

## Industry education council releases mentorship study

Lisa Grace Marr

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A comprehensive study of employer roles in youth mentorship was released at the annual Industry Education Council's Partners in Education breakfast Tuesday at Carmen's Banquet Centre.

Tony Mark, Community Developer at JPC/IEC, said the study was the culmination of a two-year \$124,000 project funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

The study uses current national research as a backbone to explore the importance of mentorship and then how Hamilton area community organizers and educators can attract and retain mentors to work with local youth in a wide variety of industries.

For example, Hamilton Health Sciences is identified as a leader in using youth mentorship programs as a way to develop employees in the face of future labour shortages. HHS has three specific programs: health care support services, high school health research bursary and health research under the microscope.

The study also provides a look at several youth career mentorship programs in Canada, and explores how to engage employers in Canada, a challenge, it notes, when the economy is weak and the focus is on the bottom line.

There are other challenges.

"For successful and lasting employer engagement, getting buy-in from the top management of both parties is extremely important," said the study's author Yehualashet M. Otite. "While it is crucial to place students' learning needs at the centre of any mentoring program, understanding employers' needs and culture is also vital."

The study offers a step-by-step process to guide educators how to start a partnership with a business.



The Industry Education Council Hamilton held its annual fundraising breakfast Tuesday morning at Carmen's. The Hamilton Spectator's Laurie Kovach was there to accept an award given to the newspaper. *Ron Albertson/The Hamilton Spectator* Source: *The Hamilton Spectator*

In conjunction with study, there was also a local effort to attract 400 mentors and retain 75 per cent of them after two years.

“We were thrilled to find that 450 volunteers came forward and while we expected them to contribute 12 to 14,000 hours, they contributed 17,863 hours,” said Mark. “Many found that they actually really enjoyed it. Still, there’s a growing need for mentors in Hamilton. I challenge each of you to find time to mentor.”

Mike Kirk, a volunteer with the Ontario Trillium Foundation, suggested that while education systems can provide the doors to opportunity, “mentorship allows people to take that first step through the door and make a success for themselves.”

The event also provided an opportunity for the IEC to recognize the contributions of business and individuals to mentorship.

The Hamilton Spectator was given an IEC Mentorship Award in the business category for the job shadow program it shares with McMaster University.

Laurie Kovach, director of human resources, administration for Metroland Media Group, said the program started about seven years ago.

Students enrolled in social sciences at McMaster are eligible to apply. Four are selected to spend two to four hours a week for six weeks exploring various aspects of the newspaper’s business from the newsroom to advertising to circulation.

Christine Foley from McMaster said The Hamilton Spectator received the award because of staff’s exceptional effort in ensuring the program’s success.

“The student feedback is always positive,” she said. “Staff often add a personal perspective about their fields. The Spec has also constantly reviewed the process (of mentorship) to ensure there is a meaningful mentorship experience.”

The individual Partner in Education award was given to Shonna Sager, who works during the day with the Salvation Army but several years ago as a volunteer started Club Gain ([clubgain.ca](http://clubgain.ca)) — a social group targeting youth aged 14 to 26 with developmental disabilities.

Sager said the group meets every two weeks at Delta United Church and is intended to provide an opportunity for youth with developmental disabilities to meet and make friends.

“Every year we fundraise for the \$3,000 for rent and that’s it. We don’t want to be asking for money all the time,” she said. “We also want to let people know we’re always looking for volunteers. It’s really just a lot of fun.”