

Human Resource Crisis in the Disabilities Service Field

October 11, 2006

Blue Heron Vocational Training Centre Athabasca Impact Statement:

Our mission is “***Dedicated To Improving Lives***” and the current Human Resource crisis is making this mission appear unrealistic.

Historically we experienced the provincial average 30% per year staff turn over which in itself was challenging, but we could replace staff. We retained a loyal core group that held to our mission / vision and philosophy. **Unfortunately**, loyalty is failing because of the “Alberta Advantage”; there are huge financial rewards to be reaped should one choose to do so. As our senior staff leave, we are at risk of **losing** our core values.

These trained, dedicated people are **not** easily replaced or even replaceable by a new “body” in the current environments. In early October 2006 we had a total of *14.5 vacancies* of which the vast majority (11) were PDD funded positions. This is **unacceptable** when our total staff *should* be 80.

The impact on our service is predictable and obvious. Individual programs are forced to accommodate other people sharing their staff. Work placements may be **canceled** and the standards are being **compromised** in their implementation due to a multitude of factors from ***overwork to inexperience***.

The monthly staffing schedule is **rarely** completed beyond the next week. It is *common* to have vacant shifts for the 4pm night residential shift at noon. The program managers are in a **constant battle** to meet the *basic* obligations. Management **frequently** covers these unfilled shifts but the result is that their **regular duties get “pushed back”**. Staff development and assessments are **lost in the daily struggle to survive**. The managers **cannot** manage without the basic building blocks of staff.

When the management structure collapses **many** people will be at increased risk. **Is there a mechanism/ plan to recover this loss of service providers?**

In a **desperate** attempt to apply first aid to the organization, the Board of Blue Heron Athabasca undertook to provide an immediate one-dollar per hour increase for all employees. *This wage increase is funded through agency resources.* The increase was appreciated but still may **not** be enough to **attract** new staff or **hold** existing staff. Needless to say, this strategy is a stopgap measure.

WE NEED A SOLUTION.

This stopgap just failed as a new hire (1 day) just advised me that they would not be staying. They are leaving to be a *janitor* at a **higher** rate of pay. *The **CEO** has developed a deep appreciation for irony.*

Staff are becoming **disengaged** from the work they do.

Managers feel incompetent because they are **unable** to attain their goals and objectives.

Individuals are being adversely affected. One young lady came to me and asked: “what is wrong with me that my *staff keep leaving* me?” “What do I have to do to *keep* my staff?” “Why don’t they like me?” Then she named **five** staff that have come and gone **this year.**

THIS IS REAL.