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# **Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities**

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EVIDENCE

**Tuesday, October 24, 2006**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Dean Allison**

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## Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Tuesday, October 24, 2006

•(1015)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)):** I call this meeting to order pursuant to Standing Order 108 (2), our study on employability in Canada. I would like to take this time to welcome all the witnesses here today. We appreciate all of you taking time out of your busy schedules to be here to talk to us about issues of employability in Canada.

We would like each group to present for seven minutes. That will be followed by a first round of seven minutes of questions and answers and then five minutes. I can assure you that seven minutes goes by very quickly, so we appreciate the fact that we're trying to get a lot into a short period of time.

Ms. Childs, welcome.

**Ms. Leslie Childs (Workplace Educator, Association of Workplace Educators of Nova Scotia (AWENS)):** Thank you. Good morning. My name is Leslie Childs, and with me is Margan Dawson. We represent the Association of Workplace Educators of Nova Scotia. It is a group of professional adult educators who deliver the nine essential skills programs in workplaces all across Nova Scotia. We work in partnership with the department of education, businesses large and small—even with one or two people—and labour.

Brigid Hayes of the Canadian Labour and Business Centre said, “The workplace is one of the most important venues for the use of literacy skills. We all know about how workplaces are changing, about the need for improved skills and increased training.” We subscribe to this 100%.

As the increasing demands of technology, a knowledge-based economy, and international standards rise, many employers are challenged to find ways to keep their workforce current with new developments and the frequent changes, and to find ways to retain knowledgeable, skilled workers in their own workplaces. Organizations need employees who are skilled in communication, able to think and solve problems, able to work with others, adaptable to the rapidly changing workplace, and willing to continue learning.

Essential skills and workplace education programs are vital to success if workers, employers, and organizations are to thrive in the global economy. Through extensive research, the Government of Canada and other national and international agencies have identified and validated the nine essential skills. Essential skills are enabling skills. These skills are used in nearly every occupation and

throughout daily life in different ways and at different levels of complexity.

In Nova Scotia, because of the partnership with the national literacy secretariat, we've been able to advance workplace education and support the Nova Scotia labour markets through the Nova Scotia workplace education initiative. This initiative has been in place for sixteen years. This recognized and award-winning initiative provides non-traditional educational opportunities for both unionized and non-unionized organizations and their employees who wish to improve their essential skills. The programs are designed to be easily accessible to all workers, are customized to meet both the individual learner and workplace needs, and are relevant to a specific workplace.

The Association of Workplace Educators of Nova Scotia—we call ourselves AWENS, as everybody has to do the acronym thing—is the only organized professional association of workplace educators in the Atlantic region. Our focus is on the delivery of customized workplace education programs through the workplace education partnership.

As a professional body, we are a source that advocates continuous learning and embraces the concept of workplace education. We are ambassadors for workplace literacy, and we were recognized in May 2006 by the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators through their excellence for municipal workplace literacy achievements. In their presentation for the awards they said, “Through the efforts of AWENS, many workers in Nova Scotia are now better prepared to meet the challenges of an ever changing and evolving workplace.”

As practitioners working in the field of workplace education, we have observed that many employers are not taking advantage of workplace education programs, and we really question why. The benefits of investing in workers' essential skills and workplace literacy are undeniable, but they are not always clear or known to management, supervisors, or workers. As well, about 75% of Nova Scotia businesses have too few employees to make implementing a workplace education program on their own feasible.

The top reasons for making workplace education a priority include cost savings and improved communications, but some other benefits are transferability of employees between departments in an organization, employee development, employee empowerment and investment in an organization, improved product quality, and improved customer service. All of those are things that businesses today are looking for.

Four in ten Canadians have literacy skills below the desired threshold for coping with the rapidly changing skill demands of a knowledge-based economy—an interesting statistic.

In conclusion, workforce training, retraining, and development fall directly on employers in both large and small companies. They need help if Canada wants to ensure sustainability and ongoing growth of workers and workplaces to build a strong workforce and compete in the global economy.

• (1020)

We talk about the importance of retaining employees to meet the demands of the labour market—the employer is the key. Workplaces are asked to be learning organizations. But how are they being supported?

According to the report, “Too Many Left Behind: Canada's Adult Education and Training System”, a large portion of Canada's adult population is not equipped to participate in a knowledge-based society: 5.8 million Canadians, aged 25 years and over, do not have a high school diploma or higher credential; 9 million Canadians, aged 16 to 65, have literacy skills below the level considered as necessary to live and work in today's society. Workplace education is proactive. It helps businesses and workers deal with a changing world.

As a government and as a country we need to be proactive rather than reactive. We need a stable workforce committed to ongoing learning and development. AWENS sees a role for the federal government to continue and increase its direct support of workplace education programs. AWENS also sees a need for the federal government to actively promote the benefits of workplace education to employers and their employees.

In closing, the findings of the evaluation of the Nova Scotia workplace education initiative, prepared in September 2005, indicate that workplace education is the way of the future. Workplace education can and does benefit workers in Nova Scotia. As a result of demonstrating new skills after participating in a program, individuals are often promoted and earn a higher income.

The characteristics of the Nova Scotia workplace education partnership model are: cost effectiveness; quality learning programs delivered on site; customized content relevant to the needs of those in their workplace, linked to literacy and essential skills development.

If there are no workplace education programs available for people who are currently working and earning a living, how will you address issues around productivity in an increasingly competitive global environment?

Thank you very much for your attention.

• (1025)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Childs.

We're going to move to Mr. Ramsey, who will speak on literacy.

Mr. Ramsey, we appreciate your being here, and Ms. Folinsbee. Who's going to present? You both will. Okay, you have seven minutes.

**Mr. Charles Ramsey (Executive Director, National Adult Literacy Database Inc.):** I'm Charles Ramsey, executive director of the National Adult Literacy Database, which is based in Fredericton, New Brunswick. It is one of the seven national literacy organizations in the country funded by Human Resources and Social Development Canada.

We'd like to thank the committee for accommodating this request to make a presentation. We're extremely pleased to be here. We submitted a written brief earlier on, on the issue of workplace literacy.

Our purpose in this presentation to the standing committee is to emphasize the need for federal government investment and leadership in both workforce and workplace literacy for adult Canadians. The importance of literacy in all aspects of the lives of Canadians has been well established.

From the various international literacy surveys, including the recent international adult literacy and life skills survey, we know that 42% of working-age Canadians have serious literacy challenges. We also know that 54% of adults with literacy challenges are employed. However, we know that only 2.2% of the dollars that employers spend on training go to literacy. These figures show the serious effect not only on Canada's prosperity, but on the prosperity of adult Canadians and their ability to participate in a democratic society.

The importance of a solution to address the literacy issue with leadership and investment by the federal government has been well documented. The first example of this documentation is the 2003 report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, a copy of which I have here. In there, it was clearly and well documented. In fact, I think the title of the report, “Raising Adult Literacy Skills: The need for a pan-Canadian response”, says it all. A second important example is the cross-country round tables conducted with stakeholders on literacy and essential skills by the federal government in 2005. Investing in adults with literacy challenges is also an investment in their children, as a measure to prevent the cycle of low literacy from repeating itself in future generations.

In our own work at the National Adult Literacy Database—or NALD, as we call ourselves—we see the thirst for, and extent for, the need for literacy resources and supports across the country. NALD is an online library that provides information on adult literacy programs, resources, services, and activities to anyone, anywhere, any time, at no cost to the user, and in both French and English.

The numbers show the breadth and depth of our service and our reach. I'd like to illustrate with some figures. In the year 1997-98, there were 172,000 user visits to our website. By March 2006—that is, in the year 2005-06—this number had increased to more than nine million user sessions in the 12-month period, or 25,000 user sessions a day. Similarly, just six years ago, the number of downloaded documents from our libraries totalled 36,000. In 2005-06 more than 4.4 million documents were downloaded in PDF format from our library.

These examples are sufficient to provide an indication of the magnitude of the need out there. I hope they also illustrate that we're not broadcasting out into a void where there's nobody home. People are actually downloading and using these resources that have been created by Canadians, for Canadians, in a Canadian context.

I want to acknowledge that the federal government has recognized the important work of NALD. Recently, HRSDC announced support of \$1.6 million over three years, to enable NALD to develop and implement a workplace literacy and essential skills clearing house and portal. This will allow us to provide a bilingual, single-source, comprehensive, up-to-date, and easily accessible database of workplace literacy and essential skills programs, resources, services, and activities to those involved and connected to the workplace and workplace literacy field.

My colleague Sue Folinsbee will provide you with further information.

• (1030)

**Ms. Sue Folinsbee (Principal, National Adult Literacy Database Inc.):** Good morning.

At the same time that we applaud the federal government's investment in the future work of NALD, we are dismayed and perplexed by the recent government cuts, especially the \$17.7 million to the National Office of Literacy and Learning funded by HRSDC. We would really like to know what evidence was used to decide that the services and programs that were cut were not value-for-money. We would also like to know why the government made these cuts with no consultation with the literacy community.

NOLL funds that were cut provided critical support to literacy programs, including those that prepare adults with literacy challenges to participate in the workforce and adults in the workplace who need to upgrade. These cuts affect crucial support to programs, such as coordination, promotion, learner recruitment, professional development for practitioners, research, partnership development, and sharing of best practices. We can already see the disastrous effect of these cuts across the country, as provincial and regional networks and coalitions that have provided these supports for decades are or will be forced to close or severely downsize.

It's unclear to us whether the cuts will affect the workplace education partnerships in place in several provinces, such as Nova

Scotia, which we just heard about, and examples like Manitoba and the NWT, where employers, labour, and provincial governments work together to promote and deliver workplace literacy programs. Nor is it clear to us what the effect will be on provincial and territorial federations of labour. Federations have been successful partners in workplace literacy partnerships. Their work provides successful examples of provincial partnerships and should be strengthened and enhanced, not cut. These provincial and territorial organizations are also really important partners that NALD and other national organizations work with closely to do their work efficiently and cost-effectively.

I'm going to go to recommendations.

The results and impacts of workplace literacy programs that we've already heard about have been well established through the years by organizations like ABC CANADA, the Conference Board of Canada, the Canadian Association of Municipal Employees, the Canadian Labour Congress, and various unions.

At this point, we would just like to make a number of recommendations to the standing committee.

First, we ask that the federal government restore the \$17.7 million to the NOLL program. The cuts contradict the advice of the same committee that, in 2003, called for an end to the patchwork approach to adult literacy, highlighted the need for a national vision and a pan-Canadian strategy, and called for increased investment.

Secondly, we urge the federal government to honour and transfer committed funds to the provinces through the labour market partnership agreements.

Third, we encourage the standing committee to review the 2003 report by the same committee, "Raising Adult Literacy Skills: The need for a pan-Canadian response", especially concerning the development of the pan-Canadian accord and an increase in the annual contributions and grants through the national funding stream and the provincial-territorial funding stream.

Also, we urge you to review the ideas and recommendations from the cross-country consultations on literacy and essential skills that happened in 2005. These consultations included employers and unions across the country and had some great ideas that the federal government could use for increasing employer investments in workplace literacy.

Lastly, we urge the federal government to consider a joint partnership model with both private and public sector employers and unions, along with other important stakeholders, to provide a shared vision of workforce and workplace literacy. We encourage a broad definition of literacy rather than a narrow one that just considers the present jobs, as well as multiple entry points for upgrading. We discourage a one-size-fits-all approach.

Thank you.

• (1035)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We're going to move next to the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women. I believe we have Ms. Neumann and Ms. LeBlanc here.

You have seven minutes. Thank you.

**Ms. Patricia LeBlanc (Member, Advisory Council, Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women):** On behalf of the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, I'd like to thank the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities for this opportunity.

The Nova Scotia Advisory Council was created to bring forward the concerns of women and provide advice to government on ways to advance equality, fairness, and dignity for all women.

Four of our primary goals are to increase the participation of women in all their diversity in the decisions that affect their lives, their families, and communities; to promote women's economic equality; to reduce violence against women and girls in communities; and to improve the health and well-being of women.

Nova Scotia has the highest proportion of persons with disabilities among the provinces. One in five women with disabilities over the age of fifteen had a disability or chronic health condition in 2001. The socio-economic situation of women with disabilities is quite different from those of women and men without disabilities.

When you add the impact of gender, they are more vulnerable than other groups. Many gender differences do exist, such as marital status. Women tend to live alone a lot more often and are widowed, and they are still the primary caregiver in the home, as well as being responsible for doing the unpaid work in the home.

Women with disabilities are only about half as likely to have a university education, as 13% of women with disabilities have a university education versus 25% of women without a disability. Less than half of women with disabilities in Nova Scotia were in the paid labour force in 2001, whereas 80% of women without disabilities were in the labour force.

Close to three-quarters of women with disabilities in Nova Scotia survived on less than \$20,000 a year. Compared to men with disabilities, and to women and men without disabilities, women with disabilities report the greatest amount of stress at work. They are more likely to fear getting fired within the first year, most likely to feel overqualified for their job, and least likely to be promoted.

In preparation for this upcoming round table on women with disabilities, the advisory council had an opportunity to speak to over

thirty women with disabilities in the Cape Breton area, which has the highest level of disabilities. The round table will focus on the economic well-being of women with disabilities and look at employment, income support, education, and training.

These are some of the comments we received from women with disabilities when we were discussing with them. Some of these barriers we refer to as the disability wall. The first one is the lack of awareness and all the pervasive negative attitudes towards women with disabilities, on the part of policy-makers, employers, and the public. It's a huge issue.

Employers tend to hire people who do not have disabilities, as they're afraid it will cost them a lot of money to make accommodations for people with disabilities. They also believe that women with disabilities will not be able to do the work. They believe women with disabilities have a higher rate of absence and require more training.

So women with disabilities are either never employed or employed as a token person, and they never advance if they are hired. Cost is the bottom line to employers, not inclusion or responsibility.

Women with disabilities are not given higher-level jobs, even if they are educated.

Employers need to give women with disabilities a chance. A lot of public education and sensitivity training are required in this area.

Some of the policies, rules, and regulations set down by various government departments serve as huge financial disincentives for women with disabilities, creating a greater dependence on social assistance.

• (1040)

Number one is the loss of a drug plan. Right now a woman with a disability can keep her plan for up to one year after she gets a job. But what happens if you go to work and your job does not have a health care plan? What is the woman supposed to do for medication?

Something needs to be put in place to help cover the cost of medication and technical aids and devices so that women with disabilities have a better chance at employment. Women with disabilities end up having to beg for benefits, and they're usually at the mercy of their social workers.

Accumulating the required number of hours to qualify for certain benefits like EI can be difficult for women with disabilities. They are doomed to go back on social assistance time and time again.

Much of the work that women with disabilities do get is low-wage and often precarious, and therefore often without benefits. Many jobs don't have health plans, and when they do, they often don't cover pre-existing conditions.

There is also a huge lack of information out there for people with disabilities. It needs to get to them in a timely way.

I'd like to now go to the recommendations.

We'd like to recommend that a gender and diversity analysis of existing and proposed legislation on both the policies and programs of employability be conducted to give women with disabilities more opportunities for employment.

We believe women with disabilities should be supported in lifelong learning by employability, career development, and employment counselling programs to achieve their full potential.

We believe women with disabilities should have a case navigator, someone whose sole responsibility is to make sure they know all the programs and are entitled to all the benefits.

Employment support services for women with disabilities should include assistance for personal care, transportation, housework, child care, and caregiving, when they enter the paid workforce, through self-arranged care programs funded through EAPD.

Access to employability services and bridging supports to well-paid work should be a flexible and long-term investment in women with disabilities.

We would like to review and amend the interaction among various income security benefits and social health benefits to ensure benefits are maintained and disincentives to employment are removed.

The federal and provincial governments should collaborate to improve accessible transportation for women with disabilities.

Labour standards, both federal and provincial, should be amended to include requirements to accommodate the workplace needs of women with disabilities. Improved support for the integration and accommodation of women with disabilities is especially important to small and medium-sized businesses and non-profit organizations, which are the major employers.

The advisory council is happy to see the issues related to employability being considered by this committee. We urge you to consider the impact of gender when tracking these important issues.

Many women with disabilities are qualified but not working. Many of those who are employed are underemployed, and a paradigm shift needs to take place in order to break down these barriers.

With the gradual recognition that Nova Scotia and Canada will need maximum labour force participation to meet the demands of our economy, it is particularly important to take advantage of women who are willing to work.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. LeBlanc.

We are now going to move to the New Brunswick Child Care Coalition, Ms. Dallaire.

**Mrs. Jody Dallaire (Coordinator, New Brunswick Child Care Coalition):** I want to start out by saying I will be making some of my remarks in French.

[*Translation*]

The New Brunswick Child Care Coalition is pleased to appear before the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

The New Brunswick Child Care Coalition is a membership-based, non-profit organization that includes both organizational and individual members from across the province. Our organization promotes high quality, universally accessible, non-profit, publicly funded child care, with trained and well-remunerated staff, for all New Brunswick children who want or need it.

We are affiliated with the national organization, the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada.

● (1045)

[*English*]

Our organization commends the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and Status of Persons with Disabilities for undertaking this study of critical employability issues. We appreciate the opportunity to demonstrate the links between employability and child care. Relating to several employability issues mentioned in the study's terms of reference, we offer the following evidence that child care supports the employability of parents while at the same time helping to provide children with the foundations for lifelong health, learning, and skills development.

Child care supports the employability of parents, particularly mothers, immediately and on an ongoing basis. In the immediate term, child care is a tremendous support to families because it allows parents, particularly women, to increase their labour force attachment.

Canada's productivity relies on working mothers with young children. They contribute \$53 billion annually to Canada's GDP. That reliance is only increased due to widely predicted shortages in skilled labour, yet Canada and most provinces have not built a network of income supports and public services, such as quality affordable child care, to broadly facilitate women's economic and social contribution.

The Canadian national child care study, which was released in 1988, confirmed that it is overwhelmingly mothers who make child care arrangements and scramble when they fall apart. Labour market surveys find that mothers are most likely to refuse work, promotions, or transfers because of family responsibilities.

Child care provides children with foundations for lifelong health, learning, and skills development, all related to their future employability. The evidence supporting public investment through program spending to develop a pan-Canadian child care system is clear and compelling. The early years set the foundation for school readiness, and all children benefit from quality early learning and child care, not just targeted groups of children.

Public support for child care is therefore an investment in our future and helps the future employability of the Canadian labour force. What makes the case for accessible, universal, publicly supported quality child care so compelling and so relevant to the issue of employability is that it meets the needs of both children and their parents. This explains why multiple studies show that the benefits of a universal child care system outweigh the costs by a factor of two to one, and that's not including the needs of at-risk children.

A focused public investment in quality universal services is required. As discussed in the New Brunswick Child Care Coalition submission to the Standing Committee on Finance, which we are going to be doing this afternoon, the federal government is terminating the bilateral agreements that committed \$1.2 billion annually in dedicated funding to improved child care services. These agreements are being replaced with capital incentives of \$250 million annually. While these incentives are not yet fully defined, already there are concerns about how they will play out in communities, particularly given the fact that the current federal government's child care spaces initiative represents an annual funding cut of \$950 million for child care services, which is a cut of almost 80%.

To build a child care system that Canadians and New Brunswickers want and need, the New Brunswick Child Care Coalition therefore calls on the federal government to adopt the focused investment strategies that follow.

First, restore and increase the sustained long-term federal funding to provinces and territories. Federal transfers must be specifically dedicated to improving and expanding child care services, based on provincial and territorial commitments to advance quality, inclusion, and affordability.

As well, enact federal child care legislation—and I believe legislation is actually being evaluated right now before the House—that recognizes the principles of a pan-Canadian child care system, makes the federal government accountable to Parliament with respect to child care funding and policy, and respects Canada's first nations' right to establish their own child care systems.

Redirect the capital incentives for child care spaces to dedicated capital transfers for the provinces and territories to use to build child care services that communities prioritize, own, deliver, and account for.

Provide effective income support for Canadian families by incorporating the current taxable family allowance into the Canadian child tax benefit.

In order to capture the numerous benefits of public child care investments, including the employability benefits described above, the federal government needs to restore and increase its public investment substantially beyond the recently terminated bilateral child care agreements and to sustain this funding over the long term.

• (1050)

Working with the provinces and territories, this public funding must be accompanied by a focused investment strategy; that is, by public policy and accountability requirements for community service providers in all levels of government that will advance the range of quality, inclusive, affordable, community-based child care services across Canada.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Our last speaker is Florence Javier.

Go ahead and present. You have seven minutes.

**Ms. Florence Javier (As an Individual):** Actually, I am a member of the Filipino Association of Nova Scotia, but I just came here to share with you my experience in Canada.

The title of my brief is “Why Canada Should Give Her Immigrants a Chance for a Better Life by Recognizing their Foreign Credentials”. It is my objective to show the committee that it is vital for the government to break down the walls that prevent qualified immigrants from working in jobs that are in line with their training.

I learned from the e-mail sent to me by the Honourable Alexa McDonough, the member of Parliament, that the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities would be holding public hearings on matters relating to employability in Canada. As a concerned citizen of Nova Scotia, a former landed immigrant, and now a full-fledged Canadian citizen, I would like to share with you my views on this matter, based on my personal experiences.

I chose to settle in Nova Scotia because I had an aunt who lived in this province. I applied as a landed immigrant seven years and seven months ago. The process was based on the points system, and because of my profession, work experience, and other factors, my application was approved. I had my credentials assessed in Toronto by the Pharmacy Examining Board of Canada, and I was allowed to take the pharmacy equivalency exam, which is a prerequisite for foreign graduate pharmacists to be able to take the board exam. Unfortunately, I did not pass the equivalency exam. To make ends meet and to pursue my dreams of living in Canada, I needed to find a job in the valley where my aunt lived. However, after submitting 100 résumés, I did not receive any calls for interviews. Then I decided to move to the city of Halifax, with the hope that I would be able to find a job that would give me the Canadian experience that the employers were looking for. I wondered why employers were looking for Canadian experience from newly arrived immigrants.

On my second day in Halifax, I met two new friends who were compatriots. I told them about my situation and right away they contacted another friend who was working in the housekeeping department of a hotel. I was recommended by my new-found friend to her supervisor, and during my job interview I mentioned to the supervisor that I wished they would give me the chance to get the Canadian experience that every employer was looking for. I was finally hired. Then I worked in that hotel for seven months. During that time I continued to apply for a pharmacy technician job in all the different retail pharmacies in the city, and I was not hired. The work in the hotel was my bread and butter, but I was also worried that my self-confidence was slipping away because I was stuck in a job that was not in any way related to my profession. So I decided to seek the advice of the Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association. They helped me with my résumé and they tried to find a job for me, but would-be employers would rather hire me as a nanny.

I was losing hope of ever practising my profession or even getting a job as a pharmacy technician in Canada. After I quit my job in the hotel, I applied for a job at Sobeys and I was hired as a stock clerk. It was there that I had a chance to familiarize myself with the over-the-counter products in their pharmacy. I decided to work as a volunteer pharmacy technician in one of the Lawtons drug outlets. After volunteering as a pharmacy technician in Lawtons and Sobeys, I was hoping I would be hired in one of their pharmacies, but I was not. I also tried applying in all the Shoppers pharmacies, but the result was the same—no luck.

This time, I decided to seek the advice of the president of the Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia. She was very helpful and accommodating, and she interviewed me. I gave her a copy of my résumé and she had my name published in their newsletter. After two weeks, I received a phone call from the company that was providing workers for the Department of National Defence. I was interviewed and hired as a part-time store clerk and a pharmacy technician. Slowly, I gained back my self-confidence.

I thought I needed a professional review, so I inquired at the College of Pharmacy at Dalhousie University if they were offering refresher courses for foreign graduates, but they did not have one. I also checked on different Canadian websites, but courses were only available in Ontario and British Columbia.

● (1055)

I wanted to move to either Toronto or Vancouver, but I could not find a job so that I could make my big move.

Foreign graduates are also required to pass the English as a second language exam, or the test of English as a foreign language. I did take the test of English as a foreign language while I was in the Philippines, and it was valid for four years only. It was only recently that they made amendments to this validity.

Based on my experience, I am therefore submitting a number of proposals to the committee. First is that the Province of Nova Scotia should encourage its educational institutions to offer refresher or related courses that immigrants can access in preparation for their licensing exams. Said courses can be offered as night classes or through distance education or correspondence programs.

The second is that employers give new immigrants the chance to be employed by considering their work experience in their country of origin—subject, of course, to the necessary adjustments for differences in systems or standards.

Third is that government agencies like the Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association do their part by helping immigrants find a niche through placement assistance on jobs related to their training.

And finally, the Government of Canada should fully implement its program for recognizing foreign credentials.

I thank the committee for giving me the chance to submit this paper. It is my hope that my recommendations will benefit our concerned policy-makers in making their plans a tangible reality, which in turn sets the pace for a progressive Nova Scotia.

I thank you, and good day.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Florence. That was a very inspiring story. Thank you for being here to share that with us today. There is a lot more that we, as a country, should be doing for foreign credentials. This is a great case in point.

We're going to start with the questioning.

Mr. Regan, seven minutes, please.

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I concur that that was very helpful and well delivered, a well-prepared presentation that highlights the problem of foreign credentials very well. All the presentations we had were excellent, and I wish I had more than seven minutes to ask all the questions that I have arising from them.

But let me just quickly ask you, Ms. Javier, did you feel that the equivalency exam was improper or unfair in some way? You talked about the other problems that arose later, but I just want to ask about the particular process of the Pharmacy Examining Board of Canada.

What did you feel about that process?

**Ms. Florence Javier:** I have shared my opinions with most of the Canadians here, even the licensed pharmacies, and they have told me that even they would not be able to pass the equivalency exam. That's what I've heard from them.

It's a requirement, so I have to go through it.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** It's a very frustrating story to hear, and it's discouraging to hear it, but it's helpful to us to hear it, nevertheless. So thank you for that.

• (1100)

**Ms. Florence Javier:** Thank you, sir.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Let me turn now to the question of literacy.

Joan McArthur-Blair is the new CEO of the N.S. Community College, as perhaps most of you would know. She said at a speech to the Halifax Chamber of Commerce last winter that the number one problem that community colleges face in this province is literacy, which I thought was a remarkable statement coming from her in her position.

The minister, in defending the cuts the government has made, has said that the government will not support lobbying and advocacy, and that they feel this should all be done at the provincial level, essentially. That's my understanding of what she's saying.

You've made a comment about the need for a pan-Canadian response—we've heard that this morning—but I also would like you to explain what you feel the impact of this is on your organizations. That's to AWENS and the literacy database in particular, or others who would want to add to this. Why is it important to have the national organizations that have been cut, as well as the provincial organizations...? In both cases we've seen layoffs, some closing their doors or looking to close their doors. Why are those organizations very important in terms of the actual on-the-ground delivery of literacy?

I think it's important to government to hear that.

**Mr. Charles Ramsey:** First of all, let me say, in terms of my own organization, that the \$17 million withdrawn by the government from local provincial and regional literacy programming—essentially because it was local and regional and the responsibility of the provinces—impacts on us because a lot of those resources.... First of all, by definition, those moneys were not used for the delivery of training, because the federal government saw that as a provincial responsibility and stayed away from that. So all of those funds were used for things like developing learning materials, doing research, providing professional development, and, in our case, in the libraries we have....

I think you will agree that the \$4.4 million in downloads of PDF documents last year really speaks to a great need out there. All of those resources were developed with that money; well, I would say 70% of those resources were developed locally, ostensibly to meet a local need, but through the distribution system we have, they were

distributed nationally and indeed internationally. They had a huge impact nationally because they provided people with the resources on a Canada-wide basis that they otherwise would not have had, unless they lived near a large university with an adult education program, like the University of British Columbia or the University of Toronto, or McGill, or Laval, or some university like that. So at that level there was a huge.... It will have an impact on us, because the major funding source for the development of those wonderful materials, created by Canadians for Canadians, has now been withdrawn.

Sue, would you like to comment on the local organizations and the impact on them?

**Ms. Sue Folinsbee:** I would just say that for the provincial coalitions I think this is really an employability issue, because provincial coalitions also develop materials and offer professional development to their members across provinces, which actually improves the quality and keeps up the professionalism of the field in terms of adult learners and programs.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Does anyone else wish to comment on this or not?

Would you like to comment?

**Ms. Leslie Childs:** I can contribute the fact that I taught at community colleges and in literacy-based programs in six provincial and territorial jurisdictions in my career. One of the biggest headaches when you move from one place to another is that your source of materials changes; your curriculum changes. You are delivering math, and math is surely math, but different provinces have different views of it. If you're preparing people to be employable across Canada and to have the kind of mobility promised to us, what we find is that people are trained in certain parts of the country and they do not have the literacy skills to be mobile, and the people trying to teach them do not have access to materials.

Every time I go into a classroom in a different constituency, I have to recreate material or spend a lot of my own time creating materials. I think I'm fairly good at it, but I would surely like to be able to have access to materials that are tried and true, and that is where I have used NALD. I have used NALD in three different jurisdictions now, and I find it just a godsend.

I think there is a distinction between public education systems, which probably end after grade 12, and which have every reason to be provincial in nature, and.... But I also think that once you get past the end of grade 12, you have to look at a pan-Canadian approach.

• (1105)

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Thank you.

I've got a minute left, and I want to turn to the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women. I appreciate the fact that there are many areas relating to employability involving women, but you focused on women with disabilities. I think the way you focused is very helpful to us, and it was an excellent presentation.

Among your recommendations you didn't mention a need to create awareness or to overcome misconceptions among employers. What would you say about that as an issue? Is it important, do you think? How would you deal with it?

**Ms. Patricia LeBlanc:** Yes, that's in our brief.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't see the recommendation, I guess. What do you want to comment about that?

**The Chair:** Just thirty seconds—a quick answer.

**Ms. Patricia LeBlanc:** We do see it as a major obstacle to employment, because a lot of times they're thinking about what they can't do, not what they can do. You might be a perfectly good bookkeeper, but you might not be able to run upstairs and get a cup of coffee.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** I guess what I'm looking for—and I don't have any time left—is what kind of programming would you see to overcome that or to create more awareness?

**Ms. Patricia LeBlanc:** Probably workshops for small business employers and government people who do human resources, and research divisions, and just by creating awareness of what women with disabilities can do. Maybe some women with disabilities who are already employed can even be guest speakers, or participate as well, and answer some of the questions for small businessmen and small business employers.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, and that's all the time we have, Mr. Regan. Thank you very much.

We're going to move to Mr. Lessard, for seven minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I would like to thank you for being here this morning. We see your contribution as essential and, as I said to the other groups, necessary to make the government aware of the problems you face.

I will address Ms. Childs first. You said that workplace training was the way of the future in the issue of employability.

May I hear a little more about that from you?

[*English*]

**Ms. Leslie Childs:** It seems that employers are faced with global competition. One thing they are doing is subscribing to more and more severe levels of standards, things like the reduction of hazardous waste or hazardous substances, and ISO standards, and things like that. They realize that if they are going to be competitive, the people in their workplaces need to be able to read and write and handle math, and those kinds of things, so they can conform to those standards. At the moment, they are finding, because of low literacy levels, workers who cannot do anything more than the jobs for which they were hired; they cannot do any cross-training, and their ability to produce a flawless product is severely impacted by that. So

anybody who wants to work in the global economy seems to be beginning to understand that the solution to the problem is to train in-house, and to train specifically for the needs of their organization. So I think they see it coming.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Let's take as an example the people who promote and support workplace training. I am thinking of the people from the Adult Literacy Database, among others, who told us earlier that there is not only an expectation in that regard but also a supply issue, because we are talking about a database, downloading programs and content, etc. That is what I understood. We are also told to be concerned about the federal contribution to support those programs and we are encouraged to transfer the funds to the provinces.

I would like to hear a little more from you on that subject. Is it because of considerations of effectiveness or confidence in the federal government's capacity or willingness to support you that you make that recommendation? I think it was Mr. Ramsey who made that statement.

•(1110)

[*English*]

**Ms. Sue Folinsbee:** I think the transfer of funds is really important, because in Leslie Childs' and my own experience we have seen a need for workplace literacy programs. Some of the money from those funds that was going to be transferred to the provinces would go to workplace literacy programs. Right now, we don't have enough support for them, so this money is particularly important for developing a support system for workplace literacy, for example, in Ontario.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Still along the same line — tell me whether I understand you correctly, because it determines the direction the committee will take — you would like to arrange some kind of partnership with the different levels of government, union organizations and employers' organizations. There are already existing forms of partnership. One of the partnerships was the Labour-Management Partnership Program, which has also just had a taste of the medicine of budget cuts. The means already exist.

Can you tell us how you see that partnership and its dynamics?

[*English*]

**Ms. Margan Dawson (Executive Director, Association of Workplace Educators of Nova Scotia (AWENS)):** I can see using the model that exists in Nova Scotia now. It's a very strong partnership model that brings the three parties together—government, business, and labour. That pretty much drives what happens in our province.

It's strong because it brings all the partners to the table, so whatever is delivered is extremely effective. It can be measured. What we've done is we have a gap. We can measure very quickly in terms of the success through anecdotes. What we don't measure and what needs to be measured is the impact on the business itself. Do you increase productivity by 1% because of this or decrease your error rates? What is the return on investment? That's something a partnership can create; it simply needs that voice. It's about recognizing the value.

Here in Nova Scotia we have this phenomenal partnership model. It's worked. It's been in place for sixteen years, and the funding is minimal. It's an employer contribution, it's a provincial contribution, and I may add that the federal government also contributes through the Canada/Nova Scotia Cooperation Agreement on Economic Diversification. We've also received funding through the National Literacy Secretariat. Pieces already exist, so let's take what is obviously highly successful, build on that, and make that a national strategy. A lot of the components are in place. We just need to take them and use them elsewhere—build it.

**The Chair:** Mr. Ramsey, do you want to add to that? We have about thirty seconds left.

**Mr. Charles Ramsey:** Yes. The report that was put out by an earlier version of this committee calls for a pan-Canadian strategy, and we in the literacy community ask for that because we feel that notwithstanding the fact that some excellent things are going on in various parts of this country, it needs to be standardized across the country. The federal government is in a position to show some leadership and bring people to the table, so the models that are used in one part of the country can be spread to other jurisdictions as well.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Lessard.

That's all the time we have. For the sake of the researchers, I just want to clarify a recommendation. Did the strategy you're talking about come out of the original pan-Canadian strategy or recommendation, as Mr. Ramsey said? Is this a different strategy that revolves around literacy in the province of Nova Scotia that you don't believe is duplicated in any other province at this point?

**Ms. Margan Dawson:** This particular model is not duplicated. There are variations of it in Manitoba and Alberta.

**The Chair:** Okay, but this relates specifically to literacy?

**Ms. Margan Dawson:** Workplace literacy and essential skills.

**The Chair:** Do you have a copy you could provide to the committee that could be part of our recommendations as we move forward, just to clarify that? There are lots of partnerships and strategies out there. We want to make sure we're talking about the one you're talking about.

**Ms. Margan Dawson:** We have a briefing, which will be translated.

**The Chair:** It will be in the brief.

**Ms. Margan Dawson:** You'll have that information in the briefing, and there's an appendix, an attachment that describes workplace education, the initiative itself, the partnerships that exist currently.

•(1115)

**The Chair:** That's great—as long as we have that.

Thank you very much, Ms. Dawson.

We'll move to Madame Savoie.

**Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP):** Thank you, and I'll allow you more time to elaborate, because many questions have come up, but I'll start with literacy. Of all the cuts, this one was the most puzzling and seems to work at cross-purposes with what we want to achieve as a national goal, not just for individuals but in building a more cohesive society and a more productive one; hence the confusion.

I want to go back to the point that Mr. Lessard raised about workplace literacy, or learning, being the way of the future. In one of the studies—and I'm not sure if we're talking about the same one, so I appreciated the chair's efforts to clarify. Madam Bradshaw conducted a study, and there were some recommendations around the need for a pan-Canadian strategy around lifelong learning, and literacy specifically. I wondered whether that's what you were talking about, because it seemed to go beyond workplace learning—and I agree on the importance of workplace learning opportunities and partnerships. But for all those people who are unemployed and wouldn't be captured in that situation, I see the need for community partnerships as well, where basic literacy learning can also occur. I wondered if you'd comment on that, because workplace literacy seems to address the needs of workers who need to continue their learning, and perhaps even basic learning, but it leaves behind a whole other group.

I wonder if you have any comments, Mr. Ramsey, and then we'll go down the table.

**Mr. Charles Ramsey:** In the briefs we've submitted and in the presentation we made this morning, we used the term “workforce literacy”. Workforce literacy captures all of those people who are not part of the workforce or able to get into the workplace.

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** Okay. There is a big difference there. Thank you.

**Mr. Charles Ramsey:** “General literacy” refers to the opportunities given to those people to upgrade their skills so that they can compete either for more training places or for positions in the workplace.

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** Thank you.

I haven't had a chance to read that, but that's a great clarification.

**Ms. Sue Folinsbee:** I think it's really important that we don't focus just on workplace literacy and literacy for jobs. We've got to look at the bigger picture.

Also, I would like to say that even within the whole issue of workplace literacy, if we look at a lot of the programs over the last fifteen years—the ones especially that labour has been involved in—the workplace was a venue and it was a place where people could focus on the skills for their jobs, but also the skills to help with their family and their community as well. I don't think we should lose sight of that.

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** Thank you.

Go ahead.

**Ms. Leslie Childs:** I just wanted to say that I've had an opportunity in the last four or five months to travel all the way across Canada and to visit some of the places I've lived and worked in, to talk to ordinary people across Canada. They ask what I'm doing, and I say I'm doing workplace education, and they say, "What's that?" I tell them, and they say, "Well, why do we need it?"

I can tell you there is a huge gap in understanding the size and nature of this problem all the way across Canada. Nobody has a handle on it really yet, except maybe us in Nova Scotia.

I think the other thing that is out there that is huge and that people really haven't come to appreciate is that there is a huge lack of credibility in the education system today. I've talked to a lot of human resources people across the country, and one of their common concerns is that people they hire or would like to hire just don't have the essential skills to do the job. And they feel bad about turning them away. They understand the impact that has on the family, but they just can't use them because they don't have the reading, writing, and math skills they need. So this is a pan-Canadian problem.

I think the way to do it is to build credibility back into learning and back into education, and to make it not such a scary place to be. Too many people today think, "I won't go into a classroom because it's scary".

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** Thank you.

Did you want to add something, Mr. Ramsey?

**Mr. Charles Ramsey:** I just wanted to say that over the last seven or eight years, the executive directors of the national literacy organizations have worked together to put into writing what we consider to be the need for a pan-Canadian strategy. In the materials that I brought, which have been circulated, you'll find a ten-year action plan that was put together by the movement for Canadian literacy, in consultation with the other national literacy organizations. That document carries a lot of weight because it was well-circulated in the community Canada-wide and it bears the support of all of the literacy people in all parts of the country at all levels. So it's a good quick read of about ten pages on what needs to be done over the next few years.

A lot of us in the literacy community consider this to be the road map, this very committee's document, which was published a couple of years ago. There are excellent suggestions in this that, if followed, would make a big difference in the literacy condition of this country.

• (1120)

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** I raised the question also because there have been community learning initiatives for cities, to make learning cities, or to help develop learning cities and learning towns. These

really embedded learning as a community process that brought these partnerships together and really helped catch everyone in the net or helped everyone participate. So I really appreciate the clarification, and I'm certainly going to look at that.

If I have thirty seconds left, I just want to speak to the issue of early learning in child care. I introduced a bill in the House that would hopefully enshrine some of the values you mentioned, like accessibility and quality, because we know that our later learning experiences really begin in early years. That will be discussed on November 21, and hopefully we will show the will of Parliament to go in that direction at that time.

Thank you for raising it.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Savoie.

We're going to move to Mr. Warkentin for seven minutes.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Certainly workplace training seems to be the theme of the morning. Earlier this morning we talked to some of the different witnesses who had some issues surrounding workplace training.

I was able to talk with them about this, and I'll bring it up again right now. According to the Conference Board of Canada, when looking at different OECD countries, Canada seems to be lacking in terms of the investment that employers are making in their employees. As an example, in Canada, employers are spending \$824 per employee, whereas across the border, just south of us in the States, employers are spending more than \$1,000 per employee.

As we look at this issue, I'm wondering whether you can identify any way we could possibly bring the employers to the table to help them see the value of investing in their employees, and whether there are any reasons you can identify that are inhibiting employers from contributing to the education of their employees.

**Ms. Sue Folinsbee:** We've been asking this ourselves, those of us who've been in workplace literacy for the last twenty years. It has always been difficult to get employers to the table, even when you show the investments.

One thing we would suggest—and this came out of the round tables—is to look at the 1% training levy in Quebec as a way of providing a pool of funds. Employers there have to spend 1% of their payroll on training, and if they don't, it goes into a fund. Some of that is also for literacy. That would be really worth investigating for the rest of Canada as a strategy.

**Ms. Margan Dawson:** I agree. When we look at why businesses aren't investing in training, I still think you need to look at your community. For example, in Nova Scotia, many of our businesses are made up of very small organizations of five or six employees. They're mom-and-pop operations and they make up a good portion of Nova Scotia. They're not always eligible for programs, nor do they have the resources to do it.

How do you get them to buy in? I think we need to be more innovative in our thinking. I think tax incentives are one way and so are programs. But we also simply have to look at the reality of their work, and I don't know that we do that often enough.

I'll give you an example. I work with a group of small business owners. They're one-owner companies. They're on their own. They may have one or two staff people. We've taken an innovative approach. We've brought them together within our community, so we actually have the numbers we require to put together a program, and we're delivering essential skills for small business owners. We've had a huge impact. I've been working with them now for three years, and their businesses have grown because we've developed the essential skills and worked it into the customized workplace—what is it that they need in their workplace. It's become a very powerful story and a very powerful picture.

It really means you need to speak to the businesses. They don't have the resources, quite often, and it's a resource issue. You can look at Michelin and High Liner, those larger companies. They have the resources and the funding to do the human resource development. That's not applicable to smaller businesses.

How do you meet their needs? According to ACOA, \$40 million was pumped into the Nova Scotia economy by women entrepreneurs in 2004. How are they being supported?

• (1125)

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Do you think tax incentives for either the employee or the employer may be—probably the employer, I would imagine—

**Ms. Margan Dawson:** I would say they would be for the employer who encourages their workers, and there has to be accountability here. It's not just handing out money. There needs to be a demonstration that in fact they're doing this. For the employer who encourages their workers to participate, what can we do to make it worthwhile for them?

There's a company called Elmsdale Lumber. They've already bought into workplace education and they've seen the value. The value is that the lumber they produce has benefited because of the workers' skills in various areas.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** I am changing the subject just a little, but maybe getting to the root cause of the issue with the lack of literacy within the workplace....

Ms. Childs, you talked about the lack of credibility our educational institutions have in terms of training people from the get-go. I'm just wondering if you can talk with us, and maybe other people can have some input, about where our people are being failed, where our citizens are being failed within the educational system, as they now are. What can be done to ensure that people aren't entering the workforce without the necessary skills?

**Ms. Leslie Childs:** That's a really huge problem, and I don't think one can begin to answer just off the top of one's head. It probably takes a lot of research and consultation, and that sort of thing. When I mention that, I have seen it in my own work, but I was also just bringing to you the opinions that I have garnered over the summer talking to people all the way across Canada, that this seems to be a theme.

I think a lot of employers just culturally have not had to see training as part of their budget. That's not the case any more. It was possible, until quite recently, for an employer to expect an employee to arrive at the factory gate fully informed, fully trained, but things are changing too fast now. Employers have to begin to understand that's part of their responsibility, just like building a safe plant or... WHMIS, or anything else. But I don't think they really have their heads in that place yet, and that's what I see one of the pan-Canadian goals could be. It would be an initiative that would promote, to employers, the benefits of training their workforce.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Okay. Of course, we do want people to get the on-the-job training. I think maybe the concerns you're hearing are legitimate, if in fact we're seeing increased numbers of people who do not have the literacy skills that traditionally people have accessed.

Are we seeing a problem with our educational institutions not keeping up with the requirements of the workplace? Are we seeing people dropping out? Even with school, between K and 12, is there some way that we need to motivate these people to stay in school? What's the bigger issue here? I think we have to maybe address that.

**Ms. Leslie Childs:** It's not so much staying in school, but making sure you have the skills you need before you leave, so that you don't need to be retrained in the essential skills in the workplace. We're only talking about essential skills; we're not talking about job-specific skills. We're talking about the ability to read and write, to handle math and problem-solve, and those kinds of things.

• (1130)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Childs.

A quick response from Mr. Ramsey on this....

**Mr. Charles Ramsey:** Yes, I just want to say quickly that the institutions often take a bad knock on this. Literacy is a moving target. If anybody entered the IT industry ten years ago and was still working there today without having had any upgrading, that person would be, for all practical purposes, having difficulty with his or her literacy because of the changing conditions in the workplace.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We're going to move now to five minutes a round.

This is where it gets really tough to try to get all the questions you want in.

Mr. D'Amours, five minutes, please.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am going to ask all my questions, to be sure I am not interrupted at the end. First of all, I would like to comment on literacy, and you may respond if you wish. I still remember the comments made by the President of the Treasury Board, John Baird, when he said that illiterate adults were a lost cause. The problems of adults who have special needs in order to be able to function are not only work related. An adult who needs assistance in literacy is not able to help his child progress further when he comes home. A child coming home from school needs help to be able to keep up with his classmates. It would certainly have a double impact. On the one hand, it could help at work and, on the other hand, I am convinced it would help our children progress further. Parents want to help their children do their homework in the evening.

That was a comment. Some committee members and some Members of Parliament should understand that reality, which is certainly a reality in rural Canada.

A bit earlier — perhaps you were in the room — we also talked about choices in relation to the Early Childhood Development Program. I have an 18-month-old grand-daughter. I am putting myself in the position of a mother who is a single parent earning approximately \$30,000 per year and has one child. Clearly it is difficult to have two. After hearing my demonstration, I am convinced you will agree with me. A mother who is a single parent and wants to send her child to a child care centre has to spend 29% of her salary on it, given day care costs of \$125 per week. To think of everything that has happened and the fact that this program was abolished! People may not yet have realized they are going to have to pay income tax on that income of \$1,200 per year, of \$100 per month.

That means that, instead of representing 29% of salary, it is more like 25%. The \$5 billion program that was implemented was intended precisely to achieve the same principle as the Quebec program, which costs approximately \$35 per week, a contribution of 8% of the salary of the mother. Which do you prefer, 25% or 8%? A mother would like to be able to provide piano lessons for her child or pay for sports activities. That certainly is not possible if she spends 25% of her salary — or 50% if she has two children — for child care. It does not make sense.

Do you think initiatives of that kind really give parents a choice? You may answer my question on literacy or on early childhood development, as you choose.

[English]

**Ms. Sue Folinsbee:** I'd like to address the issue of the impact of adult literacy on children. If adults and parents create a literacy-rich environment, it affects the literacy development of children. If adults are learning to read, it's going to encourage their own children to read. Even in workplace programs, in my own research across the country, I've seen that adults want to upgrade to be a role model for their children. They know that getting their certification will encourage their teenagers to stay in school, finish school, and even go on in school. This connection is really important. It's not either/or; we have to look at both.

•(1135)

**Mr. Charles Ramsey:** In this country, research has shown that the greatest single predictor of a child's success at school is the mother's education. If we don't make sure that parents in the home have the proper level of understanding, then the children are not going to be well prepared for school.

Secondly, I think research also shows that of the children at risk, a significant number come from single-parent families. Often the single parent is a mother with less than \$30,000 a year at her disposal.

**The Chair:** Ms. Dallaire.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Jody Dallaire:** Obviously, it leaves parents no choice. Canada's Universal Child Care Plan, which I talked about in my presentation, costs \$250 million per year which, in fact, is a reduction of \$950 million per year if we compare this plan to the \$5 billion initiative over five years for children in our province. It is not an affordable choice or an accessible choice. I know that day care centres in New Brunswick told the federal government that, even if there was the money or the initiative to create day care spaces, they were not interested in creating new spaces, because there is not enough money to recruit trained staff and provide quality service. Not only is it a problem of the ability to pay, but also a problem of accessibility. In our province, only one child out of eight has access to a space in a licensed day care centre that meets minimum quality criteria.

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** Mr. Chairman, with your permission, would it be possible to ask Mr. Ramsey to provide us with a copy of that study indicating that the mother's education level has an impact on children?

[English]

**The Chair:** Sure. Mr. Ramsey, do you have a copy?

**Mr. Charles Ramsey:** We have a copy in the library on our website, which is available in both HTML and PDF formats, but I will send a copy to the clerk of this committee. There are also others. My colleague Sue Folinsbee mentioned earlier that there's a case study of workplace literacy in Manitoba. I think you'd be interested in having a look at that, so we will forward it as well.

**The Chair:** You could even just send us the link, but either way we'll make sure we get it to the members.

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** Thank you for giving me a few seconds.

**The Chair:** I gave you a couple of extra minutes actually.

Mr. Lessard is next for five minutes, please.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** I really liked what was said this morning, that when you invest in an adult, you reach a child. In terms of literacy, it is the same principle. When there are poor children, it is usually because there are poor parents. It is even truer for single parents. It is all the same thing. The whole thing has already been discussed in the issue of access to work, and the day care issue is part of it.

I am continuing in the same vein. Let's talk about day care. The previous government had proposed an embryonic day care program that was similar in part to what is being done in Quebec. The program costs \$1.5 billion a year in Quebec. The federal government planned to spend the equivalent of \$1.5 billion for all of Canada. That is not much compared to what should be done but nonetheless it established the foundation for a similar program. In Quebec, from 1997 to last year, parents only paid \$5 a day per child, which represented significant assistance. Now it is \$7 per day. We know the per-child benefits that are distributed currently by the government. One of you said earlier that the benefit should be incorporated into the children's allowance — tell me if I am wrong — to clearly point out the fact that it is not a benefit for day care centres, but a benefit to assist parents.

Is that opinion shared? Have I properly understood the message from the New Brunswick Child Care Coalition? Is that approach shared by the other stakeholders?

• (1140)

**Mrs. Jody Dallaire:** The amount of \$100 per month is available to all families, whatever their income. The way the program works means that a middle-income family with both parents working receives less money than a family with only one of the two parents working but at a higher salary, which allows the other parent to stay at home. That is not equitable. If it was distributed using the existing system, there would be more money for low-income families. That is the reason for our recommendation.

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Is that position shared by the other stakeholders?

[English]

**Ms. Patricia LeBlanc:** I'd like to say something on behalf of children with disabilities. Day cares generally won't accept children with disabilities, and if they do, they charge extra for them. So I'd like you to keep that in mind when you're doing your child care briefings.

**Ms. Brigitte Neumann (Executive Director, Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women):** I'd like to add the matter that children with disabilities—special needs children—benefit particularly from the socialization experience that occurs when they're able to participate with other children in the child care centre.

The other benefit comes to mothers. We have recently had the benefit of some research from the national longitudinal study of children and youth that looked at the impact on a mother's health of mothering a child with disabilities. Without doubt, the lack of support for those mothers and their families reduces substantially the health status of the women in those situations. That's also something we need to keep in mind in order to build better supports in the child care system for children with disabilities and their families.

**The Chair:** Are there any other comments?

You have thirty seconds.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** With respect to the integration of persons with disabilities into the workplace, you spoke earlier of the need for a kind of mentoring that could facilitate access to work.

Can you elaborate a little more on that issue?

[English]

**Ms. Patricia LeBlanc:** A lot of times women with disabilities feel a little insecure going into a workplace, especially for the first time. Some feel that they may benefit from a coach or a mentor who would be there to answer questions they might have, instead of always having to go to the boss. There might be little things they might not know about the workplace if they've never been in the workforce before; they would be there to coach them through it and see that they know the route the night before and let them try it on their own. A lot of them feel insecure when they go, and a mentoring program would very well help them.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Lessard. That's all the time we have.

I want to ask a question in terms of the equivalency exams. Looking at medicine or pharmacists or any of these medical professions in which there's a tremendous shortage—certainly it's no different when it comes to pharmacists in this country—what kinds of recommendations can we make?

I realize that each separate organization has a board that approves and allows them to move across provinces, and we have issues just allowing cross-provinces jurisdiction when it comes to some skills and some professions. Do you have any recommendations? When we look at equivalency exams, is it the case that these organizations are going to have to realize that the equivalency exams need to be more reasonable? What are your suggestions for us?

**Ms. Florence Javier:** I would suggest that if they would only allow us to take the board exam, then we have a greater chance of making it, because the equivalency exam is more on organic chemistry, which is actually not essential to the practice of pharmacy in this present-day world.

You can ask even the licensed pharmacists here in Canada if they should adapt their exams more to the situation we have in the present world.

• (1145)

**The Chair:** Are you saying we have board exams that are different from the equivalency exams?

**Ms. Florence Javier:** The equivalency exam is more difficult than the board exam.

**The Chair:** Mrs. Savoie, do you want to ask a couple of quick questions?

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** It's 11:45, so I'll catch up my time. I'm sorry to have to leave, because it's been an excellent presentation on all the fronts.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Yes, we'll catch up this afternoon.

Go ahead, Mr. Regan.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** I want to clarify on this question. What you're saying is—

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Usually it is the next-door neighbour who can use it.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Excuse me, but I would like to clarify something Ms. Javier said.

[*English*]

I think you're saying that rather than having to do the national equivalency exam, you should be able to do the exams that each province requires in order to become a pharmacist. Is that what you're saying, just to be clear?

Are you saying that instead of having to do the national equivalency exam in order to become a pharmacist in this province as an immigrant, you should simply have to pass the exam that other people in the province have to pass to become a pharmacist in Nova Scotia? Is that right?

**Ms. Florence Javier:** Yes, that is my suggestion.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** An excellent recommendation.

Mr. Warkentin.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Thank you.

I'm going to carry on with the whole issue of foreign credentials and the recognition of those foreign credentials. Certainly I do want to express my personal feelings on this. I feel that not only are you basically being let down, as obviously you were accepted into this country based on the fact that you had the credentials to be a pharmacist, but I also believe that we as Canadians are unfortunately not benefiting from the system. Certainly we have a system that's harming not only you but harming society in general. It's probably one of the most important issues we can deal with, and should do so in a timely manner.

I think you've probably explained the system, but is there any other way we could better facilitate the process? I don't know if there's something that should be tied to your immigration process. If we've accepted you to become a pharmacist in our country, should there be a requirement for the government to facilitate the process for you to utilize your skills in the country?

**Ms. Florence Javier:** In my case, as I mentioned earlier, there are no special courses offered in Nova Scotia, as in other provinces. This was one of my proposals, that refresher courses would be offered to newly arrived immigrants, in order for them to prepare for the required examinations. This is the main proposal I am suggesting to the committee.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** So you wouldn't have been opposed to being required to go directly to a refresher course, wherever that may have been, for a length of time until your credentials were accepted here, if that was the basis for your acceptance into the country as an immigrant?

**Ms. Florence Javier:** It is one of the factors required in becoming an immigrant to Canada. That's just one, but there are other factors.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Would it have been beneficial if you had been able to begin the process of going through the equivalency before you came to Canada? Was there any way for you to start the process by correspondence or some other means, so that you would have better understood what was required in Canada, and everyone would have been aware of your skills? Did you feel there was enough information when you came to Canada about what was required of you?

**Ms. Florence Javier:** I was aware they required an equivalency exam, but I was not expecting it to be that difficult.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** You were unaware that it was different from the requirements for people here to become pharmacists.

• (1150)

**Ms. Florence Javier:** If you are a Canadian, you are only required to take the pharmacy board exam. You are not required to pass the equivalency exam. It's just foreign pharmacy graduates who are required to take the equivalency.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Mr. Ramsey.

**Mr. Charles Ramsey:** I'd like to say that this is a problem of long standing, and in spite of some changing rhetoric, the results don't seem to have changed. Maybe it's time for someone to ask why. I think there's a suspicion in the general public that some of the professional associations are a little reluctant to let this happen easier than it does, and maybe they need to be challenged on this.

**Ms. Patricia LeBlanc:** Maybe there could be some kind of apprenticeship program.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** I think that's an issue the committee should be looking at. It might be the direction it needs to go in. It's a well-regarded opinion in the general population, and I've heard it before. So you're not bringing us anything the general population doesn't agree with, and I've heard it many times.

Mr. Ramsey, I wanted to talk a bit about your statement that literacy is a moving target. There are a lot of people who don't even have the basic ability to read, write, and do arithmetic. There are two different types of literacy that we're discussing. First, there are the things that people should be able to acquire by the time they've finished grade 12. Second, there's literacy that goes beyond that to specialized work situations. I think that's what you're addressing. But where is the overlap? What are we missing out on? Obviously, we're missing out on both fronts. The fundamental issue that has to be addressed, even before we can address workplace literacy, is the standard of actual literacy that should be acquired by the time a person graduates from high school.

How do we ensure that every person in the country at least has basic literacy? Next, how do we build on that? Finally, how do we build a policy to ensure that there's on-the-ground training for both?

**Ms. Leslie Childs:** I think we need some standards. There's too much difference between schools in provinces. My kids went to school in five different provinces. Every time they'd change schools the curriculum was different. Fortunately, they all came out literate, but that may have been their mother more than their schooling.

I think this is the big issue. I'm not saying that all education in Canada has to be the same. It shouldn't, and there's no way it could be, but there has to be a way to demonstrate that people who have

finished twelve years of school have a certain level of competency. We need to figure it out.

**The Chair:** I want to thank everybody for being here today.

I realize that we could spend hours and days on this, but we are moving along. I can assure you that some of the themes we're hearing are not new. We have heard them from other witnesses.

We're going to adjourn the meeting.

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