Strategic
Initiatives
Evaluation

# Integrated Training Centres for Youth (ITCY)

Human Resources Development Canada

Développement des ressources humaines Canada

Government of Alberta

Canada

# INTEGRATED TRAINING CENTRES FOR YOUTH:

## A PROCESS EVALUATION

### Final Report

Evaluation and Data Development
Strategic Policy

June 1996

SP-AH023E-06-96

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Integrated Training Centres for Youth (ITCY) pilot project is the result of a joint federal-provincial Strategic Initiative funded and managed by Human Resources Development Canada and the Alberta Departments of Advanced Education & Career Development and Family & Social Services.

This document reports the results of a process evaluation of ITCY conducted in 1995/1996.  An outcome evaluation assessing the impact and cost-effectiveness of the pilot project will be conducted in 1997.

The process evaluation was conducted by the Alberta Management Group, in affiliation with T.D. Weiden and Associates.  The consultants were directed by an Evaluation Steering Committee comprised of representatives from the federal and provincial partners.

The Evaluation Steering Committee would like to express its gratitude to the consulting team, program staff and participants; and to federal, provincial and community stakeholders who provided important information about program operations.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

**TABLES:**



**FIGURES:**

# PROLOGUE

This Final Report summarizes the main findings contained in the companion **Technical Report** entitled, Integrated Training Centres for Youth: A Process Evaluation. The Technical Report includes detailed process descriptions along with recommendations for each of 3 Integrated Training Centres for Youth. This Final Report has been prepared separately from the Technical Report to facilitate dissemination of key results to interested parties beyond the immediate program sponsors and other stakeholders in Alberta.

As part of the contract for the process evaluation, the consultants were also responsible for designing a workplan for an outcome evaluation, including procedures for the selection/assignment of a comparison group, along with the forms and procedures needed to collect outcome data. These instruments included:

- a Baseline Survey for program and comparison group members;
- an Early Exit Survey for program drop-outs;
- Exit Surveys for program completers;
- Follow-up Surveys for program and comparison group members.

These instruments, along with a discussion of the comparison group treatment and evaluation plan, are provided in a separate document entitled, Workplan for an Outcome Evaluation of the Integrated Training Centers for Youth.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1994, Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) launched the Strategic Initiatives (SI) program. In Alberta, it was agreed that SI would fund an Integrated Training for Youth pilot project in partnership with the provincial departments of Family & Social Services (F&SS) and Advanced Education & Career Development (AE&CD).

The pilot project was initiated to test the value of customized counseling, training and work site interventions for young individuals who are at risk of long term dependence on public income support. Tenders were called in early 1995 for agencies to establish Integrated Training Centers for Youth (ITCYs) which were to incorporate certain features of a service delivery model developed by the Center for Employment Training (CET) in the United States. Contracts were awarded to the following 3 agencies:

**1.** **Career High** — a program of the Chinook School Division to provide training to youth at two sites in Red Deer and Innisfail;

**2.** **Destinations** — a partnership between two training consultants and the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology to provide training to youth in Edmonton;

**3.** **Fifth on Fifth Youth Services** — a program of the Lethbridge Youth Foundation to provide integrated training to youth in Lethbridge and area.

## Program Description

The three ITCYs target youth aged 16 to 20 who have dropped out of school and are at risk of long-term dependence on social allowance. Clients are expected to receive an individualized, self-paced intervention of up to 8 months in length, with the ultimate goal of employment. Clients may receive training in-house or off-site. In-house training may include: career planning, life skills, employment preparation, computer skill training, academic upgrading and occupational skill training. Off-site training is typically in the form of job shadow, work experience or on-the-job training placements at employer sites. Agencies also provide job search/placement assistance and long-term job maintenance as required. In addition to these services, the ITCYs received funding to provide a training allowance of up to $4,500 per client to meet basic needs and remove disincentives while clients are in training. Employers play an important role in the ITCYs, including membership on committees to advise on training requirements and on the labour market generally.

## Evaluation Approach

The purpose of the process evaluation was to:
review initial program activity;

- identify operational issues which should be addressed by the program management committee;
- collect baseline data on program clients;
- establish and collect baseline data for comparison groups at each site.

The 3 ITCYs became operational over the spring and summer of 1995. The process evaluation began in August, 1995. Interviews were conducted with a broad cross section of stakeholders, including agency staff and clients; employers; and community and government representatives. At the time of the evaluation, only one client had completed training.

## Evaluation Findings

Based upon the consultant's understanding of each program and upon feedback obtained from clients, employers and other stakeholders, the following observations were made:

- **Program Promotion** — It was generally felt that, although the agencies may be relying too heavily on their existing referral networks, they were doing a satisfactory job promoting their programs in their communities.
- **Referral Process** — It was generally felt that the referral process was functioning smoothly, although at least one stakeholder in each community commented on the lack of a formal referral protocol, or poor feedback from the agency regarding the status or progress of clients who had been referred.

- **<u>Target Group Access</u>** — In no case did stakeholders suggest that the agencies were completely missing the target group, although there were concerns that the agencies were accepting some clients who were inappropriate or rejecting others who better fit the definition of "at risk" youth.

- **<u>Program Design</u>** — It was generally felt that the programs had the resources necessary to help youth enter the job market. Most stakeholders felt optimistic about outcomes, and seemed willing to "wait and see" how things would turn out.

- **<u>Implementation Problems/Constraints</u>** — Other than contract delays and short start-up lead times, the agencies did not indicate they were currently experiencing any major problems or constraints that interfered with operations.

- **<u>Partnerships</u>** — The ITCY projects were felt to enhance existing partnerships that had already been established, but it was also suggested that new partnerships had been established with employers in a new role as trainers of youth.

- **<u>Roles and Relationships</u>** — By agreement, contract management was delegated to the province of Alberta. A few federal representatives indicated they would like to have seen a larger federal role in contract management.

- **<u>Coordination/Duplication</u>** — Stakeholders did not feel that the ITCYs had yet resulted in reduced duplication or overlap in services. It was generally felt that the ITCYs had filled a gap that had existed in the service network.

- **<u>Compatibility with "Strategic Initiatives"</u>** — The ITCYs were felt to fit the criteria and objectives established for Strategic Initiatives. The federal government was interested in the concept of a community-designed, individualized, self-paced training approach because it was seen as quite different from traditional employment training programs tendered in the past.

## Assessment

Each ITCY had strengths and weaknesses in regard to their interventions. In addition to a number of specific concerns, the following general issues were identified:

**Preliminary Costs**
Two of the ITCYs have a funding formula where training funds are tied to individual clients and are advanced as clients move through training. These agencies were on track with their expenditures. The other ITCY, however, receives fixed monthly funding. Because intake volumes were lower than expected, the agency was in jeopardy of not meeting its targeted costs on a per client basis.

**Funding Formula**
All ITCYs have a proportion of funding tied to employment success; however, the proportion of training funds at risk for each agency varies from 5% to 20%. Furthermore, the rules that govern when an agency can claim funds related to employment are not clear.

**Training Approach**
Two of the ITCYs make almost exclusive use of employers to provide job-specific skill training. This has the advantage of providing hands-on training using real equipment in a real working environment. Quality control is a concern, however. Because formal training plans are not always put in place, a client's training experience will vary depending on the availability of employers at the time the client is ready to go off-site.

**Incentives**
The provision of a training allowance is a relatively innovative feature of the ITCYs. It was hoped that the funds would be used to remove disincentives to training, and that incentive levels would be set on a case by case basis. The agencies have found it difficult to assess individual client needs, and have largely fallen back to using a grid to allocate incentive funds. Comments from clients suggest that some attend "just for the money", while others would attend without the incentive, demonstrating the difficulty agencies face in making incentives work in the way they were intended.

**Drop-out Rate**
All three ITCYs are experiencing high drop-out rates (22% — 37%), despite using a 2 week assessment period intended to screen out individuals who are unlikely to complete training. A variety of factors may be contributing to the high

drop-out rates; nonetheless, the assessment process does not appear to be adequate in determining clients' suitability for the program.

**Conclusion**

The pilot project is a unique initiative in Alberta, combining elements of integrated training with financial supports and incentives. Each agency has implemented a slightly different model of integrated training, targeting different jobs and using different methods of occupational skill training. Each model was seen to have its own strengths and weaknesses, and the process evaluation highlighted a number of issues that project sponsors may need to address in the short term. An outcome evaluation has been scheduled which will determine the longer-term cost-effectiveness of integrated training as a measure to assist at-risk youth in attaining meaningful long-term employment.

# MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

### RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION TAKEN

The following recommendations were contained in the Technical Report:

## EDMONTON DESTINATIONS

***1.*** ***Recommendation***: Confirm with the agency the amount of NAIT training that is being provided, and the extent to which expenditures for this training are on track with the original budget.

***Response: Accepted***

The Implementation Team has reviewed this issue with the contract manager, contractor and NAIT representatives. Records on the volume of training and their associated costs have been included in monthly reports by the contractor since January '96. Although it is recognized that the volume of training being conducted at NAIT is lower than originally anticipated, it has been agreed by all parties that the focus on what training is being provided is more important than by who provides the training. Therefore, where it is determined by the contractor and the participant that NAIT training is not necessary, other means have been found to secure the appropriate training. Future training contracts that involve partnerships between third party contractors and learning institutions will be made flexible enough to allow for this type of "just in time" training requirements.

***2.*** ***Recommendation***: Discuss the nature of NAIT training being provided and the extent to which it might be possible to afford clients a greater variety and depth of training in areas where NAIT is uniquely positioned to provide hands-on skills training.

***Response: Accepted***

The Implementation Team, as previously discussed, met with representatives who made appropriate adjustments to the type of training being provided at NAIT. Thus providing more of an advantage of having a Technical Institute of this stature available to the initiative. However, this has created somewhat of a lock step approach to training as NAIT has responded by establishing "mini" courses that require full-time attendance generally of one weeks duration. This is somewhat different to the original understanding which involved a revolving door policy on program delivery at NAIT. Further it is recognized that some employers are reluctant to release participants for institutional training thus hampering the effectiveness of NAIT to provide training that supplements and compliments training taking place at the employer's work site.

***3.*** ***Recommendation***: Confirm the extent to which competency-based training plans are being prepared, and whether the agency is exerting enough influence over the scope of competencies and the nature and length of training being provided by employers.

***Response: Accepted***

It has been confirmed that competency-based training plans are in place for the trainees at the employers' work sites. Further modifications have been made to these in order to ensure their completeness and the appropriate nature of the training experience. This has also been further enhanced by the contractor hiring more job developers to market, monitor and reinforce the intent that the training plans are mainly for the benefit of the trainee (in consultation with the work demands identified by the employer) and not solely for the benefit of the employer. It is also recognized that training has to be balanced with the employer's needs and accommodate their work demands so that they benefit from involvement in the program.

***4.*** ***Recommendation***: Discuss whether it may be feasible to set up 2 or 3 training placements of shorter duration rather than a single placement of longer duration so that clients get wider training exposure and more clearly view the placements as "training" rather than "work".

***Response: Conditional Acceptance***

The Implementation Team has discussed this issue and is not convinced that having the participants view the training placement as a work placement is bad. In a truly puristic training environment the attempt at shorter duration training placements would make sense. However, the success of the initiative is measured by the number of participants that complete training and move on to full-time employment (often with the same employer). Therefore, having longer term training experiences at only one employer site is acceptable. It is recognized that there are shortcomings to this approach, such as only learning one style or technique of doing "business", however the Implementation Team believes that the achievement of the expected results out weighs such inadequacies.

## LETHBRIDGE FIFTH ON FIFTH

***1.*** ***Recommendation***: Discuss with the agency the extent to which it may be feasible and desirable to move closer yet to the CET model for integrated training, by:

- ❍ integrating the pre-employment and computer training into the curriculum for each training area;
- ❍ allowing for greater individualization such that clients take only what they need to learn and can proceed through the training at their own pace;
- ❍ using more experienced students to peer-teach less experienced students.

***Response: Accepted***

The contract manager will discuss taking the components of the pre-employment and computer training and embedding them in the training areas of hospitality/retail, and other individualized occupational training. The informal use of peer teaching by more experienced participants will also be encouraged.

***2.*** ***Recommendation***: Assist the agency in making changes by arranging for them to consult with adult Integrated Training contractors who have implemented an integrated, self-paced curriculum (i.e., Career Designs, GMCC Skills for Employment);

***Response: Rejected***

The recommendation makes the assumption that what works well for Adult learners will also work well for youth. It also assumes that the Adult Integrated Training sites are working better, with fewer difficulties, then those being experienced by the Integrated Training for Youth projects. The Implementation Team is not convinced that these two assumptions are correct. However, the Implementation Team will develop a one day workshop symposium for all three contractors to attend in order to share best practice approaches with each other and to explore alternative approaches to self-paced learning.

***3.*** ***Recommendation***: Discuss whether it might be feasible to expand the scope of what can be done in the canteen (e.g., food preparation);

***Response: Accepted***

Discussions have already led to in the expansion of this facility to include more food preparation skills including commercial food preparation training such as catering services.

***4.*** ***Recommendation***: Discuss the circumstances under which a student might be allowed to take a credit class through the high school to complement occupational skill training.

***Response: Accepted***

Discussions have occurred and efforts are being made to take advantage of high school courses offered through the 5th on 5th alternative High School facility. Access to the Plato computer system and CALM course curriculum is being provided.

***5.*** ***Recommendation***: Discuss whether staff might be able to take a more active staff role in recruiting employers to become involved, particularly for work experience placements as well as downstream employment opportunities.

***Response: Accepted***

The contract manager will discuss and recommend actions the contractor should take in order to ensure appropriate work experience placements are being secured on behalf of the participants. These activities will reinforce the contractor's role and ensure that the soliciting of employer sites both for work placement and for employment is more aggressively pursued.

***6.*** ***Recommendation***: Discuss how the agency has dealt with client concerns about treatment by certain staff members, and the extent to which relations have improved.

***Response: Accepted***

The Implementation Team recognizes the difficulties that have been identified in connection with the conduct of certain staff members of the contractor. The contract manager recognizes that more work is required in this area in order to improve relations between youth participants and contractor staff.

***7.*** ***Recommendation***: Assist the agency in working out a suitable reporting protocol with F&SS.

***Response: Accepted***

Since the drafting of these recommendations, reporting relationships have improved between FSS and the contractor. An informal network has been established between staff from the two sites to ensure referrals are appropriate and the status of former FSS clients is known.

## RED DEER CAREER HIGH

***1.*** ***Recommendation***: Discuss means by which the agency might increase intake volumes through marketing and contact with new referral sources.

***Response: Accepted***

Since the inception of the pilot in Red Deer, the Implementation Team believes that the contractor has attempted to adjust referral mechanisms in order to increase intake volumes. The contract manager will discuss the potential of developing further types of referral sources and linkages in the community with the contractor.

***2.*** ***Recommendation***: Discuss whether greater tolerance and support during the assessment process might result in fewer drop-outs at this stage. In this regard, contact with the Edmonton Destinations project should be encouraged to share their tactics in dealing with clients who err in the early going.

***Response: Accepted***

In response to the concerns raised about the drop-out rates the contract manager has reviewed all aspects of the assessment process with the contractor. In addition, meetings between the three contractors have been encouraged and arranged in order to share best practices.

***3.*** ***Recommendation***: Discuss the extent to which educational upgrading can be more individualized and focused on the requirements of a specific occupation or employer. In this regard, it should be discussed whether the upgrading could occur after the client is employed (with employer agreement) if it is not clear until that time what level of upgrading is necessary for employment.

***Response: Accepted***

It is agreed that further investigation is required and will be conducted by the contract manager to determine the possibility of more direct linkage of educational upgrading and occupational skill training requirements. Educational upgrading will be more individualized in accordance with trainee's needs.

***4.*** ***Recommendation***: Confirm the extent to which PEPs are being prepared for clients, and discuss the extent to which clients can get job-specific training (covered by a formal PEP) sooner in the training process.

***Response: Conditional Acceptance***

It has been confirmed that Profiles of Employment Proficiencies (PEPs) are being developed for the clients and used at the training work sites by employers. However, it is recognized that selecting the employer comes before development of the customized PEPs for the clients (because of the need for input by the employer).

***5.*** ***Recommendation***: Confirm the extent to which the maintenance shop is being used for training, and discuss whether greater use may be made of this option.

***Response: Accepted***

It is recognized that during the early stages of the Red Deer pilot the capability of the maintenance shop to act as a training work site was limited. The contractor had not been able to complete construction and transfer personnel to the site as quickly as had been anticipated. However, every effort is being made and will continue to be made to realize the full potential of this facility.

## General

### 1. Funding Formula

***Recommendation:*** The proportion of funding tied to placement success should be reviewed to determine whether the contracts should be more closely aligned in this area. In addition, program sponsors should discuss placement activity with each agency, and come to an agreement which, at the very least, clarifies:

❍ how much training or assistance non-completing clients must receive before the agency can claim placement funds if they become employed;

❍ how long after the client leaves or completes training may the agency still claim them as a successful placement if they become employed.

***Response: Accepted***

The contract managers have discussed these issues with their respective contractor and determined appropriate levels and duration of training activities in order to claim placement successes and receive payment. Contracts have been adjusted to clarify the level and duration of training required in order to receive payments.

### 2. Training Plans

***Recommendations***: The agencies providing occupational training through employers be required to prepare individualized and comprehensive training plans for each such placement to justify the funds they are claiming for training (which they would otherwise have to spend on salaries for in-house training staff).

***Response: Accepted***

All contractors are required to provide reports to the contract managers, on a monthly basis, that identify the number of participants and the type of occupational skill training being provided by employers at their work sites. The contractors also have to produce, upon demand, up to date copies of the training plans that outline the competencies required and the progress made by the participants in achieving these competencies. Future contracts will outline minimum standards for training plan descriptions.

### 3. Incentives

***Recommendation***: The way in which incentives are provided be reviewed with each agency. It will be especially important to discuss the conditions under which the agencies would be prepared to abandon grids in favor of a more individualized approach. Consideration should be given to capping incentives at or below the welfare rate, but allowing agencies to provide bonuses to clients for progress or performance, as well as ad hoc allowances for specific needs (e.g., bus passes, baby sitting, damage deposits, clothing, etc.) to facilitate problem-solving around specific barriers. The agencies might consider purchasing or paying such funds directly (i.e. cheques made out to payee rather than cash given to clients) to ensure clients use the ad hoc funds for the purposes intended.

***Response: Rejected***

Incentive payments have been extensively discussed with all concerned. It has been recognized and accepted that it is too difficult to allocate incentives based upon a more individualized approach without the use of a grid system. It is too difficult to explain to other participants the differences that exist between them. This has resulted in a strict adherence to the grid system by the contractors. Incentives have been paid enabling some participants to move off welfare rolls and this is encouraged. In some special circumstances bonuses have been issued to participants for additional specific needs such as clothing, tools and transportation fees. In some cases these bonuses have been issued on behalf of the participant to suppliers directly. However, all agree that in order to instill self reliance and responsibility this practice has been purposely limited.

### 4. Drop-Out Rate

***Recommendation***: Project sponsors discuss with the agencies possible adjustments to the assessment process that will better screen out inappropriate candidates. It may be difficult in Edmonton and Red Deer to put clients immediately into hands-on skill training during the assessment period, although there may be ways to adapt the process to provide more work exposure. It should be possible in Lethbridge to put clients immediately into job skill training by adjusting the schedule such that pre-employment/life skill training is integrated within, or at the very least run concurrently with job skill training.

***Response: Accepted***

Adjustments to the assessment process have been discussed with the contractors. It is recognized by all involved that the drop-out rate continues to appear high and reasons for this are difficult to explain. The Implementation Team has asked the evaluation sub-committee to include, within it’s terms of reference for the outcome evaluation, criteria to investigate and review this issue further in order to determine causes and possible solutions.

# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

In 1994, the Government of Canada announced its intention to renew and revitalize the country's social security system to create an environment that better rewards effort and offers incentives to work.

To this end, Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) launched the Strategic Initiatives (SI) program to provide a funding mechanism for the federal government to work in partnership with provincial and territorial governments to test new and innovative approaches in high priority areas of employment, education and income security. Projects supported by SI are funded on a 50/50 basis between the federal and provincial/territorial governments.

Negotiations took place between HRDC and the Alberta government departments of Family & Social Services (F&SS) and Advanced Education & Career Development (AE&CD) to identify projects which would be eligible for SI funding. Negotiations ultimately led to an agreement to jointly fund an Integrated Training for Youth pilot project.

## 1.2 Program Description

For several years, AE&CD has been interested in delivering integrated training based on a model developed by the Center for Employment Training (CET) in the United States. The department wanted the Integrated Training for Youth pilot project to incorporate certain features of the CET model. For example, the Terms of Reference stated that, ideally, the programs should have the following features:

- ❍ services at one location;
- ❍ open entry and open exit for all participants;
- ❍ individualized training and self-pace learning based on a detailed action plan;
- ❍ "hands-on" work specific skill training which is competency based and tested frequently at each "competency level";
- ❍ training is provided in specific job skills determined to be in demand in the local labor market;

- ❍ basic education deficiencies are linked directly to work specific skill training (the focus is not on achieving a GED or High School credentials);
- ❍ industry and counseling oriented instructors;
- ❍ intensive training of 35 — 40 hours per week;
- ❍ support services, such as child care, participant incentives, job coach/personal mentoring and counseling (both personal and career directed), are integrated with the skill training;
- ❍ post placement counseling (both personal and career directed) of an additional 4 months after the completion of the work specific skill training.

The focus of the Integrated Training for Youth pilot project is on youth who have left the secondary school system due to their inability to function in traditional formal educational settings and who have experienced a lack of success in achieving significant labor force attachment.

The program emphasis is on integrating practical job skills and life management skills with ongoing coaching, tailored and sequenced to the individual needs of each participant. The intention is to create an individualized and supportive learning environment. This is a departure from the tradition of formal educational institutions, which generally focus on classroom-based group instruction.

The intention was that the Integrated Training for Youth pilot project would test the value of customized counseling, training and work site interventions for young individuals who are at risk of long term dependence on public income support, in order to assist them to make a successful transition to the world of work.

Tenders were called in early 1995 for agencies to establish Integrated Training Centers for Youth (ITCYs). Three proposals were accepted, and contracts were negotiated with the following agencies:

**1.** **Career High** — a program of the Chinook School Division to provide training to youth at two sites in Red Deer and Innisfail;

**2.** **Destinations** — a partnership between Hennig Research and Consulting, Skye Consulting and the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) to provide training to youth in Edmonton;

**3.** **Fifth on Fifth Youth Services** — a program of the Lethbridge Youth Foundation to provide integrated training to youth in Lethbridge and area.

Youth interested in attending an ITCY must meet basic Strategic Initiatives eligibility requirements:

- age 16 to 20;
- have less than grade 12 education;
- out of school for a minimum of 3 months with no intentions of returning;
- unemployed or underemployed;
- motivated to change.

The ITCYs began accepting clients in the spring and summer of 1995.

## 1.3 Methodology

The purpose of the process evaluation was to:

- review initial program activity;
- identify operational issues which should be addressed by the program management committee.

Other objectives of the evaluation were to:

- collect baseline data on program clients;
- establish and collect baseline data for comparison groups at each site.

Specific objectives were as follows:

1. To analyze and provide a descriptive report of program participant and comparison group characteristics.

2. To describe and review the client referral, intake and assessment processes for each program.

3. To describe and assess the components of each program and the operational procedures used to maximize success.

4. To describe and assess administrative client data collection and monitoring procedures and their adequacy.

5. To describe and assess how program funds are used.

6. To report on findings and identify operational issues which should be addressed by the program management committee.

7. To develop appropriate baseline data for program clients and comparison groups which can be used to evaluate program outcomes during the latter stages of the program contracts.

8. To establish appropriate processes for and assist with the collection of client and comparison group data.

A Monitoring & Evaluation Framework document prepared jointly by the federal and provincial governments identified a number of specific questions which the process evaluation should attempt to address. In addition, a number of other process questions were suggested by the consultants in their initial evaluation proposal. Together, these questions were used in developing guides for conducting interviews with a broad cross section of stakeholders, including:

- **Agency Staff** — The consultants visited each pilot site and conducted interviews with the agency Directors and other training/counseling staff to obtain a description of program processes and the nature and quantity of services provided to agency clients.

- **Clients** — Telephone interviews were conducted with 35 agency clients (including 11 early-exit clients) to obtain their experience in the program and their satisfaction with the services they received.

- **Employers** — Telephone interviews were conducted with 13 employers involved with the agencies to identify their role in the program and their perceptions of the training being provided.

- **Community Stakeholders** — Telephone interviews were conducted with 18 representatives of community-based agencies to obtain their perceptions of the programs and identify any concerns that may be emerging with regard to program promotion, referral and service delivery.

- **Government Stakeholders** — The following telephone interviews were conducted to obtain perceptions of the programs and identify any concerns that might be emerging at this stage:

  HRDC — Regional Office (5), National Office (1);
  F&SS — Field Office (5), Head Office (2);
  AE&CD — Field Office (3), Head Office (2).

In addition to interviews, the consultants also reviewed the agency contracts and documents pertaining to the Strategic Initiatives program. Finally, the consultants analyzed baseline data for program participants and comparison group members.  Baseline data was collected by the agencies using a survey designed by the consultants.  The agencies administered the surveys and entered the results into a computer database designed specifically to capture baseline information.  A copy of the database on diskette was made available to the consultants for analysis.

# 2.0 EVALUATION FINDINGS: DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION AND DELIVERY

## 2.1 Client Profile

Table 1 below contains data representing ITCY client activity occurring in a 6.5 month period from May 15, 1995 to November 30, 1995.

**Table 1**
**ITCY Client Volumes**

| | |
|---|---|
| Screened | 522 |
| Eligible | 422 |
| Intake/Assessment | 269 |
| Accepted | 210 |
| In Training | 148 |
| Completed, Training | 1 |
| Employed[1] | 0 |

Selected results from the Strategic Initiatives baseline survey administered to clients accepted for training at an ITCY (n=203) are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**
**ITCY Client Profile**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mean Age (years) | 18.0 | Never had Paid Employment | 9% |
| Male | 61% | Currently Employed | 15% |
| Single (never married) | 86% | On Social Assistance in Last 3 Years | 36% |
| Dependent Children | 15% | On Social Assistance Now | 23% |
| Visible Minority | 12% | | |
| Aboriginal | 13% | At Some Time Within the Past Year: | |
| Living with Parent(s) at Age 16 | 70% | — Attended School | 47% |
| Currently Living with Parent(s) | 40% | — Took Training/Counseling | 36% |
| Mean Months out of School | 17.8 | — Unemployed/Looking for Work | 85% |
| Criminal Record | 36% | — Employed | 73% |
| Learning Disability | 27% | — Mean Hourly Wage (main job) | $6.50 |

1 The client who completed training decided to return to school and therefore, does not show as being employed.

The statements in the baseline survey the youth agreed with most strongly include[2]:

- *A year from now I plan to be working (1.1);*
- *In the longer term, I will maintain steady employment (1.3);*
- *It is important to have work that makes good use of my skills (1.3);*
- *I don't want to have to depend on government support in the future (1.4);*
- *In the near future, I will be applying the skills I expect to learn (1.4);*
- *In the near future, I will find a job related to the training I expect to receive (1.6);*
- *I would take a better paying job even if it meant spending less time with my friends (1.6);*
- *I am confident I will get ahead in life (1.6);*
- *I have lots of support around me (1.9).*

The statements youth disagreed with most strongly include:

- *In the longer term I will be on social assistance (4.7);*
- *I relate poorly with my friends (4.4);*
- *I have no control over where my life is heading (4.2);*
- *Right now I would be better off financially on welfare than if I was working (4.1);*
- *There are no good jobs out there for me (4.0).*

## 2.2 Referral, Intake and Assessment

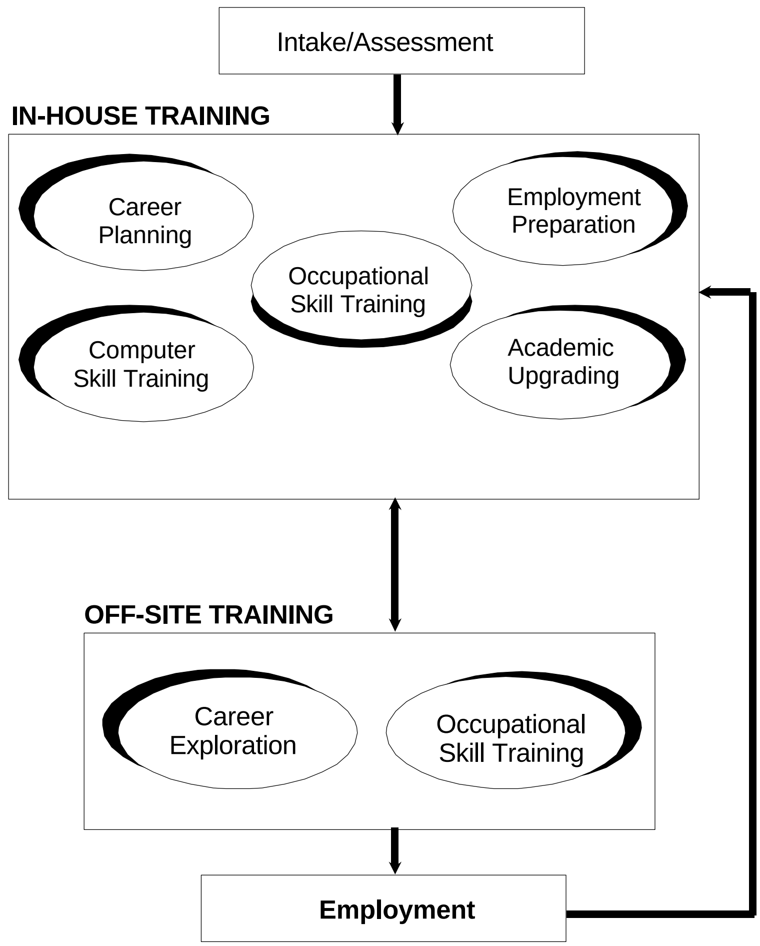
Figure 1 on the following page provides an overview of how clients typically access services at an ITCY, beginning with intake/assessment and continuing through training and employment. Various components of ITCY programming are described below.

The agencies have distributed brochures and made presentations to other community agencies and government departments. News articles and advertising have also been published in the local newspapers. Many of the referrals to ITCYs are by word of mouth. Some of the organizations referring clients to ITCYs include: Inner City Housing, Young Offender's Center, Youth Emergency Shelter, Youth Employment Services, Probation, Child Welfare, and Social Services.

---

[2] The mean ratings presented in parenthesis are based on a 5 point scale where 1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree.

**Figure 1**
**Integrated Training Centres for Youth**



Eligible youth are invited to the next scheduled intake session provided there is space available. The first 2 weeks of the program are considered a formal assessment or probationary period where clients' barriers, needs and level of commitment to the program are identified. Clients could be asked to leave the program at this point for any of the following reasons, depending on each agency's rules and ability to address client problems[3]:

- severe addiction problems;
- unstable mental health problems;
- numerous personal issues the agency is unable to help with;
- criminal charges pending;
- staff feel the client can't be trusted due to criminal history of theft;
- a history of not following through;
- lack of commitment to the program; poor attendance;
- client's goal is unrealistic or requires they finish high school;
- staff feel the client is unemployable at the time because of a lack of maturity.

In order to decrease disincentives and increase incentives to train, ITCYs received funding to be used as a client training allowance. The incentive is intended to provide for clients' basic needs while in training. Each participant can access up to a maximum of $4,500.00 in incentive dollars over a period of 8 months. The presumption is that the client will be self-sufficient through employment income by this time.

## 2.3 Training

All occupational training is competency-based, ensuring that clients master the skills necessary to work in their chosen industry. Depending on the agency, ITCY clients may receive training in-house or off-site at an employer's job-site. Clients typically access off-site training by participating in job shadowing (JS), work experience (WE), or training on the job (TOJ) opportunities. Clients may also access supplemental occupational training from other institutions or through other programs.

The most significant difference between the 3 ITCY sites lies in the way occupational skill training is delivered. The Lethbridge ITCY provides occupational training in-house, and youth who train in any given occupation all tend to receive the same training. The Edmonton and Red Deer ITCYs offer

[3] Clients asked to leave the program may be invited back at a later date provided they have dealt with their personal issues to the satisfaction of agency staff.

more individualized training but are dependent on the availability of employer-based training opportunities off-site.

The Edmonton and Lethbridge ITCYs offer training in specific occupational areas that were identified through labor market research as having the best employment opportunities for this client group. They include:

Lethbridge

custodial
hospitality/retail/tourism
clerical/office work
construction
automotive

Edmonton

The Red Deer ITCY does not limit clients' choice of occupation to pre-selected industries. The only constraint is the availability of job-site training opportunities.

ITCY clients may move back and forth between in-house and off-site training, depending on their individual needs. In Lethbridge, clients receive 5 months of in-house training. In Edmonton and Red Deer, in-house training can last anywhere from 2 weeks to 3 months, depending on the needs of the client. Whether training in-house or off-site, it is anticipated that most ITCY clients will be able to complete their training within 8 months and will receive job maintenance services for an additional 4 months.

In-house and off-site training are described in more detail below.

### *(a) In-house Training*

In-house training typically focuses on generic transferable skills. The amount and type of training clients receive is based on need, and focuses on reducing barriers to employment[4].

---

4 Because the Lethbridge program operates according to a pre-set schedule, the services are less individualized and clients all tend to participate in the same training. The only differences in training are between occupational specific areas.

### 1. Career Planning

This component is intended to assist clients in choosing an occupation and exploring a career path. It typically includes workshops and assignments that help clients identify their skills, abilities and interests.

### 2. Employment Preparation

Numerous lifeskill workshops covering topics such as attitude, communication and self-esteem are offered at ITCYs. Clients may also work one-on-one with staff or on their own to improve their lifeskills. Clients also learn how to create a resume, job search, and interview for a job. Of primary importance is the removal of barriers to employment such as transportation or child care issues.

### 3. Computer Skill Training

All clients receive a basic introduction to computers and will receive enough training to create their own resumes. Clients training in an occupational area requiring more computer skills would spend more time training in-house on the computer[5].

### 4. Academic Upgrading

Clients would receive academic upgrading only if their education level was considered a barrier to training or employment. Upgrading is typically accessed through a self-directed computerized teaching system. Curriculum tends to be individualized and occupationally related.

### 5. Occupational Skill Training

Only the Lethbridge ITCY delivers occupational skill training in-house. A competency-based curriculum has been developed for each of the 3 occupational areas Lethbridge focuses on. Training typically consists of classroom theory combined with practical hands-on experience.

**Hospitality/Retail** — Youth training to work in this industry practice some of what they have learned in "The Back Room", a canteen that is accessible to anyone at 5th on 5th Youth Services. For 2 hours every morning, the canteen operates cafeteria style. Over the noon hour, table service is provided. Clients rotate through the canteen working on practical skills which include all tasks involved in the day to day operation of the canteen.

---

[5] This is the only area where the Edmonton and Red Deer ITCYs would provide hands-on occupational skill training in-house.

**Office Work** — Clients in this training area spend most of their time working on their computer skills. In addition, they take turns training with the receptionist at 5th on 5th Youth Services. This provides for more work-simulated training.

**Custodial** — A custodial firm has been contracted to provide 12 hours of custodial training each week. The contracted company purchased a certified custodial training program from the United States and modified it for the Lethbridge ITCY. As with the other occupational training at the ITCY, a comprehensive curriculum (38 modules) has been designed. The custodial training is delivered in the evening. After receiving theoretical instruction and a practical demonstration, clients work on their own cleaning the entire 5th on 5th Youth Services building.

### *(b) Off-site Training*

The following training options are available off-site:

**1. <u>Career Exploration</u>**

Many clients will spend time at a Career Development Center researching their career options. In Edmonton, NAIT offers a hands-on career orientation to each of the occupational areas the ITCY focuses on.

Early in the program, clients may participate in job shadowing or short-term work experience or TOJ's in order to explore different career options. These job-site visitations also allow the employers an opportunity to "test" the client before committing to train them. The length of the off-site career exploration is determined by both the client and employer, but typically range from a half day to 5 days in length. They may also involve some job skill training as employers have indicated that even a job shadow should involve putting the client to work so they are exposed to the realities of the job.

**2. <u>Occupational Skill Training</u>**

Whether occupational training is delivered in-house or at a job-site, work experience is an important component of ITCYs. All ITCY clients receive a portion of their skill training at an employers' job-site. A competency-based training plan is developed by the ITCY and employer either before or shortly after the client begins training at the job-site. The client, essentially, starts working for the employer. Some clients are paid a full wage by the employer (TOJ) while they are training/working, or their training allowance may be supplemented by the employer to bring it to the wage level they would be paid if they were not part of the training program.

In Edmonton, all long-term job-specific skill training occurs at an employer's job-site. Clients may also receive a portion of their skill training at NAIT. The NAIT training may involve certified or non-certified courses and typically occurs under either of the following 2 conditions:

- the employer does not have the time or ability to provide all the necessary training at the job-site;
- staff have determined from a group of employers a basic set of skills that a client should have before they begin training at an employer's job-site.

Red Deer, also utilizes employers to provide all long-term job-specific skill training. The Red Deer ITCY (Innisfail site) was co-located with the School Division's maintenance shop. Clients can access training in the maintenance shop in any of the following occupational areas[6]:

- carpentry;
- welding;
- plumbing;
- shipping/receiving;
- general labor.

Lethbridge clients participate in a work experience placement after they have completed the in-house occupational training. In addition to training in-house, Lethbridge clients may also access external training courses. The courses are intended to supplement, not replace, the job skill training provided at the ITCY. External training would typically involve the acquisition of a more specialized skill set in one of the 3 occupational areas the Lethbridge ITCY trains in.

## 2.4 Case Management

Each new ITCY intake group is assigned to a specific staff member, although generally, all staff are responsible for monitoring that clients exhibit appropriate behavior while in training. A team approach to case management is typically used and staff informally communicate with each other on an ongoing basis. Staff meet daily to discuss what needs to be done that day and determine the most appropriate staff person to carry out any given task. In addition to informal communication among staff, a formal staff meeting is held once per week to

6 Career High considers this to be off-site training as they are physically separated from the maintenance shop and the training is not delivered by Career High staff. Training provided by the school division is not considered to be any different than training provided by another employer.

discuss client progress and "brainstorm" innovative ways to help any given client.

While a client is training off site, progress is monitored through phone contacts or site visits. Contact with either the employer or the client typically occurs on an as needed basis, with at least 1 site visit conducted every month. The training plan is discussed or reviewed during every site visit to ensure the client is progressing at an acceptable pace.

## 2.5 Job Placement and Maintenance

With some exceptions, clients are considered to have completed training after they have achieved all the competencies identified in their training plan. All 3 ITCYs try to arrange job-site training opportunities with employers who will be in a position to hire a client after they have completed their training. As this type of arrangement is not always possible, both the client and the agency would search for an appropriate employment position after training is completed. If a client cannot find employment after training, they may engage in another job-site training experience. Each new opportunity for training is intended to build on the last and eventually lead to full-time employment.

Once clients are employed, job maintenance and support are provided as necessary for 4 months[7]. Clients training in Edmonton and Red Deer will already have spent a significant amount of time at an employer's site during training. Agency staff at these 2 ITCYs believe that most problems that might occur after employment would typically already have been identified and dealt with during training. Similarly, the Lethbridge ITCY feels the in-house work simulated training will sufficiently prepare clients for employment.

## 2.6 Incentives

All ITCY clients, with the exception of unemployment insurance recipients, receive a training allowance. All 3 ITCYs have typically followed the incentive guidelines described in the Province's RFP. The training allowance is based on the following scale:

7 At the time of the evaluation, the agencies had not yet fully operationalized job maintenance services.

| Client Status | Daily Allowance |
|---|---|
| dependent (living at home) | $0.00 — $15.00 |
| independent (living away from home) | |
| ❍ no children | $25.00 |
| ❍ 1 child | $33.00 (supplemented by Social Services) |
| ❍ 2 children | $41.00 (supplemented by Social Services) |

Clients may receive a training allowance beginning on the first day of orientation (Edmonton) or beginning after the 2 week assessment/probationary period (Red Deer and Lethbridge). Each ITCY keeps a daily attendance log, and clients receive a "paycheck" every 2 weeks as they typically would if employed[8]. Clients continue to receive a training allowance until their entire wage is paid by an employer or until they reach the total sum available to them ($4,500.00). At 2 of the ITCYs, clients can access a small amount of the lump sum available to purchase work clothes or tools needed for a job.

## 2.7 Employer Involvement

The role of employers varies by site, but typically involves:

- training (JS, WE, TOJ);
- identifying core competencies;
- developing training plans;
- speaking at ITCYs;
- mentoring clients;
- networking with other employers;
- sitting on an advisory committee (*see below*).

Each ITCY has established an Employer Advisory Committee[9] whose members represent the industries the agency focuses on or represent the labor market in general. The committee's role is to identify training and job opportunities and advise the ITCY on the current state of the labor market so they can target the occupational areas that provide the most opportunity for their clients.

8 The ITCYs typically refer to the incentive as a "paycheck" as a measure to reinforce the work orientation.

9 At the time of the evaluation, the Lethbridge ITCY was still in the process of establishing an employer advisory committee.

# 3.0 EVALUATION FINDINGS: STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS

## 3.1 Clients

Twenty four (24) program participants were interviewed (8 from each ITCY). Their comments about various aspects of the program are presented below.

***(a) Training***

Clients were asked what they had been doing since they started training at the ITCY. Their responses generally matched the agencys' descriptions of the training process. Clients indicated that they usually worked on generic skills such as lifeskills, job finding skills, and upgrading their math, English and typing skills before they began occupational skill training.

The following is a brief summary of client descriptions of their training from each of the ITCY sites.

**1. <u>Edmonton</u>**

Clients indicated having similar training experiences during the first few weeks of the program. Generally, they described working on lifeskills and job finding skills. More than half also stated they had worked on the STARR lab upgrading their math, English and typing skills. After their initial few weeks in the program, clients' experiences became more individualized. Most clients indicated they received some training at NAIT in one or more of the following:

- ❍ automotives;
- ❍ first aid;
- ❍ Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS);
- ❍ handling food safely.

A few clients indicated they had participated in job shadowing and half of the clients stated they had job searched. All but 1 of the clients indicated they had spent time at an employer's job site. For the most part, clients were satisfied with the training they had received.

### 2. Red Deer

Red Deer clients also indicated having a similar experience in the initial stage of the training program. Clients indicated that during the 2 week intake/ assessment period, they worked on lifeskills and job finding skills. They also received an introduction to computers and job shadowed at 1 or 2 businesses. After being formally accepted into the program, the experiences clients described were much more individualized. Most clients indicated they participated in several more job shadows, they job searched and worked on Pathfinder, upgrading their education. Some clients also worked on computer/keyboarding skills, did volunteer work, went on work experience placements, or were employed part-time or full-time. One client learned some entrepreneurial skills and operated her own business for a short time. Clients were satisfied with the program and the training they had received.

### 3. Lethbridge

Clients indicated they received lifeskill and computer skill training. They also received job-specific skill training in the areas of office worker, hospitality/retail or custodial. In addition, 2 clients were taking courses at the Lethbridge Community College. Clients also participated in one or more job shadowing (JS) or work experience (WE) placements.

The Lethbridge clients were not as satisfied with the program as clients in Edmonton or Red Deer. Several Lethbridge clients felt the program was somewhat disorganized and indicated that they were being placed in classes with new intakes and had to repeat some of the training modules. Most of the clients also expressed concern about the job shadowing/work experience and job placement process at the Lethbridge ITCY. It was suggested that the agency had told clients when they started the program that placements would be found for them, but clients stated they were expected to "sell" the program to potential employers and make their own job shadowing or work experience arrangements.

### *(b) Incentives*

Clients indicated they were receiving $5.00 to $33.00 per day in the form of a training allowance. Most of the clients thought it was enough to get by on, while a few indicated the training allowance was barely enough to meet their basic needs. Only 4 clients indicated they would not be able to attend the program without the training allowance.

Clients with no dependents who were living with a friend or relative appeared to have less financial problems than those with dependents or those living on their own. Many clients suggested that there were people in the program "just for the money", but also indicated that ITCY staff usually "weed those people out."

### *(c) Support*

Clients were extremely positive about the support and services they had received from 2 of the ITCYs (Edmonton and Red Deer). They felt that staff did everything they could to help clients and were always supportive. Several clients also suggested that the support services were very personalized and that "there is always someone there to talk to if you need it."

Clients from the Lethbridge ITCY were less satisfied with the support they received from the agency. Clients expressed a good deal of dissatisfaction and frustration with how they were treated by staff. It was also suggested that the rules were not enforced fairly, and that older clients were allowed more control over their training.

### *(d) Impact on Personal or Home Life*

Most ITCY clients interviewed felt that the program had made a difference in their personal lives[10]. The following are some of the more common ways in which clients indicated they had been affected by the program:

- better able to deal with the frustrations/anger;
- better communication/relationships with family;
- more aware of priorities and responsibilities; able to focus on the future;
- more positive, better self esteem; higher level of motivation; improved personality.

### *(e) Employment Prospects*

Most clients indicated they felt very confident that they would achieve their employment goals, either on their own or with the help of the ITCY. Clients also felt confident that they would be able to find and maintain employment that paid them enough to live on. The majority of clients were very positive about their future employment.

## 3.2 Employers

Thirteen (13) employers were interviewed representing the following industries:

- retail/hospitality/restaurant;
- construction/plumbing;
- custodial services;
- autobody/auto parts/auto service.

---

[10] Although Lethbridge clients indicated that the program had some positive effects on their personal life, some clients also indicated a negative impact due to increased stress and frustration.

### *(a) Employer Involvement*
Most of the employers were recruited directly by the agency and were involved with the ITCYs in the following ways:
- ❍ member of the employer advisory committee;
- ❍ contracted trainer (custodial training at the Lethbridge ITCY);
- ❍ identifying labor market opportunities;
- ❍ providing job shadow, work experience or TOJ opportunities.

All employers were satisfied with their current role and level of involvement. A few employers suggested they might be interested in mentoring or guest speaking, but the others indicated they did not have time to become more involved. None of the employers interviewed had committed to hiring ITCY clients.

### *(b) Training Process*
Most employers reported having good contact with the agency while the client was training on the work-site, and problems were addressed promptly when they came up. Two (2) employers who trained ITCY clients indicated they had their own in-house training program in which competencwere identified and tested. The other employers indicated that they had not developed individual training plans and had a more informal training process. Clients received hands-on training and were essentially put to work as new employees with a "buddy" or supervisor.

A few of the employers had concerns about the appropriateness of clients placed with them suggesting the in-house training was not adequately preparing all clients for off-site training at an employer's site.

### *(c) Strengths and Weaknesses*
All employers supported the program noting the following strengths:
- ❍ program gives youth a chance to take a 2nd or 3rd crack at the job market;
- ❍ emotional support for students is excellent;
- ❍ program is willing to deal with people who would have great difficulty finding a job — teaches kids how to find a job;
- ❍ instructors are working hard to turn kids into success stories;
- ❍ kids are there by choice, are motivated and eager to improve;
- ❍ gratifying to employers to see kids trying to improve their situation — feels good to help them;
- ❍ clients get hands-on experience and good exposure to the work world;
- ❍ the program provides an option to school for those who don't want the college track;
- ❍ the program will help clients into the workforce and stay off welfare.

The employers also offered the following suggestions for improving the ITCYs:

- ❍ increase community awareness of the ITCY;
- ❍ better match between the client and the employer/trainer;
- ❍ enhance lifeskill training focusing on communication, responsibility, maturity, attitude, and workplace attire and behavior;
- ❍ longer job shadows (at least 1 week);
- ❍ get clients into work experience sooner.

### *(d) Prospects for Employment*

The training these employers were providing was essentially targeting entry level positions, although starting wages varied considerably, from $5.00 to $12 per hour. Most positions were felt to provide a career path under one or more of the following conditions:

- ❍ the employee gained experience;
- ❍ the employee accessed additional education and/or training;
- ❍ the employee was exceptional in the business.

Generally, employers felt that employment prospects for ITCY clients are good, although a few felt that a great deal depends on the individual client. It was suggested that the jobs are available if clients are motivated and apply themselves.

## 3.3 Government and Community Representatives

Interviews were conducted with 36 stakeholders, including 18 government representatives (HRDC — 6; F&SS — 7; AE&CD — 5) and 18 representatives of community-based agencies to obtain their perceptions on a range of specific issues relating to program design, implementation and operation. The findings are summarized below by issue.

### *(a) Program Promotion*

Stakeholders were asked whether they felt enough was being done to promote the programs to youth and youth-serving agencies in the community.

Both federal and provincial head office representatives expressed concern that referrals to the pilot sites had been lower than expected, leading to speculation that the agencies may be relying too heavily on their existing referral networks. It was also hoped that the low numbers being experienced were not due to an over-estimation of the size of the target group, as there was not a lot of data available on the potential number of at risk youth in Alberta at the time the proposals were being reviewed.

Community-based stakeholders generally felt that the agencies were well known among youth and other referring agencies. However, at least one stakeholder in each community indicated that more should be done to promote the programs among youth-serving agencies, particularly those outside the existing network the agencies had already cultivated.

### *(b) Referral Process*

Stakeholders were asked whether they had observed or experienced any problems in relation to referrals to the agency. Government representatives were not in a position to comment on this issue.

Community-based stakeholders generally felt that the referral process was functioning smoothly and that feedback to referral agents was adequate. Again, however, at least one stakeholder in each community commented on the lack of a formal referral protocol, or poor feedback from the agency regarding the status or progress of clients who had been referred.

### *(c) Target Group Access*

Stakeholders were asked if they had any concerns about the intake criteria or process used to select program participants, and whether these participants reflected the "at risk" target group as they would define it.

It is interesting that two of the agencies (Red Deer, Lethbridge) accepted clients who indicated on their baseline survey that they already had their Grade 12 diploma. Such youth would not be appropriate if clients must be high school dropouts to be eligible.

Comments from government head office representatives suggest that it was difficult to operationalize the definition of "at risk youth" in terms that made it clear who should be accepted into the programs. For example, the criteria that the youth be out of school for at least 3 months was felt to be a bit arbitrary and not necessarily accurate in identifying those who have truly left the traditional educational system. There was also concern that many eligible youth aged 16 — 20 lack the maturity to know whether they really want to work as opposed to finish school, and may not be appropriate for an intervention that attempts to prepare them for the job market.

Some community-based stakeholders also expressed concerns that the programs may not always be serving appropriate clients. The following concerns were made:

- the eligibility criteria relating to high school attendance and credits don't measure true attachment (or lack thereof) to the traditional school system. It was felt that arbitrary rules were making some worthy clients ineligible.

The rules were also preventing some youth from attending school or accessing other services while they waited for admission to integrated training because they would have rendered themselves ineligible;

- it was felt that lower risk youth were being accepted ahead of (or instead of) higher risk youth because the intake process did not triage on risk level;

- one agency's image was felt to be such that it may not attract high risk (street-oriented) youth;

- many youth in the 16 — 20 year old age group were felt to be inappropriate because they lack maturity and the ability to make commitments and decisions relating to their future.

In no case, however, was it suggested that the agencies were completely missing the target group; rather, it was more that they might be accepting some clients who were inappropriate and/or rejecting others who better fit their definition of "at risk" youth.

### *(d) Program Design*

Stakeholders were asked for their views on the adequacy and appropriateness of the services provided to program participants. Government head office representatives most frequently commented on the incentive component of the programs, expressing the hope that incentives were not being used improperly as entitlements or as wage subsidies for employers.

Community-based stakeholders were not familiar enough with the agency interventions to comment on all components of the programs, although many had comments (typically more positive than negative) about specific program features. It was commonly expressed that the programs were "rich" and should have the resources necessary to help the youth enter the job market. Most stakeholders felt optimistic about outcomes, and seemed willing to "wait and see" how things would turn out. Concerns expressed about the programs were generally isolated, and no overall themes emerged.

### *(e) Implementation Problems/Constraints*

Stakeholders were asked whether there were any problems or constraints facing the agency which interfered with implementation or operation of the program.

Government representatives noted delays in contracting as the main problem affecting program implementation. Delays were attributed to negotiations with the agencies:

- to work out the volume-based funding approach which was different from the previous set of contracts for integrated training;

- to get them to alter their proposals so that the programs would attend more closely to the CET model.

Interestingly, 2 of the 3 agencies (Edmonton, Red Deer) indicated they did not feel compelled to implement the CET model. On the other hand, Lethbridge expressed frustration that they had neither the experience nor the access to advice or assistance needed to implement the model. Both Lethbridge and Edmonton indicated they could have used more time to get their programs ready before accepting clients.

Other than these concerns, the agencies did not indicate they were currently experiencing any major problems or constraints that interfered with operations.

### *(f) Partnerships*

Stakeholders were asked whether implementation of the programs had resulted in new or enhanced partnerships.

Government head office representatives suggested that other federal/provincial initiatives (e.g., Canada Alberta Service Centers, Youth Initiatives) had already "broken the ice" in regard to cooperation between HRDC, AE&CD and F&SS. The ITCY pilot project was felt to enhance existing partnerships that had already been established.

Community-based stakeholders also indicated that the ITCY project had helped to strengthen or enhance existing partnerships. In addition, it was suggested that new partnerships had been established with employers. It was felt that employers were now much more actively and intimately involved as trainers of youth, and that this has not been their typical role.

### *(g) Roles and Relationships*

Stakeholders were asked whether the roles and responsibilities of various partners were clear, and whether they were adequately being carried out.

Government head office representatives generally felt there were no problems encountered in working out the roles of various partners. Several government representatives were not entirely satisfied with the flow of information about the pilot projects from the field level to project sponsors/funders. By agreement, contract management was delegated to the Province. A few federal representatives indicated they would like to have seen a larger federal role in contract management.

Community-based stakeholders were generally satisfied with the roles and responsibilities being carried out.

### *(h) Coordination/Duplication*

Stakeholders were asked whether they had observed an improvement in service coordination or a reduction in service duplication or overlap in the community as a result of the programs. Government head office representatives were not in a position to observe changes in the service infrastructure at the community level.

Community-based stakeholders did not feel that the ITCYs had yet resulted in reduced duplication or overlap in services. It was generally felt that the ITCYs had filled a gap that had existed in the service network. Any potential competition with other programs was viewed as healthy, providing options and choices for youth not able to be served by the school system. It was noted that the pooling of funds by the three governments had reduced jurisdictional barriers and made it easier to address gaps in the service system that clients sometimes fall through.

### *(i) ITCY Compatibility with "Strategic Initiatives"*

Government representatives generally felt that the ITCYs fit the criteria and objectives established for Strategic Initiatives. Federal representatives were interested in testing an approach where the community designed a program that responded to a local need rather than the more traditional approach whereby the federal government "prescribed" a service and called for tenders to supply that service. Adherence to the CET model was felt to be a provincial priority, although there was some interest in the concept of an individualized, self-paced training approach because it was seen as quite different from traditional employment training programs.

The federal coordinator for Strategic Initiatives across Canada felt the ITCY project fit the technical guidelines quite well. There was no concern over attempting to implement the CET model in Canada, as this was felt to be new, particularly in regard to youth programming. In particular, the following aspects of the ITCY project were of interest to the federal government:

- the individualized aspect of the model was of interest, as needs testing has normally been avoided in federal services;

- the ITCY projects were different in that they broke down jurisdictional barriers, allowing one contract for the agency and consequently one place for the agency to bill;

- partnerships and shared responsibility were seen as important issues at this time.  It was of interest to see employer involvement in training of youth.

# 4.0 EVALUATION ISSUES

The process evaluation was in part intended to identify issues that the federal and provincial partners may wish to discuss with the agencies to determine whether any program adaptations are warranted at this stage.

## 4.1 Program Assessment

Based on the consultant's understanding of program processes as described by the agencies, and upon feedback obtained from clients, employers and other stakeholders, a number of observations were made regarding each of the ITCY programs:

***(a) Edmonton***

Destinations has young and energetic staff who appear to enjoy good rapport with their clients. The agency has focused its efforts in four occupational areas, and appears to have established a strong employer network at both the advisory and program levels. Clients in the program are able to get to hands-on training relatively quickly, and the relationship with NAIT is also helpful in providing additional hands-on skills.

The following program concerns were noted:

- while the NAIT connection is potentially advantageous, clients appear to get a limited variety and relatively few hours of training at NAIT. The program may not be taking full advantage of what NAIT has to offer clients in the way of hands-on technical skill training;

- formal competency-based training plans were not being prepared for all on-the-job training placements. This raises questions about the quality of training clients may be receiving at some employer sites;

***(b) Lethbridge***

5th on 5th has gone the farthest to emulate characteristics of the CET model for integrated training. For example, academic upgrading is only provided where it is needed. The agency has designed the program such that job skill training is provided in-house. Competencies have been defined and are being tested. The custodial program is particularly strong in this regard, as it provides significant hands-on skill training, and clients can become certified through the program. This program also targets a higher starting wage than other training areas.

The following program concerns were noted:

- ❍ the agency was having some difficulty emulating characteristics of the CET model:
  - training was not self-paced;
  - components of the training were not individualized;
  - peer teaching was being used, but in a questionable manner;
  - the Hospitality area provided limited hands-on skill training.

- ❍ the agency appeared to be having difficulty getting employers involved in the program.

- ❍ clients expressed dissatisfaction in the following areas:
  - lack of assistance from the agency in contacting employers to set up placements;
  - unfair treatment by some staff members;
  - repeating of training modules taken earlier.

- ❍ the agency was having some difficulty with the local F&SS office in regard to reporting protocols.

***(c) Red Deer***

Career High has implemented an interesting model of integrated training. It is unique in that clients are not made to choose a career area from a limited list of options, but can train for any job in which a local employer can be found to provide work experience or on-the-job training. The agency uses a "ragged entry/ragged exit" approach where clients continue to work to enhance their employability (through pre-employment training, academic upgrading and various work experience and job training placements) until they are able to obtain long-term employment. Training becomes increasingly job-specific once the client is able to focus on a specific career area and occupation. Career High has been effective in recruiting employers to provide job shadow and work experience placements. The agency enjoys a relatively high staff/student ratio. Clients appear to be getting good support from staff, and were positive about their future employment prospects.

The following program concerns were noted:

- ❍ intake volumes have been lower than expected. Contributing factors may be:

- a drop in the number of unemployed youth in the region;
- an intake process that may be unduly harsh in screening candidates;
- an image that may not be conducive to attracting street-oriented youth;
- a payment formula that may not provide adequate incentive to maintain intake volumes.

❍ the program has a stronger and more generic academic focus than other programs. Clients take a relatively long time to get to the point where they receive job-specific skill training. Few were found to have received on-the-job training covered by a formal competency-based training plan.

❍ the maintenance shop has not been used to the extent planned in providing job skill training.

## 4.2 Program Costs

It was too early to look at the cost-effectiveness of the ITCYs in connecting youth to the labor force as clients were still in training at the time the evaluation was conducted. As an interim measure, client volumes and contract payments to the end of November, 1995 were analyzed to determine whether the ITCYs were on track in relation to budgeted training and incentive costs. Table 3 below summarizes the financial information for each agency:

**Table 3**
**Summary of ITCY Financial Information**

| ITCY | CLIENTS | | TRAINING FUNDS | | INCENTIVE FUNDS | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | # In Training | % of Quota | $ Spent | % of Budget | $ Spent | % of Budget |
| Edmonton | 76 | 33% | $169,510 | 18% | $69,456 | 7% |
| Lethbridge | 40 | 40% | $80,200 | 20% | $80,124 | 18% |
| Red Deer | 31 | 21% | $103,630 | 35% | $18,495 | 4% |

Only 1 client had completed training. The status of other clients in training would range from recently started to nearly completed, although it could be assumed that the "average" client was approximately half way through training. Consequently, training expenditures could be expected to double for those clients currently in training. Comparing % of client quota in training to % of training budget spent, it would appear that the Edmonton and Lethbridge ITCYs were on track with their expenditures (i.e., a doubling of their training expenditures would bring their % of budget spent approximately in line with their % of client quota trained). The Red Deer ITCY, on the other hand, had already spent a greater proportion of its training budget than it had client in training, and would appear to be in some jeopardy of not meeting its targeted costs on a per client basis.

It is interesting that incentive funds were not being spent at the same rate as training funds, particularly in Edmonton and Red Deer.

## 4.3 Funding Formula

Three aspects of the funding formula for the ITCYs were observed:

### *(a) Funding Approach*

The Red Deer ITCY has a relatively conventional contract involving fixed monthly funding. Edmonton and Lethbridge, on the other hand, operate under a volume-sensitive funding formula whereby training funds are tied to individual clients and are advanced to the agencies as clients move through phases of training. With this approach, it is much more difficult for an agency to "get ahead of itself" by spending at a faster rate than clients are being processed, as has apparently occurred in Red Deer. Both Edmonton and Lethbridge indicated that, because their cash flow is directly tied to clients, the funding approach made them very conscious of keeping up their intake volumes.

### *(b) Funding At Risk in Placement*

All ITCYs have a proportion of funding at risk because it is tied to placement success; however, the proportion of training funds tied to placement success varies:

| ITCY | Funds tied to placement/maintenance | Proportion of Funding |
|---|---|---|
| Edmonton | \$200 out of the \$4,000 billable per client | 5% |
| Lethbridge | \$800 out of the \$4,000 billable per client | 20% |
| Red Deer | \$37,625 out of the \$376,250 budget | 10% |

Lethbridge was particularly concerned about the proportion of their funding that might be at risk if they were not able to achieve their placement targets.

### *(c) Rules Regarding Placement*

Agencies can claim funds related to placement once the client has been employed for three consecutive months, at or above minimum wage, for 30 or more hours a week. However, the ground rules that apply to placement are not clear in regard to:

- how much training or assistance non-completing clients must receive before the agency can claim placement funds if they become employed;
- how long after the client leaves or completes training the agency may still claim them as a successful placement if they become employed.

These matters may become more problematic as clients begin to leave the agency to take employment.

## 4.4 Employer-Based Training

The programs in Edmonton and Red Deer make almost exclusive use of employers to provide job-specific skill training. Only Lethbridge attempts to provide job-specific skill training in-house. The use of employers has the advantage of providing clients with hands-on training using real equipment in a real working environment. Agencies providing in-house training cannot generally afford the same equipment or provide the same work-like atmosphere.

On the other hand, it is easier to control the quantity and quality of skill training clients receive if it is provided in-house. When relying on employers, it is more difficult to control the training clients receive, particularly if formal competency-based training plans are not being put in place, as appeared to be the case in Edmonton and Red Deer. There is a danger, therefore, that a client's training experience will depend on the availability of employers at the time they are ready to go off-site. There was evidence that clients did not always get training placements that matched their chosen interest. Some dropped out because of this, while others went reluctantly because they had no other options.

## 4.5 Incentives

The provision of incentives to clients is a relatively innovative feature of the ITCYs. It was hoped that the funds would be used to remove disincentives or provide incentives for clients to attend and complete their training. It was also desired that incentive levels would be set on a case by case basis.

The agencies have found it difficult to assess individual client needs, and have largely fallen back to using a grid to set incentive rates. The grid is typically based on whether clients live on their own and the number of dependents they have. The contracts themselves set guidelines for the maximum amounts clients can receive, both monthly and in total. This, in itself, would mitigate against a totally individualized approach.

It also appears that F&SS has been "topping up" clients in some situations, further indicating that the incentive amounts are not meeting the individual needs of all clients. Such topping up may also be causing another problem: Agencies typically dock funds when clients are late or absent, but clients could recover this shortfall through the top up, undermining agency efforts to create an incentive for clients to attend.

Clients (and others) have indicated that some youth are there "just for the money", suggesting that incentives attract people who are motivated to attend for the wrong reasons. This is to some extent unavoidable, but it further demonstrates the difficulty the agencies face in having incentives work in the way they were intended.

## 4.6 Drop-Out Rate

All 3 ITCY sites are experiencing difficulties with drop-out rates:

| | Drop-out Rate During Assessment | Drop-out Rate After Assessment |
|---|---|---|
| Edmonton | 7% | 22% |
| Lethbridge | 15% | 37% |
| Red Deer | 27% | 36% |

The 2 week assessment was intended to screen out individuals who were inappropriate and unlikely to complete training. One would therefore have expected the drop out rate after assessment to be lower than the rate during the assessment period. The contrary has occurred. Lethbridge and Red Deer appear to be having the greatest difficulty with drop-outs, losing more than one-third of their clients after they have completed the assessment period.

The high drop-out rates might be attributable to the lower than expected referral rates which may be leading agencies to carry clients who they might not otherwise accept in order to meet their contracted quotas. It may also be that clients who are "there for the money" eventually move on once they tire of the regimen they must follow in order to receive their incentive. In any event, it does not appear that the assessment process is adequate in determining a client's suitability for the program.

# 5.0 CONCLUSION

Each agency has implemented a slightly different model of integrated training, targeting different jobs and using different methods of occupational skill training. Each model was seen to have its own strengths, as well as specific weaknesses which need to be discussed to determine whether changes should be made to program processes. Of particular concern to all agencies are the high drop-out rates being experienced, and the difficulties implementing incentives in the individualized manner that was intended.

Clients were generally satisfied with the training they received. They noted positive impacts in their home and personal lives, and were optimistic about their employment prospects. Employers were also satisfied with their involvement, and were optimistic about the prospects for most of the clients placed with them.

Government and community stakeholders tended to be supportive of the programs, which were felt to have filled a gap in local programming for youth at risk. Concerns expressed by stakeholders relating to agency intake criteria and referral processes are not unexpected as new programs are introduced. The programs were seen to have enhanced existing government partnerships, and to have created new partnerships with employers as trainers of youth.

The pilot project provides an opportunity to look not only at different program models, but also at different funding approaches. Variations were found in the proportion of agency funding tied to placement success, and in the formula used for advancing training funds to the agencies. Program costs were found to be in line with client volumes for agencies using a formula where funding is tied to individual clients.

The pilot project is a unique initiative in Alberta, combining elements of integrated training with financial supports and incentives. The process evaluation was not intended to document the success of the ITCYs at this early stage in their implementation. As part of the process evaluation, a comparison group was established and baseline data was collected. In addition, instruments were designed and a workplan was prepared for the collection of outcome data. An outcome evaluation has been scheduled which will determine the cost-effectiveness of integrated training as a measure to assist at-risk youth in attaining meaningful long-term employment.