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West Kootenay, BC

West Kootenay Recruitment Pilot Confirms Need for Local Workforce Solutions

West Kootenay, BC — After a year of testing, building, and collaborating, the West Kootenay Recruitment Agency (WKRA) pilot project has confirmed what many local employers already knew: the Kootenays need a recruitment solution built for the Kootenays with local context.

Launched in November 2024 by Community Futures Central Kootenay, the pilot set out to test whether a locally based recruitment agency could help employers overcome the unique workforce challenges facing the region.

The pilot expanded on the [West Kootenay Recruitment Agency Feasibility Study](#) (March 2024), which identified ongoing hiring challenges across sectors, with approximately 1,270 jobs per year expected to require recruitment in the West Kootenays. Employers consistently cited barriers such as housing availability, childcare access, wage competitiveness, and relocation hurdles.

“We knew many employers were struggling to recruit for key positions and that a one-size-fits-all recruitment approach doesn’t work in a rural setting,” says Andrea Wilkey, Executive Director of Community Futures Central Kootenay. “With the pilot, Community Futures acted as a business incubator. We engaged a contractor to test the model for a year and see if it could be a viable for-profit business model.”

Under the guidance of Mia Gardiner, the pilot moved from concept to real-world delivery, making an immediate impact on employers and the workforce. Three pilot recruitment projects were completed, resulting in successful placements across trades, finance, and communications. Through that process, more than 600 candidates were sourced and engaged.

“The results demonstrated that recruitment in rural communities requires more than posting job ads,” said Gardiner. “Success depends on deep local knowledge, trusted employer relationships, strategic marketing of both roles and communities, and candid conversations about compensation, onboarding, and retention.”

The pilot also responded to a need identified in the feasibility study by establishing a regional HR Network. The Network now connects Human Resource professionals across the region, providing a forum to connect, share resources and knowledge, and advocate for best practices.

Most significantly, the pilot directly led to the launch of [Kootenay Talent + Recruitment](#), a new locally owned recruitment and HR firm supporting employers throughout the entire Kootenay and Boundary region.

The WKRA pilot project was made possible through the financial support of ETSI-BC and the leadership and guidance of the WKRA Steering Committee. The Committee included representatives from Kootenay Career Development Society, Kootenay Employment Services, Selkirk Innovates, the Castlegar & District Chamber of Commerce, Destination Castlegar, Community Futures South Kootenay, the Lower Columbia Community Development Team Society, the Nelson & District Chamber of Commerce, and Community Futures Central Kootenay.

To learn more about recruitment supports, visit futures.bc.ca/recruitment/

-30-

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Photo:



Mia Gardiner led the West Kootenay Recruitment Agency pilot project, highlighting the importance of locally driven workforce solutions for local employers.