YOUTH OPPORTUNITY IN THE RURAL CONTEXT: STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING EMPLOYMENT, MOBILITY, AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

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SUMMARY

The goal of this report is to outline strategies that have been used in an attempt to help improve the quality of life for today’s rural youth.

First, the report focuses on initiatives enacted by federal governments that help address youth unemployment, which is currently double the adult unemployment rate in Canada. A scan of literature from academic authors, non-government organizations, and government sources reveals multiple case studies which can be modelled after and/or learned from. One important finding reveals that simply providing youth with funding as they begin to navigate a difficult job market may not be enough to address youth unemployment, and that a more comprehensive overhaul of our post-high school strategies may be required. Case studies out of Australia and Germany highlight this.

Next, transportation programs designed to serve all residents in a rural area are outlined, with specific attention given to funding sources for these programs. This report focuses on successful programs and some that have not been sustainable. Overall, various systems of transportation are viewed as an important community component that help connect youth to the various services available to them throughout Wellington County. No specific recommendations are made in this report, however current and previously run initiatives are examined for the purpose of guiding future discussion on how to address barriers faced by rural youth.
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INTRODUCTION

This report has been produced in partnership with the North Wellington Coalition for Youth Resiliency (NWCYR), researching strategies which could help the coalition serve its mandate: assisting with positive development for rural youth, improving resiliency, and increasing engagement in community life. Policies and programs that have been implemented in the past will be outlined and evaluated to determine whether any of these ideas could be implemented in Wellington County and beyond. This research is informed by a strengths-based perspective that believes there is nothing ‘wrong’ with today’s youth. The challenges lie in the context in which rural youth are trying to succeed. Therefore, this research focuses on improving the context so that rural youth have increased opportunities to find their ‘spark’ (Scales, Benson, & Roehlkepartain, 2011).

RESEARCH GOALS

The goal of this research report was not to necessarily identify problems and trends that rural youth face in Wellington County. The organizations that make up the NWGY have frontline experience understanding the issues that face this community, and is one of the reasons the North for Youth community event was held. This event, hosted by the NWGY at Kenilworth Public School, brought together both youth and adults from North Wellington to have a conversation on how to best engage young residents. Primary focuses were established, with the coalition promising to offer support to the community as they implement the strategies that were discussed.

In addition, there have been previous conversations with rural youth about the issues faced in their communities, hosted perhaps most notably by The Ontario Rural Council. This was an organization which served as both an advocate and a sparkplug for discussions on issues faced by rural Ontario from 1998-2010 (The Ontario Rural Council, 2010), a cause that has since been carried on by The Ontario Rural Institute. Therefore, this report dedicates itself to investigating strategies for addressing the challenges highlighted in these reports.

For example, in March 2007, the Ontario Rural Council hosted a Public Forum in Belleville, ON, giving a voice to both youth and non-youth on issues that they were facing in their community (The Ontario Rural Council, 2007). Building on forums that came before them, the participants in this forum were able to prioritize what they saw as common rural issues. The research goals in this report are inspired by these
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prioritizations, focusing on connecting our youth to gainful youth employment, and suggestions on establishing public transportation in rural areas, which in turn would increase access to social and health services (The Ontario Rural Council, 2007, p. 12).

BACKGROUND

The NWCYR was established in the spring of 2014. It recently secured a $216,300 grant through the Ontario Trillium Foundation, and announced a 36-month initiative dedicated to addressing challenges faced by rural youth in North Wellington County on October 2, 2014 (Raftis, 2014). Members of the coalition come from many organizations in Wellington Country, including:

- Mount Forest Family Health Team
- Family and Children Services of Wellington and Guelph
- New Growth Family Centre
- Minto Mapleton Family Health Team
- Ontario Provincial Police
- Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy
- Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health
- Homewood Community Addictions Services
- Waterloo-Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Canadian Mental Health Association
- County of Wellington Social Services
- Upper Grand District School Board
- Wellington Catholic District School Board
- Wyndham House
- Community Resource Centre of North and Centre Wellington
- Upper Grand Family Health Team

The coalition’s partnership with The Research Shop began when Alison Vasey, Community Youth Resiliency Worker for the coalition, reached out to determine whether members of our team could offer any assistance in contributing to positive youth...
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development and engagement in north Wellington County. This report is our modest contribution to the NWCYR’s efforts.

METHODS
This report is the result of a scan of academic literature, government documents, and reports from interested non-government organizations that dedicate themselves to improving access to social resources, improving employment prospects, and establishing transportation.

RESULTS/FINDINGS
Thankfully, there have been multiple attempts in both Canada and abroad which address positive youth development and resiliency, either directly or indirectly. The following pages outline some of these strategies.

On Developing Youth Assets and Finding the ‘Spark’
This report is largely dedicated to improving structures that surround youth, guided by the belief that they thrive under the right conditions. This position has been articulated effectively through the work of the Search Institute, an organization which uses the tools of social science to better understand the lives of young people (Search Institute, 2015). In 1990, led by Peter L. Benson, the Institute released a framework for 40 Developmental Assets, designed to identify ‘positive building blocks’ for youth development (Scales, 2000, p. 84).

The 40 Developmental Assets serve as an example of what members of the Search Institute call a ‘science of positive youth development’ (Scales, Benson, & Roehlkepartain, 2011, p. 263). Rather than focus on programs that alter ‘negative’ youth behaviours such as substance abuse prevention, the goal is to focus on strategies that, for example, give youth active roles in the community (Asset # 8) or establish positive neighbourhood and school climates (Assets #4 and #5). While some of the assets focus on the young person’s environment (e.g. relationships and opportunities), other assets “measure the self-perceptions, values, and skills that young people develop to guide themselves” (Scales, 2000, p. 84). In other words, they can be separated into external assets provided for by adults and peers, and internal assets that adolescents develop within themselves (Scales, Benson, & Roehlkepartain, 2011, p. 264).

Most recently, the Search Institute has begun focusing on thriving in adolescence:
Central to the notion of thriving is an adolescent’s “sparks.” Sparks are described as a passion for a self-identified interest, skill, or capacity that metaphorically lights a fire in an adolescent’s life, providing energy, joy, purpose, and direction. Thriving is then seen as the combination over time of sparks, and the action and the youth and others take to support, develop, and nurture those sparks. (Scales, Benson, & Roehlkepartain, 2011, p. 264)

Introducing the notion of Sparks is not meant to replace the developmental assets. It is meant to be an addition to the equation. If one measures as being exposed to or developing a high number of developmental assets, combined with having a deep passion (or spark), the greater community stands to benefit (Scales, Benson, & Roehlkepartain, 2011, p. 273). Currently, the 40 developmental assets are being used to inform research that the Community Resiliency worker is doing in schools with youth. The science of positive youth development cannot be ignored when developing resiliency in youth in North Wellington.

Employment

Youth unemployment is an issue that affects both rural and urban youth populations. The youth unemployment rate sits at ~14% across Canada; in Ontario, that rate is higher at 16.5% (Geobey, 2013, p. 6). Being seven years removed from the 2008 recession, some think this problem is more of a structural issue that requires addressing through new policy initiatives as opposed to simply being the product of a lagging economic recovery (Geobey, 2013, p. 7).

As Jilly Halyk of the Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie notes, not only does lack of employment affect a youth’s economic reality, it could affect their wellbeing and mental health. Rising debt levels due in large part to the costs associated with developing marketable skills (e.g. university, training programs) affects a youth’s ability to establish stable income and independence, which can exact an emotional toll on those affected. Moreover, youth employment is an issue that affects us all: “young people without jobs do not have the resources to establish homes or purchase cars, etc.” (The Rural Ontario Institute, 2014, p. 6). Such a scenario, if widespread, could eventually weigh on the Canadian economy.

Education and skills training seems to be a factor when looking at statistics on unemployment. Unemployment rates and level of education seems to vary in Ontario: 28% for those aged 16-24 who have yet to complete high school, dropping to 16% if a
high school certificate is obtained, and dropping further to 9.5% with a college degree. Interestingly enough, youth unemployment rates rise to 11% with a Bachelor’s degree, and to 17% at Masters or above (Geobey, 2013, p. 16). As a result, strategies to address youth unemployment focus on skills development.

Furthermore, there are challenges that are unique to rural populations. The Ontario Government has recognized rural youth employment as an issue, developing the Rural Summer Jobs Service in 2003, a program which encourages rural employers to create opportunities for students between the ages of 15 and 30 by subsidizing employers at $2 per hour. While this program is a step in the right direction, not addressing youth who are not currently students can be seen as a program weakness.

The Federal government has been allocating its dollars towards the Youth Employment Strategy, as part of their Economic Action Plan. In 2012, $50 million was spent in an attempt to connect today’s youth with employers that were in need of labour. 2013 saw an additional $70 million promised over three years to support paid internships for recent post-secondary graduates. The Youth Employment Strategy is divided into three programs (Government of Canada, 2015), all seemingly targeting employers or relevant organizations:

1. **Skills Link** – a program in which businesses, social organizations, educational institutions, and municipal governments can apply for funding if they successfully demonstrate that their program is committed to offering eligible activities to youth facing barriers to employment. This organization must serve clients that are 15-30, not in school, and not in receipt of Employment Insurance (EI) benefits. This program was designed to help youth in certain circumstances, such as being single parents, living with a disability, living in rural or remote areas, or having dropped out of high school (Government of Canada, 2014).

2. **Career Focus** – Similar to Skills link, a program in which businesses, social organizations, educational institutions, and municipal governments are eligible for funding if they demonstrate a commitment to the Career Focus program. For example, an organization may set up a client with a career-related work placement, or help connect them to skills development programs for occupations which are currently in demand. The funding recipients then recruit participants, 15-30 years old, who are not currently receiving EI benefits. Organizations must have at least eight participants. The key difference between this program and Skills Link is that clients do not necessarily have to be facing situations of
hardship that could become barriers to employment. (Government of Canada, 2014).

3. **Canada Summer Jobs** – A program in which the government compensates employers a certain amount of that province’s minimum wage if they hire students between the age of 15 and 30. Eligible employers could qualify for up to 100% compensation of their province/territory’s minimum wage if non-profit; other private and public sector employers are eligible for up to 50%. Employers could choose to pay above minimum wage if they wish. Employers are responsible for insurance premiums, vacation pay and any compensation premiums. Each employer is eligible for up to $300,000 in total funding each year (Service Canada, 2015, pp. 8-9).

These Federal strategies to address youth employment have been met with some criticism, mainly that these programs are seen as being too restrictive. Yet it should also be recognized that the government cannot solve this problem on its own, that private-sector employers need to be committed to hiring youth, and to contribute in some way to help training them (The Rural Ontario Institute, 2014, pp. 14-15). However, for the purpose of this document, it is important to point out that the very existence of programs such as these seems to suggest that there are gaps in Canada’s youth employment strategies.

Some ground-level organizations do exist that try to fill this gap. While not geared specifically towards youth, **Prairie Skills Employment Services Project** created a website that has local community job boards that connect people to employment opportunities within their area. In addition, assistance is provided in creating a resume and cover letters, as well as providing tips for conducting oneself in an interview. Similar services already exist locally within Wellington County through **Wellington County Social Services**, a sitting coalition member. This social infrastructure being in place is a positive development for youth in Wellington County. Awareness of and access to these existing services is what remains a significant issue.

Given the current community context, the coalition requested that the Research Shop focus this report on investigating case studies of approaches taken in the international community, where bold initiatives have been enacted to address these issues. First, the **Youth Allowance Fund** in Australia will be investigated as a strategy that might have ideas that could serve as an inspiration to strengthen the social safety net here in Canada. This will be followed by an evaluation of Germany’s **Dual Education System**.
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Youth Allowance Fund (Australia)

Australia’s Youth Allowance Fund is a national program that provides youth between the ages of 16 to 24 with assistance payments every two weeks, depending on their social circumstances. It was introduced in 1998 “to redress perceived disincentives for young people to undertake education and training” and was adjusted in 2010 to make the income and asset test more significant in payout calculation (Ryan, 2014, p. 116). A complete breakdown of eligibility and payments can be found at the link above, but key components of this program will be summarized. Note that this discussion will include payout amounts, and while the figures are in Australian dollars (AUD), the exchange rate between the Australian and Canadian dollar is minimal, at about 3% as of February 2015 (e.g. $1 AUD = $0.97 CAD).

Allowance payments are paid to those who are either studying full-time, engaging in a job-specific training program, undertaking an apprenticeship, looking for work, or even under circumstances in which the individual is sick. Payouts are subjected to an income and assets test, much like Ontario Student Assistance Plan (OSAP) funding here in Ontario. Like OSAP, applicants could be ineligible for payment depending on parent income (Ryan, 2014, p. 117). Yet if determined eligible, even a youth under the age of 18 and living at home could still be eligible for $233.60 every two weeks (a figure which rises to $281.00 when over the age of 18). If you are between the ages of 16-24 and living away from home to study, train, or looking for work, the payment rises to $426.80.

Payouts also vary on whether the youth is a dependent, or meet the Australian government’s criteria to be considered independent. For most citizens, independence criteria are met when one reaches the age of 22; those under the age of 22 can also qualify if they can prove that they, among a multitude of other reasons, are sustaining themselves without assistance from any guardian.

The Youth Allowance Fund also takes living location into account when assessing independence. If living in a rural area, an applicant is eligible for more funding, recognizing that relocation is a reality when looking to improve one’s skills. However, in order to be eligible, one must be moving away from home to pursue training or higher education.

One major strength of this program is it takes into account the context in which the youth lives; and being supportive of youth who deal with, for example, the financial challenges brought upon by having children at a young age. If a youth is a single parent
and looking for work or upgrading skills, bi-weekly amounts of $559.20 are paid. One of the key concerns outlined by rural Ontarian youth in the The Ontario Rural Council Public Forum was teen pregnancy (The Ontario Rural Council, 2007, p. 12). The Australian Government seems to be taking this into account.

This program appears to be having a positive effect, at least for students pursuing higher education. (Bexley, Daroesman, Arkoudis, & James, 2013). The Centre for the Study of Higher Education found that, when comparing student groups in 2006 and 2012, recent students are likely to have more savings, and be less likely to draw from them. However, students from the 2012 investigation reported even higher levels of financial distress (Bexley, Daroesman, Arkoudis, & James, 2013, pp. 6-7). This contradiction between objective reality and Australian youth's perceptions of it is cause for concern.

Another study assessing the effectiveness of the Youth Allowance Fund used longitudinal data that followed youth from 9th grade until they were in their mid-20s (1998-2009) and evaluated their experience with the Youth Allowance. Those who were receiving the youth allowance reported higher levels of financial distress when compared to those who did not. While this may seem counterintuitive, it illustrates that the program may not be fully addressing the inequality that is experienced by youth who do not come from wealthy families (Ryan, 2014, p. 120). Currently, Australia’s youth unemployment rate is almost 15% (Hermant, 2014). Thus, caution should be exercised before deciding on a similar program.

Canada does offer comparable programs through a combination of the EI program and provincial-level student loan programs. For example, the income and assets test that the Youth Allowance Fund subjects applicants to looks similar to the OSAP. Also, EI in Canada covers Canadians who are sick and unable to work, or if one must be away from work to care for a gravely ill relative (Government of Canada, 2014). However, standard employment insurance is only awarded if a job is lost because of lay-off or shortage of work (Government of Canada, 2014). For those who were simply unhappy in their work, the urgency to find a new job may not allow for youth to become engaged and establish informal job contacts in their desired career fields (McDonald, Benton, & Warner, 2012, p. 80). On the surface, the Youth Allowance Fund appears to be less restrictive than the programs we have here. Furthermore, the Australian government also offers student loans above and beyond the Youth Allowance Fund through the Study Assist program.
Still, the Australian study assessing youth satisfaction with their economic reality after having received the payments deserves attention when making evaluations. It is possible that the students surveyed were experiencing relative deprivation; the sample was drawn from students at universities, where youth in less secure financial situations are likely to rub shoulders with youth from more well-off families. However, the Youth Allowance Fund may also serve as a cautionary tale that simply ‘throwing money at a problem’ and hoping that it goes away will not completely address issues in youth employment. It is possible that more comprehensive solutions are required.

**Germany’s Dual Education System**

Another national-level policy initiative worth mention is Germany’s Dual Education System. To put simply, one half of the dual system focuses on academic education, the other half focuses on vocational (job-specific) education and training. The system was partially founded upon the ideas of German philosopher Georg Kerschensteiner (Winch, 2006, pp. 381-382), who first instituted vocational secondary schools as director of Munich’s schools in the early 20th century. His ideas were then entrenched in the federal Vocational Training Act in 1969 (Deissinger, 1997, p. 298). It is an example of cooperation between federal and state governments and the nation’s private sector (Winch, 2006, p. 393). While the option is still available to pursue traditional tertiary education, an alternative path now exists.

Vocational education combines classroom time with practical workplace experience. First, youth graduate from high school between 15-18 years of age, and from here have the option to pursue higher education, or to cater their education to a specific occupation. If the student chooses vocational education, then only one or two days per week is spent in the classroom, while three to four days are spent at a registered business. In these vocational schools, the student is taught theoretical instruction that is relevant to the position they seek; and possibly subjects such as mathematics, social studies, or German (Deissinger, 1997, pp. 297-298). These programs typically last two to three years, and a final exam is taken at the end to determine if they are qualified to enter that specific line of work. (Carroll, 2013).

Thus, Germany has an educational stream that promotes occupation or even firm-specific skills (McDonald, Benton, & Warner, 2012, p. 82). About 60% of German youth opt for the vocational education route. The federal government and the private sector work together in establishing courses for what was more than 350 positions as of 2013. Through this cooperation, there were over 450,000 available trainee positions in 2013,
with about 70,000 left unfilled, although “the available apprenticeships do not always match the kind sought by students” (Carroll, 2013).

Still, this program is worth attention as recent statistics out of Germany peg youth unemployment at 8%, which is low relative to other countries in the European Union, such as Spain (56%) and Italy (38%) (The Economist, 2013). The youth unemployment in Germany is half of Ontario’s rate (16.5%) (Geobey, 2013). In addition, employers seem to be satisfied with the program, as it offers them a three year opportunity to screen applicants at a relatively low cost (Carroll, 2013). At the same time, youth are establishing much needed personal contacts when navigating the world of work (McDonald, Benton, & Warner, 2012, p. 75).

Despite the dual education system’s apparent success, caution is again advised when considering transferring a model from culture to culture (Deissinger, 1997). For example, Germany is renowned for its strong social safety net, which helps to alleviate the urgency to take a job that might not necessarily match the skill level of the applicant (McDonald, Benton, & Warner, 2012, p. 80).

Such a change would also require adjusting our entire economic system, from a liberal market economy (where employment opportunities are defined by supply and demand), to a coordinated market economy, (which governments and the market collaborate to establish a more regulated structure) (McDonald, Benton, & Warner, 2012, pp. 78-79). Employers would likely require the most convincing, as “stronger labor market regulations and union presence in CMEs [coordinated market economies] restricts employers’ options for dealing with exogenous shifts in supply and demand” (McDonald, Benton, & Warner, 2012, p. 79).

Admittedly, the case studies above may not offer tangible solutions that could be implemented by any non-governmental organization. Furthermore, the case studies above are not exactly rural-specific, although there are elements that address the rural reality. Yet these international examples of governments systematically addressing the challenges faced by youth in the job market could produce a focus for advocacy when discussing changes that might be required in our society. Canada might benefit by strengthening our social safety net as has been done with the Youth Allowance Fund in Australia, or they might not, as current employment numbers out of Australia suggest.

Furthermore, Canada could take the bold step of establishing better coordination between market and government as has been demonstrated in Germany. This
suggestion is not new; many have been calling for our education curriculum to adapt to the current realities of the job market (The Rural Ontario Institute, 2014, p. 11). Whereas this section focused on more national-level changes required to improve access and opportunities to employment for youth, the next section on transportation offers more concrete solutions that could be more relevant to and potentially implemented at the local level.

Transportation

Due to the lack of public transportation services, rural residents are often restricted to private resources (e.g. a family vehicle) for mobility (Culliney, 2013, p. 62). Often there is no access, due to parents requiring a vehicle for work, or the expense/maintenance costs of a vehicle which make it difficult to afford. However, public transportation has been proven possible in rural communities across Canada, as well as here in Ontario (McCue, Tolentino, & MacDonald, 2014).

With some form of public transport in place, a community stands to benefit in many ways. The National Center for Transit Research in the United States produced a report that highlighted three main benefits of public transit:

1. Transportation cost savings
2. Low-cost mobility benefits

Transportation cost savings to residents includes savings on taxis and savings on vehicle ownership and insurance (2014, p. 11).

When referring to low-cost mobility benefits, the authors are referring to savings associated with, for example, taking a trip to the doctor for a check-up. Those without access to transportation might skip an appointment that could have detected a small problem before it becomes a larger problem which may require an ambulance trip (2014, p. 12), which costs $45.00 here in Ontario (Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, 2011). Therefore, low-cost mobility benefits refer to trips that would otherwise not be made in the absence of public transportation.

Economic benefits were estimated earnings that a local government and its citizens could expect as the result of the existence of public transit. It can have direct economic
benefits, through the creation of jobs that are directly tied to the transit system (e.g. drivers and dispatchers), as well as indirect effects on industries that are loosely affiliated with the transit industry, such as mechanical or insurance. Economic activity as the result of linking citizens to local business could also qualify as an economic benefit (Godavarthy, Mattson, & Ndeme, 2014, p. 41). Perhaps most relevant to this report is the benefit of helping a community retain its youth population (Transport Canada, 2009, p. 3).

The potential benefits associated with public transportation are numerous, justifying an in-depth discussion. This discussion must recognize the challenges unique to rural communities when trying to implement public transportation. One such challenge is the reality of a dispersed and low density population, which would affect ridership as well as the ability to service everyone in the community as equally as possible. Rural transit systems also need to take into account longer distances increasing operating costs. Finally, a smaller population amounts to a lower tax base for a municipality, which makes the availability of public funding limited (Ragetlie, et al., 2014).

While there are concrete examples of communities overcoming these challenges, determining which strategy is right for the county should only be decided upon following extensive review and self-evaluation, asking questions such as: Could Wellington County adopt a fixed-route transit system, where routes and times are fixed, similar to the now inactive Fergus-Elora route? Or could the county adopt a more inclusive and coordinated demand-response system, modelling Wellington Transportation Services? Could a combination of both be possible? Might it be possible to ‘piggy-back’ onto larger municipal transit systems, a strategy suggested by Transit Canada (2009, p. 2)? Insight that could help answer most of these questions is elaborated upon in the pages to come.

Note: If a municipality is to provide public transportation here in Ontario, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act mandates that any level of transportation service offered must be made available at a comparable level for persons with disabilities (Ragetlie, et al., 2014, p. 14).

**Cost-Benefit Analysis**

Municipalities debating whether to establish public transportation would likely begin with asking about the costs associated with the trip versus the economic benefit to the community. The National Center for Transit Research took a sample of rural areas
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throughout the United States with transportation systems already in place to try to quantify the positive effects. Based on a summary and averaging of the costs of all communities included in the sample, the authors concluded that rural areas faced operating costs of $13.01 USD per trip, relatively high considering the cost in urban areas with populations less than 500,000 ($4.83). However, when calculating the benefits to the community, they determined that each trip created a net benefit of $14.49 per trip (Godavarthy, Mattson, & Ndembe, 2014, p. 45).

For rural areas, this amounts to a ratio of $1.12 of economic benefits for every $1.00 spent. Keep in mind that this figure is conservatively estimating economic benefits, taking into account savings by residents, and the estimated economic benefit to the community at large, among other factors. This is not to say that any particular transit system can expect to generate a 12% profit for running a public transportation system. The authors of this report are making educated estimates of the total economic impact felt by the entire community.

They also note the danger of the generalization they make for rural areas and note that costs and benefits “can vary significantly between individual transit systems based on the types of services they provide and the individuals they serve” (2014, p. 57). The logical next step to take is to evaluate specific initiatives by way of case study. Many attempts to implement rural transportation have been made right here in Ontario. Many of them can be found in the Rural Ontario Institute document “Accelerating Rural Transportation Solutions: Ten Community Case Studies from Ontario,” of which a link can be accessed in the references section of this report. Brief summaries of selected case studies will be highlighted here. Others, such as the Fergus-Elora Bus Route, and TaxiBus services in Quebec, will also be investigated. Each transit system summarized share one distinct trait: all programs referenced in this report operate to serve every citizen in their community.

**Fergus-Elora Community Bus Service**

The Community Bus Service linking Fergus and Elora was a joint partnership between the Centre Wellington Social Justice Group (CWSJG) and Elliot Coach Lines. It began with public meetings hosted by the CWSJG in both Fergus and Elora, where CWSJG heard that there was an appetite for public transportation in both communities. CWSJG then reached out to Elliot Coach Lines looking for guidance on how to establish this service, and were met with a private company that was willing to operate the service.
themselves on a non-profit basis. Elliot Coach Lines only wanted to recover operating costs (fuel and driver costs) (Centre Wellington Social Justice Group, 2014).

The service ran from June through December of 2013. Elliot Coach Lines was forced to make the difficult decision to discontinue the service, as they had lost a total of $15,000 on operating costs during the six month trial. The project was undone by low ridership and the inability to secure private sector sponsorship, despite offers to make businesses a destination stop along the route. In regards to low ridership, their research suggested that this is something that takes time to build. However, because the service was losing an estimated $2,500 a month, at $4.50 per fare, negating losses through ridership alone would have required an additional 550 trips per month.

Another reason that this partnership could not be sustained, given the circumstances, is that the joint operation did not find other revenue streams to compensate Elliot for their losses. They started operating the service in June, and did not begin seeking sponsorship until October. While they had pledges worth $6,000 by December (Centre Wellington Social Justice Group, 2014), it was not enough to sustain the partnership.

Future partnerships with private bus services and social organizations might work, by taking the intelligent ideas attempted by the CWSJG and simply rearranging the order in which they were implemented (e.g. securing private sponsorship/advertising revenue prior to beginning operation). However, the fact that this group took a risk and tried to bring a service to their community is act to be commended as much as it is project to be learned from.

**Kawartha Lakes Rural Route Transit.**

The City of Kawartha Lakes runs a bus service linking the surrounding communities, including Bobcaygeon, Dunsford, Fenelon Falls, and Lindsay. It is a hybrid between fixed-route and demand-response services. Running Monday through Saturday, 7AM until 7PM, each ride costs $5.00. There is also a Dial a Ride service for registered customers that live within 150 metres of the route, where the bus will deviate from its normal route to pick up those who prove unable to reach the prescheduled stop. The service runs two loops, which take two hours to complete (McCue, Tolentino, & MacDonald, 2014, p. 48). Routes and information are available [here](#).

The project in Kawartha Lakes (population 73,214 in 2011) is notable for a few reasons. First, they began with a trial run of a strictly fixed-route service in 2011, which was not successful, before succeeding with the introduction of the hybrid Dial a Ride service in
2013. Secondly, there is evidence of ridership building over time, as the CWSJG suggested in an evaluation of their own program. In January of 2014, they had 508 riders. By May, that number had increased by 80% to 929 (McCue, Tolentino, & MacDonald, 2014, p. 51). If counting the initial trial with strictly fixed-route service, ridership increased substantially over three years.

Start-up funding was not an issue with this transit system, as the City of Kawartha Lakes has a contract with Mole Ground Transportation to deliver the service. The program is completely funded by fares and the funding received through the provincial gas tax program (2014, pp. 51-52).

**Taxibus**

If buses are considered financially impractical, or a contract with a private company is not possible, there are alternatives. Other communities (with populations of ~40,000), such as Victoriaville or Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, Quebec, offer Taxibus services as an alternative. Ranging from $4-5 per ride, patrons give advance notice of a time they are required to be somewhere, and wait at a predetermined stop for the service. A coordinator can make the service more cost-efficient, instructing a driver to pick up multiple passengers along a route. The TaxiBus service serves as an example of an effective demand-response service that exists because passengers and coordinators plan routes ahead of time.

Other communities in Quebec allow those who aren’t school-aged children empty seats on school buses, although insurance or regulatory requirements may be a hurdle to overcome (Transport Canada, 2009, p. 26). These are examples of innovative solutions that take advantage of services already in place (as is the case with filling empty seats on school buses), or innovating traditional services (such as a taxi service).

**Rural Service – Community Care Northumberland**

Northumberland is a county that borders the shores of Lake Ontario, and includes municipalities such as Cobourg and Port Hope. It has a population of 85,390. Community Care Northumberland is a collection of social services in the area, supporting residents in need (McCue, Tolentino, & MacDonald, 2014, p. 18). It recently reorganized its Specialized Transportation program, and part of this program provides a Rural Service not only for residents in need due to their mental or physical condition, but to all residents in the county. This is not a fixed-route service, but works as follows:
The rural service is currently operating in Cramahe & Alnwick/Haldimand Townships as well as the Municipality of Trent Hills, with limited transportation to/from the Municipality of Brighton. Riders must be registered to use this service and those under 16 years of age must be accompanied by an adult. Bookings are handled through a centralized scheduling office that serves all residents across the County. The scheduling office has information on each registered client’s needs and appropriate resources are booked to ensure each individual client’s needs are met. (2014, p. 22)

The Specialized Transportation program consists of six vans, four of which are wheelchair accessible. Each van accumulates 90,000km per year, projecting to be in operation for five years (2014, p. 23). Fares cost $5.00 each, although if required to transfer to another route, this fare must be paid as well (2014, p. 24). Family rates can be negotiated, and youth under the age of 16 only pay $2.50. Riders can use this service for any purpose – from medical appointments to social activities.

This service is notable as it uses a demand-response model that serves all residents. It was initially funded through a combination of Ontario Disability Support Program Funding, which Community Care was already receiving for its other services, and an Ontario Trillium foundation grant. An $80,000 grant was awarded, $20,000 of which went to purchasing a wheelchair-accessible van (with $60,000 going to operating costs). Community Care also received $20,000 from Northumberland Community Futures Development Corporation (McCue, Tolentino, & MacDonald, 2014, p. 23).

Clearly, donations and grants played a role in the success of this transportation service, amounting to $105,000. The operating costs are estimated to work out to $28.00 per rider, for a trip that takes 25 minutes. Operating costs include wages and benefits for staff, fuel costs, insurance, licenses and maintenance (2014, p. 25). The participating municipalities sustain this program with their allowance from the provincial gas tax fund.

**One Common Thread: Funding**

The above case studies serve as contrasting examples of transportation initiatives in the province of Ontario. The Fergus-Elora bus route was a strict fixed-route service; Kawartha Lakes Rural Transit operates as a hybrid model, whereas Northumberland Community Care’s rural transportation operates strictly as a demand-response service. The TaxiBus service also deserves attention as a significant improvement on the traditional taxi service model. There are many other examples that can be found in the
Accelerating Rural Transport case study document, ready for review. However, while each transportation service has its own service delivery strategy, where they do not differ is in the need for funding beyond ridership fares. Under most circumstances, significant upstart funding was required, and public dollars were required to sustain the projects.

**Upstart Funding Sources**

While the Fergus-Elora bus route and Kawartha Lakes Rural Transit benefited from having a pre-established transportation partner, the case studies highlighted and even other initiatives that are not covered in depth in this report had access to significant sources of funding to assist with upstart costs. For example, in the case of Deseronto Transit, an initial $225,000 grant was issued in 2007 through the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, with an $85,000 private grant provided in 2008 to purchase a new bus, and a $20,000 capital grant awarded through the federal Homelessness Partnering Initiative in 2009 (McCue, Tolentino, & MacDonald, 2014, p. 39).

RideNorfolk’s first transportation coordinator funded by the South Central Ontario Region, which is a group of five municipalities that pooled resources to help transition from being counties that predominately produce tobacco to areas dominated by other crops. The Rotary Club and United Way also provided contributions. In their case, no upfront investments were required, much like the Fergus-Elora initiative, the bus service is contracted (2014, p. 73).

The point being made here is that a transportation program’s chances of success are increased if significant initial funding sources exist, or if a partnership can be established with a private transportation partner. Another potential source of upstart funding not mentioned in any case studies can be found at the federal level, where a municipality or non-government organization can apply for infrastructure initiatives by way of the Small Communities Fund through the Department of Infrastructure. It is available to communities with a population of less than 100,000 – with funding available for projects such as public transit (Infrastructure Canada, 2014).

**Operating Funding: The Provincial Gas Tax**

The Provincial Gas Tax fund is another source of revenue that is used to build and sustain rural transportation projects. Trout Public Transport out of Bancroft relied on a combination of funds from the gas tax rebate, and $100,000 in funding from the
Community Futures Development Corporation in its first two years (McCue, Tolentino, & MacDonald, 2014, p. 87). However, some transportation initiatives began prior to the introduction of the gas tax allocation to public transportation, and today use the funds to sustain the programs.

Since 2004, the Province of Ontario has been allocating 1 cent/litre of funding received through taxes on gasoline to municipalities. This amount increased two 2 cents/litre per year in 2006. The passing of Dedicated Funding for Public Transportation Act in 2013 made the 2 cents/litre concept permanent, and allowed for provincial gas tax revenue to be awarded to municipalities for the purpose of providing public transportation by way of public grants (Ministry of Transportation, 2014, p. 3).

The Ministry determines an allocation of funds based on ridership (which determines 70% of funding), as well as population size of the municipality (30%). Ridership data is provided by the Canadian Urban Transit Association, with population determined by the Ministry of Finance, using census data (Ministry of Transportation, 2014, p. 5). Funds received through the Gas Tax program cannot exceed 75% of the municipality’s own spending on transit, providing incentive to pay for transit through the tax base. Therefore, a municipality cannot rely on only gas tax allocation to pay for public transportation. However, if many municipalities are contributing to one transportation service, each of their respective populations are taken into account.

If a municipality is not currently providing public transportation, a “Municipal by-law indicating intent and financial commitment to annual funding support” is required (Ministry of Transportation, 2014, p. 10) to be eligible for gas tax funding. Contact information for those who administer the program in the Ministry of Transportation can be found here.

Active Transportation

Communities can benefit from making their roads and town centres more pedestrian friendly. By doing so, a community is making itself more conducive to Active Transportation. Even paving the shoulders on well-travelled routes could encourage cycling in non-winter months as well as reduce maintenance costs, as the Town of View Royal, British Columbia discovered (Transport Canada, 2009, p. 10). Wellington County is cognizant of this, and in 2012 released an Active Transportation Plan dedicated to creating an environment in which people will cycle or walk for both recreational and
utilitarian purposes (Wellington County, 2012). Details of plans outlined for active transportation in Wellington County can be found here.

**Rural Transit and Improving Access to/Awareness of Mental Health Services**

Improving transportation in rural areas could have benefits closely related to and beyond increasing access to employment opportunities. As mentioned prior, public transportation would provide access to the local economy, as well as any required health and/or social services. However, accessing mental healthcare in a rural community has a unique set of challenges associated. Even in 2015, there still seems to be a stigmatization of those experiencing mental health challenges. This problem is complicated by the fact that rural communities tend to be tight-knit, which means that residents sometimes give up a sense of confidentiality (Centre for Rural and Northern Health Research, n.d., p. 2). This problem is further compounded by extensive waiting lists, and the likely prospect of receiving an out-of-town referral (p. 3). Nonetheless, increasing transit options for youth living in rural areas has the potential to remove barriers in accessing employment services and important mental health services, which may significantly impact a youths’ ability to obtain and maintain employment and good mental wellbeing (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2009, p. 3).

**CONCLUSIONS**

The bulk of this report has focused on improving some of the structures that surround rural youth. While case studies of national-level strategies to address youth employment were investigated, no attention was paid to improving social services at the local level. This is because many great social services organizations already exist in Wellington County, many of which are members of the North Wellington Coalition for Youth Resiliency. The issue, it is believed here, has to do with improving awareness and access to these services.

Community resiliency worker Alison Vasey is dedicated to, among many other tasks, improving awareness of programs and services available for youth in North Wellington. This report outlined many transportation options that might improve access; and while there are significant costs associated with public transportation, there are models which North Wellington could build upon. Furthermore, public resources are available. In order for youth to thrive, their environment has to be built in such a way to allow them to thrive. Working together, we can build it!
LIMITATIONS

The current report is not a comprehensive overview but instead outlines some relevant strategies to address employment and related retention issues for rural youth and their communities.

While strategies to address transportation were concrete, tangible solutions that an organization like the North Wellington Coalition for Youth Resiliency could build upon, the case studies investigating strategies to address issues with youth employment are not as easy to build from. These strategies could be advocated for, but to fully commit to lobbying for any of these programs could end up being a massive time investment. Nonetheless, this report provides insight into relevant national level and local initiatives to address challenges specifically faced by rural youth which may be used to inform future directions of the coalition.
REFERENCES


