate findings through the Employment Ontario network

The output for the project will be a report on current referral processes, issues and challenges for Employment Ontario agencies, which will be available on-line through the ACTEW and OAYEC web sites and distributed through our networks.

3.3 PROJECT PARTNERS

EVIDENCE Evaluation and Consulting, the research department of OAYEC, was responsible for carrying out the research. Its responsibilities are outlined in the following sections and include project management, development of the focus group questions, facilitation of stakeholder consultation, and report writing.

ACTEW is collaborating with OAYEC to execute the project. ACTEW is responsible for:

- developing the research questions
- identifying participants for the focus groups with practitioners serving women
- the logistics regarding the focus groups
- developing interpretations and making recommendations
- promotion of the project across the Employment Ontario third party service delivery network

OAYEC is responsible for:

- identifying participants for the focus groups with practitioners serving youth, and providing this information to ACTEW
- developing interpretations and making recommendations
- promotion of the project across the Employment Ontario third party service delivery network

This is a province-wide project that included rural and urban focus groups and representation from all Employment Ontario regions. The project involved a range of agencies within the Employment Ontario network. It tapped into practitioners' expertise with respect to making referrals, networking with community partners, and working with specific client populations. The research process encouraged open communication within the network. In doing so, it also facilitated networking amongst practitioners in agencies within the Employment Ontario system, and with other services outside of the Employment Ontario system. Participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to jointly dialogue about promising practices, and shared challenges and opportunities. They requested that contact information be shared amongst themselves so that they could continue to correspond with one another outside of the focus group discussions.

METHODOLOGY

4.1 THE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

EVIDENCE used a participatory approach to engage stakeholders:

Stage 1: Preparing for the Evaluation

Conduct a Preliminary Meeting

EVIDENCE meets with the organization's contact person(s) to exchange information and conduct an initial scoping of the evaluation.

Build a Stakeholders' Committee

EVIDENCE works with the contact person(s) to identify interested people who can sit on the Stakeholders' Committee. This committee guides the needs assessment.

Stage 2: Conducting the Needs Assessment

Focus the Needs Assessment

EVIDENCE and the Stakeholders' Committee meet to focus the purpose of and questions for the evaluation. From this information, EVIDENCE develops the evaluation design.

Design the Needs Assessment

EVIDENCE and the Stakeholders' Committee review, critique and validate the design. The Stakeholders' Committee approves the research methods to be employed.

Collect the Data

EVIDENCE implements and/or facilitates the research methods approved by the Stakeholders' Committee. EVIDENCE collates the data collected, and analyzes the information.

Interpret Findings and Make Recommendations

EVIDENCE works with the Stakeholders' Committee to interpret data and facilitate the development and implementation of recommendations.

Stage 3: Utilizing the Consultation Findings

Translate Recommendations into Actions

After the consultation is complete, EVIDENCE works with organizations to identify dissemination strategies and develop action plans that incorporate the evaluation findings into strategic planning and/or service delivery.

4.2 THE STAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE

Project stakeholders included the following individuals:

- Deanna Yerichuk, Executive Director, ACTEW
- Paula Wansbrough, Project Manager, ACTEW
- Matt Wood, Executive Director, OAYEC.

Stakeholders contributed in the following ways:

- discussed the scope of the project
- focused the evaluation and determined relevant research questions
- decided upon and validated the design
- identified and organized focus group participants
- reviewed and interpreted the findings (draft report).

4.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research assessed the needs of women and youth in both urban and rural settings during the referral process from the perspective of service providers/practitioners. In the planning stages, the following questions were agreed upon:

Needs and Assets of Target Population

1. What are the needs of women and youth being referred within the service delivery network?
 - What characteristics distinguish women and youth from other client groups within the service delivery network?
 - What are the characteristics most commonly associated with difficulties in being referred to training and employment services?

Service Gaps

2. What barriers have women and youth experienced during the process of being referred to employment and training services?
 - At what point in the referral process have women and youth experienced significant challenges?
 - What is missing in the referral process for women and youth?
 - How are the barriers different for women and youth in rural settings?
 - How are women and youth affected by gaps in services?

Referral Practices

3. What referral practices have service providers used to meet the needs of women and youth?
 - Who makes the referrals?
 - Why are the referrals made?
 - At what point during the engagement with clients are referrals made?
 - How are referrals made?
 - Where do clients tend to be referred?
4. How have these referral practices been effective in meeting the needs of women and youth?
 - What strategies have service providers used to address challenges for women and youth in the referral process?

Strategic Issues

In addition, a strategic question was identified and is included here for reference:

- What are the individual variations on practices mandated by Employment Ontario?

Refer to Appendix D for a copy of the focus group guide.

4.4 DESIGN AND METHODS

The design for the research is as follows:

Questions	Focus Group
1. What are the needs of women and youth being referred within the service delivery network?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ service providers-urban women √ service providers-urban youth √ service providers-rural women √ service providers-rural youth
2. What barriers have women and youth experienced during the process of being referred to employment and training services?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ service providers-urban women √ service providers-urban youth √ service providers-rural women √ service providers-rural youth
3. What referral practices have service providers used to meet the needs of women and youth?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ service providers-urban women √ service providers-urban youth √ service providers-rural women √ service providers-rural youth
4. How have these referral practices been effective in meeting the needs of women and youth?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ service providers-urban women √ service providers-urban youth √ service providers-rural women √ service providers-rural youth

4.5 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

EVIDENCE analyzed the focus group transcripts using an iterative process of coding and analysis. Key data categories and emerging themes were identified. Data was collated, and findings were compared and contrasted based on client group represented, that is, women and youth, and the location of services provided, i.e. rural or urban. Significant variations in findings with respect to client group and/or location of services are noted within the report, and in the table of Appendix B that summarizes focus group results. Quotations are used in relevant sections to highlight perspectives from practitioners working with women or youth in rural or urban settings.

KEY FINDINGS

5.1 STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTED

Practitioners that work in diverse agencies, serving women and youth, from across the provincial service delivery network were invited to participate in five (5) focus groups:

- 2 focus groups – urban women (one in person, one by teleconference)
- 1 focus group – rural women (by teleconference)
- 1 focus group – urban youth (by teleconference)
- 1 focus group – rural youth (by teleconference).

Participants were invited to share their understanding of and experiences with existing referral processes for women and youth, to highlight some promising practices, and to suggest future opportunities to enhance referral processes.

5.1.1 Participating Agencies and Practitioners

A total of 29 practitioners participated in the focus groups:

- 15 from urban settings (10 representing women, 5 representing youth)
- 14 from rural settings (9 representing women, 5 representing youth).

The agencies represented included:

- women's resource centres (6)
- employment agencies (19)
- multi-service agencies (2)
- women's shelter (1)
- college – an academic upgrading program (1).

The practitioners worked in the following job categories, and were identified based on their ability to speak about referral processes within their agencies or organizations:

- Executive Director (3)
- Business Development Manager (1)
- Senior Counsellor (1)
- Employment Advisor (1)
- Employment Counsellor and/or Job Developer (9)
- Employment Facilitator (1)
- Program Coordinator (7)
- Program Administrator (1)
- Resource Centre Co-ordinator (1)
- Vocational Assessment Counsellor (1)
- Academic Upgrading Facilitator (1)
- Intake Worker (1).

5.1.2 Characteristics of Clients Served

The women served by participating agencies reflected a range of ages from 15 to 65/70 years of age, and the youth served reflected a range from 15 to 25/30 years. Women and youth living in urban settings were identified as being culturally and linguistically diverse, with a large number of newcomers and immigrants. The majority of women and youth living in rural settings were Canadian born, or of native heritage.

The vast majority of women and youth served by participating agencies, in both rural and urban settings, experience significant and often multiple barriers to employment, including:

- lack of basic needs, such as unemployment, and lack of stable or affordable housing
- socioeconomic disadvantages, such as sole support parents, living in poverty, or being social assistance/Ontario Works clients
- low literacy levels
- lack of education, skills, and/or experience, such as being without high school diploma, having no Canadian experience, or returning to the workforce after many years
- geographic isolation, such as having difficulty access services, a lack of available services, or being without reliable means of transportation
- mental health and addictions issues.

Refer to Appendix A for a more detailed summary of participating agencies and clients served.

5.2 EXISTING REFERRAL NEEDS AND PROCESSES

Participants were invited to respond to a range of questions and probes to help paint a picture of the existing referral processes within their agencies or organizations, including:

- How are client referrals facilitated?
- What referral policies/practices are in place?
- What is the nature of the referrals that you are making?

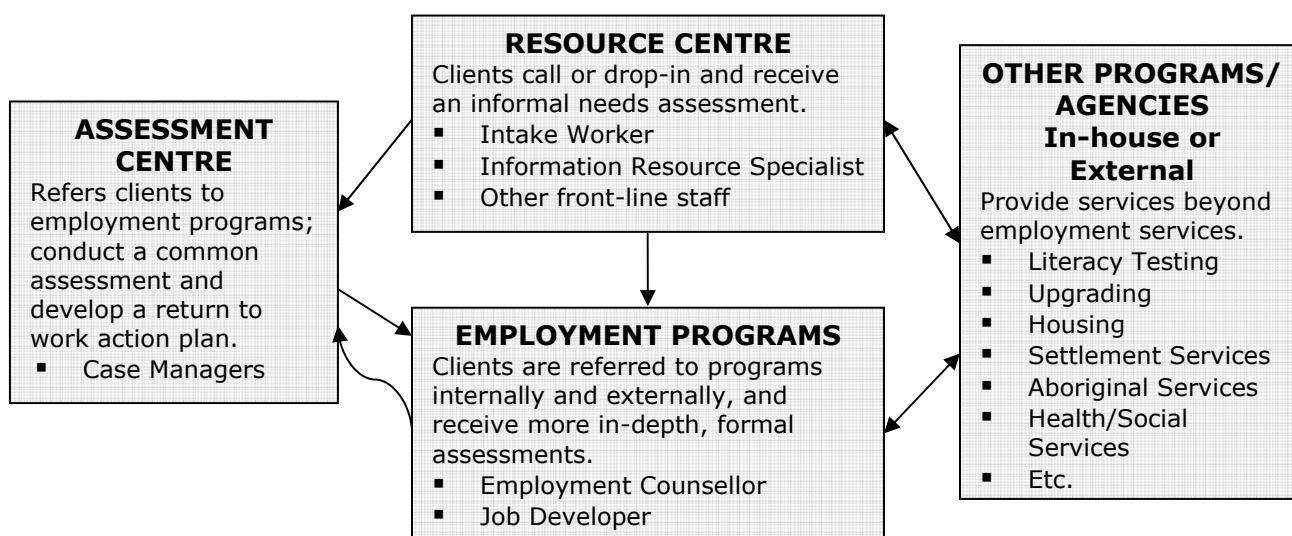
Refer to Appendix D for reference to the complete focus group guide.

5.2.1 Existing Client Referrals Process

The following are some of the emerging themes with respect to existing client referrals that were identified by participants across the focus groups:

- The range of services offered by participating agencies is diverse. Some multi-service agencies offer a broad continuum of services which may include a resource centre, employment programs, and services that go beyond employment. Other agencies provide employment services exclusively.

- Client referrals are facilitated by different staff within the organization, for example by intake workers, employment counselors, or other front-line staff, depending on the services provided (employment agency, resource centre or multi-service agency), and the clients point of access (referred by an assessment centre or other external agency to employment programs, or through a drop-in at the resource centre).
- The corresponding assessments range both in terms of depth and formality, with more basic, informal needs assessment typically taking place at the front end, and more formal or standardized, in-depth assessments happening as clients are screened regarding eligibility and fit for various employment programs.



*NOTE: With the exception of Job Connect Program clients, all drop-in clients that are **not** referred by the Assessment Centre must be referred back to the Centre before they can access employment programs.*

- Clients are referred to employment programs by assessment centres that conduct a common assessment and develop a return to work action plan (RTWAP). Clients are referred to other external agencies if required services are not available in-house, or if the assessment identifies other issues to be addressed. For example, clients may need literacy tests, upgrading, settlement services, housing, health and social services, etc.

When a client comes in wanting our program and we say you have to go to the assessment (centre) first, clients get lost. They are not coming back because they have already come for a service and we refused them. It is right away a wrong door (Practitioner, Urban Women).

- The full range of needs, including barriers to employment, take some time to be revealed as the relationship with staff develops. The majority of Job Connect providers felt that the one and half hour assessment provided for their clients is not adequate to sufficiently identify client needs. Some agencies reported providing orientation sessions to help clients get familiar with what services are available, and one agency indicated that they had developed a form that lists common concerns regarding looking for work and training as a way to help clients identify their needs.

It's like peeling (layers) off an onion when you're meeting with that client and...building that trust. It is in the second, third or fourth meeting with the individual where they build that trust and they...share that information and disclose...where (there) are some parts they might need (help with) (Practitioner, Urban Youth).

- The degree to which staff actively facilitates referrals on behalf of clients varies depending on the context (point of access; services provided), and the client being served. While practitioners reported that they help clients determine their needs, and empower them to make their own decisions, they also emphasized that it is important not to take the client at face value, but instead to work with them to see where they are stuck. It is sometimes necessary for practitioners to play more of a hands-on role in facilitating referrals, for example, making the appointment with other agencies for clients, and, if required, accompanying them to the appointment.

We're there to give them ideas and listen to them. We don't necessarily tell them what to do. It's usually about giving them the information and then helping them out with their action plans after that (Practitioner, Urban Women).

It's not very self directive. I mean, we don't just say, well, here is the name of a person, you might want to get in touch with them. It's very hands on because of the nature of the client...you want them to make this contact, so usually the easiest way is to pick up the phone and make that appointment for them (Practitioner, Rural Youth).

- Practitioners must to be careful not to breach client confidentiality, so following-up with referral agencies post referral is not feasible.

5.2.2 Referral Policies and Practices in Place

Agencies do not have formalized policies in place with respect to referring clients out of their program or agency. A few agencies indicated that they had

independently developed the following formal written referral policies or practices to guide their internal referrals:

- written policy regarding service users (agency serving women)
- client decision model which includes completion of a standardized service needs assessment (for information/referral service).

Employment agencies pointed to the following mandated policies and practices that they are required to adhere to by funders, that is, Employment Ontario and Ontario Works:

- Standard employment agencies must refer clients to an assessment centre before clients can access their services. The agency must follow-up with counselled clients every few months, and report information via a database.
- Job Connect program guidelines from MTCU require agencies to make enhanced referrals which means that these agencies will decide based on an assessment what the best services would be for that individual.
- Some agencies have formalized referral processes in place with Ontario Works who will send a referral form over which the agency will sign and return so that staff can follow-up with the case worker.
- Agencies must comply with the federal privacy legislation which ensures that an agency cannot make a direct referral to or share personal information with another agency without client consent. This has made it difficult for agencies to work collectively to develop a common referral form, although several regions/communities have been working to explore this.

5.2.3 Nature of Referrals Made

The nature of the referrals made reflects some of the key issues and challenges that practitioners face when facilitating referrals for clients. Participants stressed that the majority of the clients they work with experience multiple barriers to employment, and as a result, need to be referred to a broad range of services and agencies outside employment, before they can be successful in achieving their employment goals. This creates significant challenges for employment counsellors/practitioners who have limited budgets, mandates and timelines within which to negotiate expected goals/outcomes. Other systemic barriers (refer to section 5.4 below) such as eligibility requirements for various government services and supports present further challenges that must be overcome.

All of this makes the work of an employment counsellor/practitioner very complex. Staff are being required to multi-task, and address a wide array of causes and barriers without sufficient human resources or staffing. Some participants suggested that training and/or qualifications for these positions may be inadequate. They pointed to other provinces like Quebec and Alberta that have moved towards regulation of the profession.

With respect to the specific nature of external referrals made to other agencies and programs, practitioners that work with women and youth in both rural and urban settings all identified the following referral categories:

Employment and Training Resources

- Employment Insurance/Ontario Works
- Employment and Financial Services Canada (for aboriginal population)
- upgrading/training
- Job Connect/employment counselling program (if eligible)
- literacy program
- language and credential assessments
- placements (volunteers, 40 hours)
- entrepreneurship program.

Beyond Employment Services (Health, Social, Legal and Financial Services)

- social assistance
- mental health and addiction services
- medical and specialist services (family doctor, speech therapist)
- counselling Services (anger management, domestic violence, personal counselling)
- services for people with disabilities (ODSP)
- life skills programs
- newcomer/settlement services
- parent resource centre/Early Years Centres
- legal aid (ODSP application problems)
- credit/debt counselling.

Basic Needs (Determinants of Health)

- Safe/affordable housing
- Clothing (for job interviews)
- Food banks
- Access to services (geography and transportation, availability in rural areas in particular, waiting lists due to high demand and limited capacity, subsidized child care – including after hours/shift work).

5.3 PROMISING PRACTICES

Participants were invited to respond to a range of questions and probes to help identify promising practices with respect to referral processes within their agencies or organizations, including:

- In your experience, what strategies have helped to facilitate the most successful referrals?
- Please describe a successful experience where you facilitated a referral?
- What resources or tools do you use to assist you in making appropriate referrals?

Refer to Appendix D for reference to the complete focus group guide.

5.3.1 Successful Referral Strategies

The most important strategy that all stakeholders (across client group and location of services) pointed to was networking with a broad range of agencies and organizations in their community, and building personal relationships with the staff in those agencies. It was evident that a lot of time and energy is devoted to initiating, developing and sustaining these networks.

The following is a summary of the kinds of collaborative arrangements that agencies have established and/or contribute to:

- Inter-agency agreements where managers and/or staff from various agencies that provide employment services, or broader services for a particular client group/population meet on a regular basis to share information. The goal is to reduce duplication, increase networking opportunities, and facilitate a smooth transition to a range of services for clients
- Space for agencies to provide services on-site so that they are more accessible for clients. For example, a Career Counsellor can provide counselling, a Case Manager from an Assessment Centre can conduct assessments, or a Psychologist can do vocational testing.

Partnerships help us to work together to help the client to realize their goals (Practitioner, Urban Youth).

Because our area is so spread out (geographically), we have satellite offices...in other agencies. We feel that this really helps contribute to building trust and mutual sharing of information with clients. When other agencies see that we are all wrapping around and working towards the same end with the client it contributes to success and generates further referrals (Practitioner, Rural Youth).

- Itinerant services provided at partner agency sites such as settlement services, services provided by aboriginal agencies, or Ontario Works.
- The co-location of office space with partner agencies such as Ontario Works, or a community resource centre.
- Guest speakers from other agencies attend regular all-staff meetings such as Ontario Work's case workers.
- Exchange referral and follow-up information, with client consent when a client referral form is developed.
- Community outreach to get the word out about available services, and to learn about client needs and other services in the area (e.g. school boards and

trustees; guidance and attendance counselors in local high schools; employers). Outreach staff provides regular reports/updates to other staff, for example, at staff meetings.

- Staff sits on relevant local committees, such as a young parent advisory committee or municipal committees including economic development.
- Invitations to partner agencies to open houses and annual general meetings.

Practitioners also spoke about the need to provide assistance to clients to support a comfortable and smooth transition to relevant programs and services:

- Create a friendly and warm environment for clients to ensure that they are comfortable. For example, ensure that there are staff or volunteers at the front door who welcome them, listen to them, and provide them with timely and accurate information including information about services not offered at the agency.
- Skills/career assessment is an important part of making referrals. Clients often do not self identify very accurately what their needs are.
- Offer to make an appointment on behalf of the client with client consent and/or accompany clients to an appointment if there is any reluctance on the part of the client to follow-up.

5.3.2 Examples of Successful Experiences

Participants acknowledged that it is often difficult to know how successful referrals are because the privacy legislation restricts their ability to follow-up with clients once they have been referred to another agency for service. The stories that practitioners shared regarding successful referrals that they were able to facilitate for clients emphasized the importance of working with clients across services, providers, and agencies to ensure that they get access to the information, contacts and resources they need to achieve their identified goals. Practitioners also pointed to the importance of working with clients to manage their expectations, navigate the system, and overcome barriers on route to achieving their goals.

(It's about) coordinating with other services like Ontario Works so that the client is getting the most out of what they can get from all the different services that are available. Little bits and pieces here and there...makes up the full pie for the person (Practitioner, Rural Youth).

A woman who had a background in office work...had been laid off and she needed to update her computer skills so she attended our computer services. She would come in everyday and use the computer tutorials to work on Microsoft Office programs. After a while she was able to get the funding and to go and take actual courses and ... told us that the reason why she was able to be so successful was that we had explained that there were tutorials available for women to come in and practice on their own...She was employed shortly after that (Practitioner, Urban Women).

An individual I recently worked with was interested in an apprenticeship but did not have the educational experience or credentials to go forward – high school diploma and hands-on training. We invited the client to a trade information session where people (other youth) come in to talk about their trials and tribulations with getting into the apprenticeship. He was able to talk with someone about the barriers they went through and what steps they took and how Job Connect was able to assist (them) through the process. He found a related position (general labourer) that gave him the internal postings and opportunities he needed to go forward and this person was referred for a GED (equivalency testing for high school diploma) and it's working out very well (Practitioner, Urban Youth).

5.3.3 Resources and Tools that Facilitate Appropriate Referrals

Practitioners pointed to the following resources, tools, and mechanisms that they utilize to assist them in making appropriate referrals:

- Provide training to staff on how to effectively facilitate information and referrals recognizing that this is a skill that takes time to develop.
- Formally and informally share referral information amongst staff internally that have developed particular contacts and resources (newcomers, aboriginal community, etc.), and with partner agencies (e.g. case managers in assessment centres).
- Introduce services that allow rural clients to access services that would otherwise be inaccessible because of transportation issues, for example, a call centre or a mobile para-wheels program.
- Provide a resource manual that identifies a range of services within the region for reference by staff and clients, such as the Blue Book available in Toronto, and is sorted by topics that reflect service needs identified by clients.
- Have a resource library with information about training, associations, occupations, etc. (e.g. careercruising.com for occupational information).

- Utilize the internet, google searches, and e-mail to help connect clients with other agencies/services, for example, search Toronto-based community services at 211toronto.ca. Some agencies have developed their own websites with information about community services and links to relevant resources and services.

5.4 KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Participants were invited to respond to a range of questions and probes to help identify the most significant issues and challenges that practitioners experience when facilitating referral processes, including:

- What are the most significant obstacles/barriers you face when facilitating appropriate referrals (e.g. availability, relevance, and appropriateness of services)?
- From your perspective, what impact do these obstacles/barriers have on women/youth in your community?
- Are these obstacles/barriers different than for other client groups? If so, how?

Refer to Appendix D for reference to the complete focus group guide.

5.4.1 Most Significant Obstacles and Barriers

Despite the fact that practitioners shared their individual experiences working with women and youth in rural and urban settings, they identified very common obstacles and barriers that they face when facilitating appropriate referrals.

“Hidden” Barriers to Employment

The “hidden” barriers to employment are often revealed for those that are chronically unemployed or underemployed. Practitioners report that the level of expertise of staff is not sufficient to deal with all of these issues, and there is a lack of services to respond to identified needs. For example, there are huge waiting lists for free personal counselling.

There are a lot of barriers for women. When they go to external agencies like ours, we support them in a lot of areas – emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and physically, but sometimes when they’re dealing with bureaucracy out there they’re just cut right down and then they’re starting over again and then they lose their confidence and say, well, I’ll go back on welfare because it’s really hard. If they’re not strong enough emotionally then they’re really up against some difficult opponents (Practitioner, Urban/Aboriginal Women).

The following barriers are perceived by participants to be “hidden”, despite the fact that at least some of these should be evident early on in the assessment process, because they are not adequately acknowledged or addressed by the current system which is employment focused:

- mental health and addiction issues where services are disconnected from training and employment
- lack of safety where clients are living with violence
- poverty
- lack of stable and affordable housing
- lack of language supports for newcomers and immigrants
- learning disabilities which are often subtle
- basic literacy skills
- lack of access to child care services⁶.

It is so important to help individuals navigate the system because so many get lost and say, I have been rejected and refused and there is nothing for me. I have been passed on to 12 different agencies already and who else am I supposed to talk to? We find out all the other issues – the violence, the poverty, whatever is stopping them is a barrier and an obstacle (Practitioner, Urban Women).

(There are) growing newcomer populations in some areas, and (a) need for services in other languages. Referral agencies (often) don't provide services in other languages. (We) currently rely on a few staff internally that can speak the language and help facilitate communication (Practitioner, Urban Youth).

It is now more challenging to get funder support for child care since Employment Ontario took over. There is more criteria to access child care support, and we have had our knuckles wrapped for spending too much on child care (Practitioner, Rural Women).

Waiting Times for External Referrals

Practitioners indicated that the waiting times for clients to access external referrals outside employment services are long. For example, for one-to-one employment services offered at employment agencies, appointments are typically guaranteed within five business days, but for other services like housing or group homes, and mental health assessments and treatment, the wait can be several weeks to several months long.

We are losing clients based on the fact that interventions are not available to them. (Practitioner, Urban Youth).

Eligibility Criteria Restrictions

The current eligibility criteria restrictions have a significant impact on the ability of clients and practitioners to access required services. Practitioners pointed to the following restrictions and impacts:

⁶ *Child Care: Employment Facts from ACTEW (Refer to Appendix F).*

- If clients are not eligible for Employment Insurance or if they are not perceived as job ready, training/skills development is not available to them. For example, one client was denied EI because she did not have access to child care. Another client was paying for a daily one hour computer course out of his/her own pocket, and was stripped of EI.

We are challenged to help those that fall outside the box with respect to accessing supports. The Employment Ontario criteria is difficult if women don't want to leave the region and move away from family and supports. There has been a push towards women in the trades, but this is difficult because of the lack of child care supports (Practitioner, Rural Women).

- If clients are eligible for Employment Insurance or are in a survival job, they are not eligible for the Job Connect program. The same level of service is not available through EI.

Waiting times for accessing employment supports is disconcerting. (Clients) may be eligible for target or wage subsidy if on EI or have reach back status (had a claim within the last 3 years). In order to process this kind of a contract it could take up to 4 weeks. Often (we) lose the client because the employer is not willing to wait that long. They want to hire someone quickly (Practitioner, Urban Youth).

If you worked in a factory for many years and you have been laid off, then you have access to EI funding and training, but you don't get that funding to upgrade your skills because they say that is not your career path. So your chance of moving out of that to get more sustainable forms of employment are limited. It is the funding mechanism (Practitioner, Urban Women).

One of the biggest challenges is with women needing training and a lot of women do need training. So, even if they are on EI, being able to convince EI that they need this training in order to find work is a really big challenge (Practitioner, Urban Women).

- Agencies delivering Job Connect Programs (job search and career planning programs) cannot provide counselling services to clients who work more than 20 hours a week. This means there a lot of underemployed people who are not able to receive these services and improve their conditions.
- It is a challenge to get people registered for the Apprenticeship Signing Bonus Program (ASSB) through Job Connect because of wait times and processing

issues. Many employers are not willing or able to wait. There are a lot of conditions for clients, and it tends to be too many steps for a lot of people to work through. For example, they have to have left school at a certain point in time, need a certain number of credits to go forward, or must register with an academic facility.

System-Driven Versus Client-Driven Priorities

Practitioners suggested that the current funding priorities (employment focused) make it difficult for women and youth (even those clients that are EI eligible) to access the longer term training and upgrading required to secure sustainable and meaningful employment. For example, assessment centres are mandated to find the shortest route to employment which tends to be Job Connect programs. Practitioners in Resource Centres report that they often see clients after they have completed Job Connect programs, and indicate that that they find that job search services are often not what the client needed most.

Clients are asking why they need this (job search program) when they are not job ready. They have been looking for work for 6 to 12 months and can't find work because something important is missing from their skill set (Practitioner, Rural Women).

In the 3-week pre-employment program we assume that clients are ready and they just need tools to get them full time work. If any issues come up during this time, we are not there to counsel them, but can refer to other agencies/partners. Three weeks is a short amount of time to fix everything. There is not funding for the long-term solution. Clients can't support themselves financially for a longer period of time (Practitioner, Urban Women).

Competitive Versus Collaborative Environment

Despite the significant efforts that agencies are making with respect to establishing networks with referral agencies for employment and beyond, some participants suggested that many employment agencies are still reluctant to refer clients to other employment services or agencies because of lack of trust and territorialism. Employment agencies are expected to collaborate in an increasingly competitive environment. There also seems to be a push currently for employment programs to become self-sufficient and have multiple services under one roof which isolates providers and programs. Practitioners suggested that improved communication between agencies and funders could help to alleviate some of the existing tensions in the system.

Barriers and Obstacles Specific to Rural Areas

Practitioners located in rural and sometimes remote settings highlighted geography and transportation as an additional and significant barrier that they face. They serve large geographic areas, and public transportation systems are inadequate,

unreliable, or not available at all. This can make it difficult if not impossible for the majority of clients that do not have a car to access services.

There are also fewer services available for clients to access in rural areas. Clients must often leave the community to seek services such as addiction treatment centres, mental health services, or shelters.

There are huge differences between regions. Smaller, remote, northern communities have huge challenges making differences in women's lives (Practitioner, Rural Women).

The lack of services can be quite an issue for young people because we're in a remote location, we just don't have all of the things that required to leave the community to seek addiction treatment centres or things like that and they don't always have the money to be able to do that (Practitioner, Rural Youth).

5.4.2 Impact on Women and Youth

While the issues and challenges faced when facilitating referrals are very similar for agencies serving women and youth, the impact that these have on each population looks somewhat different.

Practitioners that work with youth report that waiting times for access to services such as employment supports, and other health and social services are particularly challenging. These obstacles make the possibility of improving their circumstances seem unattainable. Often youth will drop out of the system entirely, electing not to pursue things further.

Long wait lists and inability to find somebody that can get them any faster contributes to a 'what the heck attitude'. (They think) there's no point anyway, so I'll...do whatever I need to do to just get by" (Practitioner, Rural Youth).

You just feel so trapped because this person is saying that they are ready (for help) and last week they weren't and next week, they may not be, but right now they are. If you can (just) grab onto that moment, and sometimes the moment is gone before you can get anything in place (Rural Youth).

Practitioners that work with women report that a lot of women they see are the primary (and often sole) caregivers of their family, which may include children, partners, and seniors. Because of these circumstances, they are likely to be in and out of their occupation or profession, or to be working part-time, and as a result do not have access to government supports. For example, they are not eligible for EI

and training dollars⁷, and have difficulty accessing subsidized child care when seeking training or employment⁸. Without these resources and access to training opportunities, they are likely to remain underemployed, and economically disadvantaged.

Women are being pushed into the survival job over and over again. The issues for women and single parents are not being addressed...What we see is women who have barriers – poor or limited finances – so we try to figure out how to deal with these barriers. A lot of what we see is a lack of training and personal development work, and for people who are job ready - a job development piece (Practitioner, Urban Women).

The system (employment focused) pushes women into underemployment which leads to poverty, mental health issues, broken families, etc. (Practitioner, Urban Women).

There is also anecdotal evidence that women are choosing, and are being directed towards occupations that are more traditional for women and may not have the same earning potential. Participants perceive that this is likely because these are the opportunities that women are aware of, and/or have experience in. Practitioners acknowledged that there are a lot of barriers for women to enter non-traditional jobs. For example, there is a lack of training to upgrade skills, and a lack of subsidized child care while training or working in jobs that require shift work.

I found (working in a women's organization) that a lot of the women tended to go into occupations that were more traditional for women because that's what they knew and that's what they thought they should be doing. There wasn't necessarily a lot of consideration for different types of jobs outside of those fields – even if they didn't have skills that were specific to these traditional occupations (Practitioner, Urban Women).

There are lots of barriers for women to enter non-traditional jobs. There may be job opportunities, and employers out there who are willing to hire women, but they haven't necessarily made it a conducive enough environment for needs to be met. (For example), single mothers..need child care after hours for shift work (Practitioner, Urban women).

⁷ *Employment Insurance: Employment Facts from ACTEW, January 2007 (Refer to Appendix E).*

⁸ *Child Care: Employment Facts from ACTEW (Refer to Appendix F).*

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE FUTURE REFERRAL PROCESSES

Participants were invited to respond to a range of questions and probes to elicit recommendations to improve future referral processes and practices, including:

- What recommendations would you make to improve the existing referral processes and practices?
- Is there anything else you think is important for us to know/understand?
- Is there anything else you think is important for us to know/understand?
Refer to Appendix D for reference to the complete focus group guide.

5.5.1 Streamline Employment Services/Supports and Referral Processes

Practitioners pointed to opportunities to streamline existing employment services/supports, and referral processes to reduce wait times for services, and facilitate a smoother transition to required services/supports for clients. The following specific suggestions were made:

- Streamline funding and eligibility requirements for various employment services/supports so they are more beneficial and less confusing for clients. Currently funding and eligibility requirements involve various levels of government and are complex for employment practitioners to negotiate.
- Address the issue of disjointed services such as referrals from employment agencies to assessment centres and back, by making arrangements for Career Counsellors from the Employment Insurance office to visit employment agencies on a regular basis (once each week) so that issues can be resolved and clients in rural communities do not have to travel to the nearest urban centre to be referred.
- Develop a single document, a shared assessment and referral form, that the client could sign that would give employment agencies permission to facilitate referrals on their behalf. This would allow agencies making the referral to fax the form out with client agreement, and agencies that receive the referral to sign it and send it back so that the referring agency knows that the client followed through. Various regions have already explored this independently, but could not reach agreement. Client confidentiality concerns would need to be addressed, so this must be a legal document.

5.5.2 Shift Service Priorities in Response to Client Needs

In response to the current barriers to employment faced by women and youth, practitioners recommended shifting service priorities and funding to address identified needs:

- Work to decrease waiting times for identified employment supports like EI supports such as wage subsidies.

- Develop partnerships, across various sectors, to increase timely access to key health and social services such as mental health and addiction Services.
- Provide more training supports that facilitate apprenticeships for women and youth experiencing multiple barriers to employment (e.g. child care).
- Designate more resources for skills assessment and development to assist clients in accurately identifying their needs. Funding is currently being phased out, but new collaborations might be developed, for example, with employers and educators, to facilitate the prior learning piece for credentialing.
- Provide current labour market analysis.
- Work in partnership with funders and employers to provide more resources for longer term training and upgrading opportunities for women and youth (including foreign trained professionals) that respond to emerging market trends/opportunities.
- Consider on-line education assessment and distance education models to increase access to longer term training and upgrading for rural communities.
- For those accessing educational and upgrading opportunities, provide child care and transportation supports (especially in rural areas).
- Support innovative programs and initiatives that assist women and youth to access training/employment opportunities such as incubators for small businesses, bridging programs for non-traditional professions and apprenticeships.

5.5.3 Convene Stakeholders

Practitioners spoke about the lack of focused communication between funders, employers, educators and employment agencies currently. It was suggested that umbrella organizations like OAYEC and ACTEW might act as conveners, bringing various stakeholders together to explore shared issues, needs, and opportunities. It was further implied that this convening role could address systemic issues and strategic opportunities that are identified across various regions and/or stakeholder groups. This recommendation demonstrates the interest that practitioners and employment agencies have in continuing to find ways to work collaboratively for the benefit of the clients they serve.

- All levels of government should communicate on an ongoing basis about what each is doing and what they are learning with respect to employment programs such as Employment Ontario, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, etc.
- Facilitate partnerships between funders, employers, educators, and employment agencies to respond to emerging needs and opportunities.

- Foster a collaborative versus competitive environment for employment sector staff. In the focus groups, practitioners appreciated the opportunity to network with one another and share best practices and in fact, shared contact information in order to build their networks.
- Organize campaigns encouraging women and youth to participate in non-traditional work opportunities that correspond to current shortages in labour market. Some participants remember that the Ontario Women’s Directorate played this role in the 80s and 90s.
- Network with successful entrepreneurs, both women and youth, to facilitate access to opportunities for those that currently fall through the cracks in the system (e.g. need longer term training or upgrading, but can’t access government supports to make this happen).

5.5.4 Conduct Further Research

Given that practitioners pointed, through anecdotal evidence, to very similar systemic barriers to employment, practitioners suggested that future research be focused on examining these further and providing evidence based data on which to make future policy and practice decisions.

- Examine the effectiveness and efficiency of the assessment centres, which are considered another layer of service, and explore the potential benefits of designating community agencies as the assessment point. This avoids having people showing up for programs they are not eligible for, or not appropriate for.
- Investigate the impact of eligibility requirements on client impacts, and the system as a whole.

5.6 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The findings with respect to existing referral processes, promising practices, key issues and challenges, and future recommendations reflected by practitioners working with women and youth across urban and rural settings reflect very common experiences. The majority of clients served by participating agencies have experienced significant and often multiple barriers to employment. As a result, these clients need to be referred to a broad range of services and agencies before they can be successful in achieving their employment goals. This creates significant challenges for employment counsellors/practitioners who have limited budgets, mandates and timelines within which to negotiate expected goals and outcomes.

Other systemic barriers (refer to section 5.4 above) such as eligibility criteria restrictions for various government services/supports present further challenges that must be overcome. All of this makes the work of an employment counsellor/practitioner very complex. Staff are being required to multi-task, and

address a wide array of causes and barriers without sufficient human resources or credentials.

Despite these challenges, the honest and open feedback provided by participants, and their appreciation for the opportunity to share experiences with one another suggests that there is genuine interest in working collaboratively to address identified needs and opportunities, and ultimately, to ensure that the goals of clients can be achieved.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPATING AGENCIES AND CLIENTS SERVED

CLIENT GROUP	WOMEN		YOUTH	
SETTING	URBAN	RURAL	URBAN	RURAL
	10 participants	9 participants	5 participants	5 participants
Agency Location and Area Served <i>NOTE: In the "rural" focus groups for both women and youth, some agencies identified that they serve a combination of rural, semi-rural and urban populations. A few agencies identified that they serve smaller rural and remote communities.</i>	Eastern Ontario: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ottawa Central Ontario: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Toronto (5) ▪ Etobicoke ▪ Scarborough ▪ Brampton ▪ Hamilton 	North Western Ontario: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Kenora ▪ Thunder Bay North Eastern Ontario: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bancroft South Western Ontario: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Goderich ▪ Woodstock ▪ Beamsville/Niagara ▪ Sarnia South Eastern Ontario: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Brockville Central Ontario: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sutton West 	Northern Ontario: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sudbury South Western Ontario: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ London Eastern Ontario: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Kingston Central Ontario: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Toronto ▪ Oshawa (Ajax and Whitby) 	North Western Ontario: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Red Lake South Western Ontario: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Welland/Niagara South Eastern Ontario: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Peterborough ▪ Brockville Central Ontario: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Collingwood
Agency Type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Aboriginal women's resource centre (1) ▪ Employment agency serving men and women (2) ▪ Women's employment agency (3) ▪ Multi-service agency (1) ▪ Women's shelter (1) ▪ Women's resource centre (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employment agencies serving men and women (3) ▪ Employment agencies serving women primarily (2) ▪ Women's resource centres (3) ▪ College - academic upgrading (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employment agencies serving youth and adults (3) ▪ Employment agencies serving youth only (1) ▪ Multi-service agency (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employment agencies serving youth and adults (5)
Positions of Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Executive Director ▪ Employment Counsellor ▪ Program Co- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Program Co-ordinator (2) ▪ Executive Director (2) ▪ Resource 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Senior Counsellor ▪ Employment Counsellor and/or Job 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employment Advisor ▪ Employment Counsellor (3) ▪ Program Co-

CLIENT GROUP	WOMEN		YOUTH	
SETTING	URBAN	RURAL	URBAN	RURAL
	10 participants	9 participants	5 participants	5 participants
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ordinator (4) ▪ Vocational Assessment Counsellor ▪ Intake Worker ▪ Project Administrator ▪ Business Development Manager 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centre Co-ordinator ▪ Academic Upgrading Facilitator ▪ Employment Counsellor (2) ▪ Employment Facilitator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developer (3) ▪ Program Co-ordinator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ordinator (Youth Programming)
Age of Clients Served	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 16 years+ ▪ 30-45 years (some youth) ▪ 20-50 years (not many youth) ▪ All ages (17-67) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All ages (2) ▪ 15-70 ▪ 16+ ▪ 16-24 year olds ▪ 20-50 years ▪ 35+ ▪ 30-59 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Primary focus on youth ▪ 16-20 years ▪ 16-24 years ▪ 15-30 years ▪ Also serve adults (25+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Primary focus on youth (16-24 years) ▪ Also serve adults ▪ Offer women's programming
Diversity (Culture and Language) of Clients Served	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Canadian-born women ▪ Aboriginal women ▪ Newcomer and immigrant women ▪ Diverse population (culturally, ethnically and linguistically) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Canadian-born (White) ▪ Native heritage ▪ Some immigrants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Newcomers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Aboriginal population ▪ No/very few immigrants
Other Characteristics Identified of Clients Served	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Single mothers ▪ Shelter referrals ▪ OW/ODSP clients ▪ EI/social service ▪ Domestic violence ▪ Mental health issues ▪ Unemployed ▪ Diverse levels of education ▪ Basic needs unmet (housing, child care) ▪ Returning to workforce after 10 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low literacy ▪ Lack of education ▪ Living in poverty ▪ Social Assistance/OW clients ▪ Geographically isolated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Isolated communities ▪ Multi-barriered youth ▪ Looking for skilled traded and apprenticeship opportunities ▪ Without high school diploma ▪ Starting own business ▪ OW/ODSP clients ▪ Basic needs unmet (housing) ▪ Psychological issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Multi-barriered youth ▪ OW clients ▪ Lack of transportation ▪ Low literacy (over 33%) ▪ Low computer literacy ▪ Young offenders/with criminal records ▪ Very young parents (15 year olds) ▪ Drug use

APPENDIX B: SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

CLIENT GROUP	WOMEN		YOUTH	
SETTING	URBAN	RURAL	URBAN	RURAL
Client Referrals Process				
<p>How Client Needs Are Identified and Facilitated</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Diverse range of services offered ▪ Referrals facilitated by different staff (intake workers, employment counsellors, front-line staff) ▪ Various access points to service (assessment centres, external agencies, drop-in/resource centres) ▪ Assessments range in depth and formality, and full needs (including hidden barriers to employment) take some time to be revealed ▪ Degree to which staff actively facilitates referrals (making appointments and following-up with clients/providers) varies depending on the context, and client served <p><i>(Refer to Section 5.2.1 – Existing Client Referrals Process for details)</i></p>	X	X	X	X
<p>Referral Policies and Practices in Place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No formalized policies for external referrals ▪ Independent efforts to develop a standardized service needs assessment) ▪ Mandated policies/practices required by funders <p><i>(Refer to Section 5.2.2 – Referral Policies & Practices for details)</i></p>	X	X	X	X
<p>Nature of Referrals Made</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employment and training resources ▪ Beyond employment Services (health, social, legal and financial) ▪ Basic needs (determinants of health) <p><i>(Refer to Section 5.2.3 – Nature of Referrals Made for details)</i></p>	X	X	X	X
Promising Practices				
<p>Networking and Collaborative Arrangements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Broad range of agencies/organizations in the community ▪ Inter-agency agreements (exchanging referrals and information) ▪ Sharing space for client programs/services 	X	X	X	X

CLIENT GROUP	WOMEN		YOUTH	
SETTING	URBAN	RURAL	URBAN	RURAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community outreach Participating in relevant committees <i>(Refer to Section 5.3.1 – Successful Referral Strategies for details)</i>				
Facilitating Referrals for Clients <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating a friendly and accessible environment Providing skills/career assessment (accurately identify needs) Making appointments and accompanying clients to appointments Facilitating access to required information, contacts and resources (across services, providers and agencies) <i>(Refer to Section 5.3.1 – Successful Referral Strategies; and 5.3.2 – Examples of Successful Experiences for details)</i>	X	X	X	X
Resources and Tools that Facilitate Appropriate Referrals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training for staff Sharing referral information internally Flexible services to respond to transportation barriers (call centres and mobile para-wheels program) Resource lists, manuals, libraries Utilizing the Internet (google searches, on-line resources, website development) <i>(Refer to Section 5.3.3 – Resources/Tools that Facilitate Appropriate Referrals for details)</i>	X	X	X	X
Barriers to Employment				
Hidden Barriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poverty Lack of Affordable housing Lack of Safety (living with violence) Mental health and addiction Issues Basic literacy skills Learning disabilities Language (newcomers/immigrants) Transportation Etc. <i>(Refer to Section 5.2.2 – Nature of Referrals Made, and Section 5.4.1 – Key Issues and Challenges for details).</i>	X	X	X	X
Length of Waiting Times/ Lack of Access to Services and Supports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employment supports (skills assessment and development, apprenticeship) Services beyond employment (mental 	X	X	X	X
			NOTE: The impact of waiting times on youth in	NOTE: The impact of waiting times on youth in

CLIENT GROUP	WOMEN		YOUTH	
SETTING	URBAN	RURAL	URBAN	RURAL
health and addictions, child care, etc.) (Refer to Section 5.2.2 – Nature of Referrals Made, and Section 5.4.1 – Key Issues and Challenges; and 5.4.2 – Impact on Women and Youth for details)			<i>particular were highlighted.</i>	<i>particular were highlighted.</i>
Systemic Barriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Eligibility criteria restrictions (for Employment Insurance, training/upgrading) ▪ System-driven versus client-driven priorities ▪ Competitive versus collaborative environment (Refer to Section 5.4.1 – Key Issues and Challenges)	X <i>NOTE: The impact of eligibility criteria restrictions on women in particular were highlighted.</i>	X <i>NOTE: The impact of eligibility criteria restrictions on women in particular were highlighted.</i>	X	X

APPENDIX C: DOCUMENT REVIEW

- *Patching It Together: Employment and Training Opportunities for Women in Ontario Pre-Ontario-Canada Labour Market Development Agreement*, ACTEW, 2007. http://actew.org/projects/pwpsite/resources/ACTEW_Pre-LMDASurvey_Report.pdf
- *Putting Women in the Picture: A Portrait of Current Training and Employment Policy for Women in Ontario*, ACTEW, 2006. http://www.actew.org/projects/current/PWP_briefingpaper.pdf
- *Needs Assessment of Organizations that Deliver Employment Ontario Programs*, EVIDENCE Evaluation and Consulting, 2007.
- Presentation by Honey Crossley, Executive Director of Working Skills Centre, and member of the External Service Delivery Reference Group on Program Design, delivered to ACTEW members, February 2008. http://actew.org/projects/Program_Design_Presentation.ppt
- Presentation from Employment Ontario on *Transformation Project #9 Develop Access Strategies*, April 2007.
- *Discussion Paper: Employment Ontario Integrated Service Delivery Framework*, available on the Employment Ontario web site, Deloitte Consulting, 2008. http://www.eopg.ca/eng/publications/jan_08.pdf
- Presentation on *Design of Employment Ontario Employment Services* on the *Employment Ontario* web site. <http://www.eopg.ca/eng/sdag/SDAGDesignofEOEmploymentServices.pdf>
- *Improving Labour Market Information to Help Canadians Make Better-Informed Decisions: HRSDC/FLMM July 12-13, 2007 Symposium on Measuring the Impacts of Labour Market Information*, by Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, submitted to Strategic Policy Research Directorate Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2007.

APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

Introduction

Hello, my name is Heather Graham, and I am a Project Manager with Evidence Evaluation & Consulting (the research department of OAYEC) who is undertaking a research project on referral processes in partnership with ACTEW, and OAYEC. The purpose of the project is to develop a picture of current referral processes, the challenges particular client groups face related to referrals and the strategies developed by agencies to respond to these challenges. In meetings with practitioners we will focus on women and youth in both urban and rural settings. I will be inviting you to share your understanding of and experiences with existing referral processes for (women/youth), to highlight some promising practices, and to suggest future opportunities to enhance referral processes.

I want to thank each of you for taking the time to participate in today's focus group. At the end of this project a summary report will be publically available that will highlight themes from a series of focus groups with staff that work in diverse agencies (serving women & youth) across the service delivery network. This report will also be presented at selected meetings, conferences and forums happening throughout the Employment Ontario network. It is our hope that this research will inform the implementation and development of Employment Ontario.

Confidentiality

Your comments will be kept confidential (to the full extent provided by law). Neither your name nor any other personal identifier will be used in any reports or publications that we write about this focus group. Our intent will be to summarize current practices, successful strategies, trends, issues, gaps and opportunities identified across the focus groups – so we encourage you to share your honest experiences and opinions.

This focus group is being recorded onto an audiotape to help ensure that we accurately capture your feedback. I'd like to ask that one person speak at a time and that you speak as clearly as possible, so we can capture everybody's comments.

Any questions before we begin?

Making Introductions

1. We will start with a round of introductions. I'd appreciate if you could share the following with us:
 - Your name and position
 - A brief description of your agency (location – rural, urban, remote; size; range of services offered)
 - Characteristics of the (women/youth) that you serve (socio-economic status; cultural and linguistic diversity; etc.)

(NOTE: Flip chart the question so participants can remember what was asked of them)

Understanding the Existing Referral Needs and Processes

2. What referral policies or practices are in place at your agency?
 - What specific referral activities are mandated by funders (e.g. MTCU)?
 - Are they relevant/helpful?
3. How do you facilitate client referrals?
 - Who is responsible (e.g. designated staff)?
 - At what point in your relationship with clients are their needs identified?
 - Are their needs self identified by clients OR suggested by staff?
 - Do staff actively facilitate the referral by making an appointment, facilitating introductions, inquiring about follow-up, etc.?
4. What resources or tools do you use to assist you in making appropriate referrals? (e.g. listing of agencies/services via computer database or binder)
5. What is the nature of the referrals that you are making?
 - What kinds of services do your clients (women/youth) need/identify?
 - Where are you referring clients to address these needs?
 - internally (specific programs/services)?
 - externally (partner agencies; service sectors)?
 - nowhere to refer currently?

Identifying Key Issues and Challenges

6. What are the most significant obstacles/barriers you face when facilitating appropriate referrals for (women/youth)?
 - Availability of services
 - limited capacity?
 - gaps in service?
 - Relevance of services (hours offered; supports in place – child care, interpretation/translation; respond to identified client needs/preferences; etc.)
 - Appropriateness of services (respond to client-specific needs and circumstances; avoid stereotyping)
7. From your perspective, what impact do these obstacles/barriers have on women/youth in your community?
 - Are these obstacles/barriers different for (women/youth) than they are for other client groups? If so, how?

Identifying Promising Practices

8. Please describe a successful experience where you facilitated a referral for (women/youth)?
9. In your experience, what strategies have helped to facilitate the most successful referrals for (women/youth)?
 - Making appointments/accompanying clients

- Developing personal contacts/relationships with staff in referral agencies
- Follow-up post referral
- Working with clients to make informed decisions (self directed; empowered)

10. What specific resources/tools have assisted in making referrals?

- Are there any that you needed and did not have?

Improving Future Referral Processes

11. What recommendations would you make to improve the existing referral processes and practices for (women/youth)?

12. Is there anything else you think is important for us to know/understand?

Thank you for your participation! We appreciate the time and energy you devoted to today's discussion.

APPENDIX E: CHILD CARE - EMPLOYMENT FACTS FROM ACTEW

Most Mothers Are Employed

- Two-thirds of Canadian women with young children are employed. In 2006, 64% of women with children under three and 69% with children between three and five were engaged in paid work. In 1976, the employment rates for such mothers were 28% and 37% respectively. ^[1]

Yet Child Care Is Scarce

- With the exception of Quebec, there has been little expansion of Canada's childcare system ^[2] to meet the dramatically increased numbers of working mothers. ^[1]
- One-quarter of Canadian children under the age of seven have access to a regulated childcare space ^[3] and in Ontario there are spaces for only 10% of the children under 12. ^[5] In comparison, many European countries provide spaces to 60% or more of their child populations. ^[2] The shortage of care for school-age children, ^[4] Aboriginal children, ^[3] and children with special educational needs ^[3] is particularly severe.
- Contingent workers -- of which women are the majority ^[6] -- have unpredictable work schedules, irregular employment, and fluctuating income. ^[6, 7] Immigrant women and rural women are often employed in seasonal, irregular and shift work positions and there are few affordable childcare options that meet their scheduling needs. ^[8, 9, 10, 11]

Child Care Benefits Children, Families and Society

- Research demonstrates that high-quality child care is as positive for children as effective parenting. ^[12, 13, 14] Child care is especially beneficial to children with special learning needs ^[14] and those from low-income homes. ^[12, 13]
- Higher participation of women in paid employment increases a country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP); subsidized child care greatly increases the likelihood that women will work. ^[15, 16]
- High-quality child care is associated with increased wage earnings for families, in the short-term, and increased wage earnings for participating children, in the long-term. ^[17, 18]
- Subsidized child care enables sole-support parents to work rather than depend on social assistance for financial support at a much higher economic burden to society. ^[17] In 2003, over 40% of child care subsidy recipients in the City of Toronto were single-working-parent families. ^[19]

Child Care Builds the Labour Force

- Organizations providing employment and training services recognize the necessity of child care for women who utilize their services; 73% of Ontario employment agencies serving women predominantly offer child care program support. ^[20]

- Among low-income women of colour in Toronto, the lack of child care is cited as the greatest barrier to securing employment. ^[11]
- In a recent international study, subsidized child care is strongly associated with high return-to-work rates for mothers, which limits labour shortages in aging populations. ^[16]

Who Pays the Price of Child Care

- On average, full-time child care in Canada currently costs parents \$6,000 to \$12,000 a year for an infant, and \$5,000 to \$8,000 a year for a toddler or preschooler. ^[24] Canadian parents pay 50% of total child care costs, while European parents pay an average of 25%. ^[2] In a comparison of 14 western countries, Canada spends the least on child care, contributing only 0.2% of the GDP to the child care system. ^[2] The Organization for Economic Co-Operation in Development (OECD), an international body representing 30 countries, encourages countries to invest 2.0% of their GDP and recommends that Canada "substantially increase public funding of services to young children." ^[3]
- Some single mothers cannot work because they cannot afford child care. ^[25] The average after-tax income for a single mother was \$30,000 in 2005. ^[26] As of 2006, only 22% of single parents are able to access Canada's complex child care subsidy systems. ^[3] Forty-six percent (46%) of single mothers with children under three were employed in 2006, compared with 66% of mothers in two-parent families. ^[1]
- The annual income for the Canadian workers paid to care for our youngest children is half that of the national income average. ^[5] Salaries for child care centre staff range from \$12,500 to \$29,000 per year, and providers outside centres have lower remuneration. ^[5, 27] Almost all (98%) child care centre workers in Canada are women. ^[27] Most child care providers in Canada's Live-In Caregiver Program are women of colour and, due to immigration regulations, are very vulnerable to unfair pay and abuse from their employers. ^[28]

This fact sheet was created by **A Commitment to Training and Employment for Women (ACTEW)** in June, 2007. This is one of a series of fact sheets on employment that can be accessed and downloaded at: <http://www.actew.org/pwp>

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APPENDIX F: EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE - EMPLOYMENT FACTS FROM ACTEW

Unemployed Women Have Greater Difficulty Accessing EI

- Unemployed women tend to have less access to EI in comparison to men.ⁱ
- Women's access to EI benefits decreased 6% in the five years following the introduction of the *EI Act* in 1996; in comparison, men's access decreased 1%.ⁱⁱ
- 2005 saw an 8.3% access rate difference between the genders, with 89.6% of unemployed men and 82.3% of unemployed women qualifying for EI.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Less than half (42.8%) of unemployed part-timer workers qualified for EI in 2004.^{iv} Women account for about 7 out of 10 part-time employees.^v

EI Restrictions Often Affect Women with Dependent Children

- The population least likely to qualify for EI is also the group most likely to have young children – women aged 25-44 years.^{vi} Almost three quarters of employed women have children under the age of 16.^{vii}
- Single mothers make up about one-third of NERES, new workers or people returning to the workforce after a two-year or more absence.^{viii} NEREs are much less likely than other workers to qualify for benefits.^{ix} With the *EI Act*, men who are fathers and are NEREs are more likely to qualify than in the past; however, women who are NEREs and mothers, especially single-mothers, are less likely to qualify.^x

Gender Differences in Forms of EI Received

- Men are much more likely than women to receive regular EI benefits: 84% of men receiving EI are accessing regular benefits, in comparison with 50% of women recipients.^{xi}
- While women are less likely than men to be unemployed^{xii}, in recent years a larger proportion of EI claims are going to women (53%).^{xiii} This trend has been attributed to women's access of maternity or parental benefits.^{xiv} Forty percent of women claiming EI are on maternity or parental leaves, while only 2% of men access parental benefits.^{xv}
- Fourteen percent of all women eligible for EI also qualify for the Family Supplement claim, in comparison with 4% of men.^{xvi} The Family Supplement tops-up EI payments to unemployed parents with net family incomes of \$25,921 or less.^{xvii} Two thirds of all Family Supplement recipients are women.^{xviii}

Difficulties Accessing Maternity and Parental Benefits

- In 2004, more than one of three women with newborns did not qualify for maternity or parental benefits.^{xix} Most women who do not qualify were self-employed, or had not worked for two years or more.^{xx}

- Claimants of maternity or parental benefits must work 600 hours in the previous 52 weeks.^{xxi} Because women are more likely to work part-time, they are less likely than men to qualify for parental benefits.^{xxii}
- In 2003, more than one woman in ten was self-employed.^{xxiii} With the exception of Quebec, self-employed workers do not qualify for maternity or parental benefits. Quebec offers a plan to self-employed women who are required to contribute to the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP).^{xxiv}

EI Benefits are Not Adequate for Women's Circumstances

- In 2004, almost one-third of regular EI beneficiaries exhausted their entitlement to EI benefits.^{xxv} Women tend to exhaust EI benefits in higher proportions than men because they are more likely to work part-time and therefore receive fewer weeks of benefits.^{xxvi}
- On average, a woman makes 72 cents for every \$1.00 dollar a man makes.^{xxvii} Because wages determine the weekly financial benefits that EI claimants can receive, women on average receive less support than men.^{xxviii}
- Canada ranked sixth out of ten developing countries for maternity and parental benefits for new mothers who work part-time on average wages.^{xxix}

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