

Preparedness

INTRODUCTION

Youth today are facing many issues, including high debt load, low incomes, temporary employment, emotional stress, lack of jobs and high unemployment; the good news is that there is growing recognition that something needs to be done, and soon. On the one hand, a sluggish economy reduces opportunity for employment; on the other hand, young people lack skills and experience needed to take advantage of the opportunities that do come along. As a result, our young people are at risk of an uncertain future.

In order to better understand the issues of youth, in late 2013 the Community Foundation of Prince Edward Island (CFPEI) undertook a survey of over 200 Island youth on a number of issues that directly affect them. The report, *Taking the Pulse of Island Youth*, available on the Foundation's website at www.cfpei.ca, provides a snapshot of the findings. Bright spots include a positive sense of community, emerging entrepreneurial spirit, volunteerism and new postsecondary offerings. The main concerns include a lack of jobs, surviving on low-paying jobs, educational deficiencies and drug and alcohol addictions. On the subject of education and learning, the study reports a high rate of completion of high school and postsecondary education, a high level of inclusivity and relatively affordable tuition costs; young people also concerns about their readiness for the next stage of life including:

***"preparedness gaps with regard to readiness for
post- secondary study and the workplace" – Vital Signs, CFPEI, 2013***

WORKSHOPS

To increase public awareness and understanding of the issues identified in the Foundation report, Education 20/20 organized four public discussions (Stratford, Montague, Summerside and Wellington) for the purpose of informing the community of the report and its findings, learning more about youth issues in our communities, exploring issues of education and learning, and to identify actions to be taken to close gaps. Each session began with a presentation by Steve McQuaid, Vice President of the Community Foundation of Prince Edward Island and Katherine MacDonald, Researcher, during which they reviewed both survey methodology and findings.

The second half of the evening was given over to round-table discussion led by experienced facilitators. To launch the discussion, each participant was invited to make an opening statement; this was followed by open discussion. Discussions ranged were lively and wide ranging, and carried on well after the formal session ended. For purposes of reporting, findings have been organized around questions posed.

FINDINGS/CONCLUSIONS

To help narrow the gap between school and the workplace, one needs:

- The basic skills especially of communication and mathematics
- A positive attitude
- A high comfort level with information technology
- Strong personal management skills
- To be able to work as a member of a team

To help narrow the gap in readiness for further study, one needs:

- The basic skills especially of communication and mathematics
- To be an independent learner
- Strong personal management skills
- A high comfort level with information technology
- Problem solving skills

In general, participants felt that the preparedness gap may be narrowed by:

- Greater student engagement in the learning process
- Increased communication between parents and teachers
- Developing independent study habits
- Strengthening a culture of learning in our communities.
- Having clearly articulated expectations and standards
- Including skills needed for living and working in a modern economy
- Responding to individual student interests and needs
- Making greater use of technology in the instructional process.
- A good mentoring program for new teachers

- Schools exhibiting a “can-do” atmosphere
- Students developing good personal management and problem solving skills

As a result of the initiative, Education 20/20 recommends that:

1. Further study be undertaken to clarify the gaps in preparation for further study and for work.
2. Schools clearly define and publicize the minimum levels required to qualify for a high school graduation diploma, especially those of communications and mathematics.
3. Schools strengthen their role in preparing students for the labour market.
4. The education system strengthen its capacity to assist students in their development in personal management skills.
5. Schools and their communities work together in developing a culture of learning, including taking greater advantage of existing community resources

Education 20/20 action plan:

- To engage with Island educators in discussions on workshop findings.

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