

THE CAREER COUNSELLOR

A Publication of the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Foundation

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OVERCOMING THE OBSTACLES: CAREER PLANNING AND LEARNING DISABILITIES

This issue is the first in a series of theme-based issues to feature articles written by the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Foundation in collaboration with one of a number of national associations. This issue highlights career challenges faced by youth with learning disabilities, and profiles the efforts being made by CAMCRY and partners across the country to help these young people to confront and overcome some of the obstacles.

Below, Ms. Eva Maria Fisher-Bloom, Executive Director of the Learning Disabled Association of Canada (LDAC) shares some of her expertise in the area of employment and learning disabilities.

The ability to manipulate the symbols of language skillfully is taken for granted by millions of Canadians. For individuals with learning disabilities, however, despite their normal intelligence, school requirements, such as reading, writing, calculating, are approached with fear or avoidance.

Learning disabilities are estimated to affect 10% of the population. Within a school setting, however, given the academic, personal and employment difficulties often associated with learning disabilities, the percentage of clients with a learning disability on a counsellor's caseload is likely to be much higher than 10%.

Learning disorders may be manifested by delays in early development and/or difficulties in any of the following areas: attention, memory, reasoning, coordination, communicating, reading, writing, spelling, calculation, social competence and emotional maturation.

Individuals with a disability in one or more of these areas will often experience serious difficulty as they try to move into or within the labour market. In today's work place where machinery is replacing manual labour, and where manufacturing jobs now require an understanding of technical equipment and skill in reading and comprehending instruction manuals, youth with learning disabilities will be challenged more than ever before to obtain and sustain employment.

Recognizing the signs of a learning disability and arranging for a professional evaluation are the first steps a counsellor can take in improving the employment possibilities for these youth. The LDAC suggests that the presence of one or more of the following characteristics may indicate a learning disability among adolescents:

- poor and laborious handwriting and/or unusual spelling mistakes, disorganized books and notes
- poor social skills, few friends, or socializing with a younger group
- lack of insight into future and self
- often very literal, rigid, humourless and gullible

On average, individuals with learning disabilities maintain employment for no longer than three months. They often become resigned, therefore, to drifting from one job to another without direction or goal. Research findings have indicated, however, that through appropriate career preparation, planning and counselling, individuals with a learning disability can learn to develop the coping strategies necessary to become independent, successful managers of their own careers. In fact, a large number of Canadians with learning disabilities have succeeded in achieving this balance.

Success in the work place for individuals with a learning disability may also be supported with appropriate job accommodations. An employer can provide cost efficient assistance such as: computer monitors that check spelling and grammar, tape recorded instructions or an office buddy to clarify or repeat instructions.

The LDAC develops support materials for employment counsellors on learning disabilities, and for the adult with learning disabilities. The Association is encouraged by the work being done by CAMCRY for youth with learning disabilities. For more information on the LDAC, contact:

Learning Disabilities Association of Canada
323 Chapel, Suite 200
Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 7Z2
Tel (613) 238-5721 Fax (613) 235-5391

BUILDING SUCCESS (con't)

Brenda Porter is a Resource Teacher and Counsellor at Prince Edward Collegiate Institute in Picton, Ontario. She has worked as a special education teacher, guidance counsellor and co-op teacher for 18 years. Brenda delivered *Pathways* Modules 3, 4 and 5 with her Special Education class over a two-year period.

Reflecting upon her experiences in delivering Module 4 - "Maintaining Employment", Brenda said, "I really enjoyed doing that one with the students... it gave them a chance to run through real life situations which they would encounter. It tended to build self confidence as well. I must say that the students really appeared to enjoy it too."

Response from students involved in *Pathways* has been equally encouraging. Ian Bailey is a grade 11 co-op student at Prince Edward Collegiate Institute who has participated in *Pathways* modules 3, 4 and 5. Ian commented that "during the interview module, I increased my skills for doing interviews, what to do, what not to do."

Other students have expressed their increased confidence in being able to solve problems on the job. Some have reported successful application of anger management strategies outside the classroom environment. For many of these young people, their *Pathways* experience represents the first time that they were able to discuss their learning disabilities.

Pathways was originally intended for use solely by youth with a learning disability. However, a number of pilot tests in high schools have found that *Pathways* has relevant application to low achieving youth, and those at-risk of dropping out. The program has also found a home in a high school that is using it as part of a stay-in-school initiative with regular grade nine and ten students.

In conjunction with the *Pathways* program, Dr. Hutchinson and Ruth Anne Taves are completing the book, *Why Not Me?*. Designed as a paperback, the book contains case studies and practical methods for providing career development assistance to youth with learning disabilities. The stories are told from the perspectives of successful youth, parents, counsellors, employers, teachers and helpers.

The expected completion dates for these projects is March, 1993. The Career Counsellor will keep the counselling community updated on the availability of these and other CAMCRY projects. For more information on any CAMCRY project, please contact the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Foundation and request a copy of CAMCRY Projects At A Glance.

THE NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CAREER COUNSELLING

The CAMCRY Advisory Committee has been instrumental in directing the development and success of the CAMCRY Program. Listed below are the 11 counsellor's associations represented on the committee:

Canadian University and College Counselling Association
Canadian Rehabilitation Council for the Disabled
Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA)
Canadian Association for Vocational Evaluation and Work Adjustment (CAVEWA)
Corporation professionnelle des conseillers et conseillères d'orientation du Québec
Ontario Association of Youth Employment Centres
Ontario Teachers' Federation
ACCIS - The Graduate Workforce Professionals
Canadian Association of Rehabilitation Personnel
Cooperative Career Work Education Association of Canada
Ontario School Counsellors' Association

Each association provides advice to CAMCRY about the needs of the counsellor population it represents and assists in further developing the counselling profession. If you would like more information on the CAMCRY program and its partners please contact your association (if listed above) and ask for the CAMCRY representative. Otherwise, please contact CGCF and request a copy of CAMCRY Partners At A Glance.

CONFERENCE CALENDAR

- *Ontario School Counsellors' Association '92* - Waterloo, Ontario, November 5-6, 1992. Contact: Ruth Kennedy, (519) 570-0300
- *Alberta Guidance Council* - Edmonton, Alberta, November 5- 7. Contact: Diane Anderson, (403) 458-8585
- *Ontario Society for Training Development* - Toronto, Ontario, November 30-Dec 1. Contact: Phyllis Simon, (416) 367-5900
- *National Consultation on Career Development* - Ottawa, Ontario, January 25-27. Contact: Lou Hawkes, (416) 978-8089

CAMCRY - BUILDING SUCCESS

The Creation and Mobilization of Counselling Resources for Youth (CAMCRY) program of the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Foundation is comprised of 41 R&D projects, three of which are specifically targeted at the career development needs of youth with learning disabilities. As we have learned, career counselling must be an integral part of transition planning with these youth.

Dr. Fred Reekie and a team of researchers at the University of Saskatchewan are developing a CAMCRY project entitled *Strategic Career Counselling with Low Achieving and Learning Disabled Youth*. The goal of this project is to assist counsellors in recognizing youth with learning disabilities during the initial career counselling interview, in adapting the interview so that the youth are able to process the information being explored, and, further, in creating step-by-step strategies which can be taught to these young people to empower them to become successful career self-managers.

The initial intake interview and information processing stage of **Dr. Reekie's** project has been developed and pilot tested in Saskatchewan. The response from counsellors has been very encouraging.

Lynne Peterson, a counsellor with the Prince Albert Rural School Division in Saskatchewan and a graduate student in Educational Psychology has had years of experience working with youth with learning disabilities. Ms. Peterson has pilot tested the interview process with grade nine and ten students and has incorporated it into her daily work. When asked for her reaction to this interview model, Lynne expressed, "it is very easy, simply a new way of organizing what I already do. If I had had this five years ago, I would be further ahead [today]."

Some interview models emphasize the role of the counsellor. **Dr. Reekie's** model "takes away focus from the helper and places it back on the client where it belongs. I'm delighted with the difference in how people relate with me when they feel in control", said Lynne. The program has far exceeded Ms. Peterson's expectations. She uses the program "all the time" with her clients and encourages other counsellors to adopt it too.

Loretta Sinclair, a Special Education teacher at Elrose High School in Saskatchewan, is also very pleased with the outcomes of **Dr. Reekie's** interview process and its ability to "clarify and identify problems otherwise assumed [but not established]".

In a discussion, she highlighted the program's capacity to involve parents in the career development of students with a learning disability. She described one situation where a

student, his parents and a helper worked through the interview outcomes together to construct a career direction for this youth that he and his parents felt comfortable with. According to **Loretta**, this same young man today is "thriving" in an educational/training program suited to his needs and his interests. This anecdote exemplifies the type of success that can be achieved when counsellor, client, and parents, equipped with the appropriate tools, work together to overcome barriers.

Dr. Nancy Hutchinson of Queen's University and her team of researchers have also received tremendous support for their CAMCRY career counselling program entitled, *Pathways for Youth*. The project is based on cognitive behavioural theory, and uses modelling techniques, role playing and pair or group activities to demonstrate and practice strategies for effective career development and planning.

The *Pathways* program is made up of five modules which can be delivered independently, in any number of combinations, or as a full credit course for grade ten and eleven students. The modules include: #1 - Career Options, #2 - Securing Employment, #3 - Successful Interview, #4 - Maintaining Employment, #5 - On the Job Issues. Each module involves acquiring and practising successful strategies for managing a learning disability.

Youth, teachers and counsellors have responded very well to the *Pathways* program. Those involved have shown a desire to continue with the program. According to **Dr. Hutchinson**, "teachers have found that *Pathways* provides the kind of materials they have been looking for. Not only do we deal with activities that they want to teach their students, but they appreciate that the content is Canadian and that it is particularly relevant and interesting to their students."

TODAY'S REALITY

- 50% of youth with a learning disability are early school leavers
- The unemployment rate among high school graduates with a learning disability is double that of graduates without such disabilities
- The majority of youth with a learning disability working full time earn wages hovering around the poverty line

HELPING US HELP YOU

Making one's way through education, training and employment to a successful career is a really difficult process for many Canadians. Given that our labour market is constantly in flux, we can anticipate that this problem is not likely to go away in the near future.

The Canadian Guidance and Counselling Foundation has been working to develop a training program for counsellors everywhere who are helping Canadians with career preparation and transitions.

To achieve this objective, CGCF circulated an important survey to over 2,000 counsellors across the country. The sample was representative of a variety of communities and populations and included practitioners from the following counsellor constituencies:

- education
- rehabilitation
- private industry
- provincial and federal governments
- youth employment centres
- community agencies

The Foundation would like to extend a warm "thank you" to the many national and regional associations and organizations who provided us with the mailing addresses of these counsellors.

As mentioned above, the primary purpose for delivering this survey was to facilitate the development and delivery of a CAMCRY training program. The more specific objectives, however, include: determining the kinds of populations served by counsellors in different settings; discerning the sorts of training counsellors have already taken; understanding the kind of training counsellors feel they need and would like to pursue; and knowing what sort of time commitment counsellors are willing to give to training and how these opportunities would be funded.

The number of responses to the questionnaire has been overwhelming. Participants were encouraged to return their completed questionnaires by October 15, 1992, in order to be eligible to have their names entered into a draw for the following prizes:

- | | |
|------------|--|
| 1st Prize: | Registration fee at NATCON, 1993 or \$200.00 |
| 2nd Prize: | \$100.00 |
| 3rd Prize: | \$50.00 |

By 5pm on October 15th, only three weeks after the mail date, the Foundation recorded a 22% response rate: a very significant response for a nation-wide survey.

The Foundation was proud to have Mahesh Shah of Gary Phomin Chartered Accountant draw three prize winning names. The winners are:

- | | |
|------------|---------------------------------|
| 1st Prize: | Carol Timlin, Lindsay, Ont |
| 2nd Prize: | Serge Milot, Dieppe, NB |
| 3rd Prize: | Claude Belzile, Baie-Comeau, PQ |

Congratulations!!!

Upon an initial review of the data collected, CGCF is very encouraged by the commitment expressed to ongoing professional development. It is apparent that counsellors across the country are eager to enrich their professional knowledge base.

The Foundation will continue to compile and analyze the survey data. An official report of our findings will be written as soon as possible. Counsellors may look forward to receiving greater details in the next issue of The Career Counsellor.

The Foundation sincerely appreciates your efforts to help us help you.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

CAMCRY is committed to keeping counsellors, educators, policy makers, associations and all those involved in counselling across the country up-to-date on the progress of the CAMCRY program.

Of the 41 CAMCRY projects under development, the majority are currently undergoing **field testing and final revisions** with a target delivery date of March, 1993.

One CAMCRY project has final products ready for sale: **Occupational Videos in Demand Skill Trades** - York Region Education/ Industry Foundation, (416) 660-1076

THE CANADIAN GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING FOUNDATION IS GRATEFUL TO EMPLOYMENT AND IMMIGRATION CANADA FOR ITS SUPPORT

If you are interested in receiving information on any of the CAMCRY projects or publications, please contact:

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