

TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKER RESEARCH FOR BAG DISCUSSION FEB 2009

FOCUS

The Banff Action Group (BAG) meets three times a year to proactively look at opportunities, issues, gaps and partnerships in Banff. This group is facilitated by Town of Banff FCSS. The group is open to agencies, non-profit groups, government etc with a social or community focus.

In the spring of 2008 it came to the attention of BAG that agencies were seeing an increase in use of their services by temporary foreign workers from different countries than usual. Typically Banff's has seen temporary workers aged 18-30, from Canada, UK, Australia, New Zealand or some of Europe and whose motivations are mainly travel & experiences (BanffLIFE & One Hot Summer research). Due to government programs to meet labour shortages Banff has been seeing those with English as a second language, typically older from the Phillipines, Mexico, Jamaica etc. and their purpose for being here is more economic. BAG wanted to check that the support our agencies provided was meeting the needs of this population, and whether information of support services needed to be provided any differently.

In response to this, the Town of Banff, Family and Community Support Services (FCSS), with input from BAG created surveys for the employers and the employees. The intent of the survey was to get a better understanding of what the situation was in Banff. In addition, personal interviews were conducted with service providers & major employers in Banff to get a more in-depth idea of how the businesses are managing temporary foreign workers (TFW). Information was collected in fall 2008, and the details are below.

Check-ins with major employers for the Feb 2009 BAG meeting showed that recruiting of TFW is on hold and some have had hours reduced.

STATISTICAL DATA

The actual number of TFW in Banff is unknown. According to the latest figures from the Banff Job Resource Centre and Alberta Immigration and Employment there are about 2,000 TFWs in Banff and between 3 and 4,000 in the Bow Valley.

1. In 2007, there were 37,257 TFW in Alberta, a 66 per cent increase from 2006. The number of TFW in Canada in 2007 was 201,057
2. In 2006 Alberta is now home to almost one of every five TFW in Canada, but 8.8 percent of permanent immigrants to Canada.
3. To enhance and compliment the work by these advocacy offices, Alberta Ministry of Employment and Immigration has also kicked off a pilot project to provide additional settlement services to TFW in six cities in Alberta.
4. The total number of Banff residents who come from outside of the country in the 2007 Banff Municipal Census was 869 or 9.91% of the total population. Due to the increased number of TFW being hired within 2008 this would be expected to be higher.
5. According to the Alberta Occupational Demand and Supply Outlook (2007-2017), Alberta may experience a labour shortage as high as 111,000 workers in the next 10 years. Immigration & migration will play an important role in population growth.
6. According to the Job Resource Centres job postings compared to last year at this time, are down approximately 25%.

SUPPORT SERVICES SUMMARY

- Job Resource Centre operates a Temporary Foreign Worker information service mandated by Alberta Employment and Immigration. Amanda Coon support to employers & Renee Dumont for employees. Seeing 10-14 enquiries/ week. Connected with Banff Gospel church, library, YWCA, Bow Valley College, Health Unit etc
- The Alberta Government has responded to this dramatic increase in TFW by opening two advocacy offices for TFW in Calgary and Edmonton, and 2 confidential phone lines – one for employers & one for employees.
- Issues agencies are seeing:
 - Relationship problems
 - Depression & loneliness
 - Medical – female/ male cultural differences, sexual health, appt systems,
 - Training – ESL, computers, educational upgrading
 - Drinking, gambling
 - Financial – food & accom expensive, sending money home so limited disposable income
 - Cultural differences
 - Food – access to rice & other bulk items
 - Transportation
 - Starting to see families coming over, so family support
 - Negative work experiences but willing to put up with for job or hope of permanent status, or don't know rights
 - Don't share issues with employers

TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKER SUMMARY

Survey information was collected from approx. 70 TFW. The initial findings indicated the following:

- Majority of TFW are being recruited from the Philippines also from India, Mexico and some from Jamaica.
- the majority of TFW are being hired by the hotel/motel sector to work in low skilled positions such as housekeeping
- the percentage of TFW having the necessary skills for the positions hired into was 87.27%
- the ratio of males to females is almost one to one
- 1.36% of the TFW are with their families in Banff. Expected to increase.
- Nearly all workers are fluent in english
- Main reason for coming to Banff is work (past research at One Hot Summer & BanffLIFE has been travel
- Approx. 2/3 were hired before coming to Canada, of which 62% still working for same employer
- Contracts ranged from 6 weeks to 3 years, majority for 2 years
- The majority of TFW want to gain permanent status in Canada. For unskilled worker the only way to do this is for your employer to nominate you. Employers have limits as to the number of employees they can nominate in certain job areas.
- Challenges arriving in Banff were: weather 40%, medical/ healthcare 13%, accommodation 13%, work standards 7%, others included social, language, insurance, culture, meeting people, banking, homesick.
- Suggested services that could be offered to ease transition: help with accom 12% (from people without staff accom), orientation info 7%, healthcare & benefits 3%, others included volunteer, community classes, discounted/ free programs, tax return volunteers, TFW & employers rights
- The support services TFW were most familiar with were: library 76%, churches 60%, drs/health unit/ hospitals 57%, BanffLIFE 54%, Job Resource Centre 52%, YWCA 45%, FCSS/ Community Services 33%, other mentioned were Volunteer Centre, AIDS Bow Valley, Mental Health & AADAC.
- 72% are in staff accom & 88% are share a room (24% share with 2 other people & 7% with 3 to 5 people)
- When asked what they are doing with spare time : read 10%, exploring Banff 9%, movies & TV 9%, chat with friends 6%, other included: stay home, internet, cook, hike, bike, sleep, nothing.
- When asked what they would like to do: hike/ walk 19%, visit/ explore 9%, bike 9%, sports activities (%), others mentioned explore in & outside Banff, snowboard/ ski, friends, movies, work, basketball, learn about Alberta.

- They would like to receive info about the community by: newspaper 46%, website 43%, email 37%, brochures 31%, social i.e. potluck 27%, staff newsletter 24%. Low responses for text mail, different languages, phone hot line.

BUSINESS SUMMARY

A total of 22 businesses, the majority with greater than 100 employees from the hospitality/hotel/motel sector, responded via survey and interview. The costs of recruiting TFW may be prohibitive for smaller businesses which decreased their likelihood of responding to the survey. The following are highlights:

1. Business statistics

- Each TFW has a unique contract that applies to them and their circumstances. Each worker is classified as either a skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled worker and the government has different legislation for each of these groups with regards to employer/employee obligations and commitments.
- an average of 24% of current employees were TFW & as high as 70% of all staff in some businesses
- of those organizations recruiting overseas, as of Feb 2009 most are putting a hold on further recruitment

2. Benefits provided

- the federal government working standards that apply to Canadians also apply to foreign workers. The vast majority of businesses exceeded standards by providing additional benefits such as healthcare, dental, transportation, housing and clothing (for work).
- 100% of businesses provided subsidized housing in staff accommodation and only two did not have subsidized meals available. Legally accommodation must be provided at less than 30% of their wages.
- the benefits offered by the businesses were the same as provided to Canadian employees. Private health care was provided until TFW were eligible for Alberta Health Care Insurance.

3. Orientation and support information

- 9 out of 12 organizations that completed the online survey have staff orientations for new staff although due to numbers some orientations take place up to a month after arrival. Organizations for the most part rely on their staff orientation to provide information and support for the new workers. Information for all staff is also shared via staff notice boards.
- 3 of the businesses interviewed have a support person on staff, and 3 of the businesses have peer/mentors on staff, to help TFW with issues as they arise,
- half of the organizations surveyed work with Banfflife and Banff's Best program to help educate the TFW
- 60% provide some form of cultural awareness training to their Canadian staff -no details available
- some businesses assist TFW in accessing Banff services such as where to shop, bank, doctors' offices etc.
- some employers screen their TFW recruits before hiring and look for those fluent in English.
- english as a second language (ESL) was provided by five employers
- 6 businesses were interested in onsite ESL programming, challenges are timing due to shift work
- 11 of the businesses surveyed provide job training
- all employers provided access to computers and phones (at the employee's cost) for home contacts
- most businesses did not provide specific services to assist the TFW with integration into the workplace or community
- some of the larger employers offered discounted ski lift tickets, fitness passes, trips into Calgary and other activities but most did not know how many TFW took part in these opportunities. One business suggested that few TFW took part due to the cost. Free social opportunities were well attended.
- 9 businesses provided social opportunities for their TFW- although we don't know if these social opportunities were for just the TFW or for the entire staff

- 9 of the businesses felt that there were no gaps in the support services offered within the town of Banff that could help address the needs of the TFW. The Job Resource Centre has 2 staff focused on providing support to TFW and employers.
- 3 of the businesses surveyed said they could provide some financial support for programming for TFW

OTHER COMMUNITIES' EXPERIENCES

Each of the communities had unique situations with regards to the TFWs in their communities.

- The concept of welcoming and inclusive communities was apparent in all of those surveyed. Each of these communities has strived to welcome the newcomers into their communities, regardless of the barriers that were presented to them.
- The communities had either non-profit organization or local municipal government or equivalent, working with the TFWs.
- Libraries and job resource centres were often the hub of activity.
- Some common issues included: literacy, social inclusion, culture shock, awareness and social issues such as depression and isolation.
- Programs
 - Guide to hiring TFW & dealing with cultural issues – for TFW & employers & brochures
 - Welcoming Committee including TFW
 - Library- ESL training online (Auralog), need a library card.
 - Weekly newspaper article profiling a TFW in the community
 - Find a buddy program & Host family program
 - RCMP gives unclaimed stolen bikes for transportation around town.
 - Free ESL classes on Sunday after church, volunteer instructors
 - Toolbox re. attracting & retaining immigrants
 - Skype, video monitors & computers to connect daily with their families
 - food booths at Canada Day Celebration for Mexican & Filipino workers, friendly way for the TFWs to meet other TFWs as well as the local community
 - Free Family Literacy Nights with activity centres & dinner. FCSS, Health Unit & Adult Learning opportunity to meet TFWs and their families.
 - Building Blocks - an outreach in-home literacy support program for at risk kids under 18. 14 part-time tutors & Adult Literacy tutors
 - Host family program (only few families signed up) - provide support and social interaction.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The TFW situation is an evolving and changing situation within Banff. Here are some suggestions as to how we as a community can make them feel more welcome and ease their transition into our culture:

Need	Have already	Ideas
1. Coordinated effort to continuing to develop Banff as a welcoming and inclusive community:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BAG 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a working committee • Develop a long term vision • Welcoming committee, newcomer support staff/ agency • Support services continuing working together, through BAG • Continue dialogue between employers, employees & support services • Welcoming letter for all newcomers to Banff distributed by employer
2. Information for TFW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer staff orientations • Banff's Best/ Life In Banff • Publications – Local Lowdown, Affordability Guide, Resource Directory • BanffLIFE/ AIDS BV/ YWCA/ FCSS/ Job Resource Centre • TFW Advisory office & phone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop resources for TFW for brochure, toolkit, web page etc. • Promote resources & info already have - Affordability Guide, Job Resource Centre, Library, Credit Counselling of Alberta etc. • Provide access to info on rights & responsibilities – promote the Alberta Employment & Immigration TFW Advisory Office in Calgary & its telephone line & written materials in multi languages & Job Resource Centre • Provide lists of doctors, pharmacies & requirements to access these services to each employer, & sexual health info
3. Programs for TFW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Banff Centre, Banff Springs provide staff programming • BanffLIFE programs • Library extended hours, computers, books, exploring Auralog 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide ESL language training, specific to work situations, since TFW are not eligible for educational assistance, explore Auralog online training • Explore expanding or adapting programs already available for the whole community – BanffLIFE, BCCEC, library etc. • Clarify interest in ideas of downtown walking tours, book clubs, basketball, Alberta info or slideshow nights, • Tax return volunteer program
4. Information/ programs for businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rights & responsibilities workshop Dec 2008 • Job Resource Centre staff person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create Diversity workshops for employers and their management teams • Work with employers to prepare their staff in accepting, welcoming and integrating TFWs into their inclusive workplace • Provide information to doctors about cultural differences to help assist the TFWs receive medical treatment with cultural sensitivity
5. Community programs to celebrate diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome week 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a host volunteer program paired with TFWs to learn about Banff • Community activities - potlucks, cultural holidays, share pastimes etc. • Raise awareness – newspaper articles • Interview TFWs and learn their stories • Schools diversity info - materials & educational opportunities
6. Learn from others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some contacts & info already 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up with welcoming committee presentation offer • Keep up to date with other communities & orgs e.g. Calgary Immigrant Aid Society
7. Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job Resource Centre 2 staff • FCSS staff time • Some employers contribute • Grant possibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find funding to support the initiatives put forth by the working committee. The Alberta Employment and Immigration Ministry has provided funding for other communities who are welcoming large numbers TFWs. They are aware of the situation in Banff but need a champion to push for similar funding for Banff.