

Talking about challenges being out of work

ELLWOOD SHREVE

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Rachelle Pascoe-Deslauriers wants to hear the personal stories of people laid off from the manufacturing sector.

But participants won't need to worry about the 25-year-old Chatham woman telling anyone their secrets, because she'll be returning to Scotland in a few weeks to continue her research project at the University of St. Andrews.

Pascoe-Deslauriers is conducting research on the experiences of laid-off manufacturing workers as part of her Master of Letters in Management Dissertation in the School of Management.

She said she became interested in the topic through her experience working at Adult Language and Learning in Chatham. She left last year for St. Andrews just as the agency was seeing a lot of laid-off manufacturing workers at the same time that several retraining programs were starting.

"That got me interested in seeing how individuals understand what they're going through and . . . whether or not they're being prescribed things they want to do or . . . whether people understand what kinds of opportunities are available to them in the community."

Realizing people may be reluctant to share their personal stories, Pascoe-Deslauriers said she won't be pushy or aggressive during the 45-minute interview.

She wants to find out what kind of services they have accessed, the struggles they've had in trying to find another job, and what is going on with them in general.

She said this could be an opportunity for people to get things off their chest "in a confidential, non-judgmental environment, but at the same time, come away with a sense of understanding of what they're going through."

She added everything shared will be held in strict confidence, noting the raw data and interviews will only be available to her and her supervisor in Scotland.

Jason King, co-ordinator of the CAW Workers Adjustment Centre, has seen the benefits of giving laid-off workers a place where they can talk about their situation.

"When a person encounters job loss or layoff, they have no control over the situation," he said. "This can be a scary time and many feel isolated."

King said the local centre provides a social aspect, which is invaluable.

Members know there is always a familiar face, whether a peer helper or a member of their work family they can talk to," King said.

He added the training, development and social networking that members engage in at the centre "provide affirmation of self-worth and a renewed sense of control."

Being from Chatham, Pascoe-Deslauriers said, "I care more about what happens to this community than other communities

"But what's going on in Chatham-Kent isn't necessarily unique to here," she added.

In conversations with people from Europe, the U.S. and Canada about the research she is doing, Pascoe-Deslauriers said, "I'm always hearing, 'Oh that's what happened to my parents. That's what's happening to my uncle and my aunt and that's happened to my siblings.'

"It's something that really speaks to a lot of people in a lot of places," she added.

She said because of the cyclical nature of manufacturing work in North America and in other parts of the world, there is a large body of research on communities and people affected by long-term layoffs.

Pascoe-Deslauriers said every researcher hopes their work will have an impact in creating positive change and helping people.

"If change and benefits were to come out of my research, I would want them to be happening in this community," she said.

Anyone willing to share their story with Pascoe-Deslauriers can call 226-881-1413, which is a local call, or e-mail: rmp35@st-andrews.ac.uk.

eshreve@chathamdailynews.ca