

A photograph of a forest stream with mossy rocks and sunlight filtering through the trees. The scene is lush and green, with sunlight creating a bright, ethereal glow in the upper right corner. The water flows over dark, moss-covered rocks, and the surrounding forest is dense with green foliage.

# Building a Conservation Economy

*Human Resources and Economic Development Services in Place  
to Support a New Economy for the Northeast Superior Region*





# Acknowledgements

Ecotrust Canada recognizes the Northeast Superior Regional Chiefs Forum for their leadership role in exploring the opportunity for the Northeast Superior Region of Ontario to move to a conservation economy. We are thankful for the opportunity to work on such an innovative initiative in support of a conservation economy and the vision for the Northeast Superior Region where municipalities and First Nations collaborate to work towards a prosperous future.

We further recognize the Mayors of the Northeast Superior Region for their wisdom and political leadership that has been crucial for moving this initiative forward. We would also like to thank the Superior East Labour Development Task Force for their role in providing guidance throughout the project and for their time reviewing the draft of this report.

Finally, Ecotrust Canada sincerely thanks all of the individuals and organizations that contributed their time and candid input to this project – without this, our work would not have been possible.

## Introduction

In 2014, the Northeast Superior Chiefs Forum commissioned two parallel reports from Ecotrust Canada: this one, which provides an assessment of Human Resource and Economic Development services available in the Region, and a sister report that provides scenarios for future forest management. Together, these reports offer a glimpse of opportunities to redesign local and regional economies for triple bottom line results. The Chiefs Forum has adopted Ecotrust Canada's language – “to build a conservation economy” – as a way to express these principles of good work, strong cultures, and healthy ecologies as outputs from a deliberately reorganized economy.

# The Northeast Superior Region

of Ontario, Canada is home to more than 11,750 people with access to a range of human resources and economic development services. Ecotrust Canada conducted extensive on-the-ground research with the service providers to understand the current status of service provision and to assess the changes that may be required, with the hypothesis that the provision system of economic development and human resource development services in the Northeast Superior Region may need to be reorganized in order to support the successful building of a conservation economy and that the current service providers know best how this reorganization could/should be done. This report, commissioned by the Northeast Superior Regional Chiefs Forum with funding from the Ontario Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, outlines the trends found throughout the information that was collected.

## Populations on Reserve

Chapleau Cree:	100
Chapleau Ojibwe:	30
Michipicoten:	65
Brunswick House:	150
Hornepayne:	11
<b>Total:</b>	<b>approx. 356</b>

## Municipal Populations

Dubreuilville:	600
Wawa:	3,200
Chapleau:	2,120
<b>Total:</b>	<b>approx. 5,900</b>

**Algoma District**  
unorganized localities,  
served by local  
services board:  
**approx. 5,500**

**Total Region  
Population  
Estimate:  
11,750**

# System Overview

The following trends emerged from the on-the-ground research done with Human Resource and Economic Development service providers in the Region.



## Referrals and Partnerships Among Service Providers

A strong referral system is regularly used among service providers in the Northeast Superior Region. At present, this referral system is both formal and informal. Many organizations are also forming partnerships and formal alliances with one another to deliver joint programs and to undertake shared interest projects.



## Geographical Gap

The majority of service providers are located within municipal boundaries in the Region. Many people, such as reserve-based First Nations members, do not benefit regularly from these services because of geographical distances.



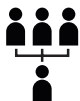
## Disparity between Policy Makers and On-the-Ground Service Delivery

The policies made by municipal, provincial, and federal governments to guide the allocation of resources and the provision of human resources and economic development services are not always well aligned with the realities and complexities of service delivery as described by service providers. They include challenging and/or restrictive policies, administrative burdens, impractical targets, and inflexible reporting.



## Funding

A large percentage of service providers cited funding challenges for their organization. These included insufficient funds to meet user needs, accessibility, and a lack of continuity.



## Inconsistency in Leadership and Policy

Many service providers are subject to the policy and funding changes that come with ever-changing leadership, whether it is municipal, provincial, federal, or First Nations.



## Skill Capacity and Retention

The Region is currently experiencing a steady population decline and is losing in particular those with more specialized skills. This trend has a negative effect on attracting entrepreneurial capacity. It can also negatively affect service provision in the Region - fewer users can lead to decreased funding.



## Differing Visions

There are differing visions of how to get the Region back to being a healthy and thriving community – these differences have resulted in tension between various parties as well as resource inefficiency.



## System Gaps

Despite the strong referral network in the Region, many individuals leave the system as a result of several factors including moving between different service providers, uncertainty around career goals, personal issues, lack of awareness of services, or lack of access to services.



*Currently there  
is no shared vision  
for a return to  
a healthy,  
prosperous Region*



# Individual-Level Scenarios

The following scenarios describe typical challenges faced by service providers and users regarding employment and training, human resources, and economic development in the Northeast Superior Region. Though they are based on real-life situations, they are not meant to reflect any particular individuals.



# Scenario 1

**Jamie**

- Aspiring entrepreneur with a business idea
- Needs support making his idea reality

**John**

- Local Economic Development Officer
- Job varies greatly
- EDC funded by municipality

Jamie learned about the Economic Development Corporation (EDC) through radio advertisements, and decides to go in and talk to John about getting his business started. John listens to Jamie and determines that what he needs most is start-up capital and to be paired with a business mentor. For the capital, John refers Jamie to the Community Futures Development Corporation (CFDC), which has an office in town – they provide loans to new businesses and may also be able to help him write a business plan, since they specialize more in advice of that nature and at the EDC they address more generalized needs. John also refers Jamie to the CFDC because he knows that facilitating the start of a new business is not “measured” by the municipality. He’d rather spend time on activities that are recognized, and refer Jamie to another organization. With respect to mentoring, John is unsure if there is anyone to help Jamie – there aren’t a lot of entrepreneurs moving to town these days.

**Themes**



Disparity between  
policy-makers and  
on-the-ground service delivery



Skill and  
capacity retention



Referrals and  
partnerships

## Implications

John is restricted by two factors in this scenario. First, he cannot connect Jamie with a mentor because the town does not have a lot of opportunities to attract entrepreneurs. John is also forced to choose between helping Jamie and performing another activity for which he will receive recognition from the policy-maker (in this case, the municipality). In this scenario, he is able to help Jamie indirectly by using the referral system.



**Jamie**

*aspiring entrepreneur*

Goal:  
Turn his  
business idea  
into reality

**John**

*Economic  
Development Officer*

Goal:  
Facilitate the creation  
and progression of  
economic development  
opportunities in town

radio ads

visits EDC

assessment

needs a  
mentor

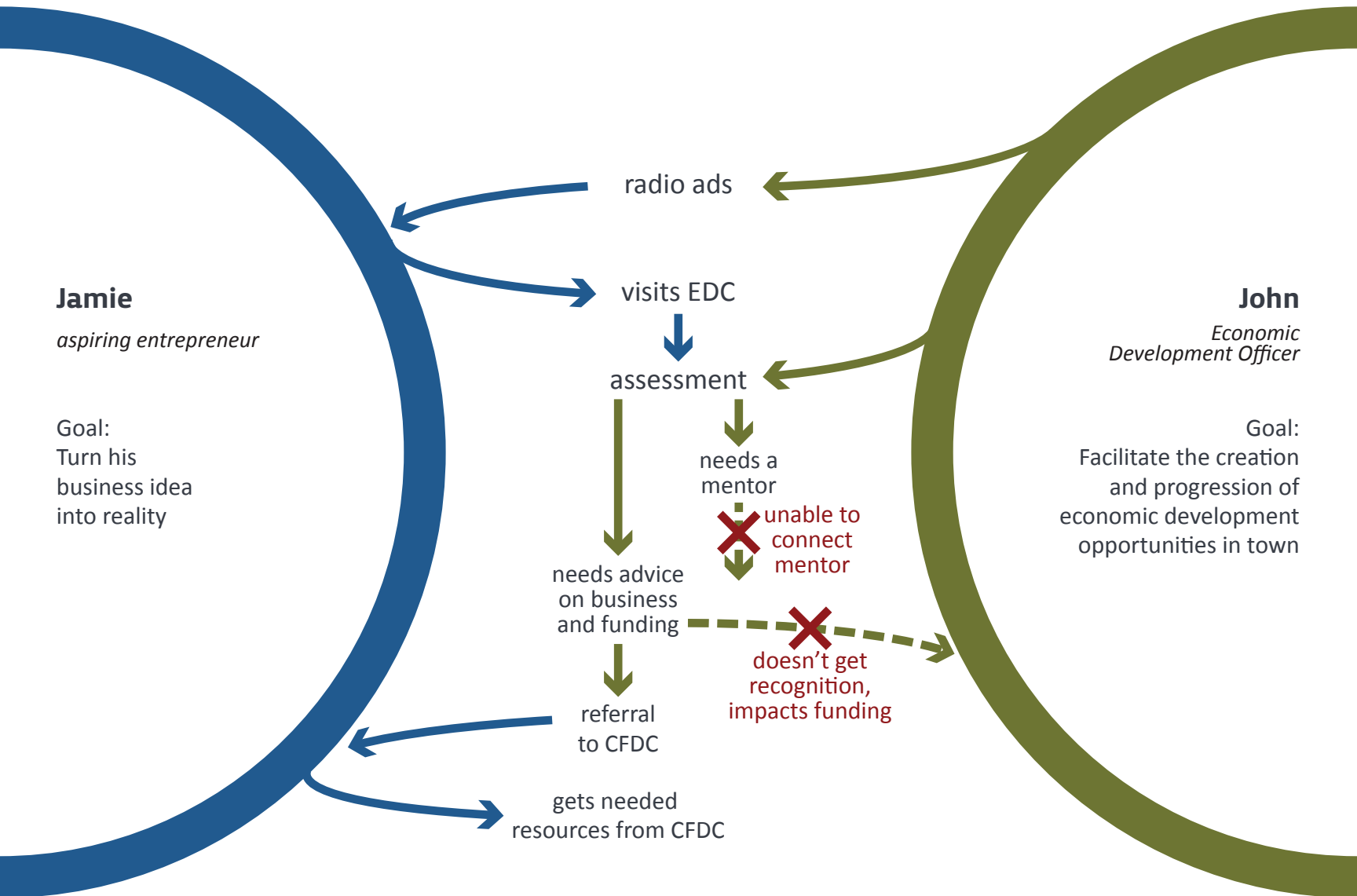
unable to  
connect  
mentor

needs advice  
on business  
and funding

doesn't get  
recognition,  
impacts funding

referral  
to CFDC

gets needed  
resources from CFDC



# Scenario 2

Dave

- Father of two, lives outside of town
- Former mill employee, recently laid off
- Needs to work to support his family

Lisa

- Teacher at Adult Learning Centre
- Funding and policies provided by province

After hearing about the Adult Learning Centre from a friend, Dave makes a trip there to sit down to talk to Lisa. Lisa completes a standardized initial evaluation with Dave and feels frustrated right away because the form does not allow her to specify that Dave heard about the Centre through word-of-mouth. This sort of thing happens often and she feels as though the forms she sends back to the government aren't an accurate reflection of what's actually going on in the day-to-day operations of the Centre. At the end of the assessment they decide that the best option for Dave is to take courses that will give him his secondary-school equivalency.

Dave is able to attend the Centre for regular evening classes. Unfortunately, after a month of classes, his car breaks down. He can't afford to fix it right away and is forced to stop the program because it is too far to walk. At this point, Lisa is working on her monthly reporting and is unable to submit a report on Dave's progress because he didn't complete a full module before stopping classes. This is frustrating for Lisa because she knows that he made some progress, but it is not recognized in the reporting format because he did not make it to the end of a learning module.

Themes



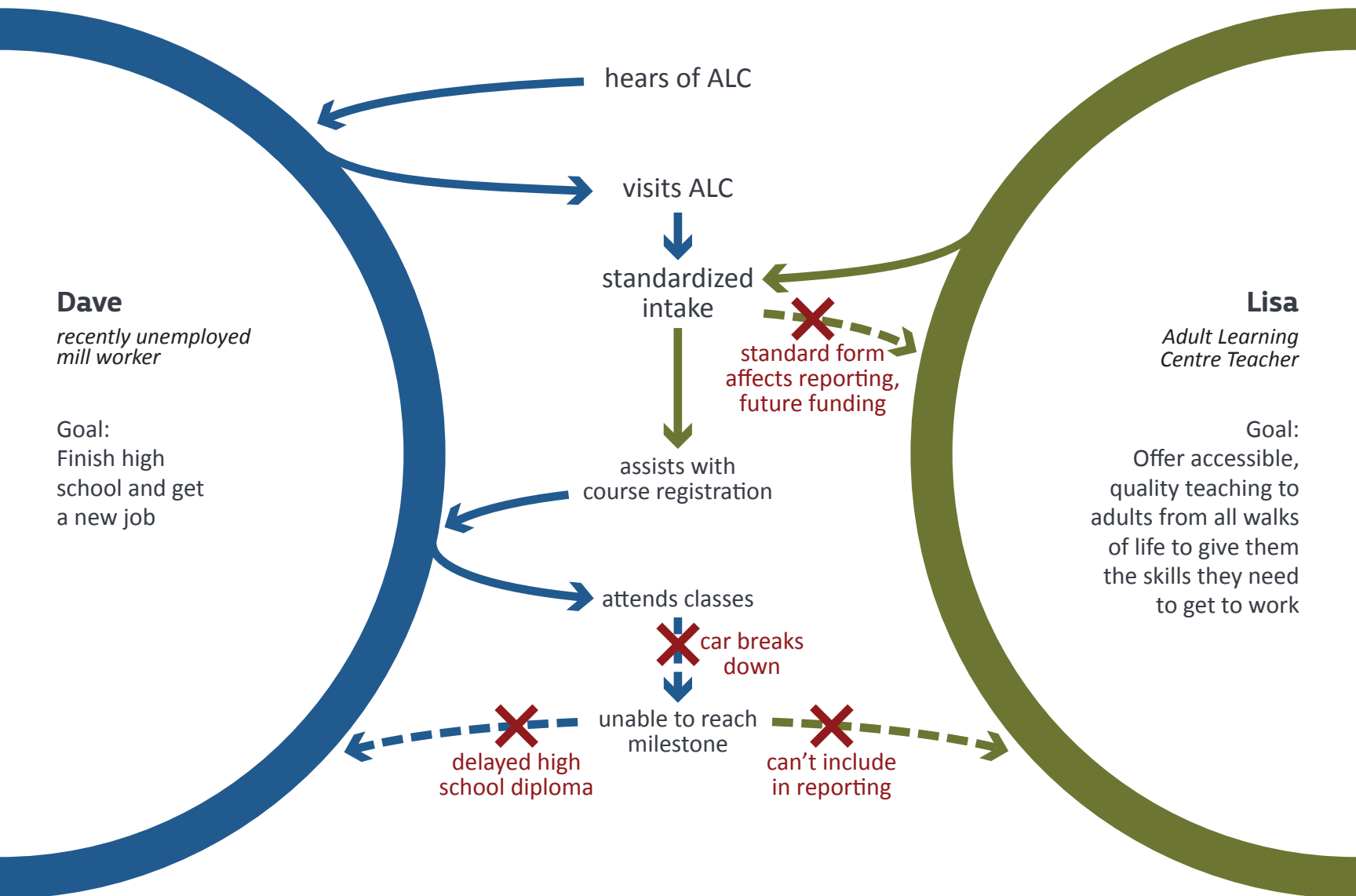
Disparity between  
policy-makers and  
on-the-ground service delivery



Geographical gap

## Implications

Policy issues come into play twice for Lisa in this scenario; first when she is unable to accurately describe how Dave heard about the Centre, and second when she must report that he made no progress due to the fact that he did not reach a milestone. The reporting requirements were set out with the good intention of being standardized, but are not collecting accurate information. This could affect future funding for the Centre as well as cause mounting frustration for Centre staff. Dave's situation highlights the geographical disadvantage experienced by some individuals who live outside of municipal boundaries – there is a barrier he must get over if he is to obtain his high school diploma.





# Scenario 3



- First Nation member living on traditional territory
- Did not complete high school
- Wants a job so he can support himself



- First Nation Economic Development Officer
- Facilitates First Nation growth and prosperity
- Funded by First Nation and government

Cameron goes to see Jessica and they determine that Cameron's main priority is to start work as soon as possible. Jessica knows that a nearby mining company is going to be looking for trained employees in the next six months and that the First Nation has signed a hiring agreement with the mining company for hiring priority of its members. However, Jessica is waiting for funding for a training program and isn't sure if they'll be awarded the money. She knows that the First Nation's Tribal Council also applied for the same funding – this is not the first time this has happened and it doesn't seem to make sense. In addition, she knows that anyone from the First Nation who gets the mining job will have to leave the reserve – which doesn't help the already-decreasing number of people that live there.

While Jessica feels confident in her recommendation to Cameron about the mining training and job, she isn't sure about the ultimate longevity of his career (and the careers of others that will undergo the training) because the skills they will obtain are not necessarily transferable to other industries if and when a job change is necessary.



Skill and capacity retention



Funding

## Implications

Jessica's uncertainty about receiving funding for the employment training program demonstrates the issues that some service providers receive around funding accessibility. The fact that the First Nation is competing with the Tribal Council for funding shows inefficiency in the system that could be streamlined. If the Tribal Council is awarded the funds, they could provide funding to the First Nation for the training program – but there is no guarantee. Cameron hasn't gone through a career goal-setting exercise and while Jessica thinks that mining will be a good choice for him, she knows that he will contribute to the declining reserve population if he undertakes the training.

## Cameron

*needs a job, no high school diploma*

Goal:  
Get a job that will enable him to support himself

visits EDO

learns about mining training

if he does training...

First Nations hiring priority

will likely leave reserve

skills are non-transferable

?

## Jessica

*Economic Development Officer*

Goal:  
Increase economic development for the First Nations through various opportunities

competes for funding

# Scenario 4

**Sandra**

- Longtime drug user
- Insufficient literary skills
- Unsuccessfully tried correspondence courses

**Katie**

- Local resource counsellor
- Funded by province to assist community members with housing, social security, and childcare

Sandra hears an ad on the radio for the resource centre in town and goes in to see what they have to offer. Katie completes an initial assessment with Sandra and determines that she wasn't ready for correspondence learning because her literacy skills are not up to par, and that her struggle with drugs is getting in the way of her moving forward with her life. Katie refers Sandra to the local drug rehabilitation counsellor so that she can get help with her addiction. Katie also suggests that Sandra take courses at the Adult Learning Centre in town, where she'll have more individualized support and will be able to improve her literacy skills and then consider the option of taking higher-level courses. However, Katie must wait almost two months to refer Sandra to the Centre because they are closed during the summer due to a lack of funding.

**Themes**



Funding



Geographical gap



Referrals and partnerships

## Implications

This scenario shows the referral system in action with mixed results. Katie is able to refer Sandra to the drug rehabilitation counsellor so she can get assistance right away. However, due to a funding insufficiency, Katie cannot complete the referral to the Centre. This demonstrates a system gap through which Sandra could leave the system and not end up taking the courses she needs, ultimately limiting her success.



## Sandra

*has drug addiction,  
ends correspondence  
courses*

Goal:  
Get her life  
back on track  
and reestablish  
herself in the  
community

radio ads


makes an  
appointment


assessment


referral to  
drug/alcohol  
counselor

need for  
literacy  
training

 closed for  
summer

 referral  
to ALC

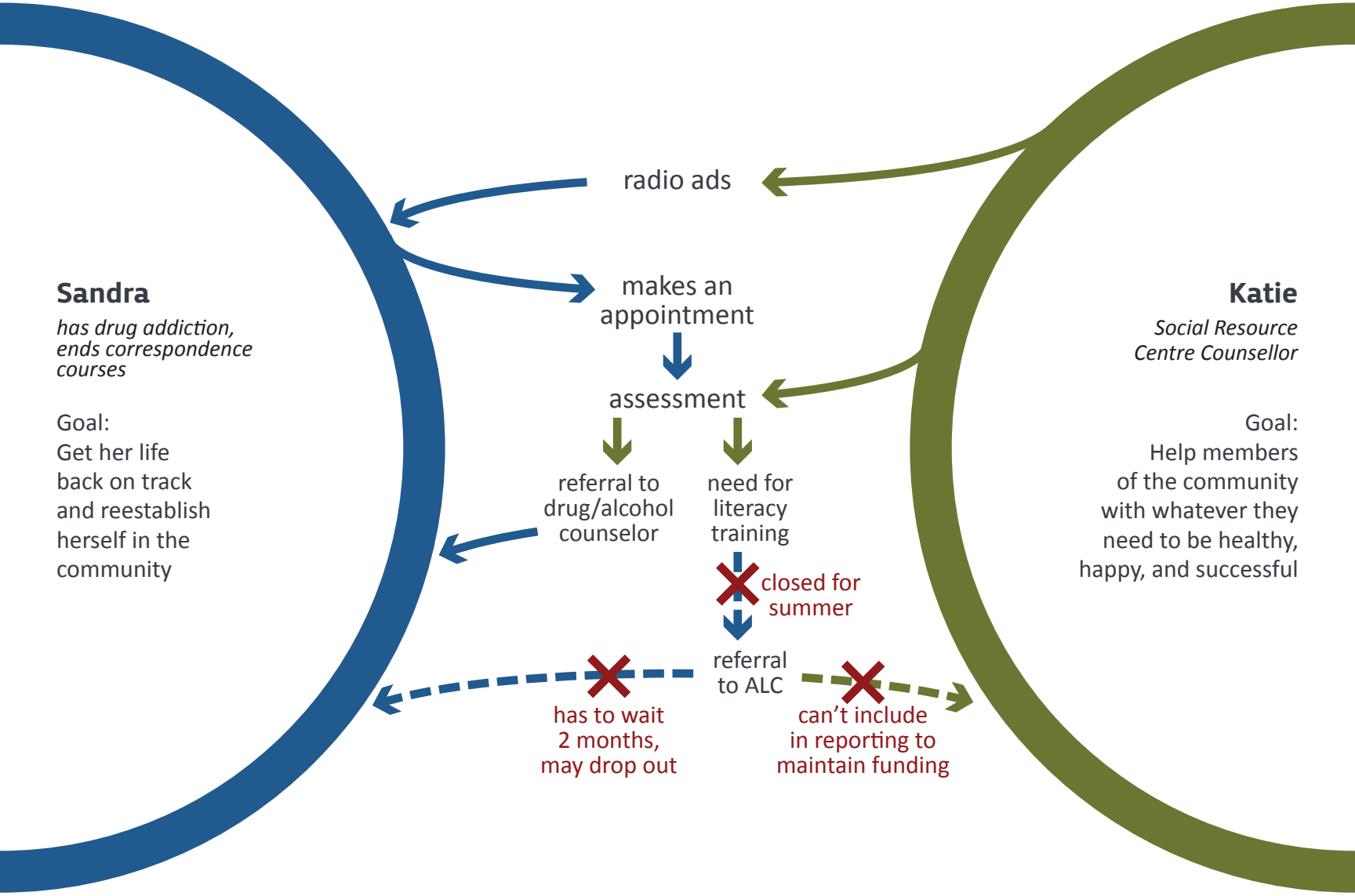
 has to wait  
2 months,  
may drop out

 can't include  
in reporting to  
maintain funding

## Katie

*Social Resource  
Centre Counsellor*

Goal:  
Help members  
of the community  
with whatever they  
need to be healthy,  
happy, and successful



# Reorganization Principles



## Culturally appropriate livelihoods

It is crucial that the solution fit within the cultural landscape of the Region. Workplace design and policies, as well as management practices that respect cultural needs, traditions and rituals are essential factors in ensuring the success of individuals and businesses in the region. Examples of this could be job-sharing between individuals to allow for child care, creative management structures, or a flexible work schedule to allow an individual to participate in the hunting season.

## Job diversity

It is important to provide for the development of a diverse selection of employment so that not all jobs are directly tied to the natural resources industry. This will provide resilience for the Region in that its economy will not be as vulnerable to changes in global markets.

In addressing the complex service provision system in the Northeast Superior Region, a number of principles should be considered to ensure changes that are made will be sustainable and a good fit for the Region and its population.



### **Flexibly specialized skills**

This means that individuals will be able to focus on a particular skill or interest, but enough cross-training will be provided between industries that they could move to other positions without “starting over” if markets dictate the need for an industry change or they desire work in a new industry.

### **Retention of people, skills, and business in the region**

Developing skilled people within the Region is one thing, but retaining them after training is another. There should be incentives in place to encourage people to stay and move to the region, helping to improve the local economy and build capacity. Young people should be targeted for retention, as they are at the start of their careers, but individuals at other career stages should be encouraged as well.



# Reorganization Model

Individuals and businesses have no defined path to take through the current service delivery system, which can be expensive in terms of both time and money. Reorganization will offer individuals a better-defined path towards achieving career goals.

A solid foundation of essential skills such as literacy, attendance, and studying/learning, as well as self-awareness and goal setting processes make individuals more likely to end up in the right industry based on their passions and strengths, and be more likely to succeed in future specialized training. The foundation-building phase should be standardized across the Region to gather and use resources more efficiently and ensure that each individual is at the same level before entering the specialized training streams.

The streams will be located in different areas of the Region and will focus on a particular industry or service (tourism or forestry, for example). Each stream will aggregate the relevant resources in the Region, such as time, people, and money, and will provide specialized training, small business counselling, and investment attraction to individuals, as well as general expertise in that industry. In order to recognize the need for some flexibility, certain skills and training will be transferable between the streams and allow for cross-pollination.

