

## ***Rural Community Training and Education Needs Assessment Survey Summary Outside East Central Alberta***

### **Executive Summary**

A community needs assessment survey regarding adult education and training in East Central Alberta was developed and administered by the Alberta Rural Development Network in partnership with the Battle River Training Foundation. A similar survey (some questions differed) was available to people in other rural regions in Alberta.

There were 53 surveys completed by people outside of East Central Alberta. The majority of these respondents were from south of Highway 1 (58%), were women (81%) and were working age, 25-64 (81%). A high percentage (94%) had some post-secondary education.

Only 25% of respondents were aware of ARDN and its work and most of those had heard of the Network by word of mouth (64%).

Fifty percent said there were not enough post-secondary courses available in their region. Respondents were as comfortable taking courses online as they were in person. Where online courses are offered, the preference is for them to be unscheduled so the individual can fit it into their own time. Two reasons why some respondents did not want online training: 1. preference for face-to-face access 2. don't know how to do courses online.

Business courses were the ones the majority wanted: Management, Supervisory Skills, Accounting and Marketing courses, as well as office administration and computer courses.

Business owners and employers showed strong support for locally offered courses (73%) and are most interested in having their staff take training in office/business administration (50%). Employers indicated that Marketing was the number one course they wanted for themselves (70%), followed by Accounting and Supervisory Skills (both 65%).

### **Recommendations:**

1. Get more feedback from men and people with a wider variety of educational backgrounds.
2. Use a variety of methods to collect data, e.g. print surveys available in community offices and at community events, focus groups.
3. Create more awareness of the survey across demographic groups through an email fan out and/or promotional campaign.

4. ARDN needs to create more awareness throughout Alberta. A variety of methods should be used to reach rural communities that combine traditional media, alternative media, and outreach by ARDN and its post-secondary members.
5. Offer more courses in rural areas.
6. Bring more in-person workshops and classroom teaching to rural communities.
7. Keep online learning unscheduled so people can adapt it to their own schedules.
8. Offer business courses locally as in-person workshops or classes, or online.
9. Explore offering an Office Administration program in rural communities.

## **Community Needs Assessment Summary: Alberta Outside East Central**

### **Goal:**

To determine community needs regarding adult education and training in rural areas other than East Central Alberta, and help find solutions to benefit learners, workers and employers in the region. Comparison of the results of the two surveys would also give an indication as to how different or similar education and training needs are in different parts of rural Alberta.

### **Methodology:**

A community needs assessment survey regarding adult education and training was developed. It required online submission. There were 53 surveys completed by respondents from outside of East Central Alberta.

### **Partners:**

Alberta Rural Development Network and Battle River Training Foundation

### **Demographic summary:**

There were 53 respondents from outside of East Central Alberta. A small majority (58%) were from south of Highway 1 and 81% were women. Most respondents (81%) were ages 25-64, i.e. working age, with the largest number (34%) ages 35-50. Slightly more people (54%) with children under age 25 completed the survey.

Respondents were more highly educated than average with 94% indicating they had taken post-secondary courses or completed a diploma or degree program (70% had completed their program). Only 2% had a trades certificate. The majority (40%) were employed full time and another 34% indicated part time employment. Only 6% were self-employed and none were unemployed.

Observation: This demographic is not typical of Alberta's rural population as it is predominantly women who are well educated and employed.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Get more feedback from men and people with a wider variety of educational backgrounds.
2. Use a variety of methods to collect data, e.g. print surveys available in community offices and at community events, focus groups.
3. Create more awareness of the survey across demographic groups through an email fan out and/or promotional campaign.

### **Awareness of Alberta Rural Development Network**

Nearly 58% of respondents were not aware of Alberta Rural Development Network and another 17% were unsure. The primary means of awareness was word of mouth (64%). Other sources were a post-secondary institution (28%) and the ARDN website (20%). Another six people commented that they heard of ARDN via email.

### Recommendation:

4. ARDN needs to create more awareness in Alberta. A variety of methods should be used to reach rural communities that combine traditional media, alternative media and in person outreach by ARDN and its post-secondary members.

### **Access to Education**

Fifty percent of respondents said there were not enough post-secondary courses offered in their region and 63% said it would be beneficial to have courses offered locally. The top three reasons cited were: save time (commuting), save money and maintain family life.

Some comments:

*"There should be more courses available online that others could afford. The libraries in this area have video conferencing and this would be an ideal way to take courses."*

*"Would personally love to complete my degree, but not the commuting distance that it would require, especially in inclement weather."*

*"Post secondary education is already expensive. Having to pay additional lodging away from home makes it unattainable for many families."*

*"Transportation costs to other communities is very expensive. Online courses are green and adapt to people's time allotment."*

*"A student would be able to keep their job while upgrading or taking courses."*

Most respondents and/or their children (66%) had not accessed locally available courses. Of those that had, courses and programs varied widely from university degrees to CPR and first aid, board workshops to Community Adult Learning.

However, 49% said they would consider furthering their education if there was more access to courses. There was a wide range of interests for these courses with only finance/accounting, other languages and computer courses named more than once. One family was able to combine courses near home with courses away:

*"My daughter completed the first year of her BEd degree at our local college and was able to save money and work while living at home. She also needed another year at home as she was barely 17 at the time. Her brother has just completed the second year of his BED / BSc combined degree in the same manner. On my 50th birthday, I returned to "for credit education" (HR certificate) online 25 years after completing my university degree. This enabled me to continue to work and parent while going to school."*

The majority of respondents (79%) would be willing to take courses on line. The two main reasons (56% each) for not taking online courses: 1. want face to face access 2. don't know how to do online courses.

There was no appreciable difference between those who favoured unscheduled online courses (64%) and those who preferred in-person classroom courses (63%). Scheduled interactive online courses were the least popular (27%). Comments from those not willing to take online courses:

*"I find I learn almost as much from my fellow students as from the instructor."*

*"Online courses are fine for mature adults, but young adults need face-to-face contact."*

#### Recommendations:

5. Offer more courses in rural areas.
6. Bring more in-person workshops and classroom teaching to rural communities.
7. Keep online learning unscheduled so people can adapt it to their own schedules.

#### **Preferred Courses**

The types of courses most respondents wanted are education (63%), business (61%), and health and trades (both at 56%).

#### **Employers' Response**

Business owners and employers showed strong support for locally offered courses (73%) and are most interested in having their staff take training in office/business administration (50%). Other choices included library management/assistant, pre-apprenticeship courses, emergency services, computer training and welding (each named only once).

When looking at training for themselves, employers indicated that marketing was their number one choice (70%), followed by accounting and supervisory skills (both 65%).

## Recommendations:

10. Offer business courses locally as in-person workshops or online.
11. Explore offering an office administration program in rural communities.

## **Conclusions:**

People in rural areas of Alberta are interested in education and training and want more courses offered in their communities. They are equally comfortable with both in-person classes and online courses. However, they want online training to be flexible to their time and needs, i.e. they do not want online courses scheduled.

Since the majority of respondents were highly educated, they expressed little interest in trades courses. Business, specifically management courses for employers and office administration for staff, were in high demand.

Employers showed strong support for locally offered courses and are most interested in their staff training in office/business administration. For themselves, they would like marketing, accounting and supervisory skills courses.

Since 58% of respondents were unaware of ARDN, more effort must be made to market the organization.

For future surveys, there should be a concerted effort to get better representation from the broader community, in particular men and people with less education. Some ways to do this might be asking employers to have their staff fill out the questionnaire, or having the survey available at displays or community events.