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

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, October 26, 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

Thursday, October 26, 2006

• (1305)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)):** Now that I've hit the gavel, we can start.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we continue with our study on employability in Canada. I just want to welcome you on behalf of our study. I want to thank you all for taking the time out of your busy schedules to be here.

As you may or may not know, we've been travelling this week to St. John's, Halifax, and Montreal yesterday, and then today and tomorrow we'll be in Toronto, and we'll be heading out west sometime in the next couple of weeks, actually sometime in November.

We do want to thank you, as I said, for being here. We realize you're all very busy.

First I want to deal with a couple of housekeeping issues. You have translation in front of you: number one will be for English and number two for French. Each organization will have seven minutes, and then that will be followed by a question and answer of seven minutes from the members, followed by a five-minute round after that. So if you're not able to get all your information in, maybe during the questions you'll be able to do that.

If we could get started, I'm going to start off with you, Ms. Barron. If you would be so kind as to start off for us, we'd greatly appreciate it.

**Ms. Carole Barron (President and CEO, Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work):** Thank you very much.

The Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work is very pleased to have been asked to present its brief to the standing committee today, so we're very appreciative of the opportunity.

I would like to make reference to page 4 of the brief so that I can be targeted and specific.

**The Chair:** I'll just mention that we realize the briefs were sent. They were accidentally left in Ottawa. They are being sent to us right now. We'll have them before the end of the presentations. So you can make reference to page 4, but just give us the information. As I said, momentarily those briefs will be presented to the members.

**Ms. Carole Barron:** I will read for you, from page 4 of our nine-page brief. I want to submit eight key points for consideration.

To give you an overview, based on the CCRW's thirty-year history with employment issues and outcomes from our research, and more significantly the diversity planning for inclusive employment in 2005, we believe there must be a direct effort in developing action on policies and strategies providing equal citizenship to Canadians with disabilities. Engaging not only the respective government jurisdictions, but also the stakeholders, persons with disabilities, employers, and community-based organizations is of key importance to the acceptance and the forward movement of any inclusion agenda.

The CCRW submits the following points for your consideration—they are not in order of priority.

First, we must acknowledge that disability crosses every sector of the four groups identified under the Employment Equity Act. The marginalized groups, women with disabilities, aboriginal people with disabilities, and minorities with disabilities intersect with a larger aspect of disability. It is important to insist that each marginalized group be encouraged to complete action plans identifying their challenges in each social policy context and strategies for implementation of key determinants to improve the quality of life. A key question is why some jurisdictions provide better access to disability support than others. How has the current government structure permitted this access to support? What is it that the government jurisdictions may extract from community-based organization strategies to move a successful agenda forward?

Second, there needs to be a recognition of three key stakeholders: community-based agencies providing and/or using services, persons with disabilities, and employers. This recognition would enable government support for the development of a national employment strategy for working-age persons with disabilities. The Employment Equity Act should be complemented with a coherent, integrated infrastructure of disability policies and programs designed to support a national employment strategy. Agencies using services and employers require access to employment tools, information, and other resources such as those provided through the CCRW's job accommodation service, workplace essential skills partnership, skills training partnership, and *WORKink*, which is an Internet-based employment resource. Persons with disabilities require access to labour market information, skills training, and development. Additional support such as job searching, résumé writing, employment matching, guidance, and assistive devices help to increase the capacity of persons with a disability to seek, secure, and maintain meaningful and equitable employment. Employers require support in identifying and recruiting skilled candidates with disabilities, job accommodation information, and access to information on assistive devices.

Third, the recognition of the portability of disability support is essential to the success of creating national standards. The government must provide recognition that all aspects of support must be equal across the nation. This is the initial step in providing for the movement of persons with disabilities to jobs and opportunities outside their current places of residence. Consistency of portability is imperative interprovincially.

Fourth, in providing solutions for employment opportunities, it becomes imperative that recognition be afforded to those key national community-based organizations that have demonstrated the capacity to build partnerships, maintain this agenda, and demonstrate results. Building on this agenda through the Employment Equity Act, the EEA auditors should be positioned to work with recognized community-based organizations linking employers to those that have the resources and tools to support the requirements.

● (1310)

There would not be an empirical need to build the number of auditors for the existing 1,400-plus employers governed under the Employment Equity Act, but rather to work with community-based organizations to link employers for support. This also increases the agency credibility in the community with the employer.

Fifth, although the federal government is no longer in the business of funding training, there needs to be recognition of its role in leading the process. Persons with disabilities require training and training support through community-based agencies that have demonstrated experience and expertise in this agenda. Government should have a full understanding of who these agencies are, what their capacity is to deliver, and how they may be supportive.

Our next point is that we question the value of building additional monitoring mechanisms that have only a moral authority, when clearly, by 2004, only 52% of regulated employers in this country had been audited and there were 309 remaining to be completed. Of those, 247 had 100 to 500 employees. How can compliance be enforced or suggested to be enforced when there is a lack of

opportunities to work with employers in supporting their needs? There must be a stronger agenda to force recognition of compliance or lack thereof.

Our second-last point is that national fora on disability issues would support employers while linking community-based agencies with employers. To increase the capacity for this agenda item—clearly not a well-received concept—there should be a reference to the development of a disability sectoral council. A sectoral approach in meeting the relative needs of children and families, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable at-risk or excluded populations will foster the growth and development of government strategies and initiatives. Bringing together representatives from each social development group to identify possible solutions to overarching issues will provide responsiveness to and enhance the government's social agenda.

This is my last point, Mr. Chairman.

Recognition of the added value obtained from national non-governmental organizations is paramount. Organizational capacity-building funding should be allocated to those organizations that have demonstrated success and results in meeting specific objectives while demonstrating innovation and leadership in achieving participation, equality, and access for and by Canadians with disabilities. Representation, responsiveness, connectedness, and results may all be parameters of the current government in evaluating the effectiveness of a performance-based model; however, an effective investment with community-based organizations will enhance the opportunity for future outcome.

● (1315)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Barron.

We're going to move to the next group.

Mr. Wilson, are you speaking? You have seven minutes, please.

**Mr. Bob Wilson (Director, Self Employment, SEDI (Social and Enterprise Development Innovations)):** My name is Bob Wilson, Mr. Chair, and I'm representing Peter Nares, executive director of Social and Enterprise Development Innovations, or SEDI.

SEDI is a national charitable organization focused on assisting unemployed and lower-income Canadians to become self-sufficient through self-employment and assets and savings initiatives. Today we will present the need for what we believe is increased federal support for self-employment for Canadians with disabilities.

As the committee knows, labour market participation by people with disabilities is significantly lower than that by the mainstream population. Because the most effective federal government employment support programs are tied directly to people's attachment to the labour market and the EI system, many people with disabilities are ineligible and are therefore underserved.

Self-employment is an important part of the Canadian labour market, with almost one in every six people working for themselves. Similar to the situation in the mainstream, self-employment is increasingly becoming a choice of unemployed Canadians with disabilities.

For unemployed Canadians, federal government support for self-employment is provided primarily through the EI system. Self-employment has been shown to create self-sufficiency and therefore savings to that system.

The self-employment benefits program has led to a network of community-based business development agencies that have the capacity to provide self-employment instruction and business counselling to the mainstream. However, only about 4% of SEB participants are people with disabilities, and many agencies lack the more specific skills to serve them effectively.

While doing so is not for everyone, there are many people with disabilities who have the spirit of enterprise to start a small business. The pursuit of self-employment is also an employment option that provides flexibility and promotes meaningful skills development for people with disabilities.

There is growing recognition on the part of government, disability, and business development organizations that self-employment is a viable option for people with disabilities. Through federal and provincial funding, organizations like ours are developing innovative but somewhat isolated programs. For example, SEDI is developing a self-employment network for disability and business organizations serving people with disabilities and an accessibility website to inform small businesses in Ontario about the new disability legislation. Despite the important work of these initiatives and mainstream delivery networks, there is no concerted national, pan-Canadian plan to support people with disabilities who are pursuing self-employment.

In order to give people with disabilities the same access to support services as other Canadians have, we believe the committee and the federal government should take the following action. We recommend that the committee identify access to self-employment as a labour market opportunity for people with disabilities. We recommend that the federal government recognize that a lack of both national supports and a pan-Canadian plan for self-employment for people with disabilities are problems that the federal government should seek to address and provide a remedy for. Also, the committee could go as far as suggesting that self-employment for people with disabilities become a recognized and ongoing requirement of the programming provided under the federal-provincial labour market agreements.

In summary, the committee should recommend that the federal government begin consulting and working with community organizations that have experience in providing self-employment services to people with disabilities in order to identify best practices and develop a resource base for organizations working to increase access to self-employment by people with disabilities. The goal should be to establish a program that provides services similar to those under the self-employment benefit program but dedicated to people with disabilities who are pursuing self-employment.

We would like to thank you for this opportunity and your time.

● (1320)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Wilson.

We'll move on to Mr. MacGregor.

**Prof. David MacGregor (Professor of Sociology, King's University College at the University of Western Ontario, As an Individual):** Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on an issue of growing importance for Canadians: ending mandatory retirement.

Just to let you know, I'm the co-contributing editor to the book called *Time's Up! Mandatory Retirement in Canada*, and I have written on the subject as well. I took part in the recommendations to the Ontario government last year that led to the government's making its decision to end mandatory retirement in the province.

On December 12, 2006, less than two months from now, the Government of Ontario will ban mandatory retirement. This is a step of paramount significance, but it is a step that must also be taken across Canada, in provinces and in those industries under federal jurisdiction.

Members of the standing committee know that mandatory retirement at age 65 is still the rule in this country. With the exception of Quebec, Ontario, and Manitoba, governments permit mandatory retirement. Indeed, the Canadian Human Rights Act includes a special provision that allows employers to dismiss workers on account of age.

Compulsory dismissal at age 65 was never a justified practice. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms forbids discrimination on the basis of age, but the persistence of ageism among powerful constituencies in Canada, including governments, the courts, unions, and employers, meant that efforts over the past twenty years to end mandatory retirement were unsuccessful until the historic decision of the Ontario government.

Forced retirement at age 65 ended in the United States almost thirty years ago. New Zealand and Australia abolished the practice in the 1990s. In fact, the Government of Canada itself ended forced retirement for public servants in 1986, twenty years ago.

There is a growing popular movement against mandatory retirement in Canada that will likely soon end the practice. Let me explain why.

As the baby boomers advance into their sixties, an unprecedented number of Canadians will be subject to rules on mandatory retirement. Previously, workers reaching the age of 65 represented a small, powerless minority. I think with this growing group of older Canadians we will find more pressure to end the practice.

Workers aged 65 will be terminated in most of Canada just as the country is facing a skills shortage of enormous depth. Most Canadians are living longer, healthier lives. In many cases, they have knowledge and capabilities that exceed those of younger workers. There is absolutely no sense, in my opinion, in expelling them from the workforce.

I think the members of the committee know, as many others do, that pension plans across the country are under pressure, and many Canadians do not have the financial resources to afford a lengthy retirement. Forcing them from work under these circumstances is an extremely cruel and senseless destiny.

Older Canadians no longer accept the stereotypes of aging. They are forging brand new lifestyles that require continued participation in the workforce. Governments ought to encourage this exciting new development by abolishing barriers against full participation by older workers.

To conclude my presentation, I believe the committee should recommend that the federal government set an example in ending what frankly is the shameful practice of forced retirement.

As a first step, the Canadian Human Rights Act must be amended to exclude age discrimination in employment. A proactive program to encourage longer working lives should be a priority at the federal level.

• (1325)

The human rights of older Canadians deserve to be fully recognized. People over 65 should no longer be treated as second-class citizens.

Thanks for your attention.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. If you had a chance to hear our last panel, we had a full discussion about that very issue. So we're certainly looking forward to hearing your expert point of view on that as we move forward.

We'll have a couple of rounds of questions. I'm going to start now with Mr. D'Amours for seven minutes, please.

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** *Merci, monsieur le président.*

If you need translation please use the device. I will ask my question in French.

[Translation]

My question is for Mr. Wilson.

You mentioned a while ago that, since persons with disabilities had certain difficulties participating in the labour market, they opted more for self-employment, perhaps out of necessity. I would like you to develop this subject.

This question caught my attention so much that I asked myself why it was easier to be self-employed than to work in an industry or for a company.

What are the different barriers that may exist? Is it only a matter of perception, or is it quite simply easier for people to work in their own environment, with their own things? Could you say more on

this subject so that I can understand the problem or the difference properly?

[English]

**Mr. Bob Wilson:** There are certainly challenges to becoming self-employed for people with disabilities; however, there is a certain flexibility that self-employment can allow that in many cases regular employment does not allow. There is flexibility around the number of work hours, the time of work hours, and those sorts of things.

People with disabilities quite often require good direction in helping them look at their business ideas, not just from the perspective of the market—as anyone who is going to become self-employed or start a business would need to do—but at what the accommodations and business challenges will realistically be relative to their disabilities. There are opportunities for people with disabilities to become self-employed, but they have to be looked at in a very realistic and business sense.

I wouldn't say that it's easier for a person with disabilities to become self-employed. In some cases there are significant challenges, but at the same time, because of flexibility and the possibility of working within their own milieu and within a very specific marketplace, the opportunities exist.

I'm not sure if that covers it.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** Yes, but maybe I'll go a bit further.

Is your organization also going to help financially?

[English]

**Mr. Bob Wilson:** No, not for funding.

Our organization has developed an extensive range of materials that can be used by both disability and business development organizations to work with people with disabilities who are interested in becoming self-employed. That was one of the first things we did. We took the time to talk to individuals and organizations that had significant experience in both self-employment development and disability issues.

Our organization has also worked consistently over the last number of years to try to bring disability and business development organizations together within communities. Rather than each one trying independently to remake the wheel, so to speak, they can learn from each other. There are very effective approaches to working with people with disabilities when it comes to types of training, approaches, and counselling. Sometimes business development organizations may not be aware of those approaches.

At the same time, there is the need to assist people with disabilities, as with anyone, to be very realistic about their business ideas and work with them to develop business ideas that will work effectively. This is one of the things we've learned.

We believe so strongly in this approach because there are very innovative and tremendous things being accomplished by organizations across the country. But we think the time is now ripe for the federal government to show leadership in providing some research and working to bring more organizations together, because in many cases organizations are working in a little bit of a vacuum.

We think there is a need for more information sharing and more ability to provide resources—by that I mean primarily research information on best practices and those types of resources—so that more people with disabilities can have the information they need to become successfully self-employed...but also the organizations that serve them.

• (1330)

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** You're right in saying that economic development agencies may not be full aware of the different forms of assistance available to persons with disabilities.

Before becoming a member, I used to work in economic development. At home, in New Brunswick, throughout my region, we were never presented with the possibility of providing additional support or making the necessary connections between persons with disabilities and their work or business projects.

My next comment will be the last one, because the time is going quickly.

You mentioned earlier that one of the obstacles was the number of hours or work schedule flexibility. This is a bit like what happens at other levels. For example, older people experience the same difficulty. For persons with disabilities, it is because of a limitation and, for older people, it is because they wish to have a balance between their retirement and participation in the labour market. For the people you help, it is out of necessity, because they have a physical or a health problem.

[English]

**Mr. Bob Wilson:** There are two things. In the foreseeable future there will be a growing link between the aging population and disabilities. Certainly there are people here who probably have greater experience than I do, but now approximately one in seven Canadians has some degree of disability, and that will probably grow to about one in five over the next twenty years. It makes sense, as the effects of aging on the population become apparent. There is that connection and there will continue to be that connection.

One of the things that self-employment offers people with disabilities is additional flexibility. People with disabilities who have been successful in self-employment are not necessarily successful in corporate terms or the terms we would think of. In many cases success is having the ability to cobble together a reasonable living income from several sources.

You may have some part-time employment based on your skills and abilities. There may also be opportunity for some self-employment or part-time employment. At the same time, there may be a base of income or a small base of income coming from some sort of disability pension plan—that type of thing.

We are certainly told that people with disabilities need to have access to every possible opportunity. Self-employment in some cases may not be their only employment, but it adds one more thing they can make use of to have a reasonable working income.

We conducted focus groups with about 175 organizations. We brought together people with disabilities, people from business, and people from disability organizations. The need for that flexibility, for

every possible opportunity, including self-employment, and for both camps and both types of organizations to learn and work together were very evident.

• (1335)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. D'Amours.

We're going to move on to Madam Bonsant for seven minutes, please.

[Translation]

**Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ):** My question is for Mr. MacGregor.

Awhile ago, a witness came to talk to us about people 50 and over who did not want to be forced to retire.

What bothers me a bit is that, with technological changes and the fact that many industries don't give ongoing training, if you don't want to put off your pension at 65—it is not an obligation—, who says there won't be people aged 65 who will be forced to go on working, even though they do not know the new technologies?

Will it become a two-edged sword? Will employers force these people to go on working until they are 70 even though they want to retire at 60 or 65?

[English]

**Prof. David MacGregor:** Certainly I didn't mean that people should be forced to work. I think work should be a choice, regardless of whether you're 65, or under or over 65. On the other hand, I think the gift of retirement is one that shouldn't be forced either. If you decide to retire, that should be up to you and not to someone else.

In terms of new technologies, some very interesting data has been turning up. For example, one of the largest users of the Internet for dating are those who are over 65. And I was quite surprised to find that video games and Internet games are played mostly by people who have retired.

If we think of technology in terms of the use of computers or understanding of high tech, I'm not sure that we necessarily find a deficit in those who are older. I think that used to be the perception, that older people fell behind, but I don't think that's really the case. I have a teenage son, and I certainly agree he can do things on the computer I cannot do. On the other hand, I have skills that he certainly doesn't have—although I wouldn't mention that to him.

I think this is true in terms of people who are older. We have a bank of knowledge that in a sense has been under-recognized in our society. We see older people as falling behind, when in fact I think in many ways they are way ahead of younger people because of their accumulated knowledge and experience. There is more and more research, for example, that older people do not lose their memory. In fact, their memory becomes more powerful and stronger. Another thing is that older people in the workforce, because of their very long and continued employment, have access to things that happened in the past that are still very relevant to the present. Unfortunately, younger workers would not realize that.

Not to take too long to get to your point, but I certainly am against forcing a person to work. That is not what I'm advocating. On the other hand, with respect to retirement, as I mentioned earlier, no gift should be forced.

[Translation]

**Ms. France Bonsant:** If people do not want to retire out of fear of being short of money, it is one thing; but, for the outstanding teacher aged 65 who wants to go on working so that more young people can benefit from his experience, it is something else.

Everyone knows that experience cannot be bought; it has to be acquired. If someone is kept on in the labour market, then succession does not take place. It is a matter of balance. Someone who keeps their job till age 72 or 75 is depriving a 22- or 23-year-old of 10 years' experience. But many non-governmental organizations need volunteers and the wealth of experience held by senior citizens.

I give that as an example, because I worked for 30 years at Bell Canada. I left two years ago, and telecommunications technology changes every three months. If I went back, I would be completely lost. I would only be good for making photocopies. There have been too many changes.

If I retired, I would not want to go back to work. But I would do volunteer work, either in literacy programs or accompanying senior citizens. The problem for me is when I hear about someone who wants to work until the age of 72. They could do something else.

I would like to know what you think about that.

• (1340)

[English]

**Prof. David MacGregor:** Of course, I'm actually one of those older professors. I'm 63. If Ontario hadn't changed the law, I would be out of my job in about a year and a half. So for me, it's certainly a personal issue.

We actually are facing a very big shortage of professors in the universities. There will be jobs and opportunities for younger individuals. We actually had a very long period with very few opportunities, because the student population became smaller for a while. That's all changed. There are lots of opportunities.

It's not just in the university sector. For example, in government and in private corporations, there are opportunities. There will continue to be. Although I probably will not retire at 65, many of my cohort will, and they will open up many jobs. I am simply arguing that those of us who wish to continue to work should be allowed to do so.

You second point has slipped my mind. Could you just remind me of your concluding question?

[Translation]

**Ms. France Bonsant:** I suggested that people aged 60 to 65 do a bit of volunteer work.

My question was as follows: if we force someone to retire, but they refuse, is it because they are short of money?

[English]

**Prof. David MacGregor:** Thank you for reminding me. I'm sorry I forgot.

[Translation]

**Ms. France Bonsant:** It's age!

[English]

**Prof. David MacGregor:** Yes, we're talking about age.

But in terms of volunteering, one of the most interesting things I've discovered is that most volunteers are younger people. Volunteer organizations often depend on very young people rather than the older group. We have this notion that volunteers are drawn largely from the older sector of the population. In fact, if you look at voluntary organizations across the board, most volunteers are people who are already working.

I'll give you an example. My daughter is on a rep hockey team. She plays for the Etobicoke Dolphins—I wanted to get that in today—and she's eleven. Many of the coaches and so forth are very young—much younger than I am. In fact, I'm a very old parent. These people are all volunteering. They all have jobs, and it doesn't prevent them from volunteering. I think that would continue to be the case for people who are over 65 and who decide to keep working.

**Ms. France Bonsant:** Thank you.

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

Mr. Albrecht, you have seven minutes, please.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the panel for appearing today.

I wanted to follow up briefly on the mandatory retirement question. I've had the opportunity to travel to a number of other countries and have observed, anecdotally, of course, that in many of the cultures around the world, age is revered and looked up to much more than it is here in North America. I've always had a concern that we have minimized the contribution that older people can make, so I am certainly supportive of your initiative.

I have a question. Could you just help me understand what kind of a process was involved in convincing the Ontario government to end that practice of mandatory retirement?

• (1345)

**Prof. David MacGregor:** I'm not sure I know the total answer to that. The first thing that happened in Ontario that was quite important was that in the year 2000 the Ontario Human Rights Commission, which is headed by Mr. Norton, made a very strong presentation and report against mandatory retirement. So that report and the human rights initiative were there from the year 2000. I think this was extremely important.



The other thing that happened, however, was that in 2003 the government of the day in Ontario was facing an election, and I think they thought they could win some votes by actually calling for the end of mandatory retirement. I think it was a fabulous thing for the government of that day to have done, and they actually said that they would end mandatory retirement just prior to the election. Unfortunately, they were voted out, but it was there on the table, and the succeeding government, the Liberals, under Mr. McGuinty, took up that issue about a year later. Although at first they didn't show any interest in it, they found it very interesting later on. I think it was, as I said, about a year later that the Liberal government decided to make the same kind of initiative the Tories had done.

My feeling is that it was, as I said, propelled by the Ontario Human Rights Commission, but I think it was also propelled by the growing recognition of governments, both on the Liberal side and the Conservative side, that there was a large number of people in Ontario who wanted to get rid of it.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** Thank you. I just wish the Liberal government of Ontario would have been as wise on some other initiatives that the outgoing government had projected, but we won't go there.

**The Chair:** Are you looking for a fight, Harold?

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** I have another comment and question to Ms. Barron and Ms. Ricker. The seventh point, or maybe it's the eighth, that you made in terms of recognizing the added value obtained by NGOs...I certainly concur with that. I'm just wondering if you have some examples where maybe this has already happened and how that could be expanded, used as a model. I'm convinced that we need to use the expertise of the people who have already done the work, instead of reinventing the wheel.

**Ms. Carole Barron:** Thank you very much for that very open-ended question. If we had the remainder of the day to respond in detail, I could certainly take it up.

However, to précis a response from the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work's perspective, we are an organization that is thirty years old this year. We started as a result of a number of community-based organizations identifying employment as a key issue, back in the 1960s. Over the course of time, the CCRW continued to evolve. Now our mandate is completely to promote and support the meaningful and equitable employment of people with disabilities internationally, with Canada being our primary focus. Our employment program has been documented in the "In Unison 2001" and "In Unison 2002" reports as being a best practice model for the country.

A very well-documented program is our skills training partnership program, which came as a result of the *Obstacles* report and the work the CCRW did back in the 1990s.

Our first skills training partnership program was held in 1995, and my colleague sitting next to me is the queen of skills training partnership in Canada, as we like to refer to her in our office. Basically, over the course of a five-year period, over 400 people with disabilities went through our model program, and today the success

rate remains 83%. All those who went through our program remain employed in Canada.

From that particular program...and because the Government of Canada went through a devolution of funding from the federal to the provincial forces over the course of time, "training" is no longer a word we are allowed to use when applying for government funding. Henceforth, the skilled training partnership program became the workplace essential skills partnership, which is the given agenda of the day for government, as you are aware.

We're very grateful for that because we have been very successful. The CCRW has mirrored its STP, as we refer to it, in the workplace essential skills partnership program. We have funding from Service Canada in Toronto, the GTA. We have acquired funding from Surrey Service Canada in B.C. We have worked with other community-based organizations to help them use our program, so that they can work specifically with their client bases in smaller areas in Canada.

As well we have worked with other community-based organizations to understand what elements are so strategic to ensuring that people with disabilities find appropriate employment. We have worked with a number of national groups and organizations, believing there is a purpose and methodology behind supporting the employment of people with disabilities in Canada. So it's not anecdotal. There is real evidence of the work supported by NGOs in Canada and the value they can bring to the table in working with governmental departments in the employment of people with disabilities.

• (1350)

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** Thank you.

Do I have any time, or am I done?

**The Chair:** Thirty seconds.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** Mr. Wilson, I know your primary focus is to help people with disabilities find self-employment, so I don't want to put you out of a job. But do you think there is a role for the federal government to play, in terms of providing incentives for employers to hire persons with disabilities?

You could get yourself into trouble by...

**Mr. Bob Wilson:** I'm not so sure about the issue of incentives. I don't believe I understand enough to say anything around specific incentives.

I certainly know that from talking and working with a number of organizations specializing in working with people with disabilities that there is a tremendous amount of information and education available to employers, which they may not be aware of. If more employers were aware of the information and the assistance—which can be everything from design assistance through to knowledge of different types of software applications that can be brought into the workplace—this would be an extremely important first step.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** I was speaking more in terms of physical barriers to people, such as accessing buildings or workstations. Are there any incentives for that? I don't know.

**Mr. Bob Wilson:** I believe there are some tax incentives that are available in Ontario, which is the area that I might know best. Here in Ontario the introduction of the new Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act is going to start to set pretty stringent standards that all businesses will have to meet, and certainly from the point of view of the business community, there's going to be an incredible demand for some incentive and some assistance to meet the accessibility, and customer service, and communication standards.

**The Chair:** MPs know how to take thirty seconds and turn it into two or three minutes.

Probably Ms. Barron would like a chance to answer that question next time around.

Mr. D'Amours, for five minutes, next round.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Barron, I would like to ask you a few short questions. I understand that one of your organization's goals is to provide training. You will forgive me, I am from New Brunswick, where sometimes we use English words because we can't find the right word in French. Training is important for your organization, as far as persons with disabilities are concerned. Am I right?

[English]

**Ms. Carole Barron:** That's part of what we do, yes.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** If it is important, do you think that offering training to people in reading and writing is also important so that they can get ahead in their working environment?

[English]

**Ms. Carole Barron:** Everything the CCRW embodies is part of the skills development agenda. The nine essential skills, as identified by the Government of Canada, are the nine essential skills that are built into all of our training programs for persons with disabilities. We have a very aggressive case management program, whereby if you are a person with a disability and you come into our program, we do what is called an intake. As part of that intake process we get to understand what your requirements are so that we can then place you as part of a continuum, so that you're not working in isolation, you're not doing training in isolation, you are part of a bigger picture. So it's about a case management plan whereby it's your plan as to what you want to do as part of your vocational development. We refer to this as an individualized vocational plan.

As part of this vocational plan, it could be that computer skills may be the piece set lacking for you because you want to be a computer technician. You can't be a computer technician if you don't have computer skills.

Literacy as part of the bigger picture is one component of many of the pieces in terms of people with disabilities.

• (1355)

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** I am glad to hear you use the word "literacy training." Ultimately you are saying that the federal government should provide more assistance to persons with

disabilities for training. I do not wish to put words in your mouth, but I also gather that, without wishing to get into politics, if there are cuts to literacy programs, this will actually limit access to training for people who may need it. For some, this training is even essential. In the end, it is as though they were being left by the wayside. On top of being in special situations because of their disabilities, these people are told that someone wants to be sure that they remain deeply ignorant. But, at the end of the day, this is not how to help the population to advance. This is not how to protect the most vulnerable people in our society.

Am I right?

[English]

**Ms. Carole Barron:** Those are very important comments you've made, Monsieur D'Amours. I would be reckless to suggest that they are not important to all Canadians with disabilities and to Canadians in general. It would be very important, when working with persons with disabilities particularly, to recognize the component we bring to the table based on the numbers of persons with disabilities through our programs, and I will use this example.

The partners for workplace inclusion program has five sites in Canada, Saint John, New Brunswick, being one of the sites. My colleague is a New Brunswicker; as one of the sites we have in Canada, we'll use New Brunswick as an example. We have found, in looking at our statistics of all the persons with disabilities whom we were able to support in finding employment in Saint John, New Brunswick, that the majority of those people had less than grade 6 education, had been unemployed for seven or more years, and had not been in the workforce, if at all, since graduating from high school. "Graduating" from high school did not often mean they had a certificate that said they had matriculated from high school or actually had a high school education, but because they were in a special needs class they actually graduated from high school.

Right across the country we have documented these statistics and have presented them to the Opportunities Fund funders for our partners for workplace inclusion program.

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Madame Bonsant is next, for five minutes.

[Translation]

**Ms. France Bonsant:** Ms. Barron, I am going to ask you all my questions first. Then I will give you a chance to answer them.

You made a comment concerning literacy training. Does the government think that only senior citizens have disabilities, and not young people?

I would also like to know whether you have a transportation problem because of some disabilities?

Do all your people have access to the Internet? You know that there is lots of training available on the Internet.

[English]

**Ms. Carole Barron:** Thank you very much.

The CCRW, which is our acronym, actually has a virtual employment resource centre that's called *WORKink*. Our *WORKink* site is set up so that it transcends every province in Canada. We have connectivity with people out in the field in every province such that they feed into the aboriginal site and the entrepreneur site with disabilities. This is all about and for people with disabilities, as well as employers.

As far as we can understand from those people with disabilities—and we have over 4.5 million hits on our *WORKink* site from people with disabilities every year—we believe they do have access to technology. It may not be in their own home environment, but from a community perspective.... If we recall, some years ago there was an initiative whereby computers were placed in libraries across the country to make them accessible for all Canadians. So we understand that there is that connectivity.

• (1400)

[Translation]

**Ms. France Bonsant:** There are people who get training on the Internet, in computers, literature, architecture and lots of other areas. We know we don't have to climb ladders in order to design a building.

Are the programs that you give recognized by the departments of education?

[English]

**Ms. Carole Barron:** From our understanding, it is primarily dependent upon the province. Every province has its own set of rules and regulations relating to the recognition of Internet-based programs. I could speak to what may be applicable in Ontario, but the applicable rules are not the same as in Newfoundland and Labrador or in Prince Edward Island. We have a different set of rules that we have to work with in every province.

[Translation]

**Ms. France Bonsant:** I am going to be funny. The reason why we need people 65 and over is to help people on a volunteer basis.

[English]

**The Chair:** We'll move then to Mr. Albrecht. Five minutes, sir.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** I'll give up two of my last five minutes. I'll only take three this time.

On self-employment for people with disabilities, I notice you are a Toronto-based organization but you are a national organization. Also, one of the points I think I heard in your presentation was that you're an innovative group but you're isolated. Are there multiple organizations like yours across Canada? What kind of network do you envision? How many organizations are there doing this kind of work?

**Mr. Bob Wilson:** I would say we're unique because we are involved and our history has tended to be with the coordination of programs, either provincially or coast to coast. One of our more significant programs, which Simon might want to speak to, is called LearnSave. It's an assets and savings program funded by HRSDC and is operational right across the country.

I talked about the programs being isolated. The point I was trying to make was that there is a fair amount of work being done around

the development of self-employment services, assisting people with disabilities to become self-employed. However, what we're saying is that it's time that there be a broader plan put in place by the federal government regarding self-employment for people with disabilities that makes use of these pockets of experience that have been developed here and there across the country, that identifies best practices, and, as I said earlier, brings together organizations that have experience in training and working with people with disabilities and the business development organizations.

We have sort of started to reach critical mass, where we were perhaps with the overall self-employment benefits program ten or twelve years ago. We have reached a point at which there needs to be some forward thinking by the federal government, as opposed to opportunities funding, one small initiative here and another small initiative there, or offers of learning technologies, funding the type of project that we might do. We need to start gathering all that information together so that more organizations are given the tools and the information they need to help people with disabilities become self-employed.

• (1405)

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** It appears to me, Mr. Chair, that maybe Mr. Wilson's organization already has that kind of skeleton in place and the Canadian government could use that skeleton to produce the—

**Mr. Bob Wilson:** Yes, we're starting to develop it slowly. We've been working on this fairly rigorously for approximately the last five or six years. What we are so encouraged about is that there's a tremendous amount of innovation and talent out there, but as I said, it's a project here, a project there, and we see that the time is quickly coming to provide better information both to people with disabilities and the organizations that are diligently trying to serve them. Now is the time to start to collect best practices and do some serious research and make the information available.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Albrecht. I hope you're not committing the government to funding here.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** No, not at all.

**The Chair:** We have some more time, and I'd like to ask some questions.

Mr. MacGregor, I appreciate your thoughts on mandatory retirement. I agree with you wholeheartedly. I think it is a very important issue, and I think it should be an issue of choice.

I have two questions. The first is for clarification. You talked about federal government employees not being required—that's been eliminated, but you're probably not suggesting in those industries where there is a concern about safety, etc., that this be the issue. I realize that every industry is slightly different. I wanted some clarification on that.

Then I'll ask my second question.

**Prof. David MacGregor:** That's a really interesting problem, the one you just mentioned—and thank you for raising it—the issue of health-related problems in certain industries where safety is paramount.

You may know that in the United States, older American pilots are fighting for the ability to work past the age of 60. I imagine that will be the case in Canada as well. The United States Pilots Association has brought this up many times, that the medical evidence isn't there to suggest that pilots at age 65 or 70 really are unsafe. One of the most interesting aspects of this question, for example, is that sudden heart attack, the kind of thing that we think about hitting someone, is much more common in the 40 to 50 age group than it is for those over 65 years of age. Of course, with pilots, and so forth, there are lengthy medical examinations. This isn't my area of expertise, I have to admit, but certainly the things I've read would suggest that it's likely the retirement age for pilots will rise to at least age 65.

Some of the arguments I made earlier also apply to pilots in the sense of, do we really want to get rid of our most experienced pilots, the ones who have accumulated so many air miles, or miles in the air?

I'm sorry, I have air miles on my mind now. I just went to Italy and I want to go back.

Certainly they've accumulated a great amount of experience, which to me seems to be lost when they're taken out of service.

Generally speaking, I don't think the evidence is there in almost any other industry to indicate that people over the age of 65 suffer from terrible detriments that require them to leave their jobs.

**The Chair:** I realize we're getting into areas of provincial jurisdiction, and this seems problematic at times. You talk about leadership, the federal government leading the way, since we have two or three major provinces already taking that initiative. Do you see that as being a possibility for the federal government, to mandate the fact that we should look at eliminating the minimum age of retirement at 65?

The second question to that is, you're not suggesting putting a top end on it, are you? Are you just saying there should not be a requirement to retire at 65 and then leave it up to the individual to choose, or are you suggesting that we should be moving that number somewhere else? You talk about age 75, but I don't think you've talked about it in the context of saying that was a suggestion. So I'd like your thoughts on that.

**Prof. David MacGregor:** I've actually been disappointed that the federal government hasn't taken stronger steps in this area. I know there's a very strong feeling among many MPs who would share your view and that of Mr. Albrecht that retirement at age 65 is probably not a good idea.

One thing that really interests me as a researcher is that among experts—the demographers, and so forth, particularly in the Canadian government, who by the way have done some wonderful work in this area—the climate of opinion changed very suddenly around 2003. Before that, experts were saying it didn't matter whether we got rid of mandatory retirement or not, that it wasn't a very important issue.

But if you now read the literature coming out of the federal government in terms of looking at workplace issues, quality of life, and so forth, they've turned around dramatically, arguing that mandatory retirement definitely should be gotten rid of. They're following the same kind of research that's going on in Europe, where

that change in climate is taking place, which is very interesting. It took place, as I said, around 2001 and 2003. The expertise now, labour market expertise and so forth, is arguing very strongly that we need to get rid of it. So if the federal government decided to move in that area, it would have lots of research to draw upon.

I hope I'm not overstating this, but it seems to me that the Canadian Human Rights Act has this shameful part in it that permits employers to get rid of workers on the basis of age, and they don't even give an age, just whatever is prominent in the workplace. I think this is a very sad comment. I believe the first thing to be done is to get rid of that particular permission of that particular part of the Canadian Human Rights Act. Also, as I mentioned in my presentation, I think the federal government should be more proactive in encouraging workers to stay longer and make it possible for them to stay longer.

• (1410)

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

I have one final question to Ms. Barron—perhaps two questions.

Where do you receive your funding from? Do you receive it from organizations? Is there any government funding? How do you guys sustain yourselves?

**Ms. Carole Barron:** The CCRW receives core funding in the amount of \$405,000 from the Office for Disability Issues. All of our other programs and services that employ staff, who are often persons with disabilities, come from project-based funding.

We also receive membership fees from corporations, individuals, and agencies, and as well, consultation disability awareness training and job accommodation service. Our job accommodation service is the only service in Canada that reflects the duty to accommodate and can support both the employee and the employer in trying to understand the requirements for duty to accommodate.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Really, the question I wanted to ask first but is now second is that we've certainly heard when we've talked to people across the country about priorities for funding cuts, and we heard some of my colleagues talk about it.... One of the things that's come up in terms of a great program for which the funding hasn't changed substantially for the last number of years is the Opportunities Fund, which I think you mentioned.

What about any other funds or even opportunities? What would you recommend? What are two or three funds that do some great things and should see some increase in funding? Once again, I raise the Opportunities Fund only because it's been raised to us. Is that a great fund to look at?

It certainly appears to me, from what we heard, that it is a fund that we get a tremendous amount of value and mileage out of, and it hasn't been increased substantially in the last number of years. Do you have any thoughts on that? I realize there are 100 programs to choose from, but I'm just thinking of maybe one or two.

**Ms. Carole Barron:** Systematically, I just went down through my head going ding, ding, ding, ding, which one? It's almost like roulette. Which one will come up?

I have to support your observation with regard to the Opportunities Fund. It is a most valuable fund for non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations in Canada. The funding level lacks the opportunity to provide the type of support that's required for community agencies in Canada to provide support for persons with disabilities.

When you look at the Opportunities Fund, and I'm sure people have brought this to the table to you, then you are aware of the value of the community coordinator, the EAS, as well as the entrepreneurial or skills initiatives that are available under that fund.

As you're probably also aware, the terms and conditions for the Opportunities Fund actually are due to expire March 31, 2007. So those of us who have very valuable organizations, departments, and programs across Canada supporting the employment of persons with disabilities are left at times with a knot in our stomachs wondering where is this money going to come from.

We are demonstrating the value. We are demonstrating the results. The people with disabilities are receiving training and funding; and training you can call skills development, you can call it essential skills initiatives, you can call it whatever you want, but look it up in the Oxford English dictionary and it's still training. Basically, I think the Opportunities Fund is a primary fund for the Government of Canada to ensure is maintained.

Secondly, in terms of not so much a fund but a department for the Government of Canada to pay particular attention toward is the Office for Disability Issues, which has under its direction the social development partnerships program—the disability component, which is strategically important for allowing organizations nationwide to look for funding to provide supports for persons with disabilities.

I think those would be the two, primarily, because, from our perspective, we've worked with both those funds over a specific period of time. But basically right across the country, Service Canada and the kinds of supports and initiatives it can bring under the Opportunities Fund are very primary.

• (1415)

**The Chair:** I appreciate that, and I think certainly as we discuss recommendations when we're doing this report, that would probably be one that all parties could get behind. Certainly the time limits of the report will be good, as it expires next March. So thank you very much.

I have Mr. D'Amours for one question, and then Madam Bonsant.  
[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I also wish to thank you for pointing out to us that we should check the status of the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities on March 31, 2007.

I wish to ask Mr. MacGregor a question, or maybe make a comment.

The questions you asked were so good that almost all of them got answers. However, maybe there is one small thing I would like to know, Mr. MacGregor.

Today we are faced with a labour shortage with the result that we have to go looking for immigrants in order to fill certain positions. I am going to confess that, perhaps because of my age—I am 33, so I am definitely still a bit far from retirement—I was totally unaware a few months ago that the mandatory retirement age was 65.

Perhaps there was a reason for that 30 years ago, but do you think that things have evolved in a way that we can no longer allow it and that we need all our labour force to fill jobs in Canada? Do you think that that is today's reality, or is this something that should have been done in the past, quite simply as a matter of fairness towards people, regardless of their age?

[English]

**Prof. David MacGregor:** Thank you for your question.

I don't think that the age 65 was ever really justified. In a sense, I think it was always a blow against human rights for people who were older.

On the other hand, there's no doubt that the country as a whole requires and needs older workers now in a way they didn't before. Partly that's because there were so few older workers before; there were far more younger workers. Now we have a situation where older workers...it's switched, exactly. So this becomes a much more important issue.

You mentioned that many people don't recognize that mandatory retirement even exists. In fact, until one gets older, you don't really think about things like that. I remember not even worrying about my pension until just a couple of years ago, whereas before that it was simply just numbers, as far as I was concerned. That's the other thing that's happening. More people are reaching that age and becoming aware of these barriers that they didn't know were there.

I think one of the things that's interesting, for example, is the Human Rights Commission in New Brunswick for many years actually justified mandatory retirement. They said it was a good idea, given pensions and so forth. All of a sudden they changed their minds in New Brunswick. I'm not sure if you're aware of this, but in 2004 the Human Rights Commission advised the government to get rid of mandatory retirement—that is, the provincial Government of New Brunswick.

I know there's a new provincial government there, but I'm hoping they will act on that, because it is such an important right, the right to work. I think we need to recognize how important it is if we take away that right.

• (1420)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. D'Amours.

Madam Bonsant.

[Translation]

**Ms. France Bonsant:** Ms. Barron, you say that the fund ends on March 31, 2007. You're lucky since a lot of Status of Women Canada agencies have already closed their doors for lack of funds.

Do you ask the government for funding every year?

[English]

**Ms. Carole Barron:** On a point of clarification, CCRW receives core funding from the Office for Disability Issues. For all of our other programs and services, there are probably two parts to my response. Part one is we receive the funding from the Office for Disability Issues for core services. We used to be funded \$2.8 million annually for core services. Our funding now is \$405,000 annually.

**Ms. France Bonsant:** Annually.... Does it mean that every time you want to have more money you have to ask for it every year?

**Ms. Carole Barron:** Yes.

**Ms. France Bonsant:** Wouldn't it be logical if you asked them for three years and not to have to take six months just to fill out those stupid papers so you can have your money?

**Ms. Carole Barron:** Do you want to come to work with the CCRW?

**Ms. France Bonsant:** I've been there, done that. No, thank you.

**Ms. Carole Barron:** I'm getting ready to retire, so I'm with Mr. MacGregor on this.

One of the important pieces here is that just recently, through the Office for Disability Issues in the former government, they actually provided core funding to eighteen key organizations in Canada to March 31, 2008. So this year I do not have to fill out any papers or forms for core funding.

However, for every other project that's currently funded, we have to submit proposals and funding...requesting continued support. So we don't know from year to year whether or not all those results that we're able to demonstrate for people with disabilities will continue.

**Ms. France Bonsant:** I'm asking you the question because on the resources for *placement carrière-été*, the student thing, we deposited a recommendation for a three-year period instead of one year. There are strict limitations working with disabled people, so you don't have the money to get one person to work only on the paper stuff. It's very expensive, and it's frustrating too, because you never know from one year to another if the door will still be open or not. *C'est pour cela que...* three years.

**Ms. Carole Barron:** Yes, exactly, and I would fully support your observation with regard to three years, particularly as it relates to human resources.

Just as an example from the partners for workplace inclusion program, which has five sites in Canada, we are funded year by year through the Opportunities Fund. Even though we demonstrate our results, we exceed our targets and our objectives, and we're demonstrating everything we are required to demonstrate as indicators under the Opportunities Fund, we are required every year to submit a letter of intent. That has to then be reviewed. We're currently at the stage where we're waiting to be asked to submit a proposal to continue our work. So we're very familiar with that degree of anxiety that occurs every year, wondering if we will be able to continue.

The other piece to that, when you talk about paperwork and people, is that we have five sites across Canada employing a total of only ten people—in all of those five sites accumulated—yet we are able to overachieve our results and demonstrate to the Government of Canada that we're able to make that employment issue happen for people with disabilities.

So I completely support your observations.

**Ms. France Bonsant:** The message is received.

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

I want to just say thanks to everyone for being here. I think Ms. Barron made it very clear that every issue we have before us today we could study not only all afternoon, but all day. We realize how all these issues cross borders and cross departments, in terms of employability, and that's why as a committee we decided unanimously that we would look at this issue. As I said, we started with a fairly narrow focus, and it expanded to older workers and to persons with disabilities, because, quite frankly, this whole issue of employability, as you're all well aware, affects so many people.

I just want to say thank you once again. Your input and insight has been most valuable, and we appreciate it greatly. So thank you very much for your time.

The meeting is adjourned.

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