

## **Focus on Employment**

### **Serving the Employment Needs of People with Disabilities**

Focus on Employment is a unique non-profit employment program providing individualized supported services in the Swan River Valley area since 1992. The program is designed to maximize employment opportunities for people living with disabilities or with disability related barriers to employment.

Focus on Employment provides its services to the community via an annual service delivery agreement with Manitoba.

The NDP government froze our budget at \$60,017.12 for the four years 2012/13 to 2015/16. Over that four-year period, we have been able to continue to operate due to

- operational efficiencies,
- staff turnover with delays in recruitment, resulting in savings of salary dollars, but also resulting in extra hours worked by remaining staff,
- fundraising,
- reducing the hours of paid wages in 2015/16 by 5.4%, and
- drawing down our contingency reserve (currently at \$2,777.00).

This year we again appealed to Manitoba Department of Families to increase our budget, and recently received our Service Purchase Renewal Agreement and confirmation of an increase of \$1,500.00 (2.5%) for the three year period April 1, 2016 through to March 31, 2019. However, we must also now provide service to clients in Roblin, and our budgeted cost of doing so is \$1,040.00. Therefore, this increase does little to address the immediate or long term needs of the program, and will almost certainly result in further program cuts by the end of the three years.

Staffing costs represent by far the greatest line item in our budget.

- Wages have remained almost static over the five year period. We have delivered our services with a Full Time Equivalent (FTE) of 1.6 split between two (2) employees.
- Assuming average core inflation rate (Canada) to the end of 2016/17, this is equivalent to an approximate 8.6% average reduction in salary over the 5 year period. If salaries do not increase to the end of 2018/19, this is the equivalent of an approximate 12.3% average reduction. And this is for staff whose wages were very low to begin with (e.g., \$13.25 for the Job Coach/Developer).

The Board is concerned about being able to provide staff a fair and competitive wage, with benefits that will attract and retain quality staff members. Of particular importance, continuity is fundamental to maintaining the trust and confidence of those we serve, as well as our employer partners. In the past ten years, we have experienced staff turnover in our Job Coach/Developer position of seven (7)

individuals. In most cases, the reasons for leaving were part time position (0.6 FTE), non-competitive wages, and the lack of an employee benefit program.

The demands on Focus have increased over the last decade. For example, the number of new intakes increased 2.3 times and the number of community members served increased by 10% for the most recent four-year period (2012/13 to 2015/16) as compared to the four-year period from 2007/08 to 2010/11. One reason cited by staff in exit interviews is that a 0.6 FTE position is not enough to adequately support the existing case load.

Focus cannot run a deficit, and are concerned about being able to continue to operate the program and deliver the quality services required to people living with a disability in our service area. To that end, we have met with the Town of Swan River and the RM of Mountain to request support to the program, and will be meeting with other municipal governments.

Sustainable funding that recognizes the impact of past and future inflation is necessary to ensure that Focus on Employment can deliver its program to the community. **In order to accomplish the goals of the program and ensure its' sustainability into the future, Focus on Employment believes that it**

- **should not be cutting hours of service, but rather increase staff to 2.0 FTE positions, and**
- **requires annual funding of \$74,070.00 with annual inflation rate increases (includes benefits costing \$2,100.00).**

The NDP government addressed its deficit, among other means, by freezing the funding for our program and others like it. Effectively, by doing so, the NDP government addressed its deficit on the backs of disadvantaged members of our community and society. We implore the Progressive Conservative government to be different, by providing adequate sustainable funding to Focus on Employment so that we can fully deliver our services to the community. If supporting people living with disabilities in achieving independence and a better experience of life, through employment, is important, the projects supporting the people need to be funded adequately to achieve their goals.