

Government of Ontario Local Poverty Reduction Fund

Program Evaluation of La Passerelle-I.D.É.

Final Report

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1. Introduction

La Passerelle-I.D.É. provides a suite of programs targeted at Francophone immigrants, encompassing cultural competency, essential skills acquisition, labour market insertion and entrepreneurship development. In each of these areas, La Passerelle-I.D.É. (henceforth, ‘LP’) has fine-tuned its unique, innovative approaches. In addition LP has convened the Francophone Workforce Development Council – an intersectoral body that brings together key stakeholders among employers, government ministries, service providers and educational/training institutions.

The leadership of LP believes that employment, entrepreneurship and income outcomes for Francophone immigrants and racialized minority youth can be improved through a culturally adapted pedagogical method that focuses on: a) enhancing individual social capital and networks; b) increasing the availability of information about job opportunities and the skills needed by employers; c) building technical skills in response to employer-identified needs, and key competencies related to launching a business; d) improving business English proficiency; e) improving cultural competencies, soft-skills and knowledge of business practices; and, f) increasing personal confidence and assertiveness outside of an individual’s comfort zone.

LP’s approach also considers how employers can positively change their own attitudes and hiring practices to create more employment opportunities for Francophone immigrant/racialized minority youth, through: communicating the potential economic impact of hiring such youth; formal, sustained employer engagement; needs-related consultation/demand-informed research; Francophone labour force planning; and, tailored, demand-driven curriculum design and training.

2. Evaluation Questions

Two core questions guided this evaluation of LP’s programs:

- 1) What are the outcomes, over time, in terms of poverty and employment indicators for participants in La Passerelle-I.D.É.’s various poverty reduction interventions?
- 2) How have the recruitment and human resource management practices of employers changed as a result of FWDC partnership engagement?

3. Evaluation Design Components

The evaluation includes three major stakeholder groups: service users; employers; and the Francophone Workforce Development Council (FWDC). A two-wave survey and two focus group discussions were conducted with service users and they are described in Part 4 below. A short survey was administered to employers who took part in the Déjeuner Conférence program, which comprises networking and recruitment events organized by LP. These results are discussed in Part 5. The results of interviews with FWDC members are discussed in Part 6.

4. Employment and Entrepreneurship Programs for LP Service Users

a. Methods

A longitudinal study was conducted to assess the impact of the programs offered by LP on the reduction of poverty among its francophone immigrant clients. We used a mixed approach that relied on survey questionnaires and focus group discussions. While the questionnaires allowed for the collection of demographic and socio-economic information, the focus groups aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the quantitative data and to highlight the differences in participants' settlement journey and experience.

All of the data collection tools used in this evaluation were reviewed and approved by the Office of Research Ethics at York University. All participants were given a consent form outlining the purpose of the survey and how the data would be kept confidential. Participants were assured that their participation in the study would be voluntary and that they could refuse to answer any or all of the questions without any consequences in terms of their relationship with LP or their ability to access services.

A number socio-economic and demographic questions, such as country of origin, level of education, work experience, number and age of children, and immigration status, were incorporated into LP's intake form completed by all clients seeking services. The expanded intake form will continue to be used by the agency into the future as a tool to collect key information about their clients that can be analyzed when developing new programs. In fact, all of the tools that have been developed for this evaluation program can be implemented again in the future by LP.

The baseline survey (or Survey 1) included more detailed questions and was conducted at the beginning of the participants' enrollment in one of the courses. Participants were asked about their current or last paid employment in Canada (or their last business venture for those who are self-employed), their income, and their housing arrangements. Several survey questions were drawn directly from existing surveys, including Statistics Canada's Ethnic Diversity Survey and the Labour Force Survey. To ensure that the education question accurately captured the participants' educational attainment, the response options were modified to reflect certificates that are commonly granted in countries that follow the French educational system.

Participants were asked about the programs that they had completed at LP and the degree to which they found them useful in securing employment. There were several questions regarding their employment history in Canada, the compatibility of their job with their educational background, their level of satisfaction, and the precarity of their work status, including whether it was permanent or contractual. Precarity was also assessed using questions related to variation in their average number of hours worked from week to week. In addition, participants were asked to identify their source of income, including any government benefits.

Participants were asked about their housing situation, including: the stability of their housing arrangements; the number of people living with them; and the number of rooms (relative to total occupants) in their dwelling. To get a sense of their overall economic situation, participants were

asked about the cost of their housing, whether they receive any housing subsidy, and the percentage of their income spent on housing.

The follow-up survey (or Survey 2) was conducted several months after the baseline survey. By this point, the participants would have completed their course and have had time to begin to implement the skills they had obtained, whether to search for new employment or start a business. The initial plan was to conduct this second survey six months after the baseline, and to include a third wave with more open-ended questions 18 months after the initial survey. Ultimately, however, great difficulties were faced in obtaining an adequate response rate for the first two surveys, and so the research team opted to conduct one follow-up survey and then focus group discussions using a prepared question guide.

Data collection for the baseline survey began in early November 2016. Following respondents' feedback that the survey was too long and asked too many personal questions, the survey was revised in August 2017 to streamline a number of questions. For example, the question regarding living arrangements was changed to "who do you currently live with?" rather than listing all possible relatives individually. While the baseline survey was supposed to be conducted soon after the participant had completed the intake form and prior to engaging in any courses or services at LP, difficulties in reaching participants created delays and backlogs. As a result, many participants completed the baseline survey several months after their initial registration.

Data collection for the follow-up survey began in June 2017, in time to capture the first set of respondents roughly six months after their initial survey. However, LP staff faced many difficulties reaching participants, including changes in addresses and phone numbers.

In the data, each client was assigned a unique ID number that was generated by the LP's client database. The client ID number was used to record and track the survey responses. This ensured confidentiality. An interview training manual was developed for the staff of LP to familiarize them with ethics protocols and techniques to improve the response rate. A short training was also offered to the staff members who were initially assigned to the project, but subsequent staff members did not receive this training.

While the intake form was completed by the clients, the designated staff member entered the information into the Survey Monkey system. The baseline and follow-up surveys were conducted over the phone and LP staff entered the responses directly into Survey Monkey.

b. Baseline Survey Results

152 baseline surveys were collected during the period November 2016 to October 2018 out of a total of 1,055 invited service users (14.4 percent). With the low response rate, the convenience sample of participants, and the lack of access to data on the full intake population, we are unable to determine the representativeness of the sample and thus the results must be interpreted cautiously and taken as suggestive.

Women made up the majority of baseline survey participants (52.7 percent), while 46 percent were men, and 1.3 percent stated 'other'. Of the 125 participants who provided their ages, the mean age was 35 years. The sample was a highly educated group, over 63 percent having at least a Bachelor's degree, and 42 percent had a Master's or Doctoral degree. Forty participants pursued education in Canada, completing primarily certificate or diploma programs.

Respondents' immigrant status in Canada varied but included mostly permanent residents (34.4 percent), participants with open work permits (24.5 percent), Canadian citizens (13.9 percent), and refugees (7.3 percent). The participants were a recent migrant population, with over 80 percent arriving in 2015 or later. The top four countries of origin were France (30 percent), Cameroon (11.3 percent), Democratic Republic of Congo (10.7 percent), and Haiti (6.7 percent).

One of the key questions of the evaluation relates to the effectiveness of the LP's economic programs, and so at the baseline participants were identified in terms of the programs they attended: PAO, TESS and Tremplin-Emploi. The PAO program focuses on helping entrepreneurs develop their business and marketing plans, as well as familiarizing them with Canadian business law and finance. TESS prepares clients to enter the job market by providing them with training in areas of job search, resume development and English language skills. Tremplin-Emploi is a signature job training program developed by La Passerelle-I.D.É. and is conducted in partnership with a local community college with input from employers. The partner college develops courses based on feedback from employers on the skills and technical knowledge that they require for bilingual francophone positions within their organizations. Participants undertake an intensive four month program to prepare them for work in a particular sector; the first iteration of the program focused on the financial sector. Participants are provided with a Certificate of Completion from the college at the end of the program.

All three programs are supplemented by the additional workshops and networking events that are offered by LP on a regular basis. There is the Déjeuner Conférence whereby employers seeking to fill positions that require bilingual talent meet with pre-screened clients who would be suitable for the listed positions. Employers conduct an initial interview with the selected participants and invite suitable candidates for follow-up interviews. PAO also conducts a brunch program where entrepreneurs are given a chance to meet established business owners to get feedback on their ideas and to network. Finally, Compétences Culturelles is a workshop that introduces the clients to the norms and practices of the Canadian workplace as well as culture in general.

The majority of study participants in the survey (53.3 percent) did not participate in any of the economic programs at the time of the baseline survey. The breakdown of participants in the economic programs were as follows: PAO participants comprised 8.6 percent, TESS 12.5 percent, and Tremplin-Emploi 17.8 percent. Nearly 8 percent participated in more than one of these economic programs. Due to these small sample sizes, we grouped all economic program participants into a single group and compared economic program participants with non-economic.

c. Follow-up Survey Results

Of the 152 baseline surveys, there is a follow-up survey from 71 participants (or 46.7 percent). Follow-up surveys were collected between June 2017 and February 2019, and range from four months post baseline to 20 months post baseline. The varied length of time between baseline and follow-up make comparisons difficult but they still provide valuable information about longitudinal changes.

In the smaller follow-up survey sample, men (52.9 percent) made up the majority, 45.7 percent were women, and 1.4 percent were ‘other’. Of the 52 participants who provided their ages, the mean age in the follow-up survey was 35 years old. Again, this sample was highly educated, over 57 percent had at least a Bachelor’s degree (39 percent had a Master’s or Doctoral degree). Twenty-three participants pursued education in Canada and completed primarily certificate or diploma programs.

The immigrant status of follow-up survey respondents again varied and included mostly permanent residents (37.1 percent), participants with open work permits (14.3 percent), Canadian citizens (12.9 percent), and refugees (12.9 percent). The follow-up group had fewer recent migrants (61.9 percent) arriving in 2015 or later compared to the over 80 percent in the baseline group. The top four countries of origin remained the same: France (21 percent), Cameroon (17.1 percent), Democratic Republic of Congo (12.9 percent), and Haiti (7.1 percent).

Although there was a shift in the gender balance, immigrant status, and length of time in Canada from the baseline to the follow-up survey, the samples were very similar according to age, education and countries of origin.

In the follow-up survey, the majority of study participants had been involved with at least one of LP’s economic programs. Participants in PAO made up 11.3 percent, in TESS 15.5 percent, and in Tremplin-Emploi 23.9 percent. Just over 11 percent participated in more than one economic program.

d. Economic Indicators

Homelessness. At its most basic level, homelessness can simply mean lack of housing. It can also encompass more nuanced housing situations, such as inadequate housing, overcrowding or precarious/temporary living arrangements, or what is referred to as “hidden homelessness” (see Canadian Observatory on Homelessness: <https://www.homelesshub.ca/blog/how-can-we-measure-hidden-homelessness>).

Respondents were asked a number of questions that aimed to identify hidden homelessness. One question in particular asked “how would you characterize your current housing situation? a) permanent, b) short-term/temporary, or c) unstable – at risk of eviction.” Roughly 20 percent of baseline respondents indicated that they were living in a temporary housing situation and 75 percent were in permanent housing. The follow-up sample had a larger percentage living in temporary housing (51 percent) compared to permanent (46 percent), which suggests housing

insecurity increased among this group. One participant in both samples indicated they were at risk of eviction.

In terms of pathways, it appears that 42.6 percent of those who were in permanent housing at the time of the baseline survey remained in permanent housing at the point of the follow-up survey. 6.4 percent transitioned from temporary/short-term to permanent housing. However, 10.6 remained in temporary/short-term housing and 40.4 percent went from permanent housing at the time of the baseline survey to temporary/short-term housing. Reasons for these transitions should be investigated further.

Comparing participants by program (i.e. economic versus non-economic programs), we find there were no differences between program groups at baseline and at follow-up. They appeared to experience the same changes.

Employment status. Baseline respondents were asked about their principal activities over the past month. In the follow-up survey, respondents were asked about their principal activities over the past 6 months. Respondents were not limited to a single response and were asked to select all that applied.

At baseline, 20.4 percent indicated they were working full-time, 12.5 percent part-time, 9.9 percent were self-employed, 8.6 percent were in full-time studies, and 4 percent were in part-time studies. 29 percent indicated they were looking for work. At follow-up, 23.9 percent of the 71 respondents indicated they were working full-time, 22.5 percent part-time, 14.1 percent were self-employed, 9.9 percent were in full-time studies, and 2.8 percent were in part-time studies. 19.7 percent indicated they were looking for work.

Among those who were unemployed at baseline and completed a follow-up survey, nine participants found work full-time, seven participants had worked part-time, one participant was self-employed, two participants were full-time students. Eight remained unemployed. Those who were unemployed at the follow-up survey had part-time work, were students or were unemployed at baseline. None of those who were full-time workers or self-employed at baseline were unemployed at follow-up suggesting full-time work and self-employment offered more stability.

There were no major differences between program groups although the non-economic group was slightly more likely than the economic group to be unemployed at baseline (32 versus 25 percent, respectively) and then slightly less likely at follow-up (18.5 versus 20.5 percent, respectively). Both groups' unemployment numbers dropped.

NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). This is a commonly used indicator to assess the integration of young adults into the labour market. Statistics Canada reports that the NEET rate for 25-29 year olds nationwide has ranged between 15-19 per cent over the last 20 years, including a low point of 15 percent in 2018 (see <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/181010/cg-c001-png-eng.htm>).

We had a much larger age range (from 18 to 72 years old) at both baseline and follow-up surveys. However, over 66 percent were 35 years or younger in the baseline giving us a generally younger population. 24 percent of participants at baseline were not in education, employment or training. In the follow-up survey, the percentage of participants who were NEET was 13 percent. Between the baseline and follow-up surveys, 5.6 percent remained NEET, 7 percent became NEET, and 21 percent found education or employment (there were no respondents in training).

In terms of program groups, there were few differences between them, although the economic group was slightly less NEET at both survey points (22.5 versus 26 percent, respectively, at baseline and 11.4 versus 15 percent, respectively, at follow-up). In addition, both groups similarly dropped in their percentage of NEET participants.

Long-term unemployment. Defined as unemployed for 27 weeks or longer, this indicator was measured by asking respondents about their activities over the previous months at both data collection point. The intake form and baseline respondents were asked about their principal activities over the past one month. Response options included: working part-time; working full-time; self-employed; looking for paid work; attending school full-time; attending school part-time; caring for own children (unpaid); caring for other family member (unpaid); maternity/paternity leave; long term illness; and 'other'. In addition, those who had indicated that they were not employed, they were asked the date of their last paid employment in Canada to determine whether they had paid employment at some point. In the follow-up survey, respondents were asked about their principle activities over the past 6 months. (see <https://www.ontario.ca/page/labour-market-report-june-2017>)

At baseline, of those not employed and having lived in Canada for roughly one year, 54 percent had never held a job in Canada. Thus, roughly half of the unemployed experienced long-term unemployment after arrival. At the follow-up survey, 42.9 percent of those unemployed indicated they did not work during the prior six months. Five participants, who had never held a job in Canada after living here for at least one year and were unemployed at both survey points (baseline and follow-up), remained without work experience. Overall, long-term unemployment declined among LP clients.

Among the unemployed, there were slight differences between program groups in terms of their long-term unemployment after arrival in Canada (58.6 percent for the economic group, 50 percent for the non-economic group). However, the economic group was much less likely to be long-term unemployed at follow-up (33 percent) compared to the non-economic group (60 percent). It seems the economic program participants were able to find some employment between baseline and follow-up. This may be attributed to participation in the program as well as selection effects, in that those in the economic program may have had stronger motivations to find employment. Note that the sample sizes are small and these results are merely suggestive, not conclusive.

Financial security. Statistics Canada defines the low-income measure as a fixed percentage, usually 50 or 40 percent, of the median adjusted after-tax income of private households. The income is adjusted to account for different household sizes. Unfortunately, due to the personal nature of the income question and the discomfort among participants when asked, less than half

the observations had useable data for household income, which is required to estimate this measure. No household income was requested in the follow-up survey, only personal income.

Fortunately, we included other measures of poverty in the baseline and follow-up survey. These other questions related to sources of income and whether they were able to make ends meet or cover their basic needs, which are often used in surveys of poverty due to the sensitive nature of questions of income as well as reliability and validity issues related to income-based measures of poverty.

In terms of income sources, sixteen participants at baseline indicated they received government assistance or benefits in some form, and ten participants had this form of income at follow-up. Based on the other two questions, whether they had enough to make ends meet or cover basic needs, we have seemingly different stories. While the majority at both baseline and follow-up indicated they were able to make ends meet, and more so at follow-up with 64.6 percent versus 56.5 percent at baseline, a greater percentage expressed inability to cover their basic needs (baseline 71.3 percent and follow-up 84.6 percent). There could be several explanations for this inconsistency. First, the variables were not coded consistently, and we had 85-87 valid responses (56-57 percent) out of the baseline sample of 152 respondents. Second, there were differences in the ways the questions were asked; the question about making ends meet was a scale while the question on basic needs requested a dichotomous “Yes/No” answer. Finally, to the extent that the result is valid, it may suggest that while participants make do with what they have and perhaps they become more adept at managing the limited finances they do have but they are not sufficient to meet basic needs.

After examining the different types of program participants and these variables, we continue to find inconsistencies. Economic program participants indicated they were less able to make ends meet at baseline (51 percent had no difficulty) compared to non-economic participants (63 percent) yet they were more likely to make ends meet at follow-up (75 versus 48 percent, respectively). At the same time, economic program participants were less likely than non-economic participants to have trouble covering basic expenses (67 versus 76 percent, respectively) at baseline, but more likely to have trouble at follow-up (93 versus 72 percent); they increased in insecurity over the period in terms of basic needs. Economic program participants were also more likely to be on government assistance at both survey points (roughly 14-18 percent versus 7 percent of non-economic program participants).

e. Focus Group Discussions with LP Clients

Two focus groups were held, in December 2018 and February 2019. Each lasted about two hours and included six participants who had participated in a cross-section of LP programs. While the first focus group was conducted by an external facilitator, the second was conducted by an LP staff member. Participants were asked to identify the most memorable aspects of the programs in which they participated, the impact of the program in terms of finding a job or preparing them for the workplace, ways in which the program could be improved, and what other programs or services would assist them in finding appropriate work or helping them settle in Canada.

The limited size of the groups means that the results are limited in their usefulness, but several themes arose that were not otherwise discernable from survey results:

- There is a need for more specialized English language programs for francophones. It was also noted that the focus should be more on technical English language skills and not merely conversational language skills;
- Basic computer skills training is more important than is perhaps realized because those with management level positions ‘back home’ may have had little direct experience in using computer hardware and software (a role handled by more junior staff);
- Entrepreneurship programs are good but if funds to follow through on entrepreneurship ideas are not available then the time is wasted;
- A recurrent theme was that the parent and child program was extremely valuable, and participants tended to see cultural programs as part of an integrated package with the more explicitly employment-related programs;
- A number of participants indicated that the cultural competency workshop helped to introduce them to Canadian culture and workplace practices. It also served as confidence boost in tackling the job search process;
- Participants suggested that career advisory services and a mentoring program to connect former and current students and professionals in relevant fields would be useful.

f. Summary

The picture we have of LP clients’ economic and employment changes over time is complex. In this evaluation, we examined data related to housing, employment status, NEET rates, long-term unemployment, and financial security. While some indicators show improvement over time, others raise questions and concerns. All deserve further inquiry and examination. We also emphasize that the results discussed here are not conclusive as there were unexpected issues and changes to the research design and implementation, including staff turnover, after we began the evaluation and this led to challenges with sample size, validity of data, comparability, and response rates and missing data.

With those words of caution, we do find some evidence of positive changes in economic circumstances for all service users, particularly in terms of employment, NEET rates, long-term unemployment, and managing money. However, there is also some evidence of on-going and increased challenges with housing and financial security to meet basic needs. What the evidence suggests is that service users, in both the economic and non-economic programs, are likely to have benefited from the information shared and training received but this seemed to manifest more in terms of part-time employment. Participants continue to face on-going challenges to full-time employment and self-employment, which appeared to be more stable. Thus, LP’s economic programs may be beneficial for reducing unemployment rates and long-term unemployment rates, however these improvements may be more likely to be associated with part-time work. Over the period of study, participants had less permanent housing and felt they were unable to cover basic expenses (of which housing would be one). Yet, again, we must be cautious to not simply attribute causation of these outcomes to agency programs, particularly when the data

collection process faced problems and we were unable to control for external and internal factors.

Rather, this study highlights the importance of using multiple indicators to show the multi-faceted nature of poverty, the need for research strategies to connect with precarious workers, the need for agencies to be able to offer stable and well-paid employment to conduct these kinds of evaluations, and, importantly, the need to address structural factors as well, particularly as they relate to employers.

5. Employer Surveys

Déjeuner Conférence is a recruitment event that aims to bring francophone clients together with employers who are seeking to hire bilingual francophone talent. These events, which are held at LP's office, serve as a preliminary screening process where employers are able to conduct short interviews with applicants and invite suitable candidates for follow-up interviews. In addition, the familiar surroundings at LP provide the clients with a sense of comfort, which helps them to overcome any anxiety associated with the job interview process.

A short survey was distributed to employers one month following their participation in a Déjeuner Conférence event to get their feedback on the applicants' levels of job preparedness, language capacity and soft skills. Employers were also asked about the salary and benefits of the positions that they were seeking to fill, as well as the number of clients that they had interviewed, invited for a second interview, and hired.

A total of seven employers, all of whom had participated in a recruitment event organized by and held at LP, completed the survey. They represented diverse sectors: two were from technology; one hospitality; one media; one education; one finance and insurance services; and one staffing agency that was seeking to identify candidates mainly for finance and insurance services. While all of the employers would be considered large companies, 5 out of the 7 have 500 or more employees and the remaining two have 100 – 499 employees. All indicated that they have offices outside of Ontario, conduct work in French for dealing with customers and/or clients locally, nationally or internationally; 4 out of the 7 employers indicated that they use French often through the normal conduct of their company, 2 use French sometimes and 1 did not respond.

In terms of recruitment strategies, of the 7 employers, 6 indicated that they use “college/university campus recruitment”, 4 use “community organization recruitment”, 4 use “private recruitment services”, 3 use “open recruitment events”, 4 use “temporary agencies”, 4 use “online job search sites”, 5 use “company’s website”, 3 use “database of resumes submitted” and only 1 uses “Newspaper (print and/or online)”. The reliance on recruitment events and temporary agencies highlights how job opportunities may be hidden in some sense from the general public; job seekers would need to be connected with a college/university, community organization or recruitment and temporary agencies in order to get connected with employers.

While 5 of the employers indicated that they were seeking to fill open positions, only four provided details about the job openings. Most were full-time permanent positions (over 30 hours

per week), 3 of the 7 positions paid \$11.41 - \$14.99/hour (minimum wage \$11.41/hour at that time), one paid \$15.00 - \$19.99, one paid \$20.00 - \$29.99/hour and one paid \$30.00 - \$39.99/hour. Most of the positions only required high school level education; only one required university level and two required college level education. Hence, the majority of the jobs were entry level positions that did not require high levels of education.

In terms of the employers' assessment of the quality of the pool of candidates that had attended the event, they provided the following feedback:

	Level of educ	Work experience outside Canada	Work experience in Canada	English language skills	Technical or job skills	Inter-personal skills	Job readiness	Professional self-presentation	Knowledge of your sector	Knowledge of your business needs
Excellent	4	1					1	1		
Very good	2	3	1	1	4	4	4	4	2	3
Good	1	3	3	3	2	3	1	1	3	2
Acceptable			2	3	1		1		1	2
Poor			1						1	
No Answer								1		

It is interesting to note that employers rate the clients' work experience outside of Canada fairly highly (mostly excellent or very good), but their work experience in Canada was viewed as good or acceptable and one employer noted it was poor. Employers had a positive view of the clients' technical and interpersonal skills, as well as their job readiness and professional self-representation. They found the applicants' English language skills to be largely good or acceptable and the applicants' awareness of the employers' sector to be mostly good or acceptable. This may be in part due to some of the programs, such as Cultural Competency, and workshops that LP offers to its clients. It seems that the English language training is insufficient or does not meet the specific requirements of the employers; this is a point that was raised by the clients who had participated in the focus group sessions as a weakness in the programs at LP. Hence, it would be important for the organization to examine the types of English language training that are currently offered and to augment the program so as to meet the needs of employers.

In terms of the basis on which candidates were selected for a follow-up interview, most employers noted work experience abroad (4 out of 7), French language skills (5 out of 7), and English language skills (4 out of 7). Only one noted education and technical skills as deciding factors; this was the employer that was seeking to fill the \$30.00 - \$39.99/hour position that required a university level education. Interestingly, 3 employers cited lack of English language skills as a factor in deciding not to invite candidates for a follow-up interview.

6. The Francophone Workforce Development Council

Background

The final component of this evaluation concerns the work of the Francophone Workforce Development Council (FWDC). Our purpose here is to study the role and effectiveness of the FWDC, not in terms of a direct impact on poverty reduction indicators, which would clearly be unrealistic, but instead within the terms of its own mandate.

The FWDC was established as an initiative of La Passerelle-IDÉ (LP) and met for the first time on September 24th 2015. The Council is co-chaired by Mme Léonie Tchatat and Dr Catherine Chandler-Crichlow. It comprises representatives from the private sector, government and educational institutions. The council met 10 times between September 2015 and October 2018. In most cases between 10 and 14 members have attended, not including the co-chairs and LP staff.

The mandate of the FWDC (paraphrased from its *Terms of Reference* document) are as follows:

- 1) Advise LP on strategies to expand and strengthen the francophone bilingual talent pipeline in the Toronto region
- 2) Identify and set priorities to address issues that negatively affect the supply of francophone talent
- 3) Maintain a current understanding of workforce needs in priority sectors where demand is projected for francophone bilingual talent
- 4) Ongoing review and guidance on tactical activities to ensure a results-driven and market-informed francophone bilingual talent agenda for the Toronto region
- 5) Assist in mobilizing support from major stakeholders to develop francophone bilingual workforce development initiatives including research, outreach, marketing, communications and policy recommendations

Methods

In evaluating the effectiveness of the FWDC our purpose was to assess if the Council was fulfilling its stated goals. Based on the Council's mandate, noted above, a set of indicators was established for this evaluation:

- 1) The existence of a clear and shared agenda, and defined roles, for the FWDC
- 2) The existence of an approved first year work plan (including communications/marketing strategy, research strategy, curriculum development strategy)
- 3) Confirmation of buy-in from stakeholders
- 4) Evidence of increased understanding of the value of francophone talent among participating FWDC members
- 5) Diversified sectoral representation on the FWDC

- 6) The generation of research-based projections of labour market needs for francophone bilingual talent in diverse industries/sectors in the GTA
- 7) The development of tailored curricula to respond to labour market needs in the GTA

While the initial proposal for this evaluation envisioned a survey questionnaire of FWDC members, the limited number of participants, the diversity of the organizations that they represent, and the mostly qualitative basis for assessing the realization of the mandate, meant that guided interviews made more sense as a technique to gather feedback.

Interviews were conducted with 14 members of the Council in August and September 2017. Each interview lasted 30-50 minutes and was conducted and transcribed by a York University graduate student with no relationship to LP and under the supervision of the external research consultants.

It is important to note that the evaluation of the FWDC was conducted at a specific point in time when the Council had been operating for approximately two years, although some Council members had been involved for a year or less. The findings presented here are therefore representative only of the membership and experience of the Council at that time. To supplement interviews, we have also reviewed all available minutes from FWDC meetings between September 2015 and June 2018.

The following sections outline the findings for each of the seven indicators listed above.

i) Clarity of Agenda and Roles for the FWDC

There was widespread enthusiasm and admiration among Council members for the way in which the FWDC has been convened and the efficiency with which its discussions have been conducted. Many commented on the constructive, convivial and professional way in which the meetings of the Council have been run.

While a positive view is to be expected among those who have self-selected to serve on the Council, it is notable that, on the whole, those who have become engaged have stayed engaged. This applies even among private sector participants, for whom commitment to such meetings is assessed according to their 'bottom line' usefulness.

Nevertheless, it does appear that greater clarity could be sought in terms of the longer-term mandate of the Council. One respondent suggested that the FWDC should:

“really do a rethink on what is their position and what role do they want to play? It is about banking? Is it about workforce development? Or is it about ... conducting various high-level research? Like what is the role as a Council, and what is the role of La Passerelle as a participant and as the secretariat?” (Education/training sector, FWDC member, 2017)

One view of the FWDC is that it should seek to foster an effective talent ‘pipeline’ for employers needing francophone and bilingual recruits, and it should do this by advising on training programs that directly meet labour market needs:

“I think one of the bigger functions of the Council is the creation of targeted training programs, like the one for financial security advisor that's being developed and delivered by Seneca College over at La Passerelle” (Government sector, FWDC member, 2017)

In this way, the FWDC serves as an advisory board for LP to ensure that its programs are directly relevant to the needs of large recruiters looking for francophone or bilingual talent. Indeed, one FWDC member suggested that LP is the ‘operational arm’ of the council:

“I think the reason why the Council is successful, so to speak, is because the operational arm of the Council is La Passerelle.” (Government sector, FWDC member, 2017)

The development of training programs, with the advice and support of FWDC members, is certainly one aspect of the FWDC mandate. However, the view that LP is the ‘operational arm’ of the FWDC speaks to a need for further clarity in the relationships between the two. In its inception, the FWDC was a creation of LP, and the LP acts as its secretariat and co-chair. It is not clear, though, if the FWDC is designed to assist LP or if LP is designed to execute initiatives devised at the Council, or both. It might make sense to refer FWDC members to the Council’s Terms of Reference.

If the FWDC is to convene discussion on wider issues in the longer term, then LP should perhaps be seen as a participant in the Council, rather than the executing agency for initiatives conceived at the Council.

Some members of the Council see a need for this relationship to be clarified

“I think what for me would be most important would be for the Workforce Council to define itself in relation to La Passerelle, is it the same thing? ... Is it there to serve La Passerelle or is it there to look at the francophone position within a workforce development ecosystem? I don’t know if I am advising La Passerelle or the Workforce Council” (Education/training sector, FWDC member, 2017)

This implies that in the long term there needs to be a discussion concerning the mandate of the FWDC. Can it simultaneously be an advisory board for LP or should it be seeking a larger role in terms of leading discussion, research and advocacy on the issue of francophone immigrant integration? Can it do both, or is it unrealistic for LP to act as the ‘operational arm’ for a larger mandate?

One participant suggested a more focused three-part mandate for the Council, revolving around labour market research, mobilizing joint initiatives between employers and educators, and building relationships across sectors:

“To me, as I said, the research or the evidence base, the mobilization of both employers and educational institutions and bringing them together, and the relationship building.... If I were them, I’d streamline the mandate. I would really concentrate on these three things and then simply spell out how they are going to do this...” (Government sector, FWDC member, 2017)

One FWDC participant also suggested that a greater advocacy role is a logical next step, having convened key players. In particular, the Council could seek to influence government policies and programs: “as a powerful group we should be able to get the ear of various ministries and Ministers” (Education/training sector, FWDC member, 2017). The task then is to craft an agenda for such advocacy.

ii) The Existence of an Approved Work Plan

An initial indicator for this evaluation exercise was the “existence of an approved first year work plan including a communications/marketing strategy, a research strategy and a curriculum development strategy”. However, given that the FWDC is not an executing agency, it seems unrealistic to expect it to have a plan of this kind. This speaks, perhaps, to the blurring of functions between FWDC and LP discussed above. To the best of our knowledge, such a plan does not exist. Rather, FWDC meetings have comprised of discussions around the following issues:

- Reporting on LP activities and events
- Discussion of LP programming and where FWDC members might contribute
- Debating ideas regarding future programming that is needed, or areas of other support for francophone youth
- Sharing of employers’ experiences in hiring, training and assessing recruits
- Broader discussion of labour market trends and opportunities
- Updates on policy developments and studies/reports

iii) Confirmation of Buy-in from Stakeholders

It was clear from our interviews that the members of the FWDC have a strong commitment to its goals. As noted earlier, there is obviously some self-selection involved here, as the Council’s active members are likely to be those who care about the issues that it addresses. Nevertheless, participants found the meetings to be valuable and expressed an impressive level of enthusiasm for the work of the Council.

There were several reasons for this ‘buy-in’ from participants:

Relationships. Many of the participants were recruited to the Council because of previous contact with the co-chairs. Their initial participation was thus founded on these long-standing and fruitful relationships. The important agency of key actors in convening such a group should not be under-estimated.

Inter-sectoral bridging. For many participants, the Council offers an opportunity to hear the perspectives and experience of stakeholders from other sectors, with whom they might otherwise have minimal contact. This is perhaps most true in relation to contact with major private sector recruiters. While post-secondary educational institutions, settlement service providers and government officials might all have contexts in which they hear each other's views (especially in funding relationships), there are fewer opportunities for those in the non-profit and public sector to gain insights into the operations of major corporate players.

"I have found the work of the Council very interesting because ... it is a bridge between educational institutions and vocational programming and employers, and the labour market." (Government sector, FWDC member, 2017)

Likewise, corporate players from the financial, telecommunications, technology, media and other fields are provided an opportunity to hear about each other's experiences and strategies in a cross-sectoral conversation that happens relatively rarely:

"I found that no matter whether it was telecommunications, hotel, regardless of where it was, there was this dialogue around certain foundational skills that you needed that just made for a really healthy, passionate discussion. And we started to share ideas, we talked about what we were doing, we talked about what they were doing, it was helpful because I brought back a couple of those things." (Financial sector, FWDC member, 2017)

Recruitment. An obvious reason for involvement on the part of major private sector employers is to tap into a source of potential recruits – that is, to create a 'talent pipeline':

"this is helping us build up the talent pool to actually be able to fill current and future vacancies." (Media sector, FWDC member, 2017)

That said, the number of direct hires out of LP programs remained quite small in most cases, so the future orientation in this quote is perhaps key.

Reputation. For some employers, the Council provides a means of exposure to the francophone community and therefore reputational enhancement:

"First of all, it's helping us just build our reputation within the francophone community, as an employer." (Media sector, FWDC member, 2017)

While these reputational benefits are perhaps most directly relevant to organizations that service the Francophone community in particular, they also accrue (albeit in largely intangible ways) to other large corporate players based on their participation in initiatives that have beneficial social goals. In this way, participation in FWDC is part of a wider commitment to social inclusion and immigrant integration:

"[our] strategy is to have a positive impact in the communities in which we do business" (Financial sector, FWDC member, 2017)

While there is clear buy-in and enthusiasm from existing FWDC members, there are also several caveats. First, no degree of social responsibility will entice a private sector employer to take on a recruit who does not have the other skills they require to do that job. This is an issue we will address in the next section on the value of Francophone talent. Second, there is a need for wider sectoral representation on the Council, beyond those who are already convinced by the business case or social importance of francophone youth integration in the labour market. This is an issue we turn to in section 5.

iv) Increased Understanding of the Value of Francophone Talent

The main strength of the FWDC is not primarily to change the hiring practices of its members. Even with large employers at the table, hiring by Council members would have a limited overall impact. Rather, the Council's impact is in widening awareness of the availability of francophone talent across entire sectors, and the benefits to be derived from hiring them. The participants in the Council can do this through highlighting the work of LP and their membership in the Council.

“So it is more, from an impact perspective, can I help broaden or strengthen the impact the organization is having? So it is not always finding a job for someone if we don't have the operations to support it, that is not something we are able to contribute” (Technology sector, FWDC member, 2017)

“When I participate in these meetings, I am looking to see what difference do we need to make, and who else do we need to bring to the table and what other types of organizations do we need to bring? So it is more, from an impact perspective, can I help you broaden or strengthen the impact the organization is having. So it is not always finding a job for someone” (Technology sector, FWDC member, 2017)

Aside from regular FWDC meetings, and the individual networking done by FWDC members, wider events such as the annual Francophone Human Capital Forum have also served to raise awareness of francophone talent in the Toronto region. Several respondents spoke very warmly of the connections forged at the Forum:

“It's very concrete. It's not like, sometimes you get into a lot of theory and nothing in practice, but this [the Forum] is conceptually sound but at the same time they work very well on the ground, and they are very connected to the ground.” (Government sector, FWDC member, 2017)

One key point raised by several employers, however, was that French language abilities in isolation are very seldom enough. At the very least, employers in the GTA would be looking for bilingual recruits who can also work effectively in English and this has sometimes been a problem for the clientele served by LP:

“One of the major barriers is that the Francophone talent are actually not bilingual, they are French” (Financial sector, FWDC member, 2017)

In addition, for most jobs there are also obviously some technical skills or experience required that go well beyond language capacities alone.

v) Diversified Sectoral Representation

Overall, the FWDC is seen as having the right people at the table and the sectors represented are logical choices given the Council's stage of development. These have tended to be representatives of the financial sector, telecommunications, francophone media, transportation and technology. Many have province-wide and Canada-wide businesses, meaning that they have a direct interest in francophone talent. In addition, provincial government officials and post-secondary training institutions, especially those involved in offering programs in conjunction with LP, have been present. Many participants noted that the Council forms an impressive group:

“I think that the representation they have on the Council, is strong, is quite strong. For the most part I think that they have the right people at the table and I think a lot of the financial institutions, which would have a need, they would have some level of need for bilingual French, and they got the right people there, people who are looking after the call centres, looking after the types of positions where they need that frontline bilingual French speaking individuals. I think there is someone from Via Rail. I have always sort of been impressed with who they have had at the table” (Education/training sector, FWDC member, 2017)

There was, however, a sense that the Council could be further diversified in a variety of ways.

There has been an emphasis on the financial sector in part because of the background and networks of the founders of the Council, and because the major banks have both a need for bilingual call centre staff and the scale of human resource management capacity to take an interest in initiatives like the FWDC. This has meant that much of the initial work on curriculum development and job placement was focused on the financial sector. But several participants noted the need for a diversification of sectors.

“So right now there has been a focus within financial services and customer service. But maybe we can take a look at other industries or other areas where some of these individuals might be well suited for.” (Education/training sector, FWDC member, 2017)

The Council is certainly primed to do this, with representation from several other major sectors as noted above.

Other aspects of diversification were also raised by FWDC members. On the government side, there has been strong representation from the province of Ontario, and a representative from the City of Toronto, but officials from other surrounding municipalities have largely been absent. The federal government has also not been represented at the FWDC.

Within the education sector, some participants noted that participation was mainly from the post-secondary colleges (especially Seneca and Humber), but universities were not present. The training and job preparation programs also tend to emphasise office-based work rather than skilled trades, which also offer significant employment and self-employment opportunities:

“...[I] would really like to expand the model as well to the skilled trades. So far we are looking at professionals, [but] there is a really big need to have more trades people in Ontario in several sectors” (Government sector, FWDC member, 2017)

The skilled trades also raise the issue of union representation at the FWDC table. Union involvement in training centres and in organizing certain labour markets in the skilled trades mean that they constitute an important player in the labour market ‘ecosystem’.

More broadly, one respondent commented that there is a continuing need for outreach to other employers and sectors because initiatives such as the FWDC tend to attract those who are already convinced of the business case or social importance of what LP is doing. The ‘usual suspects’ tend to be engaged in such activities but the systemic issues that underpin the employment prospects of Francophone, often racialized, youth are much deeper:

"I think what the Council has done really well has been to connect with employers, and to engage the employers, to better understand their needs. But the people that they have engaged... they're all our usual suspects... they are all big organizations who would get the diversity argument, the diversity business case. But they are just one aspect of the employer community... There are systemic issues that undermine the successful integration of Francophone immigrants, particularly racialized Francophone immigrants. (Government sector, FWDC member, 2017)

vi) Research-Based Labour Market Projections

Labour market analysis of sources and trends in demand for francophone and bilingual workers are seen as key for the development of programs and policies for governments and post-secondary institutions:

“I think a big challenge is getting a really good accurate assessment of what the needs are from an employer's side. This is not an easy task. In some instances it is quite obvious right, you know in government or other sectors there is a need for bilingual speaking [recruitment]. However, there could be a fair number of private sector organizations that may have a need but you're just simply not aware of that.” (Education/training sector, FWDC member, 2017)

“I think if there is one key ... activity that the Council needs to focus on, it is getting and being more involved in the employer-based research. So that we have a placement of what jobs employers are finding hard to find talent. To understand the fit between those jobs and francophone bilingual talent. And to align supply and demand.” (Consultancy sector, FWDC member, 2017)

As a convening table rather than an agency with operational capacity, the FWDC does not have the capacity to conduct detailed labour market analyses. Nor, indeed, does LP have this kind of in-house expertise available. The creation of ongoing projections concerning the size, location and sectoral distribution of labour market demand for Francophone and bilingual talent cannot therefore be expected of either institution. That said, as seen over the past three years, the FWDC and LP have been the driving force behind such research undertakings.

There are, however, three ways in which evidence-based labour market insights have been generated by the FWDC.

First, a report was commissioned from an external consulting firm, Mercer Canada. The consultant's report, published in November 2017, provided an analysis of publicly advertised job postings over a two-year period that included the key word 'French' (taken as an indicator of a bilingual selection criterion). Among other findings, the report found that such openings were most common in the Finance and Insurance sector, followed by Health Care, Technical Services, Retail and Wholesale sectors.

A second context for generating insights into labour market demand was through qualitative feedback at Francophone Human Capital Forum events, supported by participants in the FWDC and organized by LP. The first forum was held on November 17th 2016, the second on February 15, 2018, and the third on February 13, 2019. Through breakout discussions, qualitative information on labour market trends and needs was generated and later published in a report that included the Mercer Consulting results. This model has been identified as a key means of generating data moving forward:

“The Council is going to maintain a current understanding of the workforce needs of priorities sectors, where there is going to be a demand for them. The human capital forum gave us those indicators very strongly.” (Financial sector, FWDC member, 2017)

A third form of qualitative data generation is through the FWDC itself. While limited to the employers and sectors represented around the table, the Council provides:

“barrier-free access to real-life information, in terms of what was really happening on the ground in these organizations, and in the overall ecosystem” (Consultancy sector, FWDC member, 2017)

In this way, then, discussion at the Council provides information on employer needs and current experiences. Indeed, the minutes of FWDC meetings indicate that employers regularly share their experiences in hiring, training and assessing employees, and engage in broader discussions concerning labour market trends, opportunities and challenges.

Overall, these lines of intelligence-gathering provide the beginnings of an important evidence-based mapping of the labour market within which francophone talent is seeking employment, and ensures that this is shared with service agencies, educational and training institutions, government ministries, consultants and employers:

“I think they have begun to plant the seeds for evidence-informed [...] guidance in terms of okay here is an area where we hear employers systematically and steadily telling us that there is a gap. And they have actually now, they have done a very smart thing which is to start focusing on sectors. So this is what they are doing now. They started at a very general level, and the data is what it is, and from that first study which Mercer did, now they’ve been drilling down into specific sectors where employers identified skill shortages or labour shortages. I don’t think their job is completed. I think this is very much an evolving aspect of their work; it’s central. I would say that that particular piece is central to what the Council has, under the leadership of Leonie and Catherine, has been able to do and I would say that this is something that they should really, really keep doing.” (Government sector, FWDC member 2017)

There is certainly a good case for a more qualitative and real-time approach to understanding trends in the labour market. One FWDC member made the point that labour markets are changing so quickly that past surveys become dated very quickly and so a real-time sense of where demand is moving is needed:

“...you can't predict five years, maybe two. But I would say realistically it's year-by-year now. So I think as a council, they have to get into that mode of thinking that things are going to happen a lot quicker. And so the research that is done and whatnot, how are you not just looking backwards, but also looking forward because that is the main thing right now.” (Technology sector, FWDC member, 2017)

vii) Curriculum Development

The FWDC creates effective linkages between major employers and several community colleges, especially Seneca and Humber, which offer programming in conjunction with LP. The Council itself does not develop curriculum, but rather identifies areas where programming is needed and connects key players together to satisfy those needs.

One issue raised was that the numbers of qualified graduates coming out of such programs represent only a small fraction of the total recruitment needs of major employers – for example in call centres run by major financial institutions:

“I think the Council is quite effective at facilitating discussion with major stakeholders to understand the barriers that need to be overcome or achieve more employment of Francophone workforce... I think the challenge we have ... is the scale isn’t sufficient to keep the big employers at the table.” (Financial sector, FWDC member, 2017)

Conclusions Regarding the FWDC

The FWDC works very effectively in several ways.

First, it advises LP on skills, training and workplace needs across different sectors. It provides a strategic point of contact between LP as a provider of settlement and employment readiness services on the one hand, and employers themselves on the other. The council also serves, informally, as a venue for accountability and feedback on the work being done by LP.

Second, FWDC provides a convening table at which the private sector (especially large employers), government ministries (especially at the provincial level), and educational institutions (especially community colleges), and staff from LP itself, are brought together to focus on the needs and opportunities that exist for francophone immigrants, especially in relation to youth engagement with the labour market.

Finally, by exposing major employers, government officials and educational administrators to the work of LP and to the specific needs, and value, of the population that it serves, the FWDC does important work in promoting awareness of francophone talent in the Toronto region.

There were several areas where members of the Council recommended either clarification of the FWDC's role, or an expansion of the voices represented at its table.

- A key clarification concerns the relationship between the FWDC and LP, especially if the FWDC is to have a role that exceeds the operational capacity of LP to implement
- In the absence of a specific workplan for the FWDC, a visioning document that lays out realistic goals and outcomes in the medium and long term is needed
- Creating a context for continued exchanges regarding labour market trends and needs will remain a key role for the FWDC
- There is potential for the FWDC to take on a more active advocacy role concerning the needs of francophone and racialized youth in the labour market
- There is potential for wider representation on the FWDC from private sectors employers, the labour movement, educational/training institutions and other levels of government.

7. Challenges to Data Collection

There were several challenges to recruitment and collection of data, which underscore the need to read the results of this evaluation with caution:

- First, two main paid staff, one from LP and a research assistant for the evaluation, left their respective positions after we began collecting data. The transitions were relatively smooth and handled well by LP, but this meant the Executive Director had to take on greater supervisory responsibilities in addition to a full workload.
- Second, LP interviewers had to balance their other responsibilities with the conduct of interviews. In our training of interviewers and agency staff, we underlined the importance of matching interviewers and participants who had not previously worked together. LP's funding proposal did not include a budget line specifically for data collection by their staff, which could have strengthened the human resources and time allocated to this aspect of the research.

- Third, it was expected that participants would be reachable for follow-up surveys after completion of a program at the agency and that they would be willing to participate in the study. However, during data collection LP observed that members of its clientele population live in significantly unstable working and housing circumstances that made it difficult for interviewers to reach them. This led to phone interviewers having to make repeated calls, in some cases with little success.