What Would It Take?

A longitudinal study of the long term unemployed in Toronto

TWIG | TORONTO WORKFORCE INNOVATION GROUP

About the Toronto Workforce Innovation Group

Toronto Workforce Innovation Group is Toronto's Workforce Planning Board. We examine data, synthesize research and seek input from policy makers and practitioners to strengthen Toronto's workforce development system. We look at how economic mobility, industry trends and workforce dynamics affect Toronto's economy. Our research is an on-going and continuous process that includes our numerous consultations and focus groups with employment/training service providers and job seekers in addition to the deep data mining that informs our work. Toronto Workforce Innovation Group is one of 26 similar planning groups tasked by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development to work closely with our local economies.

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Executive Summary

This project will assess the feasibility of conducting a longitudinal study of job seekers in the City of Toronto. The goal is to discover, describe and document the "life-experiences" of people who have encountered workforce development programming, and those who should be able to benefit from employment services.

According to the 2016 workforce development annual report by Toronto Employment and Social Services, (TESS)[1], the average length of stay on Ontario Works (OW) is 35.5months. The report also notes that for all OW clients, 44% remain on assistance over 2 years, 34% between 6 months to 2 years and 22% under 6 months. A 2017 action report by (TESS)[2] states that the proportion of cases[3] on assistance for less than a year dropped from 43% to 38% while the proportion of cases on assistance for more than 36 months rose from 22% to 34%.

Barriers to exiting assistance and remaining off of assistance include: limited education and skills; language; persistent health challenges; the lack of affordable, accessible childcare; intimate partner violence; lack of housing; inability to access transit; lack of motivation to work, indifference to visiting an employment service, the low level of minimum wage and fear of losing benefits and discrimination.The reality of people who continue to be unemployed for prolonged periods suggests that (a) the barriers to employment were perhaps misidentified, (b) the barriers were correctly identified but the interventions were inappropriate or ineffective, or (c) the interventions were correct but the implementation was not effective. Only by collecting information from the Long Term Unemployed (LTU) themselves it is possible to determine what is not working for these job seekers.

Information from and about these job seekers will provide an understanding of their common characteristics, their short and medium term adjustments after job loss, their job search strategies and how these strategies change over time, how income support may have helped them cope with financial hardship and whether or not involvement in job search interventions was beneficial. This knowledge will help policy makers design appropriate interventions and effectively support the transition of the LTU into meaningful employment.

A longitudinal study is the most effective way to gather this information as it offers several observations of the same subject(s) over a period of time. This allows for detecting changes in the characteristics of the target group and establishing sequences of events. To assess the feasibility of a longitudinal study in the context of the City of Toronto, this project will determine the following:

1. Which stakeholders and partners are necessary to implement a longitudinal study?
2. What types of information would it seek to uncover?
3. What parameters need to be taken into account?
4. What methodology is most appropriate and why?
5. How can the study be best implemented, maintained and supported (via web-based platform, interviews, etc.)
6. What financial resources are required to support this type of work? Which organization(s) have the capacity to do it?

Introduction

Information about a country's labour market provides valuable insights regarding the well-being of its economy. One measure that has important information about the labour market is the "Unemployment Rate". Every month, Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey (LFS) collects data to calculate Canada's official unemployment rate- the number of unemployed as a percentage of the total labour force. An unemployed person is someone who, during the survey's reference week, was without work, had actively looked for work in the past four weeks, and was available for work. In Canada, the official unemployment rate is based on a working-age population that starts at age 15.

Statistics Canada's LFS release for September 2017 showed that the national unemployment rate for the month of September was 6.2%. During the same time, the unemployment rate in Ontario was 5.6%. However, in September 2017, the unemployment rate for the City of Toronto stood at 7.2%, significantly higher than the national and provincial rates.

Long-term Unemployment in Canada and Ontario

The unemployment rate is certainly a problem; but it becomes more worrying as the duration of unemployment increases, leading to long term unemployment (LTU). According to the Ontario government website[4], LTU can be defined as the proportion of unemployed people who have been actively looking for work for the last 27 weeks or more during the LFS. Statistics Canada on the other hand defines LTU as the proportion of the labour force aged 15 or older who did not have a job any time during the current or previous 12 months and have been actively looking for work in the past 4 weeks. According to Toronto Employment and Social Services (TESS), those on assistance for three or more years are referred to as long term unemployed.

The Ontario government website[5] reported that over the first eight months of 2017, an estimated 91,000 people in Ontario were LTU for 27 weeks or more. In the first nine months of 2017, LTU individuals accounted for 19.2% of the total number of unemployed people. Although this was a decrease compared to 19.7% last year, it was significantly higher than LTU of 11.7% in January 2008, the year of the recession.

Analysis undertaken by Toronto Employment and Social Services', TESS (2016)[6], TESS (2017)[7] and TESS (2017)[8] found that a sizeable portion of the Ontario Works (OW) caseload remained on assistance for a significant period of time. For example:

- On average in 2016, 67.5% of OW clients were on assistance for more than 1 year and 44% for more than 2 years.
- Between 2010 and 2016, the average length of time on assistance increased from 26 months to 36 months, the proportion of cases on assistance for less than a year dropped from 43% to 38% while the proportion of cases on assistance for more than 36 months rose from 22% to 34%. This trend has been mainly driven by the increasing length of time older clients stay on OW.

It is more than a decade since TESS conducted a detailed caseload analysis and the organization has never tracked people over time to better understand how changes in the lives of individuals and their families are affected by long term stays on assistance. A longitudinal study provides an opportunity to address this important knowledge gap and to inform changes that can make a positive difference for those who are in the greatest need of enhanced services/supports, perhaps supporting them to move out of poverty and, to the extent possible, into employment.

According to a latest action report by TESS (2017)[9], apart from longer absences from the labour market, OW clients in 2016 identified five other barriers that prevent them from re-entering the labour market.

- Poor health (including both mental and physical health conditions)
- A lack of education and/or skills
- The lack of "Canadian" work experience
- Transportation
- Poor language skills
- Housing and homelessness, a common barrier cited by approximately 1 in 10 applicants.

A research project by The Region of Waterloo community services (2013)[10] discussed some reasons identified by staff and participants as to why people entered or returned to OW. These are: recent immigrants who need financial support once the support from Immigration and Citizenship Canada expired, a lack of education, returning to school/training, precarious or part-time employment, health issues or difficulty paying for medical supplies and treatment as low-wage employment may not cover these costs, stabilization/destabilization of life circumstances, temporary/seasonal work and odd jobs, moving in/out of the region, change of family/marital status, insufficient support to address life challenges and/or barriers.

Designing effective employment services requires a detailed and holistic understanding of the experiences and "barriers" faced by the LTU - their pathways onto assistance, the strengths/weaknesses of any employment support they may have received, the positive/negative interactions between employment services and other systems such as health, education, immigration etc. Many jurisdictions conduct longitudinal surveys of job seekers or income recipients to gain this type of information.

Objective of the Study

The purpose of a longitudinal study is to discover, describe and document the "life experiences" of those who have encountered workforce development programming, and those who should be able to benefit from employment support. The results derived from a longitudinal survey could assist in the design and delivery of more efficient and effective workforce development programs.

A longitudinal study provides information about the same individual (s) at different points in time, allowing the researcher to track changes at the individual level. The information could also provide programs and policy makers with a better understanding of the composition and characteristics of those who obtain employment and those who do not. Currently there is no survey of this type in Toronto (or Ontario) nor are there other data sets available (or collected) that uncover the day to day challenges faced by job seekers.

Designing and conducting a longitudinal survey is a significant undertaking. It would include the determination of what information to collect, time intervals, sample size and the mechanics of how to remain in contact with cohorts of job-seekers over time. This feasibility study aims to provide advice and guidance on the possibility of implementing a longitudinal study of job seekers that addresses the issues described above.

A key objective of this type of study is to integrate the research into ongoing program improvement. Therefore this paper will recommend how such data can be collected, analyzed and applied as part of regular and/or periodic reviews of workforce development activities. Given the above objectives, the feasibility study will include the following:

1. A review of existing literature on longitudinal studies that explored the views and experiences in and out of the

labour market of people on income assistance. This will help identify any common characteristics of the LTU.

2. An identification of the partners and stakeholders necessary to implement a longitudinal study.
3. A description of the type of information we seek to collect from the longitudinal survey.
4. A report and reflection on the perceptions and experiences of service providers; i.e. their understanding of the ways in which these clients (or potential clients) aren't being served and/or have had limited success and their understandings of alternatives.
5. A proposal for a methodology that, with revisions, can be incorporated into subsequent service planning, including approaches to program development and more integrated service delivery.
6. An estimate of financial resources that would be required to support such a survey and what organization (s) have the capacity to undertake and support this work.

Toronto Workforce Innovation Group's mandate is to conduct research on Toronto's workforce development trends, gaps and opportunities and report our findings to the public by providing accurate, current labour market information to business, policy makers, service providers, and media. We also promote programs and/or approaches that support economic growth and workforce development in Toronto to influence public policy.

To fulfill our mandate we conduct ongoing research that informs our projects and partnerships. Part of that work is to regularly convene service providers to explore various concepts, including conducting a longitudinal study of the long term unemployed. The stakeholders we meet with on a regular basis are the 50 Employment Ontario service providers in Toronto and Toronto Employment and Social Services (TESS) managers and staff. Employment Ontario providers meet in 4 local, geographically organized networks monthly. This allows us frequent opportunities to explore ideas, concepts and projects. We work with TESS through regular conversations with the program managers and staff at the City of Toronto. In addition, one of TWIG's staff members co-chairs the Toronto Employment Social Services sub-committee, offering another opportunity for conversation and sharing ideas about improving service delivery.

Through the course of this project TWIG had conversations with the Manager, Central Region at MAESD, with our employment/training consultant and with other provincial staff in the policy area. We talked with senior managerial staff at the City of Toronto to explore options, parameters and scope for this type of survey. All of the conversations and consultations lead us to believe that there both is a need for this type of survey and strong support.

Literature Review

The definition of long term unemployment (LTU) is conditional upon how it is perceived. Theoretically, the longer the recession the higher the average duration of unemployment becomes and the larger the pool of long-term unemployed. However, what constitutes LTU has over the years become a moving target.

Long-Term Unemployment Facts and Some Common LTU Characteristics in Empirical Literature

The Broecke and Swaim (2016)[11] in an OECD report stated that Canada's incidence of LTU, the share of the unemployed who have been searching for a job for more than one year, was 11% in the fourth quarter of 2015. This was still 4 percentage points above its low point of 7.0% in the fourth quarter of 2008. According to the same report, once unemployed, mature workers often face greater challenges in re-employment. Their re-employment rate within one year is low, at 32% for older workers compared with 52% for prime-age workers.

Moazammi (2017)[12] reported that in Ontario, the duration of unemployment has trended upwards. He found that the length of unemployment for the prime working age population has risen from 14 weeks in 1976 to 20 weeks in 2016. For mature workers aged 55 to 64 years, the duration has increased from 18 weeks in 1976 to about 28 weeks in 2016.

According to TESS (2017)[13] , between 2010 and 2016, the average age of the caseload increased from 38 to 39 years. In 2016, older adults comprised 31% of those on assistance for 3 years or more. This is an increase from 2010 when older clients made up 24% of cases receiving OW for three years or more.

This indicates that mature workers are more likely to be LTU. Studies show that, in general, the length of unemployment is a good predictor of whether a worker will find a job. A rising trend in the duration of unemployment is of concern.

Tess (2017)[14] stated that in 2016, over two-thirds of the caseload (nearly 70%) had a high school diploma or less, putting them at risk of being stuck in a low-wage precarious job. Findings by Moazammi (2017)[15] also showed that education is valued in Canada. Using Ontario data for 2011, his paper found that the unemployment rate declines as the level of education rises, although analysis was not done disaggregating LTU and short-term unemployment (STU). Based on Ontario data, Moazammi (2017)[16] also found that lone-parent families have a higher unemployment rate.

The City of Toronto (2015)[17] identified some common characteristics of people on their social assistance caseload. For example: over 60% of OW clients face multiple barriers to employment, less than 50% have Canadian work experience and one-third of applicants have less than a high school education.

Existing literature for the US and Canada- Broecke and Swaim (2016)[18]; Kosanovich and Sherman (2015)[19], Mayer (2014)[20] and Krueger et al. (2014)[21] ; found that men are more likely to be LTU than women. TESS (2017)[22], on the other hand found that the ratio of male to female OW applicants remained fairly consistent from 2010 to 2016. In 2010, 49% of primary applicants were female while 51% were male. In 2016, the proportion of women rose marginally to 51%, whereas men made up 49% of OW applicants. Also according to Krueger et al. (2014)[23] and Mitchell (2013)[24], LTU are more likely to be single.

Based on empirical literature some common characteristics of LTU in the City of Toronto are:

- more likely to be mature workers
- single, mostly male
- single parents, mostly female
- overall slightly more female
- face multiple barriers to employment
- have limited Canadian work experience
- have less than high school education

Kroft et al. (2013)[25] and Kroft et al. (2014)[26] concluded that job finding rates decrease as the unemployment duration increases, especially after the first month of unemployment. Perhaps LTU are negatively branded by employers. They might be screened out because of perceptions regarding human capital depreciation. This may result in a higher share of LTU among the unemployed over time, which could create a permanent class of unemployable and discouraged workers, leading to a loss in the productive capacity of the economy as a whole.

The Ontario government currently spends more than $1 billion annually in a range of employment and training programs to assist unemployed Ontarians[27]. To better respond to the needs of the LTU, we need to design better services for which better information is required on these clients and one of the most effective ways to collect this information is through a longitudinal study.

Longitudinal Study: Definition, Types, Benefits and Challenges

A Longitudinal Study in simple terms is an observational study. It follows individuals at specified intervals over time and observes how the subject's behavior and experiences are influenced by their social and economic surrounding. Major types of longitudinal studies include:

1. Trend Surveys: Examine how public opinion changes over time. As long as the researcher's sample is representative of the population he/she wishes to study, it isn't important that the same people participate each time.
2. Panel Surveys (Individual level or Household level): Collect repeated measures from the same sample over an extended time period. They are mostly designed for quantitative analysis and use structured survey data. The subject could be an individual, a firm or a household. Some panel study run over many years and others are short term. Often they are used to examine long-term effects such as an individual's education, income, labor market outcomes in the context of their family background, or later life health outcomes in the context of earlier health behaviors.
3. Cohort Studies: Cohort studies often select an age cohort born in a particular month/year and follow that cohort at infrequent intervals, often with a focus on areas like child development, career development and so on.
4. Data Linkage studies: Data or record linkage is a process of pairing records from two sources or a single source to select the pairs that belong to the same entity. This helps to create a new, richer dataset for the same entity, enabling the construction of a chronological sequence of events allowing for better analysis.

According to Lynn (2001)[28], some common challenges facing a longitudinal study are:

- Relatively higher sample attrition, i.e. sample drop out over time. Cumulative non-response overtime could lead to biased data.
- Changing definitions of the study population due to deaths, births, emigrants, immigrants and so on.
- Issue of relevance and consistency regarding the use of data and variables. Questions considered particularly important at the start of a study may become less relevant years later, and vice versa.

The main advantage of using longitudinal studies is that the involvement of data collection over longer time allows researchers to determine patterns efficiently. A series of snapshots collected over time can create a rich and well-informed picture. Researchers can use this to understand cause and effect relationships better. The benefits clearly outweigh the weaknesses.

Existing literature indicates that longitudinal studies done in the past can be an effective means of collecting information to design better programs. To formulate an effective response, it is important to learn from the experiences of the LTU. Longitudinal studies are more likely to be the most effective when it comes to establishing robust evidence concerning the pathways of life experiences of individuals over time.

Examples of Longitudinal Studies

There have been numerous reports on longitudinal surveys in the medical literature. A notable example is the Framingham Heart Study[29]. The study began in 1948 and was designed as a cohort, observational study of cardiovascular disease. Through the course of the study this disease was recognized as a growing health threat. The true global impact of the Framingham Heart Study was a 50% fall in cardiovascular disease mortality, attributable to prevention and risk factor modification. In a similar manner, a longitudinal study in the area of the labour market can help us identify the barriers faced by the long term unemployed and how these barriers can be overcome or prevented.

Another example is The U.S. Department of Labor'[30] study on unemployment insurance (UI) recipients, conducted to gain an understanding of short- and medium-term adjustments after their job losses in two geographic locations in California, Los Angeles and Central Valley. The study used data from a two-wave longitudinal survey and UI administrative records. The focus of the study included how recipients' job search strategies changed over time, how UI helped them cope with their financial struggle, and their level of satisfaction with the program. Policy makers can use this information to evaluate the effectiveness of the UI program and give insights to the unemployed as to how to return to work faster.

In Canada, an example of the longitudinal survey was the Survey of Labor and Income Dynamics (SLID)[31] that explored significant areas like transitions in jobs, income and family events. SLID, launched by Statistics Canada in 1993, had longitudinal estimates available up to and including 2010. The goal was to track the labor market activities, family changes and receipt of government transfers/income levels of Canadians over a period of time. The samples for SLID were selected from the monthly Labour Force Survey (LFS) composed of two panels. Each panel consisted of two LFS rotation groups and included roughly 17,000 households. A panel was surveyed for six consecutive years. A new panel was introduced every three years, so two panels always overlapped.

SLID data increased the understanding of the issues affecting the duration of low income spells and the factors that are the most important in triggering flows into and out of poverty. Based on this, government worked to improve the well-being of Canadians by changing eligibility requirements for UI/EI, transferring the responsibility of training/employment programs to the provinces to make them more flexible and adaptable to local needs and circumstances, introducing parental benefits, and the child benefit program.

A second example of a Canadian Longitudinal Survey that began in 2011 and is conducted every two years is the Longitudinal and International Study of Adults (LISA)[32]. It collects information about jobs, education and health of Canadians to understand how changes in these areas affect people's lives. It aims to help improve education, employment, training and social services in Canada. Survey outcomes increase our understanding of the long-term benefits of postsecondary education, transience in the workplace and across the labour force, the experience of families coping with job loss and poor health, and the need for standards of living for retirees.

A third example is The Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging (CLSA) that began data collection in 2011. It follows approximately 50,000 men and women between the ages of 45 and 85 when recruited, for at least 20 years. Data collection for the study is conducted through telephone and in-home interviews, as well as during visits to Data Collection Sites (DCS). All participants are contacted 18 months after each full telephone or in-home interview to maintain contact. The CLSA will collect information on the changing biological, medical, and psychological, social/ lifestyle and economic aspects of people's lives. These factors will be studied to understand how, individually and in combination, they have an impact in both maintaining health and on the development of disease and disability as people age.

Australia has a large portfolio of longitudinal surveys. An example of a longitudinal survey relating to the subject matter of this study is The Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (LSAY)[33] that tracks the transitions of young people from school to higher studies, work or both. These surveys began in 1995 followed by 1998, 2003, 2006 and 2009, with the latest conducted in 2015. The Australian Government Department of Education and Training, with support from state and territory governments, manages and funds the LSAY survey.

In this survey a large group of young Australians are followed for 10 years starting at age 15. Since 2003, survey participants have been selected from school students who participate in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)[34] survey in Australia. This is a written test that students take in school to assess their knowledge and skills. Prior to 2003, students were randomly selected from schools all across the country.

Individuals are contacted once a year for 10 years. Information collected includes details about student achievement and aspirations, school retention, social background, attitudes to school, education and training, job seeking activity, work experiences, social development and satisfaction with various aspects of their lives. The goal of the survey is to help government and other related agencies offer the best educational, employment and social opportunities by better understanding the experiences and pathways of young Australians.

The Stepping Stone Survey[35] also conducted by the Australian government traced people's views and experiences related to employment services and income assistance over time, even after sample members left government funded assistance. The tracking helped determine the training and support required by job seekers and the pathways that lead to paid work.

The Survey was conducted between April 2009 and December 2014. The Department of Employment contracted the Social Research Centre to conduct the surveys through phone interviews. It was a four cohort, six wave longitudinal surveys of almost 50,000 government income support / employment assistance customers. The goal was to use the findings to improve employment and income support services available to people who were looking for work and/or receiving government assistance.

For this survey labour and income information was collected for persons aged 16 to 69. Family information covered persons of all ages. The individuals living in the dwellings selected at the beginning of a panel are called longitudinal respondents. These persons were followed for six years, whether they moved or not, and regardless of age. In addition, the survey interviewed cohabitants: people who shared a dwelling with a longitudinal respondent at some time during the six years, although they were not initially selected for the sample. Cohabitants remain part of the sample as long as they continued to reside with a longitudinal respondent.

The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA)[36] Survey began in 2001. It is funded by the Department of Social Services and overseen by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social

Research (University of Melbourne). Data is collected annually through interviews with all people over 15 years old in each selected household. Participants are interviewed yearly on topics such as employment, education, relationships and health. The data collected and analysed through HILDA has had a substantial impact on Australian policy development. Its findings have been used to help shape proposals on Australia's Future Tax System Review, the Government's 2011 Paid Parental leave policy, decisions about minimum wage rates, and national monetary policy.

Involvement in a longitudinal study requires a considerable commitment. According to Lynn et al (1998)[37], incentives tend to boost response leading to high retention rates. Examples of monetary incentives include the British Panel Household Survey. This method was found to improve response rates from 56% to 63.3% when a £5 promissory note was used.

Longitudinal Study in the Context of the City of Toronto

Identifying stakeholders and partners necessary to implement a longitudinal survey for the city

Performing an accurate and informative longitudinal survey will require the close participation of the City of Toronto's departments of Employment and Social Services (TESS), the department of Economic Development and the Ontario Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD) as well as the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services (COMSC). Toronto Employment and Social Services manages the social assistance caseload and would be able to provide access to both service providers and clients. Economic Development at the City collects and disseminates data about social assistance recipients, city neighbourhoods and location of services. MAESD funds the network of Employment Ontario service providers while Community and Social Services administers the Ontario Works program and the Ontario Disability Support Program. Additionally, there are over 100 points of service delivery across Toronto when all the social services funded by various levels of government are combined. The participation of these providers will be critical to a survey.

Toronto Workforce Innovation Group already works closely with TESS, is involved with the Economic Development staff at the City of Toronto and is part of the Employment Ontario network. TWIG's relationships to both government and service providers could facilitate implementing this type of survey.

Information that we seek to collect from the longitudinal survey

A longitudinal survey would provide valuable information for both policy and program developers. As noted above in the comments from service providers, there is currently no mechanism in place to track clients in the city over an extended period of time. The information that might be collected from this type of survey includes:

- What have been the life experiences of these clients?
- How have they benefited or not benefited from workforce development programs/employment and/or training services?
- If they have participated in workforce development programs, then are there programs that were effective for some amount of time in helping them get and keep jobs? What were these programs and why were they effective?
- If programs haven't been effective, what was missing? What could be added to the mix to make this type of programming work for the long-term unemployed?
- What groups and/or individuals benefit most from workforce development programming?
- What other types of services or interventions are needed to support people along a pathway to employment?

Understanding the pressing needs in the community and the initiatives undertaken by the project to address them

There is both appetite and need in the community to collect and use this information. Service providers and policy makers are interested in having as much data as possible to ensure that policies and programs closely match the needs of Torontonians. In many of our interviews, for this project and others, we have heard clearly from government and providers about the need to:

- Have better data in order to understand in depth who is on the social assistance caseload
- Identify what kinds of programs and interventions LTU envision that would allow them to move off social assistance
- Examine similar policies and programs in other jurisdictions that are successfully supporting people on social assistance or living in poverty to overcome barriers to employment. This would include organizations such as Jobs First NYC that works in concert with government, service providers and industry to train and equip candidates for employment. They work from a community development/community organizing approach that ensures commitment from all partners, which sustains the work.

The 2016 Toronto Employment Social Services[38] report noted that "unemployment rates are consistently higher for certain groups, with rates for recent newcomers, older workers, racialized groups and young people are at least twice as high or higher than the overall city rate of 6.9%." The report goes on to say that while the overall social assistance caseload has gone down, the length of time clients remain on social assistance (Ontario Works) has increased and the average time is now over two years[39].

The same report does have numbers for those on social assistance, 109,780 cases served representing 190,907 individuals. The majority of clients are female, 27% are youth between the ages of 18-29 and 13% are between the ages of 55-64, and 85% report at least one significant barrier to employment. While these numbers paint part of a picture of the long-term unemployed, they don't tell us very much about the individuals and what, if any, interventions are successfully helping them find or keep jobs.

Also, increasing lengths of stay have financial impacts on the OW program. TESS (2017)[40] reported that if length of stay was reduced by one month in 2017, this would represent a potential caseload reduction of roughly 2.8% and, as such, would yield monthly savings in TESS' gross caseload costs of $21.7 million gross ($600 thousand net) in 2017. Moderating ongoing increases in length of stay is a priority for TESS, and for clients who want to move out of poverty.

TWIG's former Executive Director co-chairs the Toronto Employment Social Services sub-committee of the city's social development branch. This group is comprised of service delivery agencies across Toronto receiving funding from the city to work with social assistance recipients. One of the priorities of this committee in 2016-17 has been to examine possibilities for better coordination of services. A longitudinal survey of clients would be very useful as a step towards greater coordination and collaboration among service providers.

TWIG interviewed numerous Employment Ontario service providers in Central Ontario, primarily from the City of Toronto, in November and December of 2016. Without exception they spoke about the need for better data and a more systematic method of capturing this data. They also described the systemic difficulties imposed by different funders in terms of expectations, outcomes and client service. In addition service providers often mentioned the need for additional, or wrap-around services to effectively serve those clients who were long-term unemployed or faced multiple barriers to employment. The barriers or difficulties described by service providers include:

- The lack of resources to track job seekers over an extended period of time
- The difficulty in working across employment/training service provision systems, such as EO and TESS
- The funding mechanisms that reward agencies for moving people out of service rather than for long-term service
- The lack of enough funding to provide wrap-around supports such as help with transportation, housing, child care

The agency representatives discussed the need to provide wrap-around supports for clients facing multiple barriers but said their funding did not allow them to provide these services for enough time to allow clients to transition successfully into employment. In addition, we heard about the difficulty of effectively serving people who were out of the labour force for extended periods of time, the lack of adequate resources to serve clients who had been involved with the justice system, or older workers. While they do collect data on their client population, they don't have the ability to track clients over a long enough period of time to have a thorough understanding of who the clients are and what they require.

Last year, the Toronto Workforce Innovation Group published the report[41] "95 Weeks Later". This analysis of employment rates, earning trajectories and the characteristics (e.g. educational attainment) of unemployment among sub-populations utilized information gathered from focus groups and one-to-one interviews with job seekers across Toronto. These interviews and focus groups uncovered important information about the "lived-experiences" of the unemployed, their challenges and perceived opportunities. The information was unique in that it gave a coherent voice to the unemployed and provided information not previously available to programs or practitioners.

Some of the comments from older job seekers we heard in these interviews and focus groups were:

"I am **constantly moving my life** in search of happiness, satisfaction, and what works best for me. I have tons of skills and have worked in law, journalism, media, marketing and communications. **I am not afraid of the job market**; I wouldn't even mind trying my hand as a cook."

(Manuel, Job Seeker)

"What can I do? Who is going to hire me? I worked my entire life in the insurance industry and no one even bothers to read my resume. **Young kids and Internet sites** have stolen my career."

(Alan, 57 year old job seeker)

"I'm so tired of putting together a bunch of part-time jobs. I sometimes work nights or too many days in a row, just to get enough money into the house. **I really need something steady** like an office job so I can pull my life together."

(Maureen, Job Seeker and Single Mother)

It was clear from the conversations that these older workers' unemployment was both involuntary and structural. We also found that:

- Participants over the age of 55 were discouraged about future job prospects and many had been unsuccessful in trying to secure even entry-level employment.
- Interviewees were not interested in taking additional courses or participating in skills training. One noted that by the time they had finished a program they would be close to retirement.

- Older job seekers were very concerned about financial security and indicated they were using up their savings and might have to think about selling their homes.
- Many thought that employment services and training are directed to youth.

Job seekers between 35-54 years of age had a different experience. The majority of people in this group are new immigrants and have been in Canada less than 10 years. They experience persistent unemployment. Many had participated in training or skills upgrading but this did not often lead to jobs. They were unsure about where to go to find help in securing employment.

Youth, aged 20-34 had different reactions to the interviews. These were mostly individuals who had not graduated from high school or had a GED, and had very unrealistic career aspirations. Most were on government assistance. Interviews and focus groups with these participants revealed that they had:

- Very little interest in upgrading their education or obtaining occupationally or industry-specific certification.
- There was a significant disconnect between their career goals and the kind of education and/or training needed to achieve these goals.
- Multiple barriers to employment including mental illness, low motivation, lack of housing.

How to do this

A more systematic way of capturing information about the long-term unemployed in Toronto on an ongoing basis would be to:

- Develop a thorough understanding of the experiences of the unemployed,
- Document the barriers/challenges of long-term unemployed,
- Identify what services have been effective for whom (and what's not) for subgroups of job seekers (e.g. youth), and,
- Recommend what the unemployed need to facilitate greater labour force attachment.

Working Collaboratively

Toronto Employment and Social Services and the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development have already developed protocols that enable the governments to work together on employment service interventions. A survey such as this would be another opportunity for the municipal and provincial governments to collaborate to:

- Develop a better system of tracking clients
- Have a better understanding of the long-term unemployed and what programs and policies might be successful in helping them to find and keep jobs.
- Develop and design coordinated policy and programs for this population.

Methodology: Toward a Robust Analysis of the Experiences of the Longer Term Caseload

In order to build a comprehensive understanding of the LTU, the fundamental question is how to find them, select them and track them for a reasonable duration of time. The proposed approach is the panel survey. One feasible way to do this would be to draw a representative sample from Employment Ontario[42] based on the duration unemployed and other characteristics common to the LTU group. The study would examine people who are LTU, regardless of whether they receive OW or ODSP.

There are close to fifty Employment Ontario service providers with over fifty points of services in Toronto. In addition, there are 19 Toronto Employment and Social Service (TESS) Employment Centres and other numerous job search agencies that serve hundreds of thousands of job seekers each year. 15% of these EO service providers might be selected to pool out the samples.

Selection of a representative sample will require deciding on the demographics of the sample. Samples can be stratified and elements of interest may include a combination of the following: age- whether to study youth, prime working age or a combination of both; gender; family structure- couple, couple with children, single parent, single; immigration status, age at immigration; place of residence; source of income- EI, OW, ODSP ; highest level of education attained; field of study; common ways to find work; degree of mobility; number of jobs held in the year; how last job was obtained and the reason for job loss.

The size of the sample is a question of capacity. Data can be collected using a combination of online surveys/email, face to face interviews and/or focused group discussions. Information collected online permits a bigger sample. A sample size of 1000 will allow for an accurate sub-group analysis.

Most of the longitudinal surveys that were examined for this report track clients at six month intervals for between 2-5 years. The frequency of tracking will depend on the resources that are available to implement this type of survey. Ideally it would be at regular intervals over several years.

Service providers could be the entry point for implementing this type of survey; they could provide introductions to clients and help compose a representative sample from the caseloads. Depending on the resources available an online platform could be designed and developed to collect information.

It was been mentioned in the proposal that TWIG would examine the viability of conducting this longitudinal survey in cooperation with TESS and EO service network. The financial resources necessary to support this type of survey will depend on the frequency of tracking and the size of the representative sample. We estimate that between $150,000 and $300,000 over 3 years might be adequate.

To build out the narrative and provide new data for analysis, it is crucial to develop the most thorough understanding of the experiences of the study participants. This can be done through:

I. In-Depth Interviews and Focus Groups

a. Longer Term Unemployed

The focus of these will be on the barriers and challenges experienced by the clients themselves and include clients' perceptions of:

- Experiences of unemployment, labour force attachment/training/other activities
- Challenges/barriers to exiting assistance
- Challenges/barriers to participate in the labour force
- Participation in other community activities, access to and utilization of other services and supports. (Especially if anti-poverty focus).
- Experiences with services and service providers
- Supports needed or what they perceive would matter regarding employment and training, other services/activities.

The study should consider having half the sample interviewed individually and half participate in focus groups, based on the understanding that some clients may be more comfortable to speak in a group and provide a different kind of narrative, than individually.

b. Practitioners/Service Providers

There are two additional and important data needs. First, in developing a thorough understanding of the experiences of the LTU, it is important to collect equally in-depth data from front-line staff to identify their understanding of:

- the barriers/challenges of LTU they deal with
- understanding of similar clients who are not accessing their services
- what's been effective for whom (and what hasn't been) for LTU subgroups,
- what services these clients need to achieve greater labour force attachment.
- how the providers determine what services/supports to provide.

Second, it is important to elicit the knowledge of system/providers' managers concerning:

- the barriers to effectiveness for these groups, including their understanding of system challenges (e.g. standard rules and procedures)
- how providers might ultimately like to see these addressed
- the providers' perspectives on what might matter and how to achieve the intended results.

The specific questions/interview and focus groups guides should be developed with a view to be used by others so that this study might be replicated for other subpopulations.

II. Study Design

Several elements will support the use of the data to inform possible interventions that are most likely to actually address the experiences of such long-term clients. These include:

1. Examining innovative workforce development approaches in other jurisdictions for relevant learning specific (or applicable) to the identified subpopulations;
2. Analyzing "life experiences" and data regarding clients, including "service delivery experiences"
3. Identifying program design principles and features most likely to be effective for these subgroups
4. Identifying a "menu" of relevant supports, delivery challenges, and alternative intake and outcome measures (e.g.

informed by Pace, NY CEO, etc.)
5. Identifying implementation challenges and possible responses.
6. Developing design details and approaches to building capacity both administratively and for service providers.

III. Pilot the Process and Evaluate

The work described above should be the subject of ongoing monitoring and evaluation once timelines are established. A report should be provided (at the end of initial data collection) that provides a rich description of the subpopulations and their challenges/barriers. A second report should offer recommendations on programming/service delivery approaches that might be most beneficial, as well as how to increase the capacity of the system to regularly include a process of ongoing data collection for program improvement. Follow-up reports should describe changes in the status of participants over time. Implementation of alternative services and program should be considered separately and, if implemented, an external evaluation of those initiatives should be considered.

IV. Conclusion

Developing, designing, implementing and tracking a longitudinal survey represents a significant challenge in Toronto. Doing this will involve stakeholders at all levels of government, various types of service delivery programs and approaches as well as locating and following the LTU themselves. The good news is that governments are increasingly coming together to work collaboratively on finding policy and program solutions that complement rather than detract from each other. The difficulty will be finding sufficient resources to conduct this type of survey in a climate of ever-shrinking budgets facing ever-growing demands.

End Notes

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