

Press Release

Barriers Faced by Somali Youth in Accessing Post-Secondary Education, and Employment Training and Opportunities

The **Somali Centre for Family Services of Ottawa (SCFS)** in partnership with Carleton University's **Centre for Studies on Poverty and Social Citizenship (CSPSC)** has completed a study on the barriers faced by Somali youth aged 17 to 30 from the Ottawa area in accessing post-secondary education, and employment training and opportunities. With funding from the **Ontario Trillium Foundation's Seed Grant**, the SCFS's main objective was to address social and economic exclusion.

The research team, supervised by Dr. Adje van de Sande, Chair of CSPSC, consisted of three graduate students from the School of Social Work and two youth leaders from the Somali Community. The research team ran focus groups to collect input from Somali youth regarding their own experiences in seeking out vocational training, and enrolling in college and university programs. Five themes emanated from the focus groups.

1. While post-secondary education is highly valued in the Somali community, most of the participants who have attended post-secondary institutions did not feel they are being well equipped beyond their educational credentials to compete for employment within their chosen fields.
2. Many participants expressed a need to have more job placement opportunities and access to training programs that specifically align with their chosen career path.
3. The discrimination and labeling of Somali youth, particularly males within Ottawa creates serious obstacles to employment opportunities, and the youth who actually incur a criminal record will have an even harder time finding employment in the future.
4. The youth in this study overwhelmingly favoured the creation of an educational/employment centre or resource program to run within a pre-established service centre.
5. Participants expressed a great need for Somali youth to have mentors from the Somali community who can help to guide them through education and employment decisions.

The research team offered four recommendations:

1. The creation of a Somali focused employment and post-secondary education resource centre.
2. The development of a mentorship program for Somali youth.
3. Ensuring that the staff person in the resource centre could offer private sector liaison.
4. Offering subsidized placement opportunities for Somali youth to design their own placements.

The next step involves applying for an Ontario Trillium Fund Grow Grant to pilot an employment and educational resource program to be located in the Somali Centre, which could offer mentoring, information on post-secondary education, and liaison with private sector employers.

The Executive Director of the Somali Centre for Family Services Abdirizak Karod stated that, "thanks to financial support by Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) and the support from the government of Ontario, now the Research Report gives us the opportunity to use this evidence-based information to engage our youth for better employment and trades training, while also endeavouring to secure the resources needed to make this undertaking a success."

“Research like this empowers organizations such as the Somali Centre for Family Services to better understand social and economic exclusions faced by a specific group in our society and provides governments with data to better address these exclusions.” Said Hon. MPP John Fraser of Ottawa South.

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