

December 10, 2008

Ms. Rhonda Tulk-Lane  
Manager, Youth Retention and Attraction Strategy  
Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment  
P. O. Box 8700  
St. John's, NL  
A1C 3E2

Re: Youth Retention and Attraction Strategy for Newfoundland  
and Labrador

The Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Social Workers (NLASW) would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the development of a Youth Retention and Attraction Strategy for Newfoundland and Labrador.

This brief report addresses some of questions outlined in the consultation report entitled "*Developing a Youth Retention and Attraction Strategy for Newfoundland and Labrador: Background Information and Guide for Stakeholder Feedback*". The NLASW looks forward to working collaboratively with government in addressing these issues.

If you have any questions, or require additional information, please feel free to contact the undersigned below. Thanking you in advance for your support.

Sincerely,

Annette Johns, MSW, RSW  
Social Work Consultant  
NLASW

## **Introduction**

The development of a Youth Retention and Attraction Strategy is very timely for the province of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL). Our province has experienced tremendous economic growth over the past several years, and the key to keeping our province vibrant and healthy is to attract young educated workers to remain in NL and to contribute to its' social fabric.

## **Factors that Influence Youth Career Decisions**

Education lays the foundation for a healthy and vibrant province. Children need access to quality early learning and education prior to the start of elementary school. By focusing on literacy, comprehension, and skill development, young children gain the confidence and abilities they need to further their educational aspirations. Without a solid framework of learning through the K-12 system, career options can be limited. It also is important that government continue to support non-traditional education programs, such as those being offered through the Community Youth Network. Oftentimes, young people who do not do well in the traditional school system, do extremely well in these non-traditional programs.

Community support and engagement also is integral to youth career decisions. Research shows that when young people feel supported by and included in their communities change is possible.

Access to affordable post-secondary education is paramount to decisions that young people make about their career choices. Student debt is a reality that impacts whether one decides to pursue a particular career option and to stay in the province. It is recommended that government continue to examine the student loan program with the goal of reducing student debt for post-secondary graduates.

## **Factors Impacting on Youth Decision to Stay in Province**

Young people, similar to most residents of NL, place a high value on living in a province that is rich in history, culture, family traditions and connections, and outdoor living.

Newfoundland and Labrador has a tremendous amount to offer individuals and families who choose to live and work in this province. However, there are several factors which impact on a young persons' decision to stay in NL.

Economic security is one of the key factors. Young people need to feel safe and secure with their financial planning; while working in a job or career that maximizes their full potential. With the given trend towards more precarious forms of employment (seasonal, contract, etc), government needs to partner with industry leaders and organizations to ensure that employment opportunities for young people who have college and university degrees are competitive. Incentives such as competitive wage packages, permanent positions, medical benefits, continuing education, and pension planning do make a difference.

Access to affordable and high quality early learning and childcare is another key factor for young families. Young working families need access to child care to ensure full participation in the workplace. Currently, childcare spaces in the province are limited. It is recommended that government enhance investments in early learning and childcare to ensure that young families have access to these services.

### **Social Work Profession**

The recruitment and retention of social workers is an issue for social work employers throughout the province. The Memorial University School of Social Work is already responding to the demand for more social workers by increasing the number of students enrolled into the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) Program from 45 – 60 by 2009. With 15 more BSW graduates completing the program each year, many of whom are young adults, it is anticipated that many of the vacancies in social work positions can be filled. It is imperative that government continue to work with Memorial University and community stakeholders to access the need for additional spaces within the social work program to meet increasing demands in the workforce.

In terms of recruitment and retention of young qualified social workers, it is important that employers offer competitive wage packages, re-location bonuses, access to continuing education, permanent positions, medical and dental benefits and pension planning. Given that

the Regional Integrated Health Authorities are the largest employers of social workers in NL, it is important that government continue to enhance their employment packages.

Regional diversification also is important in terms of social work recruitment and retention. Oftentimes, some of the more difficult to fill social work positions are found in rural and remote areas of the province where there limited employment opportunities in other sectors. Young couples often choose to live in communities where there are greater employment prospects for both partners. Therefore, continued investments in rural NL are crucial to attracting young people to live and work in this province.

### **Summary - Population Health Matters**

It is important to highlight that policies, initiatives and programs that are important to the broader population in building vibrant communities, such as the provincial poverty reduction strategy, economic and social development, and quality health care, are the same factors that are important in retaining our youth to live and work in NL, and recruiting other people to our province. It is important that government continue to invest in rural development and renewal, maintain its' commitment to primary health care and high quality health care, and increase investments in education and post-secondary education. We know that there are a number of factors that impact on the overall health and well being of a population. These factors are addressed through the social determinants of health. Therefore, it is important that government continue to explore these determinants of health and make necessary investments that will keep our province vibrant and healthy.