

Bob Perreault:

Welcome to *In Focus*, my name is Bob Perreault – very pleased to be joined today by Lisa Benoit who is the manager of Algonquin College Community Employment Services operating out of Perth. Lisa, thank you so much for being here today.

Lisa Benoit:

Thanks so much for having me.

Bob Perreault:

Now we're happy to have you here but unfortunately the circumstances that brought this conversation to light something that we've seen in this region before unfortunately last week Canopy Growth making that huge announcement of cutting its workforce further cuts to come later on this year as well and you reached out. And tell us why you reached out to us.

Lisa Benoit:

Sure. Facing a job loss is never easy, you know there is a period of this overwhelming nature of what are my next steps. We thought it important for people to know that there are free Employment Ontario services in Lanark County, in Smiths Falls, in Perth with our organization "CES" and, in Carleton Place as well. It is very important for people to pause, take a breath, and become familiar with what programs and services are available to them in their community and available to them at no cost.

Bob Perreault:

Now, let's take Canopy sort of out of the equation; if somebody does get laid off because we have seen it unfortunately at other places as well throughout the region what should, you know, once they're ready and once they've dealt with it because it can be a traumatic emotional blow but what are their next steps? First steps, I should say.

Lisa Benoit:

Yes, for sure and I think it is important to acknowledge that everyone's pathway will be very different. When you take a large layoff, it is important to realize that comparing yourself with the progression of perhaps your former colleague or your neighbor is really not doing yourself a service. Everyone is going to approach this with a very different skill set, a different educational background, different goals and interests and it's important to put all of that together to develop what that next step action plan might look like. When you come into an Employment Ontario center you are going to be greeted by staff and go through a series of activities to discuss what is next. And that for some maybe things like just updating a resume and that may be the only service that they require. For others, if they've been in a job for a long time, it might be getting some assistance in assessing what else is out there. Generally, you're not looking for work when you're already employed. It's easy to lose sight of what other companies are hiring what's the criteria for other jobs. And then, it can scale all the way up to: I

want to go back to school, or, I want to retrain, and I want to now do something very different. So, there can be some retraining programs or some short duration courses that that folks may also want to explore that we can provide some assistance with.

Bob Perreault:

Really interesting because, you know, not necessarily the case with Canopy – but we’ve seen it in other places in the region where people have worked at jobs for a very long time and then the job is gone. And like you said, they’re not constantly looking at the job market and looking at what skills are necessary. Should they maybe, if you know, should it be something to just sort of take a look at every now and then just to see – if you’re brushed up, because you never know what can happen?

Lisa Benoit:

Yes, I believe so, even if you are employed. It’s important to still keep a pulse on what are some industry trends. If you have no intentions of leaving your job and you’re staying in the same sector, it’s not to say that your job isn’t going to change over time, right? New technologies, new trends in business, trends in construction – these are all things that that everyone regardless of your employment situation – should really be keeping in touch with. There are often refresh skills that people can do to enhance the skills that they have to stay in their own careers. Again, for people who’ve been laid off that might be doing a complete pivot and going back to school to take something different; now I will say whenever we talk about retraining or going back to school we do get some people panicked. Because, they think of a very traditional “being in a classroom for a 2-year period”. Oftentimes, what we’re talking about is really short duration courses. It could be a matter of up to a year, it could be six months, it could be six weeks. There are programs that are available that can really help people rapidly re-enter the employment market. So again, all of this is very much dependent on individual goals, but it is important to find out what those options are so that you’re looking at this with a pretty fulsome picture. These are the paths that are available to you now.

Bob Perreault:

Yes, and those online options are incredible. Really because, like you said, not everybody can do it, not everybody can make the time, make the commute, or move, or whatever, to go back to school and then quote traditional sense. Doing something online, you can even gain the skills and not necessarily take the exam, but you’ve all of a sudden gained these this new skill set that you can put on the resume and it may be something that you need to move ahead in a job.

Lisa Benoit:

Absolutely, and upgrading means different things to different people. For some, if you’ve been working in a job where you’ve not been using technology or computers on a consistent basis, then perhaps they spend a little bit of time on some computer upgrading is something to consider. Not tied to credentials, just something to refresh skills. For someone else, they may be leaving a job and, for example; if I worked in manufacturing and suddenly “I’ve always had an interest in healthcare”, you may actually be looking at something very formal like taking a

personal support worker program. There's really is no limit to what training or retraining can look like, depending on what your employment goals are. And determining employment goal would really be that first step. There are services that can support with that, so taking a skills inventory, doing a career interest test – these are services that all exist within the Employment Ontario network. And, something that you can access for free at all of the service providers in Lanark County.

Bob Perreault:

Yes, and where are some of these service providers in Lanark County?

Lisa Benoit:

For sure. If you're in Smiths falls, that would be onTrac employment services. If you're in Perth, that would be our location at Community Employment Services and we're at 40 Sunset Blvd. And in Carleton Place, that would be the Canadian Career Academy. You can find all of those services online. And again, all of them offered at no cost to job seekers.

Bob Perreault:

Tell me a little bit about the mindset of people coming in your doors and then exiting. Because, I'm sure for many of them it's a sense of relief. And being pointed in a direction – or even several different directions – to explore, can often boost that confidence which is vital in getting a new job?

Lisa Benoit:

Yes, it's overwhelming and I will say, it starts from just that very basic putting together the resume. When you're in a job, it's sometimes hard to step I can look at all of the things that you've done and be able to reflect that on a piece of paper. It's quite interesting to see people come in and actually have a conversation about what they did in a day with their organization, and see that being formed for them in a one-page document. I mean even just having that summary of yourself and your skills can be quite a boost to people to see on paper what transferable skills that they have to offer for another employer. And certainly, for us, there's nothing better than getting a phone call from somebody to say that they've landed their next job, or, to see somebody graduate from a program that maybe a year ago they never thought that they would be able to take or be able to do. It's quite rewarding for us to see how these pathways work out for individuals.

Bob Perreault:

And there's strength in numbers too, because I know not everyone is going to interact with each other and so in your centre, some people prefer to keep it completely private but there is the opportunity to meet other people who are going through the same sort of thing. And just knowing you're not alone, even if you're not speaking to somebody but you just see that there are people there, knowing you're not alone in this plight, can be another way that you get a boost.

Lisa Benoit:

Absolutely and you will also find that all of our centres, a monthly roster of workshops so there is an opportunity for you to come together at a location to attend an employment workshop that might be on things like interview skills. Again, if it's been some time since you've had to do that, we can't stress this enough, it's always good to practice in a safe environment. It may be interview skills, you may be attending some workshops on topics like creating a LinkedIn profile, or, resume development. It's nice to sit in a group environment and be able to work through those sessions. And again, everyone's path is very different, we do meet individuals whose next step might be into self-employment and they just need some direction on what local services exist to help them start a business. We often meet with people who whose next step may actually be retirement and having some conversations about services or referrals to community resources that might be able to help them in bridging that gap or helping them with planning. It is recognizing that everyone is coming to us with a very different goal and very different skills.

Bob Perreault:

All right. Well, the services you offer are incredibly valuable and we know that there are people in our listening area who are looking for them and it's great to know that they are available across the County. Lisa, I want to thank you very much for taking the time to speak with us if somebody would like to get more information to reach out what's the best way for them to do?

Lisa Benoit:

Yes, for sure. I would encourage people to go to our website www.cesperth.ca and you'll get some information on programs and services that exist. You will also see upcoming events on that website as well, for example, March 30th we will be having a job fair in Perth. You can get more information as it becomes available on our website. You can also drop by our location without an appointment; it's 40 Sunset Blvd. Suite 102. We're located in the Factory here in Perth, or, you can call the office at 613-267-1381.

Bob Perreault:

Excellent, thanks so much we'll share that link on our website as well when we post this interview a little later today. Thank you so much for being with us, I look forward to our next conversation.

Lisa Benoit:

Perfect. Thanks so much.

Bob Perreault:

You're very welcome. Our guest today on in focus Lisa Benoit manager of the Algonquin College Community Employment Services here in Perth. Once again that website to go and visit is cesperth.ca I'm Bob Perreault thanks so much for listening. Have a wonderful afternoon.