



## **Waikato Jobs Summit – What’s Happening?**

*By Sandra Perry, Chief Executive Opportunity Hamilton*

In March 2009, Opportunity Hamilton and the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) organised the Waikato Jobs Summit. Nearly 200 business leaders attended the Summit and provided ideas for saving and growing jobs in our region.

You might be wondering what outcomes we’ve achieved so far? The great news is we’ve achieved a lot and have put in place some short- and long-term initiatives to help build sustainable employment in our region.

Here’s a snapshot of some of the key initiatives we’ve got underway.

### Saving and Creating Jobs

The people in our local MSD office deserve an accolade for all the hard work they’ve put in over the past year as unemployment in some sectors has reached new heights. The Ministry has put several effective initiatives in place that are saving and creating jobs for local people.

Many programmes have focused on helping young people, in particular, as they represent a large portion of the unemployed.

### *Youth Programmes*

For instance, initiatives like Youth Transitions Services and Modern Apprentices support young people to get the training and qualifications they need to gain employment. While the Youth Development Partnership Fund is another programme enabling local authorities in our region to create new training and work opportunities for young people.

### *Work and Income Programmes*

Work and Income’s Skills4Work is another initiative that will be offered out to the marketplace in due course and reduces the fees of a new apprentice for 12 months, making youth employment more attractive.

Additionally, Work and Income’s Job Ops scheme provides employers with a \$5,000 subsidy to provide employment opportunities to young people with low or no skills or work experience. Around 90 people in our region have been employed through this scheme so far and over 1160 young people have been placed into work across New Zealand.

## **Long Term Employment Sustainability**

In addition to the brilliant work by MSD, Opportunity Hamilton has begun implementing some of the longer-term initiatives suggested by Summit attendees.

### *Waikato Cycleway – job creation*

One of our biggest successes so far has been the Government announcement in July that the Waikato region will receive funding for part of our planned cycleway track. Forming a committee to look at this cycleway project and bidding for Government funds was a direct result of the Waikato Jobs Summit. This project will create jobs during construction and in ongoing tourism dollars upon completion. We expect work on the cycleway will get started in 2010.

### *Lean Thinking – saving and creating jobs*

Another idea coming out of the Jobs Summit was that companies need help to ‘do more with less,’ or increase productivity. Opportunity Hamilton has responded by offering additional training workshops on Lean Thinking. Lean Thinking is a proven workplace philosophy that increases productivity and efficiency and, over time, has potential to save and expand jobs. Our clients are reporting tremendous improvements to their bottom lines as they implement Lean Thinking principles.

### *Lobbying for National Funding Scheme*

Opportunity Hamilton’s Bank-Able NZ Scheme continues to help businesses grow and thrive here in our region. And, we’ve had several opportunities to promote this scheme to Government for national rollout. This programme provides security for businesses to obtain a commercial bank overdraft facility which the business pays back to the bank under its normal terms and conditions.

Opportunity Hamilton believes there is potential for companies throughout New Zealand to benefit from Bank-Able NZ and will continue lobbying Government to roll it out.

### *Critical Response Team*

Another suggestion at the Waikato Jobs Summit was an investigation into the need for a Critical Response Team to work with companies on the verge of collapse to help them save their businesses. Opportunity Hamilton spent several months interviewing local banks, accountants, lawyers and others close to struggling businesses.

As we researched the need for a Critical Response Team, we discovered there were already many services and organisations available to these businesses and their needs are well catered for. The outcome of this research resulted in our development of a self-diagnostic tool businesses can use to determine if they require assistance in different aspects of their businesses. We then work with those companies needing help by pointing them to local advisors.

## **Regional Approach**

One message that Opportunity Hamilton and MSD worked to communicate during the Jobs Summit is that one or two organisations cannot save and create jobs on our own. Achieving this goal requires a whole-of-region approach. And, it's been heartening to see many businesses and organisations putting their own initiatives in place to stave off unemployment in our region.

### *Example – Youth Guarantee Scheme*

One such programme is the Youth Guarantee Scheme offered by the Tertiary Education Commission. Waikato Institute of Technology (Wintec) has been successful in gaining 120 of the 175 youth guaranteed places available in the Hamilton area.

The Youth Guarantee Scheme recognises traditional secondary school is not for everyone and works to engage young people who may otherwise be left behind by the education system. The scheme is offered to 16 and 17 year olds and provides education to prepare them for employment.

It's been a busy time since the Waikato Jobs Summit, but I feel we're making some great progress for our region.

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