

Learning Annex Background Summary

Working Together Report

A Steering Committee, with representation from: City of Hamilton (Neighbourhood Action Strategy, Ontario Works and the Planning Division), Mohawk College, Workforce Planning Hamilton, Hamilton Community Foundation, Social Planning and Research Council, North Hamilton Community Health Centre – Pathways to Education, Hamilton Wentworth District School Board, Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board, First Ontario Credit Union, Employment Hamilton and the YMCA was formed in order to examine community assets and needs around education and job skill training. A proposal was developed and submitted to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) in the spring of 2013 with the support of the Steering Committee and community partners. Titled the Neighbourhood Micro-Labour Market Project (LMP), the feasibility study was led by Mohawk College, Workforce Planning Hamilton and the City of Hamilton’s Neighbourhood Action Strategy. The analysis was conducted from November 2013 to April 2014. Neighbourhood planning teams, community agencies, employers and residents in the Jamesville, Keith and Beasley neighbourhoods of downtown Hamilton were consulted; the purpose of which was to develop neighbourhood-specific strategies to improve educational outcomes and participation in job-skill training programs.

The Steering Committee identified three primary objectives for the feasibility study:

- (a) Identify the major barriers to high school completion, post-secondary attendance, and job-skill training programs for people living in the Jamesville, Keith and Beasley neighbourhoods;
- (b) Engage neighbourhood employers in assessing current training and skill needs; and,
- (c) Explore the concept of a Learning Annex and its potential ability to respond to these neighbourhood challenges.

In total, information was collected from 65 neighbourhood residents and 55 employers with 26 key informant interviews conducted. Additionally, a review of best practices was undertaken relating to high school completion, post-secondary attendance and job skills training programs. An analysis of labour market conditions was also completed for the three focus neighbourhoods. Finally, an environmental scan of Learning Annexes and Learning Centres was also conducted. Based on the results of this analysis and review, four priorities were identified:

- (a) Increase resources and support around navigation of training and education pathways;

- (b) Increase activities to raise aspirations and create engagement around training and education;
- (c) Engage employers in the overall process; and,
- (d) Reduce barriers and create incentives to attend training and education programs.

If implemented, the result would be an increase in sustainable and living wage employment for residents within the three participating neighbourhoods.

The findings and recommendations of the research are contained in the “Working Together: Examining Employment, Education and Training Strategies for the Jamesville, Beasley and Keith Neighbourhoods” Report (attached as “Appendix C” to Report CES15046) and represented Phase 1 of the Learning Annex project. The final Working Together report was presented to the community in May 2014. At the same meeting, community workshops were facilitated around the Learning Annex concept, including: navigation; involving employers; raising aspirations and creating engagement; reducing barriers and creating incentives). This information was summarized by a graphic facilitator, which helped participants clarify this complex concept (attached as “Appendix G” to Report CES15046).

MTCU Grant Application (Summer 2014)

A funding application to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities was submitted in summer 2014, to develop and coordinate an implementation and operationalization plan in support of a neighbourhood-based Learning Annex in Hamilton. This application represented phase two of a three-phase project around a Learning Annex. The implementation and operational plan identified the resources and partners required for the establishment of the Learning Annex (representing Phase 3) and was outlined in Report CES14028 (September 17, 2014). As part of that report, Council approved the hiring of two temporary staff to develop and support the continuation of the Learning Annex project, should the funding application be successful. However, this grant application was not successful. In order to ensure momentum on this project was maintained, Neighbourhood Action Strategy staff, supported by the Learning Annex working group, conducted the necessary research and developed a business plan in support of the Learning Annex from November 2014 to June 2015.

Additional Community Engagement and Funding Requests

As part of the consultation around the Learning Annex and the identification of needs, existing programs, potential partnerships and additional community sessions were held.

December 2014

A stakeholder meeting was held in December 2014 in order to understand what services are currently provided for youth and how youth access these services. The five key questions, and their primary responses are summarized below:

Question	Key Responses
What brings you to the table?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong desire to collaborate around education and employment • Focus on importance of education • Desire for enhanced community connection and equality • Social responsibility
What services and/or curriculum do you provide for youth?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth advocacy and programs • Desire for collaboration • Mentorship • Disconnect between skill identification and available employment
Where do you provide your services and/or curriculum?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primarily within a physical location in the downtown area of Hamilton
How do youth access your services or programs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through partnership referrals, schools, websites, word of mouth and networks
How do you recruit youth?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Success with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website & social media • Word of mouth • Educational establishments • Targeted media campaigns

Based on the consultation, there is an opportunity for the Learning Annex to take advantage of the community desire to partner and collaborate on a project focussed around youth, education and employment.

This information was analysed in comparison to the results and recommendations of the Working Together Report, in order to corroborate the findings between the various audiences and refine the approach required for this initiative to respond to the needs of Hamilton youth. The chart below summarizes the needs of adult, youth and service providers.

Working Together Report
Youth Want: Athletics, mobile service, tours, financial planning
Adults Want: Training & skills support, navigation, on-site child-care, blended learning opportunities, financial support/planning, accessible locations, accreditation

Service Providers Want:

To raise aspirations, engage neighbourhoods, build relationships with employers, offer service mobility, offer expertise and navigation

May 2015

A second stakeholder meeting was held in May 2015 in order to discuss next steps and approaches for youth engagement together with potential delivery models for the Learning Annex. Seven topic areas were explored, focussed around specific components of the Learning Annex. The primary responses are summarized below:

Theme	Key Takeaway
Youth & Family Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empower youth to take on leadership roles • Mutual respect, trust and relationships are key • Interconnectedness between school, social circles, family and employers is critical • Peer-to-peer engagement and positive relationships are important • Athletics and arts are “hooks” to get youth involved
What is a Learning Annex?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network of partnerships and collaboration & navigation of services and resources • Mobility is an integral component (combination of physical space and virtual platforms) • Mentorship will play a key role; youth & adult collaboration • Include multiple pathways/ opportunities • Address barriers: transportation, housing, mental and physical health, finances, basic life skills, educational services, sense of worth, community outreach
Sustainability of the Learning Annex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with community partners to build relationships and programs • Continual evolution • Importance of diversified partners • Must meet / understand the needs of the target population for partners to see value and success
Defining the Navigator Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retention and access to wrap-around services; maintain connection • Must be approachable, safe and consistent • Advocate for youth • Case worker; include virtual support • Mentorship & unique skill set; importance of soft skills • Work with youth, service providers, family
Credentials and the Learning Annex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide hands-on experiences • Provide opportunities that foster youth’s passions and

	integrate fundamental, employable skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of peers, teaching peers • Potential for game-based learning • Youth must be part of the curriculum design • Credentials must be meaningful to youth and employers
Understanding the needs of Hamilton’s Labour Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrepreneurism, literacy, soft skills, experience, driver’s license, health & safety training are key • Trades are important; jobs that are the future • Work with employers, youth and educators in a meaningful way • Retention is an issue • Focus on job possibilities; goes beyond simply education
Use of technology in the Learning Annex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use as an engagement, retention and service provision tool • Benefits to engaging digitally as well as face-to-face • Use of social media, in combination with on-line learning, gamification and mobile applications • Benefits: accessible, strong engagement tool, instant connection and access to information • Constraints: literacy, cost, must be relevant, need moderators, privacy concerns

Environmental Scan: Youth Engagement Opportunities for a Learning Annex in the GTAH Area

In order to better understand youth engagement strategies, an environmental scan of organizations supporting youth in skill building and education was completed, with a focus on local service providers (attached as “Appendix H” to Report CES15046). However, organizations outside of Hamilton who have notable youth engagement experience were also contacted. These included Fusion Youth Centre in Ingersoll, the City of Toronto’s Youth Equity Strategy, and Winnipeg’s Aboriginal Sports Achievement Centre. Interviewees were asked to identify particular strategies they found helpful in engaging youth in their work. They were also specifically asked about reaching out to vulnerable youth. The recommendations, presented below, were further informed by a literature review of youth engagement.

Recommendations for Youth Engagement

1. Build Trust
2. Allow Youth to have genuine ownership of projects
3. Use youth to attract youth
4. Use incentives / remove barriers
5. Make it fun – use recreation and the arts as engagement tools

6. Consider the brand
7. Be transparent
8. Be flexible

The above best practices offer an approach to making the Learning Annex a truly youth-led, youth-serving initiative. Additional work around specific methods of engagement was also conducted (attached as “Appendix I” to Report CES15046), and will be utilized as part of the engagement strategy for the Learning Annex, and its sustainability model moving forward. Examples include best practices around the use of social media, role of community partnerships and unique engagement activities.

Our Future Hamilton: Communities in Conversation

As Vision 2020 nears its end, the City of Hamilton is asking everyone who lives, works, plays and learns in our community what they think Hamilton will look like in 25 years and to share their vision for the future of Hamilton. In April 2015, Phase One of the campaign was launched. The results of the “Our Future Hamilton: Communities in Conversation” campaign will be used to ensure that planning is informed by the priorities of Hamilton’s residents. Through an analysis of the responses received to-date, the following youth-related themes can be identified:

- Youth employment and living wage jobs
- Social services and supports for at-risk and street involved youth
- Youth programs including arts and recreational activities
- Opportunities for youth leadership, mentorship and empowerment
- Supports around mental and physical health for youth
- Creating a youth-focussed community and community centres
- Support for newcomer youth
- Educational supports and grants
- Access to transitional housing for youth; safe, affordable housing
- Engaging youth in a youth-friendly way; give youth a meaningful voice
- Inclusivity and opportunity

This information validates the need in our community for youth focussed activities, programs, spaces and empowerment. The Learning Annex is an initiative that can support this need.