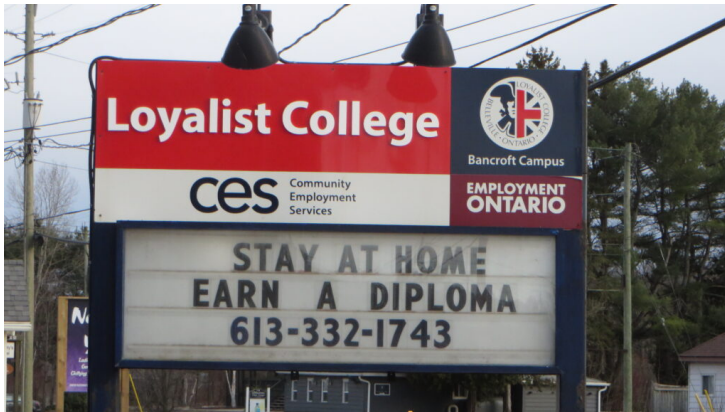


Employment services helps more residents during COVID-19



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By Michael Riley Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

With the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the economy so severely, there have been many temporary and permanent layoffs across the country, with double digit unemployment likely during the second quarter of 2020. Over half a million people have been laid off across Ontario. Unemployment in Bancroft has undoubtedly risen, but Mayor Paul Jenkins says there's no way to have a definite figure at this point, as the situation is changing daily.

?We know it's not good, we know local business is hurting, and it's how we transition out of this that's going to be the big story.?

Consequently, Bancroft Community Employment Services has seen a sharp rise in the number of people needing its services.

Bancroft CES is administered by Loyalist College and has offered some form of employment services since the early 1980s.

They now have two resource centre attendants, two employment and program advisors for their youth and student programs and four employment counsellors. They offer job placements, online supports and wage subsidies to offset the cost of training new hires. They also offer employment counselling and youth and student programs. They can help with resumes, cover letters, and education or retraining for a first or second career. All of this can be done by phone or online during the COVID-19 crisis.

Warren Gee, the CES campus director comments on COVID 19's impact:

?The way that it has impacted the local labour market is unprecedented, and it is still too early to determine the longer-term impacts. Individuals have had immediate support from some of the government initiatives and that has helped displaced employees bridge the gap while they wait to see the ultimate impact to their positions.

?We know businesses in the food and retail sectors have modified or suspended their operations which has resulted in job loss and staff reductions. Many companies have staff working remotely, some offering online or phone ordering with curbside pickup only, and there are some with only certain essential divisions of their business open.?

While those who have been laid off have had government support such as the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit, easier and faster access to Employment Insurance and the Canada Emergency Student Benefit, these are only stopgap measures while many wait to see if their layoffs are only temporary or become permanent.

?The longer this situation goes on the more positions that could transition from temporary to more permanent layoffs,? says Gee. At this time however, CES isn't aware of any permanent business closures in the area.

Gee says that since the CES office closed to the public on March 17, they have advertised more than 40 job postings for a few essential services, businesses proceeding with their hiring plans for the summer, and for a new business wanting to hire in order to be prepared for when they can open.

?Being a very seasonal and tourism-based community, this could have a huge impact on the re-opening and recall of employees as well as summer hiring to those non-essential businesses. Seasonal employees may become concerned about a delay in their return to work and the impact that could have on their ability to qualify for EI at the end of the season. Possibly this will be reviewed by the government later.?

Laurie Crawford is one of those who've been laid off due to COVID-19. She was laid off March 15 from Tim Hortons.

?That's what happened with me, the staffing got lowered and unfortunately, you're one of the ones they let go.?

She has been using the Bancroft CES for years, ever since they first opened.

?Back in my younger years, I used to go there and they would help me a lot. The girls are great. They help you with everything, they actually go above and beyond. If you need help with anything, they're there. For instance, the other day, I wanted to apply for something so I shot Michelle [Perk, resource centre attendant with the Bancroft CES] a text and she uploaded my resume and sent it off for me as I don't have access to a computer. They have my stuff on file so they are able to do that. I'm really happy with them. I've had great luck with whatever I've gone there for. Even if it's not job related, they're there. I can talk to them about anything.?

While she is happy with what the government has done with CERB and the changes to EI, she thinks the process was a little confusing and that they could've done more.

?I don't think it's enough per se, because they're trying to get the students the same amount of money which is odd to me. Not that they don't deserve money, but someone with bills and mortgages and a lot of adult responsibilities should get more. So, I think they could have done a little bit more, but I don't want to sound greedy.?

While she has been laid off, she has been trying to stay busy; doing puzzles, colouring and talking her dogs for drives. She's also planning ahead, sprucing up her resume and keeping abreast of job postings, for when everything returns to normal.

Gee says that the CES will be there to help both job seekers like Laurie and employers as the pandemic unfolds and as we start to get back to some sense of normalcy in the coming weeks and months.

?This is a time to focus on the things we can control, to stay positive and find ways to prepare yourself for the future,? he says. ?We're still here to help both job seekers and employers.?