



Alberta Council of Disability Services

Current Post-Secondary Programs and Recent Closures

Education and Training for the Community Disability Services Sector

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In the 1970's this was a new field. It did not seem possible to do the job without some kind of degree; educational or behavioral. It was an exciting time with lots of research going on and many pilot projects and new therapeutic modalities being tested. Philosophies started to shift away from a need to "fix" the person to society needing to change. Things like curb cuts to increase accessibility make a huge difference in the lives of some. Now it is not the person who needs fixing, but society that needs changing. Some believe philosophically the shift to a social justice and citizenship approach for people with development disabilities has led to a de-professionalization of the field. Today Disability Studies programs are not about a "rehab type" model, but about mindsets, theory, research and social change resulting in how to best provide personalized supports.

Historically low wages and a lack of a strong and valued identity for the sector led to low enrolment numbers. As a potential post-secondary student, it is hard to justify your ROI, when your starting wage will be little more than you would make serving coffee. When the post-secondary educators lost their envelope or discretionary funding, due to budget cuts as a result of the economic bust of 2008, colleges also started making sound business decisions to cut programs that were not financially viable. The cumulative effect of this can be seen below. Disability Studies diploma and certificate programs, started closing almost annually.

Closure of Alberta Diploma and Certificate Programs:

1. Medicine Hat College - 2008
2. Lakeland College - 2008 (estimate)
3. Bow Valley College- 2008/09
4. Grande Prairie College- 2008-2009
5. Lethbridge College - Day program Closes - 2009/10
6. Red Deer College - 2010
7. Portage College - 2011
8. Mount Royal University – 2013

Today there are major concerns about the lack of minimum standards for those working with vulnerable Albertans. The need for a skilled workforce is acknowledged by government, service providers, families and self-advocates. With 17,000 staff in the sector and an average turnover rate of 20% we need approximately 3400 new staff each year. We need to reverse this trend.

There is major concern about the lack of opportunities and avenues for post-secondary education for the field of Community Disability Services.

Current Programs:

1. Bow Valley College - restarting Fall 2014 - wait listed
2. Grant MacEwan University - Capped at 20 - 2014
3. Lethbridge online Certificate program
4. Some private colleges and training enterprises.

We draw new staff from a narrow group of untrained employees, those that actually understand the work because they have a family member or have had some type of connection/relationship with someone who has a developmental disability, as well as newcomers to Canada who bring a variety of value systems and many individuals who are just passing through to something else. At a recent Self Advocacy Conference when asked what they wanted to know about their new support worker more than one responded "how long are you going to stay"?

Currently the majority of the training happens "in-service." Mandatory training: Medication Administration, First Aid and CPR, Abuse Prevention and Response Protocol and Crisis Intervention, are required by the ACDS CET (Creating Excellence Together) Accreditation Standards. Examples of other training and information recommended by the ACDS CET Accreditation Standards are included but are not prescriptive. One organization recently stated they invest over 100 hours of training in the first six months at a cost of \$2500, conservatively speaking. Other organizations wait for anything other than mandatory training, because of the

high turnover rates and their lack of ROI. Many organizations have developed their own training, but this leads to a lack of consistency in standards and requirements creating inefficiencies and a lack of portability between organizations.

The blending of staff from various disciplines, Social workers, personal care aides and the broader human services sector staffing, also shifts the culture of the organization and leads to confusion around the actual scope of practice for disability services. MRU blended their Social Work Diploma and their Disability Studies program, and found the Disability focus was getting lost, so they reversed this initiative.

Credentials required for this work are also increasing, due to increasing numbers and complexity of individuals receiving supports. The essential services provided by this sector are being challenged.

We need a skilled workforce with minimum standards for those working with vulnerable Albertans and are looking to Government of Alberta to establish some required standards, similar to what they did for early childhood education, or the establishment of an apprenticeship program like they did in Ontario.

Alberta Education also has high school level curriculum that would provide dual credits through their Career Technology Studies programs, however no one is currently teaching it, to our knowledge.

ACDS has developed a standardized Workforce Classification System with six job classifications and accompanying competencies that is being rolled out. A professional association, the Alberta Disability Workers Association (ADWA) has been established. Identifying the accompanying knowledge and skills and the development of a standardized assessment process that ties into these competencies is a key next step.

A skilled workforce is key to successful outcomes for people with disabilities. Without Government of Alberta support the spread between theory and practise, may continue to grow. We need your support in breaking this cycle. "The Social Policy Framework is about long-term systemic changes and policy shifts that will take time, commitment and community ownership to realize." We are looking forward to working collaboratively with Innovation and Advanced Education as a next step.

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Educational Levels of Disability Services Staff 2005-2013

Tracking staff educational backgrounds through human resources

The ACDS HR Pro-Tracker provides the Community Disability Services sector with a tool to track human resources variables, understand how these influence staff turnover, and inform the development of evidence-based strategies to address workforce challenges.

The ACDS HR Pro-Tracker can:

- Track sector information, enabling users to obtain sector-wide organizational and employee data, calculate sector-wide turnover rates, and thereby produce sector-wide information to help develop systematic initiatives and help influence sector-related HR policies and practices at a regional or provincial level.

Reported staff education levels by service providers 2009-2013 - Province-wide

	2013
High School	36.9%
Certificate	16.5%
Diploma	23.9%
Degree	18.7%
Graduate Degree	1.7%
Other	2.3%

Central Alberta Service Providers

In an effort to get a better understanding of the situation facing Central Alberta Service Providers as they seek to provide quality of life supports for adults and children with disabilities, the Central PACE Workforce Committee decided to develop a tracking system that would allow them to examine and report on the turnover of staff among service providers in the areas of PDD and FSCD funded supports.

Since the pilot of 2005, members of PACE and its Workforce Committee have promoted the use of the Tracking Turnover Template and as a result, agencies throughout the Central Alberta Region have been reporting their data for evaluation.

2013 – (Data from ten participating agencies)

Education Level of Workforce				
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent 2013
Valid	Less than Grade 12	15	3.4	3.4
	Grade 12	228	51.5	52.4
	1 Yr Certification	59	13.3	13.6
	2 Yr Certification	77	17.4	17.7
	Post Secondary Degree	56	11.3	12.9
	Total	435	96.9	100
Missing	System	8	3.1	
Total		443	100	

Pulse Check – Finding and Hiring Qualified Applicants

The ACDS pulse check survey is distributed in all PDD regions. It seeks the input of senior organizational leaders as to the current happenings in their organization/region, and to shape the focus of future strategic planning. The survey was to provide a snap shot in time of any changes, if noticeable, from their perspective.

The information is likely largely anecdotal in nature and is not evidence-based.

2010 Challenges in order of frequency	New in 2010	2009 challenges in order of Frequency
Compensation		Compensation
Finding and hiring qualified applicants		Finding and hiring qualified applicants
Inflexibility of funding structure	✓	Recruiting and staffing irregular shifts
Lack of opportunity for career advancement	✓	Proper orientation and training for new staff
Job stress and difficult shifts		Job stress

In 2010, when asked if organizations have noticed a change in the qualifications of job applicants:

Have you noticed a change in the qualifications of applicants applying for positions?

	Yes	No
Edmonton	50.0% (11)	50.0% (11)
Calgary	60.0% (9)	40.0% (6)
South	36.8% (7)	63.2% (12)
Central	50.0% (5)	50.0% (5)
NE	57.1% (4)	42.9% (3)
NW	87.5% (7)	12.5% (1)
Provincial	53.1% (43)	46.9% (38)

Among agency leaders who answered yes, several stated that there has been an increase in the number of qualified applicants. A majority, however, expressed a decrease in training, education, and qualifications amongst applicants. Staff arriving from Ontario were noted as having higher qualifications.

Strategies and Solutions

Community Disability Studies Strategy Forum Summary Report (2011)	“With the assistance of a grant from the Alberta Rural Development Network (ARDN), the Alberta Council of Disability Services (ACDS) and the post-secondary institutions offering community disabilities studies convened a forum focused on identifying strategies to address these challenges. The forum was held in Leduc on February 23, 2011. Since the issues are long-studied and well understood, the forum objective was to develop a logically sequenced & prioritized Disability Services Workforce Action Plan , with clear outcomes, responsibilities and timelines, to be executed by Government, participating post-secondary institutions, ACDS, employers and partners, for ensuring an adequate supply of appropriately skilled workers for the disability services sector.”
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Current State

A number of Alberta’s post-secondary institutions offer a range of certificate, diploma and degree programs related to community disability services. These programs strive to develop professionals who can work effectively with persons with a broad range of disabilities in designing and developing their quality of life. Typically, program content includes courses on Exceptionality, Interpersonal Communication, Positive Behaviour Supports, Health Care, Values and Issues, Counselling, Growth & Development in Childhood, Rehabilitation in Adolescence and Adulthood, Human Sexuality and Sex Education, Recreation and Leisure, and Community Organization.

These programs have all been experiencing declining enrolments for the past five years or more; a number of institutions have recently suspended their disability studies programming and one offers programming only on-line through eCampus Alberta.

In summary, a number of Government of Alberta ministries/agencies working in the social sector are dependent on funded agencies for achieving their mandate. These agencies draw upon a dwindling pool of qualified workers; in reality, the number of graduates from the various post-secondary programs is so small that most providers hire unskilled workers and provide orientation and basic skills development using the Foundations curriculum (developed by ACDS) and other training materials.

Public Perception

- There was general (but not unanimous) agreement among those interviewed that the disability services sector is significantly under-valued by the public. That is, providing high-quality disability services is not high on the public agenda; there is a general lack of appreciation for the range of competencies required to provide high quality services; and workers and provider agencies are not ‘esteemed’ in the public domain.
- It is estimated that there are approximately 17,000 workers in Alberta’s disability services sector, providing services for about 15,000 clients. Together, these comprise roughly 1% of Alberta’s population. It is therefore not surprising that compared to, say, emergency room overcrowding, there is not widespread awareness or public concern regarding disability services workforce issues.
- At the same time, those interviewed suggested this situation (i.e., lack of public awareness and concern) could change quickly with more adverse incidents (such as the recent death of a disability services worker in Camrose) receiving media attention. It was suggested that there are parallels with recent Government of Alberta actions to develop a provincial curriculum and certify health care aides, which arose from the Long-Term Care Review which was, itself, prompted in part by a number of high profile adverse incidents involving residents and their care providers.

Post-Secondary Institutions

- Alberta’s post-secondary sector, like the Government of Alberta proper, is currently coping with significant budget restraints....elevating concerns regarding efficient program delivery and declining enrolments.
- Alberta Advanced Education & Technology confirmed that all community disability studies programs had experienced declining enrolment for several years. While Mount Royal University’s program is fully subscribed in the current year, the conventional wisdom is that this is attributable to students using the program as an entry into other, related but over-subscribed, fields of study (e.g., social work) and should

not be seen as an 'uptick' in interest in disability studies programming.

- There is no province-wide curriculum for disability studies...nor are there province-wide job classification/competency profiles. ACDS' Foundations program provides 'basic orientation'; while it is laddered into the existing post-secondary programs (ranging from 9 – 13 credits) few of those who take the Foundations training go on to enrol in post-secondary programs. The speculation is that this is because sector wages do not justify the additional tuition costs.
- Post-secondary institutions have considerable difficulty evaluating (and granting credit) related to the experience and training taken 'in the field' by disability services workers who seek to upgrade their post-secondary education through certificate, diploma or degree programs.

The Challenge

The issues described under 'Current State' will require systemic change, which is beyond the scope/mandate/ability of any single post-secondary institution, ACDS, any single workforce council, any family or interest group, or any single Ministry.

Systemic change will require collective action by each of these, coordination, Government of Alberta leadership and public support.

Disability Services Workforce Logic Model

The findings of the current state assessment were synthesized to develop a workforce logic model (figure 2).

Albertans' expectations regarding enabling independence and enhancing quality of life for disabled persons, as operationalized through Government of Alberta policies, should drive the development of a disability services workforce strategy.

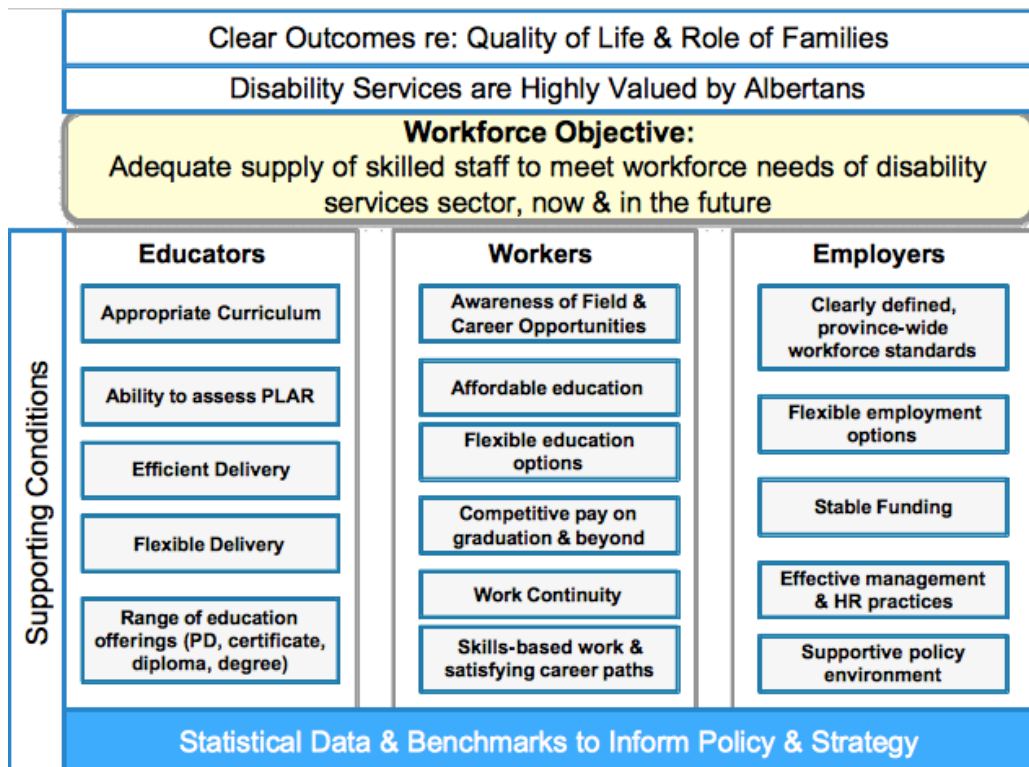
For example, if the desired outcome is simply to provide caretaking supports, given declining enrolment in disabilities studies programs and persistent low wages, the logical 'systemic' solution would be to suspend such programming and develop short-term certificate programs and/or enhance the Foundations curriculum as required. If, on the other hand, the objective is to maximize the independence and quality of life of disabled Albertans, a whole other range of strategies will be required, including clear articulation of service outcomes, identification of worker competencies, development of a standardized provincial curriculum etc. Everything derives from the desired outcome or strategic objective; proceeding without clarity or consensus on this is extremely problematic as the various stakeholders may be operating at cross-purposes.

Currently, there appears to be confusion or, at least, uncertainty regarding the desired outcomes and, in addition, what the Government of Alberta sees as the long term role for families of the disabled and for provider agencies. An early requirement then would be convening a forum at which Government of Alberta ministries, provider agencies, sector associations and client families could debate and come to a consensus on the ultimate goals for the sector.

As previously noted, public support is also a critical component to effecting systemic change. A 'consensus forum' as described might be a useful first step in engaging public opinion. Government-funded social policy advertising (i.e., similar to the 'Live Right Now' campaign to promote healthy lifestyles) may also be effective.

Once there is consensus regarding the strategic objectives and with enhanced public support, the question then becomes...what actions are required, when and by whom, to achieve the supporting conditions (outcomes) required to ensure an adequate supply of appropriately skilled workers for the community disability services sector. Some of the supporting conditions are logically related; for example, post-secondary institutions require employers (or funders of employers) to articulate the competencies required of disability services workers in order to develop appropriate curricula. Efficiencies at the post-secondary level will support affordable education, and so on.

Figure 2



Developing an Action Plan

As noted in the discussion of the Workforce Logic Model, there are many ‘supporting conditions’ which contribute to the goal of an adequate supply of appropriately skilled workers....and there is uncoordinated action underway with respect to many, if not all, of them.

A strategic plan demands focus based on defined criteria: impact, logical sequencing, cost, etc. While further discussion is required to finalize the elements of the **Disability Services Workforce Action Plan**, define outcomes, identify responsibilities and timelines, the forum participants agreed on the following as priorities:

1. Establishment of a supportive policy environment
2. Stable funding for provider agencies
3. Wages commensurate with enhanced standards
4. Development of a job framework with defined competencies based on service outcomes defined by the Government of Alberta
5. Development of a standardized provincial curriculum based on enhanced ACDS CET (Creating Excellence Together) standards
6. Flexible education delivery options

DISABILITY & COMMUNITY STUDIES PROGRAM REVIEW Stakeholder Consultation (2009)

Note – The program at Red Deer College was closed in 2010.

“In response to a 5-year trend of low enrolments, Red Deer College is conducting a review of its ‘Disability & Community Studies’ (DACS) program to determine whether there is a future for this type of programming and, if so, what that programming should look like. The two-year DACS diploma program develops professionals who can work effectively with persons with a broad range of disabilities in designing and developing their quality of life. Typically, graduates of the DACS program find employment in schools, community programs, vocational/employment programs and residential living programs; other employment opportunities exist within the public service, Alberta’s health care system and, increasingly, in the private sector. Program content includes courses on Exceptionality, Interpersonal Communication, Positive Behavior Supports, Health Care, Values and Issues, Counseling, Growth & Development in Childhood, Rehabilitation in Adolescence and Adulthood, Human Sexuality and Sex Education, Recreation and Leisure, and Community Organization. As part of the DACS program review, Mary Gibson Consulting was

	<p>engaged to interview employers and selected Government of Alberta Ministries to obtain information regarding trends in disability services and the demand for DACS-type graduates, the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the current DACS program and graduates, and the incidence and type of employer-provided training (see Figure 1). Interviews were conducted with 15 social service agencies and 8 Government of Alberta Ministries; summaries of these interviews are provided in Appendix 2.</p> <p>This report is a synthesis and analysis of the information provided during these stakeholder interviews.”</p>
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Key Findings

Environment

- Typically, employers of DACS graduates will also hire from other related human services fields, including Education Assistants, Early Childhood Development workers, Social Work, Psychology, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy and Recreation Therapy.
- The service agencies are currently experiencing moderate to severe shortages of skilled staff. Low wages combined with the cost of obtaining a DACS diploma, lack of profile for the human services field, difficult (emotionally and physically) work conditions, and availability of other employment opportunities are all cited as contributing causes for the current labour shortage.
- Absolute demand for services is increasing and is expected to continue to do so as the population ages. The complexity of clients served by these agencies is increasing and client/parent expectations are also rising.
- The shortage of skilled workers impacts the programs and operations of 5 Government of Alberta Ministries. While individual Ministries are aware of and concerned about the labour situation in the social services sector and have attempted individually or jointly to provide some relief (e.g., by supporting the ACDS effort to market the profession), there is no coordinated cross-Ministry initiative to address the issue of the dwindling supply of skilled community support workers. In fact, our investigation suggested this issue is not on the current list of Government of Alberta priorities.
- While employers are unanimous in the need for workers with a broad range of skills (behavior modification, medical support, psychology etc.), the decline in enrolment at DACS-like programs at other Alberta Colleges (Appendix 3) and, in fact, nationally does not bode well for the future supply of people with the skills and training to work with the disabled. This situation will be exacerbated in the near (5 – 10 years) future as our labour force ages.

<p>Embedding ACDS Foundations Training into the Alberta Education High School CTS Program (2009/2010 proposal)</p> <p><i>Note - Newly developed Career Technology Studies courses that relate to disabilities were deferred by Alberta Education.</i></p>	<p>“ACDS and the workforce councils have also been concerned with the survival of the disability studies programs in post-secondary institutions. While employers strive to ensure that employees are skilled, confident and competent in their roles, given tight fiscal restraints, training resources and funding are not readily available to meet these increasing demands. It is anticipated that with an aging population and more individuals with complex needs requiring services, the demand for skilled and competent workers will be even more pronounced.</p> <p>The opportunity to engage students at the high school level is critical. The workforce developments over the past several years have positioned the disability services sector to support credentialing process and directly align this within a clearly defined career path. The disability studies programs in Alberta have articulated transfer agreements that allow students to continue on with their undergraduate and graduate studies.</p> <p>The sector has and is a vital service in the community and to Alberta. Embedding Foundations learning outcomes within Alberta Education CTS curriculum enriches the attitudes, skills and knowledge of students by exploring this valued occupation”.</p> <p>- ACDS letter to The Hon. Mary Anne Jablonski (June 2010)</p>
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- In the fall of 2009 ACDS representatives worked with a Curriculum Manager at Alberta Education to embed the learning outcomes of the Foundations in Community Disability Studies program into draft courses in the Health, Recreation and Human Services cluster of the new CTS program.
- With the assistance of an Alberta Education Curriculum Development Manager, we developed a gap analysis and identified learning outcomes from the Foundations Program which could be embedded into courses that had already been written (e.g. the current course Professional Standards and Ethics). During the process, we made many recommendations and enhancements to the courses.
- Learning outcomes *specific to our sector*, were used to develop additional courses, called Community Disability Studies 1 and 2 (CDS1 and CDS2) and to significantly enhance a course titled Supported Populations that was part of many other pathways in HRH.
- This curriculum was successful in meeting a validation process required by Alberta Education, by two post-secondary instructors, Cheryl Crocker (Grant MacEwan University) and Rhonde Le Seuer (Mount Royal University). Once the courses were validated in December 2009, they were then included on the Alberta Education website as draft high school CTS courses.
- After a period of time as we were waiting for the editing to be completed, we noticed that all course relating to “disabilities” were removed from the Alberta Education website. When asked why the courses no longer were posted on the website, we were advised they were “under review”.