

## Federal government provides more funding for CCS program

By Bill Rea

The Learning Innovation for Future Employment (LIFE) for Youth Program at Caledon Community Services (CCS) has received another infusion of federal funding; to the tune of \$344,533.

Dufferin-Caledon MP David Tilson was at Chez Thrift in Bolton recently to make the announcement, and congratulate both current and past participants in the program.

‘Since 2006, the government has helped more than half a million young Canadians develop the skills they need to help them succeed in the job market,’ Tilson commented. ‘I am pleased to announce that young Canadians in Caledon will benefit from our initiatives to connect young people with jobs.’

The funding is coming from the government's Skills Link initiative, which is aimed at helping young people who face barriers to employment, including those dealing with problems like being single parents, having disabilities, etc., develop skills and gain experience needed to find a job, or get the confidence to return to school.

Since 2006, the initiative has helped more than 179,000 young people get jobs or return to school.

Tilson told the gathering this was the eighth renewal of funding for LIFE for Youth.

‘You’ve done a great job and it’s such a great program,’ he told CCS staff involved with it. ‘We’re proud to work with organizations like Caledon Community Services.’

Tilson observed that youth unemployment is a problem, hovering around 12 per cent in Canada. But he added things are a lot worse in other countries. He said he was recently in Italy, where the youth unemployment rate is in the area of 42 per cent.

‘Many youth are looking for work and struggle to get their foot in the door,’ he observed.

Tilson also commented on the size of the grant going to CCS.

‘It’s a lot of money, but at the end of the day, it’s money well spent,’ he remarked, adding LIFE for Youth is a concrete example of what can be achieved. ‘Today’s youth are tomorrow’s workforce.’

Mary Falcone, LIFE for Youth program manager, expressed appreciation for the funding.

‘We’re very, very grateful,’ she said, pointing out the program has completed seven cycles, moving young people forward to healthy futures for themselves.

‘It teaches a lot of youth, and we’re so very grateful for that,’ she remarked.

Cathy Perennec McLean, director of employment and development with CCS, said the success of the program impacts the whole agency, as the young participants come into contact with the other programs it provides.

She added the placements the students have with local agencies and companies have offered the chance to acquire more skills.

‘Young people will benefit immensely,’ commented CCS Chief Executive Officer Monty Laskin. ‘The LIFE for Youth program is a winner for Caledon youth, for Caledon Community Services and for the Caledon community. Each benefits through hands-on training in many of our programs and in many Caledon businesses.’

‘We appreciate the federal government’s support,’ he added. ‘The participants thrive in our program and the community’s businesses are grateful for the value-add of LIFE for Youth Trainees in their workplaces.’

One of the employers offering placements has been Maratek in Bolton. Maratek President Colin Darcel said they have had four students placed with them, and one is still with the company, while the other three have returned to school.

‘All had a good experience,’ he said. ‘We’re always looking, as a company, to find good young talent.’

Program graduate Leona Chalmers recalled she had little experience and was having trouble finding work, until she saw an advertisement for LIFE for Youth. She said it was a ‘fantastic learning experience,’ adding it helped her find work and boost her confidence level.

She added the program will help anyone who’s committed to learning.

Ailsa Stanner Moroz, program manager with Caledon Parent-Child Centre (CPCC) said they’ve taken in about half a dozen placements and they’ve been very helpful, working with the children and connecting with parents.

‘It’s absolutely our pleasure to mentor and help them on their way,’ she said.

Program graduate Victoria Armata, who was one of those who had a placement with CPCC, had nothing but good things to say about LIFE for Youth.

‘The program has really changed my life for the better,’ she declared, commenting she received support and encouragement. She added the program opened her eyes to different work environments and prepared her on how to conduct herself on the job.

She added CPCC helped her find her passion, which is working with kids, and she plans to return to school in September to take

early childhood education.

'It really opened up some doors for me,' she said.

There were also some current participants in the program who spoke.

Giovanna Parlagrco said she took a year off after graduating high school in 2012, but had trouble finding a job for lack of experience. She was encouraged to try the program, and saw the many opportunities it had to offer. She landed a placement with Jobs Caledon at CCS 'I'm learning on my own how to take responsibility,' she said.

Sandro Dambrosio said he came to the program after one semester of college.

'It wasn't for me,' he recalled. 'I figured I needed to find out about myself.'

Joining the program has helped, as he looks forward to seeing how different workplaces operate.

'I'm looking forward to how it's going to turn out for me,' he said.

Amber Randell recalled she started looking for work at 14, and after her first job didn't work out, she spent several years being unemployed.

'Definitely, I was not where I wanted to be with my life,' she said.

It was her mother who suggested she look to CCS.

'Basically, what I was looking for was a chance,' she said.

While she's only been in the program a short time, Randell said it's made her feel empowered, given her a work ethic and taught her how to have an open mind for understanding the workplace.

'This program has given me back what I had 14 years ago,' she added.



Dufferin-Caledon MP David Tilson is seen among numerous participants, both past and present, in the Life for Youth program of Caledon Community Services. He was on hand to announce another \$344,533 in federal funding for the program. Photo by Bill Rea