

## PROFILE

### **Service!Plus Abbotsford & Nanaimo, BC**

It's a line that teenagers hear all too often – 'Without any work experience, we can't hire you!' – the classic Catch-22 when it comes to finding that first job. But two B.C. cities, Nanaimo and Abbotsford, are piloting a program aimed at addressing the dilemma that teens as well as employers find themselves in when it comes to new workers.

Ken Bathurst, Director of Industry Development for Service!Plus, explains the program got its start when the petroleum industry realized many of their young workers did not possess the necessary skills to deal with the general public. The program, designed specifically for teens aged fifteen to eighteen, originally focused on customer service. Following industry feedback, Service!Plus training expanded to include safety training, employee self management, as well as communication and service skills. "Raising awareness regarding job safety is a top priority in the program", says Bathurst. "We got Workers' Compensation Board involved to ensure that teens know how important it is for them to take responsibility for safe workplace practices, and to know their rights in the workplace."

The program has received tremendous support from Nanaimo and Abbotsford's employers and school districts, with some schools granting credits for students who have taken the training and received Service!Plus certificates. Bathurst reports that industry is encouraged to look for Service!Plus graduates when hiring, and says that increased industry involvement has allowed for the creation of bursaries to assist with the cost of the twenty hour program. "We want more teens to have safe and successful workplace experiences the first time out", says Bathurst. Increased community support would indicate Service!Plus is working for both teens and employers.