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ABSTRACT
        A Youth Career Centre in South Alberta has been
proposed to fulfill the career development needs of youth. The center
should be based on the tenets of career development theory that
suggest that five basic processes are necessary to facilitate the
career development of youth: initiation, exploration, decision
making, preparation, and implementation. Results of a survey of
community services for the career development of youth in Calgary
showed no single service providing assistance in all basic career
planning processes. The following gaps in the service network have
been identified: lack of interagency collaboration; need for
collaboration between business, schools, and agencies; need for
services with mandates to help youth in specific age parameters; lack
of consistency in program delivery; service delivery hindered by
inadequate funding; service deliverers and educators overwhelmed by
the enormous needs of youth in the city; services spread throughout
the city and difficult for some youth to access them; career
development with an occupational and not a life-planning and
life-roles focus; over emphasis on skills development; inadequacy of
the system's capacity to deal with dropouts; reactive rather than
proactive services; and poorly marketed services. Interviews with
Calgary practitioners regarding these gaps and needs resulted in
overwhelming support for a centralized, specialized youth career
center. The complexities of the problems suggest that services need
to be multifaceted. (Contains 32 references.) (YLB)

The Youth Career Centre of Calgary: A Rationale for the Development of a

Community-Based Centre for Meeting the Career Development Needs of

Youth

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Running Head: Youth

Introduction

In this paper, the theoretical and applied rationale for a proposed Youth Career Centre in Southern Alberta is presented. The mandate of the Centre will be to fulfill the career development needs of youth, who are broadly defined as individuals between the ages of 12 and 24. The mandate will be filled through the provision of consistent and expert consultation concerning issues such as the meaning or salience of career and life planning, the exploration of interests, values, aptitudes and abilities, understanding the fit between educational and workplace demands and individual attributes, occupational decision-making, preparation for implementing one's tentative career goals, and the development of self-management skills which foster self-directed career and life planning. A brief theoretical rationale for such a service is presented, followed by the results of a survey of community services for the career development of youth. Gaps in the service network are identified, and recommendations for a centralized forum for the delivery of service are provided.

Mangum (1987) has noted that the transition from adolescence to the adult world of work is inherently difficult, particularly in a society that has made a practice of separating the home and workplace and extending the period of adolescence. One of the primary indicators of this problem is the high rate of youth unemployment in Canada. The school-to-work transition is complicated by the fact that many youth are unsuccessful at accessing and maintaining jobs, largely as a result of two factors: a lack of attitudinal and affective work competencies (Duggan and Mazza, 1986; Herr and Cramer, 1988; Mangum, 1987), as well as the overwhelming demand from business

and industry for youth to upgrade their basic literacy adaptability skills (Crawford, 1988; Dole, 1989).

Various attempts have been made to deal with this problematic issue, including youth employability programs, career education, school-based transition programs and other, more holistic approaches. These efforts have met with limited success; Magnusson, Day and Redekopp (1988) suggest that the reason for this lack of success is that most programs for youth seem to focus on the development of specific skills to the exclusion of self-management or salience issues. There seems to be an underlying assumption in such approaches that competence in technical skill areas will generalize to the attitudinal and self-management qualities that are necessary to effect an optimal transition. However, this is not always the case, and there is an ongoing need to develop innovative means of facilitating youth's transition to work. We propose that a Youth Career Centre (YCC), based on the tenets of career development theory, would be an effective way of addressing some of these problematic issues.

Five Basic Processes of Career Development

The general goal of the YCC will be to help young people develop the skills and attitudes necessary for career management. Given the developmental nature of adolescence, and the numerous factors that affect individual career development (c.f. Astin, 1984; Farmer, 1985; Hackett and Betz, 1981; Super and Nevill, 1984), Magnusson (1992) suggests that five basic processes are necessary to effectively facilitate the career development of youth: initiation, exploration, decision-making, preparation and implementation.

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Initiation. To initiate simply means to facilitate the start of something; most youth need to be initiated into the processes of career planning in a way that secures their involvement. This begins with an exploration of **structural salience**, which refers to value systems, belief structures, interest patterns, and personal characteristics; such qualities remain relatively stable over time (Magnusson and Redekopp, 1989). These factors provide structures around which youth organize experience and derive meaning. It is also necessary to explore contextual salience, which is temporal, and is a function of youth's perception of their immediate circumstances.

Magnusson and Redekopp (1989) note that the transition from school to work (or even the notion of "career") must be salient in order for youth to effect changes in their lives; that is, salience provides the **motivation** for change. When the work-role or transition has personal meaning to youth they are at a "readiness point" to engage in career development tasks. It is the process of motivation building and initiation to career planning which is missing from many traditional youth programs.

Exploration. Adolescence is considered a time of general exploration where an increasing level of self-awareness will eventually lead to the implementation of one's self-concept in a chosen occupation (Super, 1957). At this point in adolescent career development, one can assist youth in the process of engaging in self-examination, role try-outs and occupational exploration. The role of information acquisition throughout the process of exploration is fundamental, and the majority of career educators and practitioners place a great deal of emphasis on the provision of information. However, although many sources of occupational information exist, it is very difficult to keep up with the explosion of information available. A

centralized service could effectively marshal resources and serve as an information center, thereby freeing other service providers to concentrate on process. Furthermore, a centralized service could monitor innovative advances in the process of exploration, and serve in a consultative capacity to other service providers.

Decision-making. Decision-making is central to career development. It generally entails the development of priorities, the setting of tentative goals, and an evaluation of the decision made. A variety of decision approaches have been proposed (c.f. Gelatt, 1989; Jepsen and Dilley, 1974; Krumboltz, 1979; Super, 1957) and are applicable to a youth population. Ultimately, however, if the initiation and exploration processes have been thoroughly conducted, a "right choice" intuitively begins to emerge (Magnusson, 1992). A centralized service could provide expert assistance regarding decision strategies, styles and techniques to youth and service providers.

Preparation. Once a career decision has been made, it is essential to take action to follow through. For most youth, this preparation includes the ability to adapt to change (Magnusson and Redekopp, 1989; Mithaug, Martin and Agrin, 1987), the mastery of basic literacy skills, the acquisition of basic pre-employment skills (e.g., job search and job maintenance skills), and occupational and work maturity skills (Duggan and Mazza, 1986). For all youth, it also involves the development of specific action plans that specify long and short-term goals and the steps needed to attain them. Many community-based providers of services to youth focus on preparation, however, there is a need to coordinate and expand efforts in this area.

Implementation. Implementation of one's career goals tends to involve a complex synthesis and integration of one's skills, knowledge, attitudes and experiences into strategies of self-management. The process of becoming an independent life and career planner is facilitated by adequate social support systems, which provide a source of monitoring, evaluation and feedback to the youth. Many support services for youth stop after a decision has been made or, in some cases, after basic preparation has been conducted. There is a need to help youth implement their plans through the development and utilization of various forms of social support.

Community Transition Services in Calgary

In order to ascertain the breadth of career planning services available to youth in Calgary, an informal review of 20 existing services was conducted; the five processes outlined above were used to describe the services offered. No single service provided assistance in all of the basic career planning processes. The majority of the services emphasize employment preparation more than exploration or decision-making, and none of the services explicitly focused on the initiation process. The more comprehensive services were found in post-secondary educational institutions, which offered career and educational counselling and some form of job preparation. Generally, the quality of such services are dependent on funding, the degree of institutional support for career (as opposed to educational) counselling, and the leadership of qualified personnel. However, even these comprehensive services do not focus on salience issues, nor on the implementation of one's career plan. Furthermore, they have restricted access to services; typically, the service is only available to students of the institution.

Many of the community-based services focus on preparation for employment. For example, the Youth Employment Centre for youth aged 15-24 is primarily concerned with job preparation skills such as resumé writing, interview skills, job-search and job maintenance. As an adjunct to this primary focus, some career exploration (e.g., CHOICES) and decision-making (e.g., the Career Decision-Making System) strategies are available. However, the Youth Employment Centre does not have trained career counsellors facilitating these processes, nor are parents encouraged to participate. Once again, little (if any) attention is paid to initiation and implementation processes. An exception to the community programs is Explorations, a program put on by Calgary Parks and Recreation. This program seems to address the processes of initiation, exploration, decision-making and preparation, but does not formally address the implementation process.

Career services in secondary schools tend to be "hit and miss". Some schools offer an excellent range of services, while others are limited in both resources and expertise. As with the post-secondary institutions, the quality of career services seems to be dependent on the training and initiative of the staff; if the counsellors have formal counsellor and career training, they tend to provide a more comprehensive service. Some programs, such as the Career and Life Management (CALM) 20 curriculum and the WOW and SUPERWOW programs are school-based while others (e.g., Gateway Club) are school-related. Other programs also exist; Grekol (1991) described a number of promising strategies (e.g., transition programs, mentoring, teacher-advisor programs, peer tutoring) within the Calgary Public School System that address the issue of student retention (and therefore, indirectly, career development). Unfortunately, with the exception of CALM 20 (which is a mandatory course

containing a unit of career development) these services are available at a
limited number of sites, and there is little consistency from site to site
regarding availability and quality of service. Thus, while the schools are a
logical forum for the delivery of career development services to youth, they
tend to lack the personnel and the resources to offer a comprehensive service
at all sites.

Summary of Gaps in Calgary-Based Youth Services

Despite the considerable time and energy focused on the career
development problems of youth, it seems that many youth are falling
through the gaps in the support systems available to them in Calgary. There
are many reasons why this seems to be the case; the general results of
interviews with service providers, supplemented by systemic difficulties cited
in the literature, have been summarized in the following13 themes
explaining gaps in career development services for youth:

1. Lack of inter-agency collaboration. Most programs operate
independently of each other and thus remain disconnected (Magnusson, Day
and Redekopp, 1988). There is a lack of commitment to the long-term inter-
agency planning process that would be necessary to develop effective
relationships between agencies. One of the most common complaints
registered by the Calgary service providers is that services are fragmented and
there isn't enough inter-agency collaboration. Part of the reason for this may
stem from the perception that the agencies are competing against each other
for a limited pot of government funding. Regardless of the reasons, it creates
a difficult work environment for practitioners and educators to the extent
that they are basically uninformed about what other agencies are doing, and
thus they are missing potentially valuable referral sources.

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Fortunately, there is a trend towards more collaboration amongst Calgary service providers as evidenced by recent networking efforts such as The Calgary Career Development Practitioners Network, the Adolescent Needs Network and the Youth Services Network. At present, these networking efforts are in their formative stages and focus more on information sharing than collaboration of service; this is not surprising given the different training and theoretical frameworks of the different service providers (e.g., psychiatrists, counsellors, social workers, teachers, administrators, etc.).

Another barrier to effective collaboration seems to be a latent suspicion or mistrust of other agencies. There is a perceived competition for diminishing resources amongst youth agencies, and the politics surrounding this issue make it difficult to share all of one's resources, especially if it means potentially losing out on a grant to another agency. This perception was shared in an interview with Lou Brown (Brown, Halpern, Hasazi and Wehman, 1987), who stated:

> Many parents and taxpayers function under the tragic illusion that
> we professionals like each other, work together, respect each
> other's roles and expertise, share information, and plan jointly.
> We do not ... these unfortunate circumstances must be improved
> upon dramatically if meaningful transitions are to be realized. All
> responsible for school-to-postschool transitions must join together
> in order to provide individualized services so critical for lifelong
> success in integrated community settings (p. 548).

2. Need for collaboration between businesses, schools and agencies.
Numerous model programs and educational models in the United States and Europe owe their success to the almost symbiotic level of cooperation between schools, businesses and youth agencies. In Canada, and Calgary in

particular, such levels of cooperation do not exist. For example, McMan

Youth Services Final Report (Hill, 1991) on their 1990-91 Super WOW

program indicated that finding jobs for their youth was extremely difficult.

An average of twenty phone calls per student was made for each placement.

Although a variety of factors led to this problem, it does not seem to be an

isolated incident, and bespeaks of the lack of business cooperation and/or

advance agreements necessary to ensure the success of such programs.

3. Services have mandates to help youth in specific age parameters, frequently neglecting youth of elementary or junior high school age. Many

youth are neglected because they do not fit within a particular agencies

specific operating guidelines. For example, the mandate of the Youth

Employment Centre is for youth aged 15 to 24. These restrictions to access

may be problematic because youth tend to be passed from one service to the

next until the "right" placement is found. The impact on the youth is

generally disempowering and discouraging. This process of "service-tag" may

continue until the youth reach adult status, at which time they are confronted

with learning how to access a whole new range of services and service

providers for adults.

4. There is a lack of consistency in program delivery. Although there

are numerous exemplary programs in the city, the level of sophistication and

effectiveness of the career development focus varies considerably with the

agency, school or coordinator that runs the program.

5. Service delivery is hindered by inadequate funding. Smith, Walker

and Baker (1987) have documented the requisites for the success of social

programs; they found that in addition to the quality of program design, staff

and operations, program success was determined by the stability of program

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operations and the security of funding over time. Many Calgary-based programs operate on a year-to-year funding basis; even though they may be quite successful, inadequate and unstable funding often leads to a "here today gone tomorrow" situation. Furthermore, most services do not have the resources to invest in sophisticated career planning tools, data bases or personnel who are trained in career development.

6. Service deliverers and educators often feel overwhelmed by the enormous needs of youth in the city. Guidance counsellors in the school system noted that the career development needs of youth frequently take a back seat to more pressing "personal counselling" concerns such as difficulties in the home, acculturation, substance abuse, and teen pregnancy. The time constraints on counsellors is exacerbated by the fact that most guidance centres are only open during school operating hours, and some students may find it difficult to get an appointment. Recent studies have shown that a majority of high school students across the country believe that the amount and content of career planning assistance they receive falls short of their needs (Jarvis, 1989; Posterski and Bibby, 1988).

7. Services are spread throughout the city and are difficult for some youths to access. It was overwhelmingly observed that service deliverers cannot make assumptions that youth have the transportation means or bus .are to get to services spread throughout the city. Youth may have to travel across the entire city to access a service not available in their own community.

8. Theory suggests that career development should have a life-planning and life-roles focus, but in actuality it is primarily treated by many practitioners/educators with an occupational focus. Examination of the services currently in place to facilitate youth's transition to work indicates

that much of what is being done runs counter to a vast body of theory and research (Super, 1957, 1990; Miller-Tiedeman and Tiedeman,1990; Magnusson, 1992) which suggests that career development and choice should not be treated as a single event occurring primarily at the high school level, but rather as an ongoing process extending over the entire lifespan of the individual (Sankey, 1985). In practice, most services emphasize making an occupational choice, and/or finding employment. Services need to be multi-faceted in order to address all of the career development needs of youth. Halpern (1985), for example, suggests that effective transitions for youth must include assessing the quality of his or her residential environment and social or interpersonal network in addition to employment.

9. Skills are not enough! Existing programs for youth in Calgary emphasize skill-building. After matching the interests, abilities and aptitudes of youth to occupational types, most programs emphasize the acquisition of job search strategies, resumé writing skills and interview skills. They also assist youth in making further education choices to supplement skill acquisition. However, little is done to develop attitudes or foster adaptability skills (Magnusson, Day and Redekopp, 1988; Mithaug, Martin and Agran, 1987). A variety of promising attempts attempts have been made to complement skill and knowledge acquisition, including fostering attitudinal change and work maturity (Duggan and Mazza, 1986), deliberate psychological education (Masker and Sprinthall, 1970) and values clarification (Simon, Howe and Kierschembaum, 1972).

10. The systems capacity to deal with dropouts is a major concern. For a variety of economic, psychological and academic reasons, at-risk students cannot respond in a positive way to conventional schools and programs.

Moreover, dropout prevention attempts come too late; it is necessary to motivate youth to value education and future careers even before junior high school (Smith and Lincoln, 1988). Parental involvement seems to be a strong factor in successful remediation programs; however, parents are often out of touch with their children's education, and lack the knowledge necessary to advise their children about career development issues. In Calgary, service providers indicate that parental involvement in career planning is lacking; there is a clear need to find ways to include parents where possible in the career planning process.

11. <u>Services tend to be reactive rather than proactive.</u> Employment oriented programs are seen to be "band-aid" solutions. Rather than providing short-term, "quick-fix" solutions, a long-range vision or plan for young people is needed. Movement towards a more proactive stance is increasingly evident as Calgary service providers try to anticipate trends and to begin the process of collaboration.

12. <u>Calgary services are not well marketed.</u> A major obstacle to youth's quest for school-to-work and career development assistance is their ignorance of existing services. This is especially true of at-risk youth who have disengaged themselves from the system and who do not have extensive social support systems to rely upon. Many youth view the process of becoming involved in the "system" as an intimidating and disempowering experience.

13. <u>The demand for a youth career centre.</u> When educators and practitioners in Calgary were interviewed about what they saw as gaps in the delivery of career development services to youth, there was overwhelming

support for a centralized, specialized centre for the career development of youth.

Rationale for a Youth Career Centre

Given the notable gaps in the current Calgary based services intended to address youth's career development and school-to-work transition needs, it becomes obvious that no single program approach solves all youth career development problems. The complexities of the problems suggest that services need to be multi-faceted; programs with several service elements are more likely to produce results than single-service efforts. For example, a work experience component offers synergistic potential when combined with other program elements such as efforts to make career planning salient, career exploration activities, labor market preparation, skills training, and self-management skill development. Such an integrated array of services is also crucial for reaching youth who may be "at-risk" (Smith, Walker and Baker, 1987).

Ideally, a career development centre for youth should offer multiple services to all youth. Such a comprehensive mandate would include youth aged 12 to 24 who may be in or out of school. It is crucial to reach younger youth before they drop out of the system or develop value systems that are difficult to change. The centre would also need to collaborate extensively with schools, businesses and other service agencies, with the idea of sharing (rather than hoarding) expertise. A youth centre could provide services to and with parents, in order to facilitate family career planning. Within the actual service design of the centre, the complete range of career development processes would need to be offered. Finally, programs and services would

need to be individually tailored to meet the idiosyncratic demands of youth . (see Magnusson, Day and Redekopp, 1988).

The above mandate for a youth career centre necessitates specialized staff to operate the centre and coordinate activities. Personal life and career counselling would supplement the development and delivery of programs, enabling the centre to be self-sustaining through service fees (where possible) and contracting arrangements. In this model, the centre would not rely on on-going government funding for support, and would become a stable source of service delivery.

Summary

A strong need exists for the development and implementation of a comprehensive centre for the delivery of youth career development services. The guidelines for effectiveness are, to say the least, ambitious, and will require extensive work on the part of a number of members of the community in order for the dream becomes a reality. At present, a fledgling organization known as the Youth Career Centre Foundation of Southern Alberta is working on this task. A preliminary time line for program development and building construction has been developed, and a marketing and fund-raising program is being prepared. The foundation has the backing of local chapters of the Rotary Service Club as well as a number of local businesses. Although in its infancy, there is considerable optimism that the dream will in fact become a reality.

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