

John Deere: Driving The Workers In The Right Direction

Language	English
Provider	John Deere
Location	Ontario
Highlights	In September 2008, John Deere, a manufacturer of agricultural equipment and light transportation vehicles products, announced it was closing its Welland plant and moving operations to the United States and Mexico. The closure came as a shock to workers and the community, since Deere had spent previous years upgrading the plant and hiring workers. At the time of the announcement the plant was running at almost full capacity.
Overview	John Deere closed its operations in Welland, Ontario in September 2010. The John Deere Action Centre has been helping the laid off workers since March 2009, through active seeking of jobs, advertising and focusing on excellent customer service.
Issues Targeted	Welland had been facing numerous plant closures. The City lost about 6,000 manufacturing jobs between 1991 and 2001 due to plant closures and layoffs at other large operations like Stelpipe and Atlas Steels. Nearby Niagara communities, such as St. Catharine, Port Colborne, and Niagara Falls, have also seen major plant closures. Jobs in the service industry and health care are available, but they generally offer lower wages and benefits or require significant retraining.
Key Features	<p>The Action Centre offers a resume service, help with interviews skills and a job board. They can also enhance their job search skills and practice mock interviews. Staff note that a lot of people who were laid off at John Deere haven't written a resume or been interviewed for a job for 20 years. "Sometimes it takes a bad interview before people realize they need help." The Centre also helps streamline access to Employment Insurance benefits.</p> <p>The Centre also provides information on re-training or alternate career options. Former John Deere employees have access to courses, in house, on CPR, food handling and Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS). Staff will also refer them to a supplier for upgrading in math and English as a Second Language. In the basement of the location are 12 computers, so workers can take computer courses.</p> <p>Every two weeks, a local non-profit group, the Business Education Council of Niagara, visits on site to answer questions related to business training. Centre staff will also</p>

	<p>refer individuals to local college courses, the Ontario government's Second Career program and other community service providers.</p> <p>Changes have taken place through the years. At first, no funds were available for re-training or upgrading. For example, workers might want to get a first aid certificate, or take a college course to better them. The Coordinator was able to advocate for a \$50,000 retraining fund, so that as of spring 2011, each client is able to receive up to \$500 for retraining.</p> <p>In addition, staff moved from passively waiting to hear announcements for jobs to aggressively seeking them out. The Centre Coordinator meets regularly with local employers, reminding them of the skilled workers available and trying to get advance notice of jobs that might be coming available.</p> <p>The John Deere Action Centre has been helping the laid off workers since March 2009, through active seeking of jobs, advertising and focusing on excellent customer service.</p>
<p>Key Results</p>	<p>The purpose of the Centre is to help people find another job or move to retirement or another career.</p> <p>The Centre submits regular progress reports to the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. (MCTU) An MCTU advisor visits every month. Once a year, the Centre Coordinator prepares a 12-15 page report on progress and accomplishments.</p> <p>The MTCU advisor also evaluates the Centre Coordinator. The advisor collects information on forms, and speaks to the Steering Committee about the Coordinator's work.</p> <p>As of February 2011, 82 percent of the Centre's clients had been adjusted. Some found other jobs, but then lost them again. Two hundred of the original 800 John Deere employees were still looking for work.</p> <p>Each individual client of the Centre benefits in their own way. Matt's story, reported in the Welland Tribune of January 28, 2010 demonstrates the positive impact of its work for John Deere employees. (Benner, 2008)</p> <p>Three months after being laid off, Matt found that job he had trained for. He is making better money, he likes what he is doing and it's close to home.</p> <p>Matt admits the local job market is tough and he is thankful to have landed on his feet.</p>

	<p>He credits the action centre with helping him make the transition. Matt said just having Internet access and links to job sites was beneficial and there were interview tips and resume tips that he believes helped him get his job.</p> <p>"There is a lot of people who think the action centre is a waste of time or some stupid gimmick. I checked it out one day and it was one of the best moves I ever made."</p>
Contact Details	<p>John Deere Action Centre, Welland, Ontario Brian Wren, Centre Coordinator Telephone: 289-820-7006 E-mail: coord@cogeco.net</p>
Sectors	Manufacturing
Projects	Worker Adjustment
Sponsors	Business: large (500+)
Target Audiences	Older workers Workers
Target Audience Details	The Centre works with almost 500 union workers from all demographics. Their average age is 35-40, with 5-10 percent over the age of 55.
Initiative Types	Practice
Funding Mechanisms	<p>The funding for the Centre originally came from John Deere and the Ontario government. In the first two years, John Deere provided \$200,000 and the government \$180,000. Now in its third year of operation, the Centre's funding now comes solely from the government. It will provide \$155,000 to keep the Centre running to March 31, 2012. A six person committee oversees the work of the Centre.</p> <p>Local partners for the Centre include Niagara College, the John Howard Society of Niagara and its employment services division Job Gym and the firm that provided Employee Assistance Programs for John Deere.</p>
Challenges	Many workers are reluctant to take another manufacturing job. They put in many years in the sector, were laid off, found work and then were laid off again. So, some are looking at career changes. Their challenge is that most of their skills are in manufacturing, so it is difficult for them to make a career switch unless they acquire

	<p>significant retraining. Many have a Grade 12 education but need college or university training.</p> <p>Even manufacturing jobs are hard to find in Welland, with an unemployment rate of 11 percent in 2011. Many larger employers have shut down and the jobs available have lower salaries and fewer benefits. According to the Centre Coordinator, "Some people can't afford to go back to school," he said. "Some people are getting the interviews; they just aren't getting the jobs."</p> <p>Too many large employers work with Job Gym or the John Howard Society to hire new employees, bypassing the John Deere Action Centre.</p>
<p>Conclusion</p>	<p>According to Centre staff, elements that lead to effective adjustment programs include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertising: It's important to let workers and the larger community know that an Action Centre is running. Early on, Deere staff held an Open House and contacted the media. As a result, several articles appeared about the Centre in the local papers. At times the wife of a worker would read the article and urge him to use the Centre. The Center Coordinator also attends job fairs and local trade shows like that of the Niagara Industrial Association. In this way, he can meet with potential employers and let them know about the availability of skilled workers from John Deere. • Good location: An action centre should be easy to access and seen as being in a neutral location, neither company nor union. • A solid Centre committee: Most action centres have a steering committee of some sort. It's important that these people can work well with the staff and peer helpers and that everyone operates from a position of trust and dedication to helping the workers. • Excellent customer service: Workers will come if they believe that the Action Centre can provide them with tangible benefits. Staff needs to know the answers; the agencies, programs and opportunities to help workers transition effectively. Visiting other action centres can provide ideas and valuable information on how to provide quality services.