



House of Commons
CANADA

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

HUMA • NUMBER 033 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Wednesday, November 8, 2006

—
Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

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

Wednesday, November 8, 2006

•(0840)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), on our study on employability in Canada, I will commence now.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for being here.

As for how we're going to handle today's proceedings, we're going to get each of you to make a seven-minute opening statement. If you don't have enough time, hopefully in the questions and answers you'll be able to get out some of the additional information. We will then have a seven-minute question and answer first round, followed by five-minute question and answer rounds.

Ms. Strachan, perhaps you'd like to start off for us. We'll give you seven minutes to get started, and then we'll proceed to your right after that.

Thank you, Ms. Strachan, for being here this morning.

Ms. Norma Strachan (Executive Director, ASPECT): Thank you for being here today. I really appreciate that the committee has come to Vancouver to allow us to make presentations in person.

I want to talk to you about a framework for an employment strategy that ASPECT has developed. ASPECT is an association of service providers for employability and career training. We have over 145 member organizations. These are community-based employment training agencies located throughout 58 communities in British Columbia. ASPECT members are both non-profit and private organizations that provide community-based employment and career training specifically designed to assist individuals in overcoming their barriers to employment.

All of the not-for-profit organizations are governed by volunteer boards, as is ASPECT. The board of ASPECT has been instrumental in developing this strategy and it has been validated by our members at our last AGM.

Community-based trainers are professionals who specialize in employment and career counselling for individuals struggling with employability issues. Community-based trainers have experience in providing the following services in their communities: academic upgrading, numeracy and literacy, vocational and career assessment counselling, employment preparedness, job skills training, work experience and job placement, job maintenance, crisis support as needed, transition support to independence, and language instruction as required.

The purpose of ASPECT is to facilitate liaison, resource sharing, and problem solving between service-providing agencies and governments, to promote positive working relationships and problem solving, and to coordinate professional development opportunities for the management and staff of agencies.

Our community-based training agencies are long-standing providers for HRSDC. They have always met and typically exceeded the agreed-to performance targets. We address employment barriers and speed the transition to employment and economic independence through some of the following characteristics that are unique to our sector.

We're committed to working with marginalized populations, with people who have barriers to employment. We are client-focused, working with each individual to overcome their barriers. We maintain close working relationships with local employers and employer associations. We're informed about the labour market gaps and the needs in our communities and provinces. Our agencies are connected to other resources in their communities, resulting in significant enhancement in service to multi-barriered clients and also in community capacity building.

ASPECT has maintained a mutually beneficial and collegial relationship with the regional headquarters of HRSDC, now Service Canada, for over a decade. ASPECT often acts as a conduit between service providers in Service Canada, in helping to clarify issues and solve problems.

I meet regularly with regional headquarters and I have served on the interim Voluntary Sector Advisory Committee on Employment, and two of my board members continue on the permanent Voluntary Sector Advisory Committee.

As Canada is called upon to compete in an increasingly global economy, we must undertake the development of a strategy that will prepare people, will increase our productivity, and will provide the greatest opportunity for individual economic self-sufficiency. ASPECT consulted with our own members to obtain their input for the development of this employment strategy. We believe that further extensive consultation and collaboration involving a spectrum of stakeholders, involving all levels of government—employers, workers, agencies, and others—are required in order to develop a strategy that truly addresses the diverse employment and human resource needs in British Columbia and ultimately in Canada.

As a starting point, however, ASPECT is pleased to present this document as a framework for developing such a strategy. This framework will describe the current situation in terms of what is working and what's not working and it will provide a vision for a more comprehensive and responsive strategy. It will articulate the principles that we believe must attach to the strategy and it will provide a series of specific recommendations that are intended as guidance for the next step in the development of a national strategy.

It's important to recognize there are many effective employment-related initiatives currently in British Columbia. The development of a new strategy should build on those strengths while addressing the shortcomings of existing programming.

• (0845)

What's working? Program and service delivery is currently being delivered through local organizations who are in touch with the employment, economic, social, and environmental needs of their communities. Much of this is thanks to Service Canada for resisting the provincial models that have happened here in British Columbia, sort of large corporate brokers that deliver on a province-wide basis.

There are at least some employment services available in most communities, thanks to Service Canada. Some areas have access to a broad diversity of services to meet a spectrum of needs. The federal government has maintained budget levels. The concept of establishing and rewarding the achievement of results is a good one. New contracting models have recently been introduced that provide some flexibility and discretion for delivery organizations in meeting the needs of their clients. Economic growth has provided opportunities, bringing previously marginalized people into higher-skill occupations with greater remuneration, especially in urban areas. There has been no political interference in budgets or in service delivery agency selection, and we've been given an opportunity to influence policies through access to political representatives, such as today.

What's not working? People are falling through the cracks. They don't get service because they don't fall under either the federal or the provincial definitions: people returning to work after a long absence, young people who've not had jobs recently. There does not appear to be any connection between economic employment policy at either the national or the provincial level. There are insufficient support services available—for example, day care—to enable self-reliance for many workers. Targets and measures of results are not reflective of local conditions and encourage creaming, where we're only serving the most employable clients. Accountability has come to be interpreted by some federal staff as auditing on a micro level, with a

focus on monitoring expenses rather than results. There's been some change in that, thanks to the Voluntary Sector Advisory Committee.

Federal-provincial co-management. While there appears to be more communication, differing cultures, philosophies, and priorities have made co-management a failure in British Columbia in relation to coordinated delivery, and HRSDC policies are not clear and often not well communicated to the regions. It's not possible to accurately assess real impact of programs, as data is inadequate, not validated, and often not available to agencies. Service delivery agencies are assuming greater risks with less recompense—less money—resulting in many withdrawing altogether.

So we propose a strategy that's congruent with national economic strategy and is shared by all levels of government.

We believe in triple bottom-line accountability; compassion, tolerance, and respect for all Canadians, regardless of their employment status or their eligibility for EI; consultation—and thank you for this again—inclusion and integration. Social inclusion creates social cohesion. We believe in partnership with the provincial government, and that development and delivery of employment programming should be done through community partnerships; lifelong learning, and that needs to be supported by government; flexibility and adaptability in programs for communities; accountability to focus on outcomes; and cohesion and coordination between the various ministries at the provincial government level and at the federal government level.

Thank you.

• (0850)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Strachan.

We'll now move to Ms. Worton. Seven minutes, please.

Ms. Jane Worton (Member, Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria): Good morning. My name is Jane Worton. I'm here from the Community and Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria. I'll speak today about employability issues for people with multiple barriers to employment.

The community council has worked on four related projects addressing people with multiple barriers.

We have a project called the employer challenge, where we work with employers to encourage them to reduce poverty in the workforce through HR practices.

We have a community action team of people with experience living on low incomes who are committed to making change in the community and challenging stereotypes about people living in poverty.

We are working on a labour market dialogue, which is a series of conversations...sorry, I'm speaking too fast.

The Chair: Maybe you could slow down a bit for the translation. It's very understandable; you want to pack a lot into seven minutes.

Ms. Jane Worton: Exactly. I've got to get through, got to get to the recommendations. Okay.

The labour market dialogue is a series of conversations between employers and social service agencies and people with barriers to employment, and they're trying to discuss what innovative supports employers can be provided with so they can hire people with barriers to employment.

Finally, there is the social purchasing portal, which is basically a business arrangement between businesses that commit to buying services and goods from suppliers that hire people with multiple barriers to employment.

The common thread through all four of those projects is that we're talking about multi-sectoral solutions. When I talk about people with persistent barriers to meaningful employment, that's not one person or one group of people. There are some common groups that often tend to experience these barriers. There are people who are homeless, sex trade workers, ex-inmates, first nations and visible minorities, people with physical and mental disabilities, single parents, mature workers, and immigrants. The nature of those barriers that we're often working with is that they're multiple, compounding, and overwhelming for the people who are experiencing them.

When we talk about the barriers, we actually often like to try to reverse that and ask instead, what are the supports that people are missing in order to become employable? We've gathered a list of them, which you'll see on the PowerPoint that I've distributed, and probably very few of these are going to be new information. I'll just list them for you: transportation, phone, appearance, child care, food, social skills, health, housing, money, friends and family, and education.

There's nothing new on that list, so why am I spending the time to tell you about it? The reason I want to draw it to your attention is that despite the fact that these are things that we know to be issues for employability, they're not reflected in policy. These continue to be challenges for people on the ground.

I want to give you an example of that by telling you a story about Mary, a woman in Victoria. When she moved to Victoria, she got a job in the tourism sector working part time—she's a single parent—then the Asian economy took a downturn and she was laid off. She had to make some quick decisions about what she was going to do in order to be able to cut her budget sufficiently to make ends meet. She

didn't have friends or family to rely on; she was new to the community.

The first decision she made was to not have a bus pass. That seems like a good decision, except she then wasn't able to easily access new businesses to distribute her resumé. She also took her child out of child care, which also seems like a good decision—\$734 a month she didn't have to spend—but then when she was offered a job, she couldn't get into child care because there is such a long wait for spots and she had lost her spot. She also made the decision a lot of parents do when they're living on low income to ensure that their children have what they need—she started skipping meals. She was skipping two meals a day through the majority of her job search, which fairly immediately started to have a ramification on her health. Then eventually she was still unable to find work and lost her housing.

That's an example of what I mean by multiple and compounding barriers to employment.

For many people, these missing supports are matched by emotional stress, and then people, as they're looking for help, are faced with a piecemeal system. There is no continuous thread taking them through all of the services and supports that they require. Finally, there are people who are faced with discrimination in any form, whether that's based on their past history of employment, such as sex trade workers or people with criminal records, or for people who are first nations or visible minorities.

I want to start talking about solutions and remind you again that the community council's perspective is that it's everyone's responsibility to do something. Because I'm here today addressing a task force of the Government of Canada, I'm going to focus on solutions that the government can take up.

First, we would ask that you review the Canada social transfer. This is not a system that is working for people on the ground to ensure that the dollars are getting to the places where people need them. Within that review, I would encourage you to develop a national poverty reduction strategy, which includes a housing strategy, national welfare standards, and a universal accessible and affordable child care program, and to integrate dental care and pharmacare into the medicare program. I'd also encourage you to adopt an integrated approach across the ministries that address employability issues.

In terms of what services Canada can deliver in supports for employers, we could use some incentives to hire and retrain people with barriers to employment—a community referral service for employers with employees with barriers to employment, encouraging recognition for foreign credentials, and just raising employer awareness about these issues. You also can provide support for community services, such as the organization I am here on behalf of.

The federal government is in a unique position to enable comprehensive community initiatives. You are one of the only organizations that can bring all key players to the table, and I would encourage you to build on the success of initiatives such as SCPI or the urban development agreements, which have had great success, at least on the ground in Victoria. You also have the ability to build capacity for the voluntary sector, providing core funding and longer-term projects and supporting innovation overall.

● (0855)

Finally, we'd encourage you to support individuals and families directly by providing support services for people who are precariously attached to the workforce, or the working poor. Once you've found a minimum wage job, there are almost no services to help you move up and out into more long-term or permanent work.

I'd also encourage you to allow access to education without a loss of benefits. For people who are looking for work, being able to upgrade their skills is a key piece in employability.

Finally, I'd encourage you to look to your own house and ensure that you're paying a living wage for federal workers and contractors.

We really appreciate the opportunity to come here and provide some input, and I look forward to the questions and discussion. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Worton. I appreciate your presentation as well.

The last presentation we have is by Ms. Dutt. You have seven minutes.

Ms. Shyla Dutt (Member, Pacific Foundation for Diversity): Thank you, honourable chair and members of the committee.

I'm Shyla Dutt from the Pacific Foundation for Diversity. I realize, living as I do now in British Columbia, that it is a rare opportunity for us, being in one of the extremities of our country, to have input to a parliamentary body. For that I am, therefore, appreciative of your coming to Vancouver to listen to us.

Very briefly, to acquaint you with the foundation, it's a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to strengthening national action in response to Canada's accelerating diversity. Through grassroots research and dialogue, the foundation seeks to facilitate partnerships and strengthen relationships and open doors actually among diverse communities as much as within the wider community.

Based in Vancouver, the foundation brings a west coast lens to critical issues emerging from the dynamic changes to Canada's population—among them, enhancing the efficacy of community and government employment support programs for Canadians from diverse backgrounds.

We'd like to submit two related issues for your consideration. We're focusing on this particularly because who the federal government is makes a big difference to its awareness of the issues of diverse communities. Hence, we've chosen to focus today on the barriers to employability of visible minorities in the federal government.

The second issue we'd like to look at is the lack of federal subsidies for immigrants to gain Canadian workplace practical experience. We think these two things would make a big difference to the composition of the population here.

As far as the employability of visible minorities goes, while the focus of this hearing, we recognize, may be on employability in businesses in various industry sectors, as I mentioned, we're concerned that the most significant employer in the country, in both numbers—166,000 employees—and authority in terms of regulation of other employers, is less representative of visible minorities than is the private sector it regulates, especially at management levels.

We fully agree that appointments should be based on merit and only on merit, but what we have observed through our work is that job requirements and the qualifications required to carry out jobs are based on and assessed according to job descriptions created for a demographic reality that is different from what exists today. The public to whom the government provides services is vastly different from that of a couple of decades ago and, I might mention, is in different regions and is changing rapidly, a refrain we hear frequently these days. Institutional leadership, however, has stayed the same.

Almost four million individuals identified themselves as visible minorities in 2001, members of a group that is increasing six times faster than is the rest of the population. Visible minorities could make up between 19% and 23% of the population by 2017, another reason, looking forward, we have chosen to focus on this group. Roughly one-half of them would be Chinese and South Asian by then. About 70% of visible minorities are born outside the country. By 2017, of the population, 22% would be individuals whose mother tongue is neither English nor French. These are important assets, not liabilities, in a global economy, but their qualifications and talent have failed to fit the definition of merit in our public institutions.

Canada's great endeavour has been the crafting of an inclusive society. It's with this, our shared national value, in mind that I ask the honourable members of this committee to assess the accountability of the Public Service of Canada in acting on the commitment it has made and the leadership it has shown to become representative of the public it services.

Despite the investment of much effort and many resources, representativeness of visible minorities has eluded the public service. The private sector has actually done better in terms of hiring visible minorities, with 13.3% versus 8.1% in the public service, based on 2001 statistics. The gap will be even greater when the 2006 census data are released.

One possible reason for this, to look at it constructively, is that many visible minorities live in the major cities and represent between one-third and one-half of the population of these cities, but 40% of the jobs in the federal government are based in Ottawa, where visible minorities make up only 14%. So in a way it's understandable that there's chronic under-representation. Chinese and South Asians constitute the highest proportion of visible minorities.

● (0900)

Because 70% of visible minorities are foreign-born, they are less likely to meet entrance requirements, such as mandatory French-language fluency, testing methods, foreign credential recognition, professional registration barriers, and lack of Canadian workplace practice.

Recent management positions, for instance, in B.C. and Alberta regional offices of the federal government have been slow to be filled because they couldn't persuade people to move here from the east. This means there is even less representation in our regional offices. People have to get acquainted with the environment here, and then they move back. Only 22% of public service jobs used to be advertised for national areas of selection, so people from the regions couldn't apply for those jobs, actually. According to the Conference Board, there are subtle impediments—terms such as “lack of fit”, accent, overqualification, foreign credentials, again Canadian work experience, and lack of a welcoming environment. If nothing is done, there will be an increasing disconnect between those who govern and the governed.

I'll move on to the second issue, and hopefully I'll get a chance to talk about the recommendations.

Concerning the employability of immigrants, according to the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, without significant increases in immigration of skilled workers, many sectors of the Canadian economy will not be able to expand and keep pace internationally. Yet according to StatsCan, one in five immigrants had not had any employment during the first two years after arrival. Most did not find employment in their intended occupation for two years. The biggest hurdle was lack of Canadian work experience, followed by recognition of foreign credentials.

Employment rates are higher for those who have immigrated under the skilled category, and even higher for those who have university degrees, but only four in ten have found a job in their intended occupation. This is a waste of skills and talent in the middle of our skill shortage. With StatsCan projecting that the immigrant population will reach between 7 million and 9.3 million in 2017, it's critical that the federal government design innovative programs to provide incentives to employers to help immigrants get that Canadian workplace experience.

B.C., to our knowledge, is the only province that has instituted a program that subsidizes workplace practice. The greater resources of the federal government, we feel, could be brought to bear on this.

Thank you.

● (0905)

The Chair: Thank you very much. I'm sure there will be some questions asked so you can expand on that.

We're going to start with Mr. Regan, for seven minutes.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to all of you for coming in this morning to join us. I'm sorry we didn't have the others who were scheduled to come. Perhaps they couldn't make it.

I have a few questions. Let me start with Ms. Strachan, from ASPECT.

Can you describe what the connection should be, in your view, between economic and employment policy at the national level?

Ms. Norma Strachan: Could I ask you to repeat that, please?

Hon. Geoff Regan: In your brief you say, among the things that aren't working, there does not appear to be any connection between economic and employment policy at either the national or the provincial level. Would you describe what you think that connection should be and what should change in that regard?

Ms. Norma Strachan: It appears that in the economic policy federally in British Columbia, if I may address that, there is a growing need for skilled workers here, and yet there seems to be a lack of willingness to address the labour force that's available but is currently not eligible, for example, for EI or income assistance. A number of people are underemployed or, as Jane described, not able to be employed for a number of reasons. So there is economic growth, there's a desire for economic development, yet there are not the supports in place to help the workforce.

Hon. Geoff Regan: So you're saying it's the connection between the fact that there's a need for skilled workers—that's the economic need—and that the social policy should be supporting that by helping them. Obviously people are at various different levels in terms of what their training is and what their ability is to take on a range of jobs, whether it be a person who needs literacy training or one who needs highly skilled, highly specialized training in relation to something. It seems to me there's quite a variation, quite a *varia strata* between. What do you think is the most important part of that to address?

Ms. Norma Strachan: It's interesting that you mention literacy training, because the federal government just cut funding for literacy training. The provincial government isn't picking up on that.

We have to remember that ASPECT's members are mostly working with multi-barrier clients. If anybody is eligible for EI, they are the most skilled workers. They've already proven they can get and hold down a job. They're already the most skilled workers.

Our agencies are also working with income assistance clients, through funding from the provincial government.

Literacy is a huge issue for a number of multi-barriered people. It's a hidden disability. There are other supports that are required. As we mentioned, there is a lack of day care, lack of transportation, just the presentation.... The federal government no longer funds life skills training. Those are the supports that are needed for people who are multi-barriered. If we were able to recognize incremental steps to success, rather than just "any job is a good job, get them employed", and then there are no more supports available to them, they're on their own, they're employed—

There needs to be a commitment to some sustainability of employment and to life-long learning, as we addressed earlier.

• (0910)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Are you familiar with the labour market partnership agreements between the Government of Canada and Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan, which would provide training for people who are not eligible for EI?

Ms. Norma Strachan: Yes, I am, somewhat.

Hon. Geoff Regan: From what you know about it, is it a good model?

Ms. Norma Strachan: Yes, although there's much talk of devolution here in British Columbia. We have mixed feelings about that, because as I said in my presentation, the federal government has been instrumental in ensuring there are services in most communities in B.C. We're grateful that Service Canada is there. It's the one resource that's available for communities, and people who live in communities.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Just to be clear, what do you see that the role of the Government of Canada should be, versus the role of the provinces?

Ms. Norma Strachan: With respect to the role of the Government of Canada, if I'm referring to the LMPA, I believe the funds associated with the LMPA are funds that are available to all Canadians and able to be used for more multi-barriered clients.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I guess the question is whether the Government of Canada should be organizing this. Or should it be giving money to the provinces and asking them to deal with that?

Ms. Norma Strachan: I'm speaking for myself, and I'm also speaking on behalf of my board, because we've had this discussion. We believe the Government of Canada should be responsible for that. We have a distrust of the sometimes interesting political peccadilloes of the Province of British Columbia. And we have concerns that some of the models that have been adopted here have not been supportive of the voluntary sector. It's the Government of Canada, please.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I have lots of questions for all the witnesses, but I'll get another chance. I have less than a minute left, I think. Let me ask Ms. Worton a question.

When you talk about the Government of Canada setting welfare standards as part of a national poverty reduction strategy—obviously welfare is delivered by the provincial governments—precisely what role would you see the Government of Canada playing? Would you see it suggesting standards? I don't think you can impose standards on welfare. What is your view about how that should work? Let me put it that way.

Ms. Jane Worton: You are more familiar with the federal policy, perhaps, in this area than I am. My understanding is that the federal government could in fact impose standards. It would be a substantial shift. In fact, if that were possible, I would suggest that the federal government give money through the Canada social transfer and ask the provinces to deliver it.

Hon. Geoff Regan: So like CAP, in other words.

Ms. Jane Worton: Yes.

I really want to emphasize one of the substantial issues. The community council is part of a national poverty reduction strategy, and the variants across the country for welfare standards and welfare delivery are a substantial problem.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Can I just clarify that when I say CAP, I mean the Canada assistance program, not the community access program.

Ms. Jane Worton: I understood what you meant. And yes, I would advocate going back to that system.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I thought you did; I didn't know if everybody else did.

Ms. Jane Worton: Thank you for that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Regan.

It is interesting, as we travel across the country, that witnesses would be advocating on behalf of more federal involvement. There are definitely some provinces, and some members from various regions, who say they want less. This is a useful exercise, seeing where different services lie in the country.

We appreciate those follow-up comments.

Ms. Savoie, we're going to you, for seven minutes, please.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for those presentations. They were really packed with information and based on your experiences.

Jane, I know you and really appreciate the work you and the Community Social Planning Council do in Victoria. I'm closely aware of all the different initiatives, starting with projects you haven't even identified. I know that Marge Reitsma-Street, for example, presented documents on poverty that really showed the face of poverty. You referred to compounding barriers and I think those were really well identified. So thank you.

There were several references from all three presentations to the fact that some people don't fall under the federal or provincial definition, and they just fall between the cracks. There was a suggestion about adopting an integrated approach across ministries federally—adopting multi-sectoral solutions. I think it's fair to say we're hearing that a lot. I think people are reacting to silos that in themselves are not bad, but there's a tendency for organizations to not share information, so valuable data gets lost.

In Victoria I know there was an approach to address that, and you referred to it. It was called the Victoria Urban Development Agreement. There were literally hundreds of people who participated in this. The objective of that exercise was to bring the focus of the federal government, the provincial government, and the local governments on key issues that were articulated by the community over many meetings and bring together a huge diversity of groups.

This agreement was never signed, and I'm having difficulty finding out where it is. It seems to have slipped off the minister's desk. At the moment I am working to get some information about where it is. I doesn't matter if the Conservative government wants to rebrand it; I think the concept was good.

I'm wondering if you want to talk a little bit about that. It was an attempt to have all three levels of government focus and bring the resources that were needed to address the specific issues that were identified by the broad community, rather than having programs from the federal government that were imposed, or accountability measures that had nothing to do with outcomes. The point was to have everybody focus on the key issues. I think some of them in Victoria were around housing, among other things.

Do you have any comments?

● (0915)

Ms. Jane Worton: Certainly I think that's exactly the kind of thing the federal government has the capacity to do. It wasn't just that the dollars were coming in from the federal government. The way the urban development agreement was happening, it was leveraging enormous dollars, including from the province, which otherwise would likely not have been at the table. But other people were coming to the table saying, these are the issues, and if the federal government puts this money in, we'll put this money in. The municipal governments were starting to get interested in community economic development.

I spoke of the enabling role of the federal government, and urban development agreements are a prime example of that.

Another successful point is the work the federal government has been able to do around homelessness. I'm terrible with what the acronym SCPI stands for, but I hope you are all familiar with it. Again, there has been a response where other people have put dollars in, so we're able to do much more because the federal government is the first to the table.

Ms. Denise Savoie: You referred to the different levels of government bringing money to the table, but it was more than that, as I recall. Ms. Strachan mentioned falling between the cracks and not fitting into one definition or another. It was proposed that resources from all levels be brought in to ensure that some of the policies that weren't dovetailing together might be changed. That was another really valuable aspect.

I guess I'm hearing that this is an initiative you would like to see us really look at to address some of these disjointed problems. Would that be fair to say?

Ms. Norma Strachan: Yes.

Ms. Denise Savoie: I know there's such an agreement in Manitoba, and I think there is one either in Saskatoon or Regina. I'm not sure which of the two cities has one, but I know they have that type of agreement.

I'd like to come back to some of the barriers. You mentioned barriers and describing them. I think we all understand what those barriers are. What about the barriers at the policy level? Do you want to identify why people don't fall under federal definitions, and what we could do about those people in terms of employment?

● (0920)

Ms. Norma Strachan: I'm old enough to remember when I started in the employment training field. It was 1986. At that time, I worked in a program that saw me work directly with clients. We were able to help anyone who came through the door, and sometimes there was a breakdown in ages. There were certain programs to help people under the age of 24. Others helped women returning to the workforce. But people were able to come and seek assistance getting employment, regardless of their funding source.

Often, one of the biggest barriers that I found was kids who came from loving families. Their parents make it too easy to stay at home and not get out and get a job. Sometimes those are kids who need help finding out how to get a job.

In Victoria, we have a number of kids—I guess it's the case throughout British Columbia and, I hear, across Canada—who are on the streets and don't have any supports. We hear of that and it's heartbreaking.

There were often women who were returning to the workforce who had husbands and kids, yet those women are now no longer able to get assistance if they've been out of the workforce for more than five years.

There was an open door policy. If someone needed help getting assistance, they could come to our program and get help.

Ms. Denise Savoie: When was that?

Ms. Norma Strachan: That ended in 1997.

Ms. Denise Savoie: It ended in 1997?

Ms. Norma Strachan: Yes. I forget what the bill was, but I think it was Bill C-911. What that did was change the definition of access to programming for those who were EI-eligible or—

Ms. Denise Savoie: Yes.

The Chair: That's all the time we have.

Ms. Yelich, for seven minutes, please.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Thank you.

I, too have lots of questions for each and every one of you, and I will start with you, Ms. Strachan.

You're "an association of community-based trainers that represents and promotes the interests and activities of members to strengthen their capacity to provide services to people with barriers to employment."

My question is, how do you describe ASPECT's primary role? Are you a coordinating force, or do you actually create training programs for people with barriers to employment?

Ms. Norma Strachan: Both, actually. It's a bit of a conflictual situation sometimes. Our first mandate is advocacy, so we represent our agencies and the issues of our agencies to both the federal and provincial governments and to many ministries in the provincial government. We provide networking opportunities. We have conferences, newsletters, and workshops for the professional development of the people who work in the agencies, who are members of ASPECT.

We also have some provincial government contracts, because the British Columbia government was moving toward large programs with a single point of contact, where programs would be delivered throughout the province by one agency. They were moving toward large corporations like PricewaterhouseCoopers, and I was concerned that the community-based agencies would become extinct if that model continued.

So we do develop programs in response to RFPs from the provincial government. Our models are always client-focused and individually based. From time to time, we have contracts with the provincial government. They're subcontracted out through our member agencies. We only provide the administrative infrastructure.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Your website mentions that you're delivering a program entitled IMMPowerBC.

Ms. Norma Strachan: IMMPowerBC, yes.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: IMMPowerBC. Well, that's cute. It's designed to employ skilled immigrants.

So what kinds of barriers to employment are confronting skilled immigrants in Canada?

Ms. Norma Strachan: I was very interested in that. I just came back from Ottawa last night, where I was at a conference. IMMPowerBC receives joint funding from the federal government and the Ministry of Economic Development in British Columbia to help skilled immigrants get employment commensurate with the skill that they came to Canada with.

The barriers are frequently the inability to jump the hurdles and get the training vis-à-vis language issues. Oftentimes regulatory

bodies provide barriers to people. They're unable to navigate those barriers. They need assistance and often funding to navigate those barriers.

Other issues are just understanding the lexicon of the Canadian language. We've had people looking for jobs as actuaries who didn't realize they were accountants in Canada. So there are those social barriers as well.

I think my colleague spoke very eloquently to them.

• (0925)

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Yes, she did, and I will go over to Shyla.

I wanted you to expand on the job requirements. You said the job requirements should reflect the demographics more, and you were quite clear that people should get this on merit. However, it should reflect the demographics. I would like you to expand on that, because I think there's something there. Where would you make changes to reflect the demographics with immigration?

Ms. Shyla Dutt: For instance, if you are providing a service to do an analysis of what sort of people are in that location or market, it varies according to the different regions in this country. It's quite different here compared to Nova Scotia, or Toronto, or Ottawa. If a service is to be delivered, you have a generic job description that applies to one location, not from here...and apply it across the country, across all branches of government, it makes a big difference. So that's one thing.

In my day job, I work in human resources. I help a lot of employers develop what I call diversity competency, because there are a lot of issues. When people deliver programs and services, they don't find the response, they don't find people applying for programs or services from certain segments of the population, and that's because this hasn't been factored into whoever is delivering that service. So when you look at that job, this qualification should be a requirement. Very often it isn't there.

It's very generic in terms of skills. We're still on the old mode. Even though we call them competencies, we still just look at education and at whatever experience they've had in the past, which are things that are required in today's marketplace.

The Chair: Ms. Strachan, did you want to add something else?

Ms. Norma Strachan: I want to comment that at the conference I was at yesterday I heard presentations from all across Canada. They were talking about the services available to skilled immigrants in each province. The thing that struck me goes back to the question we talked about earlier: should these services be delivered federally or provincially? The thing that struck me there was the redundancy, the duplication of efforts and energies in every province of Canada, trying to figure out ways to form credential recognition.

It's bad enough that people have to try to figure out how to be a nurse in Nova Scotia. Then if they want to move to Ontario, there's a whole other set of criteria. There's so much duplication. So once again, I reinforce the fact that I feel a lot of the responsibility, and the need for coordination, is a federal government responsibility.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I couldn't be more in agreement.

Another question I want to add to my previous question is, how do you see language or culture fitting into the requirement? All can answer that.

Ms. Shyla Dutt: It's a lot better now than it used to be when I started out in human resources, when people just looked around the offices to see who spoke that language. Now front-line service deliverers like police have recognized that, and because of necessity, they've started a trend towards actually having that as a qualification. It made a tremendous difference instantly in the employability of people from those segments of the population. If you needed someone to speak Chinese, then you automatically looked at someone who—

● (0930)

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Did that go the expense—

The Chair: We'll catch that on the next round. We're over time there. Seven minutes goes by way too quickly.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: It does, yes.

The Chair: We're going to move over to Mr. Regan again, five minutes this time.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you.

Which question do I ask first? I'll start with this one, and it is actually a question for all three of you.

In your brief you talk about the purpose of ASPECT, and I see the first verbs in each line are to facilitate, promote, and coordinate. It strikes me that I've had the sense, particularly with literacy, that some members of the government have a concern that there are groups that are engaging in lobbying and advocacy and don't feel that's directly benefiting the need of improvement in terms of literacy, in terms of actual literacy training.

The question I have for each of you is this. Tell me how would you argue to the government that it's important to have organizations that do advocacy, facilitation, promoting, and coordinating of the kinds of groups that are actually delivering training and other services directly to people?

Why don't we start with Ms. Dutt.

Ms. Shyla Dutt: That's actually what our foundation does, because the service deliverers are so busy focusing on delivering their services. The reason we founded this foundation was to actually support them in marketing their own programs within the community.

By the way, I want to use this opportunity to say that the fact that you've set up a coordinating agency to look at equivalencies is a great step in the right direction. One of the incredible pitfalls in foreign credential recognition is the fact that there are so many different agencies and such unevenness about the standards of those

recognitions, so just that coordination role is a fantastic first step that this government has taken.

Having announced that, we haven't seen where that's gone. On the ground here we don't see the application of it. So yes, there needs to be agencies that can articulate it, because, coming back to your question, the front-line service providers don't have the time to deliver that.

I just want to come back and take the opportunity to also talk about skilled immigrants. I think one of the areas where the federal government could really make a big difference is funding ESL for skilled immigrants. What happens now is that there's much more of generic ESL provided and not ESL for professionals. At their initiative, certain colleges have tried to do that, but they have really struggled for lack of funding. That's a big support that could happen, and the coordination of the foreign credentials.

But I think the number one issue I had hoped to make was that the federal government would actually fund Canadian workplace training. A StatsCan survey has shown that the number one issue is not so much language, as we would have thought, as it is the lack of Canadian workplace practice experience. You get engineers, doctors, architects, and construction workers who have all the skills and a lot of experience, but what they miss is that little link that doesn't give them the Canadian registration because they haven't had Canadian workplace practice. I think my colleague was absolutely right in saying that much of what they need is that lexicon, that currency of practice, the way people talk in a workplace in Canada. You only get that from being in a Canadian workplace.

The B.C. government, which has taken a bit of drubbing on this thing...I'd like to say that the one thing the B.C. government has done that I wish the federal government would do is actually subsidize. It has a program called Skills Connect, which you are probably aware of. I helped to market one organization that has a Skills Connect grant. They've been very successful using that to place. They've had amazing success in placing people within three to six months in a job in their own field.

● (0935)

Hon. Geoff Regan: The \$20 million enhanced language training initiative, which was to help immigrants acquire the language skills necessary to obtain and retain jobs suited to their skills and experience, announced in 2005 by the previous government, was left out of the budget in 2006 by the new government.

It seems to me you're saying that kind of initiative is very important.

Ms. Shyla Dutt: Absolutely, because it's an important link in terms of Canadian workplace practice.

A lot of skilled immigrant workers tend to have language skills, especially if they have a university education. A lot of focus goes toward the others who aren't at that level of skill, who may not have the language.

Remember, we've also shifted from an emphasis on family reunification to the skilled immigrant category. That has now dramatically changed.

The Chair: That's all the time we have for Mr. Regan.

We're going to Ms. Savoie, for five minutes, please.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Thank you.

I guess I'm trying to understand whether there are actual gaps in programming to support immigrants, new Canadians, or people with low literacy skills, or whether it's just a lack of coordination between the various levels of government. So let me just put that out there.

Years ago, in a past life, I worked with new Canadians. I'd pave the way with employers to help people get jobs. Then I'd work with them in terms of getting settled in the country.

Is that piece missing now, clearly missing? Has the government shifted it to non-profit groups, community groups, and now those are being cut? Is it an absence of programs or is it a lack of coordination—or both?

Ms. Shyla Dutt: The short answer is that it's both. Certainly there's a lack of coordination when it comes to foreign credential recognition. There's a lack of coordination when it comes to the whole Canadian workplace practice, where experience is required. But really, it's not having the program in terms of ESL for professionals.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Thank you.

Jane.

Ms. Jane Worton: Additionally, there are people who, in falling through the cracks, are now not even on the radar screen for service provision. These are people who are completely out of the system, who are engaged in sex trade work, or who often are without phones. And because they don't have phone access, they're not necessarily being counted among the numbers of unemployed.

In Victoria, for instance, all kinds of people have left social assistance, and yet their numbers aren't being reflected in the workforce. We know they're there, but they're not being counted in any way.

It's not just that the federal or provincial governments aren't directly providing services for these people; no non-profit is funded to provide services for them. There are gaps in service provision because nobody has the dollars to do it. Off the side of your desk, you can help only one or two people individually.

I would say that there's a similar gap in service provision for people who have just made it into employment. There's this idea that you take a job, any job, and once you get that job you just sort yourself out. But there's no support to move up, which is why we see this growing number of people who are working poor.

In Victoria, when we look at the numbers of people who are living below the poverty line, 18,000 of them worked at some point in the past year. Half of the people who are of working age and living below the poverty line actually have work, but they're not able to retain that work.

So there's a huge amount of skill and service delivery that needs to be provided for people, right across the country. I'm familiar with the Victoria numbers, but it's a national issue.

Ms. Shyla Dutt: I would like to add here that the self-employed segment is not at all within the whole circumference of social programs. It just totally isn't in there.

Ms. Denise Savoie: So that would be another gap.

Ms. Shyla Dutt: There are many self-employed, among immigrants especially.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Right.

At the risk of repeating earlier comments, the importance of the urban development agreement, which was in process, was that it was identifying gaps on the ground and relaying that to other levels of government. That process has stopped.

I'd like to come back to literacy cuts. Really, of all the cuts, I found those the most egregious and the most difficult to understand, even in conservative terms of productivity. There were different reasons given—i.e., we don't want to fund advocacy, or we don't want to fund programs that don't reflect the federal or that are beyond the federal jurisdiction.

That said, one type of project that was beginning in different parts of the country was the development of what was called the "learning community". The idea was to join up different agencies and different groups and different educational service providers and social providers and link them up in order to better deliver services. This is an initiative that was getting off the ground in Victoria, and it's one that I was really excited about. It looks like the national secretariat of learning is not one of the programs that is going to continue. However, we don't know what the cuts will be.

Do you think that kind of learning community, providing support and bringing people together, would be useful to address some of the issues? Perhaps you would comment on that.

● (0940)

The Chair: I'll just mention that you have about 20 seconds left.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Oh God, I spoke too long.

Ms. Jane Worton: Yes, that is something that would support lifelong learning. Yes, workplace literacy issues and funding for that are enormously important, but I think there's more in terms of having a community that supports lifelong learning, which Norma touched on.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Can you, in ten seconds, explain how you would say to the government how important that kind of lifelong learning, joining up groups in this community structure, would be?

Ms. Norma Strachan: When there was the Canadian labour force development... There have been various committees started federally, and then they have had provincial spinoffs, partnerships, in which the sectors were able to get together and talk about the ways in which clients would come through programming.

Although community-based training is often considered to be the lower level of it, often what we have found is that people may.... Sometimes it is a lower level, but sometimes they may go to.... I've had people who have come out with master's degrees and then have had to come into a community-based training program to find out how to integrate, how to take their degree in anthropology and get a job in Victoria.

People often integrate and move in and out of the educational systems within Canada. With the educational systems working more collectively and cohesively and with the articulation agreements that were coming about from that, those are the kinds of things where we were able to recognize prior Learning assessment and recognition. All those initiatives have been cut at the federal level over the last 10 years.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Savoie.

We're going to move to Ms. Yelich for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Thank you.

One of the questions I would like to ask each and every one of you is about the federal-provincial roles. I think I hear that you prefer to have the federal body, or the government, there, but that you would really prefer to see the provinces more engaged—but maybe I'm not hearing that right—because of the unique circumstances of each and every province and region.

I want to know if you feel that your province is unique at all in some of its needs compared to other parts of the country and if that is why we should have the province more engaged. I'm talking about the province of B.C. We're here to talk about employability and labour issues. I'd like to know if you think it's unique, if you think there's a unique solution, and what part B.C. should play.

Maybe we'll give Jane a chance to open.

Ms. Jane Worton: I think that B.C. is a unique province, but I don't think that issue is unique to B.C.

From my perspective and from my organization's perspective, I would say that the federal government delivers dollars to the provinces and then leaves the provinces the choice of how to spend those dollars. My argument would be that the federal government has a responsibility to ensure that those dollars are spent in a way that the federal government designated and desired them to be spent. So from my perspective individually, as a taxpayer, I want to make sure my federal dollars are being spent the way the federal government intended them to be spent. I think that's an issue across the country.

Ms. Norma Strachan: I concur with Jane.

I travel a lot across Canada, and I have colleagues in other provinces who are in situations comparable to mine. I'm surprised by the commonality. I've seen some great devolution agreements. In Quebec the devolution worked out quite well. In Alberta the devolution agreement has worked out quite well. My concern would be, whatever partnerships there are and whatever the management model is, that the federal government maintains some guidelines and directions about how the dollars should be spent in the interests of citizens, not in the interest of just one group, one silo group.

The model you mentioned, our IMMPowerBC program, actually is a Skills Connect contract, and that's an example of where the federal government contributed money to the B.C. Ministry of Economic Development, with some guidelines as to how it was to be delivered. It was to be delivered for skilled immigrants, but there was a requirement for a financial contribution from the immigrants to partake in that program.

• (0945)

Ms. Shyla Dutt: I have a slightly different view, in that B.C. is very unique, as are other regions. The composition of the population is very different. In our experience, what we've found is that programs such as the racism-free workplace strategy are formulated in Ottawa. When you talk to the regional offices about programs or proposals, they have to go to Ottawa for approval and they have very little sensibility. I don't blame them. They're not here every day living our reality. They don't have the cognizance of what it is. We find we are often responding to what's already been designed over there, which is so different, especially when you look at those types of issues. Given that B.C. has the highest proportion of visible minorities.... For instance, if you look at some of the other groups in terms of disabilities or first nations, we have a very unique composition, and it doesn't work for us.

I will come back to your question. Even in B.C., like in any other province, the situation of an urban city centre like Vancouver, Toronto, Winnipeg, or Montreal, it's very different from the other regions...from parts of B.C. itself, the province itself. I think you have to look very locally at what makes sense. What makes sense in Vancouver does not in Prince George or Prince Rupert. That kind of local responsiveness is very important. The program delivery, the program approval, has to take place very locally. I think that's where it has to focus. The idea of having an audit framework, a performance measure framework, and indicators developed somewhere is so process oriented...and not concrete delivery oriented.

The Chair: A quick response, please, Ms. Worton.

Ms. Jane Worton: I completely agree with what Shyla said. What I'm advocating for are some minimum standards across the country and great flexibility in local and regional program delivery. The urban development agreements are a prime example of it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Perhaps I can just indulge the committee. We have about 12 minutes left. So that you can all have one round each, do you mind if we just go to four minutes?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We'll go for four minutes. So we'll get three rounds in here.

Mr. Regan, four minutes.

Hon. Geoff Regan: As you know, the Fathers of Confederation, as they were called...the four colonies essentially came together and agreed to take a bunch of areas of responsibility and put them over here and created a new order of government that had responsibility for a certain number of things. What they didn't include was the regulation of the professions, like the medical profession, including nurses and doctors, like lawyers, engineers, etc.

What interests me here is what role the Government of Canada can play. What it tried to do in the past, of course, was to put pressure on provinces to work together to recognize immigrants' credentials, to make sure this moved more smoothly, and there had been a variety of initiatives to try to assist that process.

The question is this. If the Government of Canada doesn't have any power to say to the provinces, you, Ontario, must have the same regulations as Nova Scotia, or vice versa, and you must coordinate this so the standards are the same...? Is it better to have the Government of Canada doing that? No question, this is a national problem, and there are national objectives here. I think there is a role for the Government of Canada. I'm just trying to define what it ought to be. Or should the provinces be coming together and saying, okay, we're going to create a multi-province organization like COFI, which is going to do this?

What's your view on that? You mentioned the nurses, so it struck my mind.

• (0950)

Ms. Norma Strachan: I'm not familiar enough with the politics around this to know what's doable and what's not. If you could get the provinces to come together—and to some extent I hear they're trying to work on some of those issues collectively, through the forum of labour market ministers, and so on—I think there needs to be an impetus or an incentive that's put in there from the federal government.

It could be a hobby looking at what's going on with the government and the disparate bodies across Canada. If you get a change in government in one province, if you have four provinces working together on one issue and you get one provincial election, it could throw everything off, and for that reason I'd go national.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Since I have so little time, let me go back to asking the two of you to answer the question I asked earlier, if you feel like answering it, about the role of organizations that do the facilitating, promoting, and coordinating.

Ms. Worton is keen to answer. Go ahead.

Ms. Jane Worton: It's time. It's money. There's one extra piece. It's actually really difficult to do advocacy work or to be seen to be doing advocacy work when you are also applying for contracts from that government, and that is one of the pieces we hear quite frequently. Front-line service delivery organizations feel that they will be penalized for doing what they consider to be advocacy.

Hon. Geoff Regan: The real question or the debate is this. Why should the Government of Canada fund the groups that do the facilitating, promoting, and coordinating? That's what I'd like to clarify for the government.

Ms. Jane Worton: We are rooted in the community and we're engaging with all sectors, and we have the time to be able to be a

point of contact for the governments—to be able to say, here are some of the issues. We can identify the key issues, and then the government can take those up into policy.

Hon. Geoff Regan: The thing I am looking for here is this. In order for the direct service delivery to happen, why is it essential that groups like yours or groups that are doing these kinds of coordinating and advocacy functions be funded? That's really the essence of it.

You can finish, but I'm out of time.

Ms. Jane Worton: I don't know if anybody else has something to add. From my perspective, we're bringing a number of players together. It's preventing duplication. It's ensuring a continuity of service. We're able to discuss policy together. We're able to bridge some of the sectoral gaps, look at all three levels that have had a horizontal and vertical approach to policy development and service delivery.

Ms. Norma Strachan: There are advisory services to government as well. We're providing a service to government. I just need to clarify that this aspect is not getting any funding from either the federal or provincial governments—for the role that we play in advocacy.

Ms. Jane Worton: We also are primarily funded by community organizations, foundations.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I guess I have literacy on the brain.

The Chair: Thank you.

We are going to move to Madame Savoie, for four minutes.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Okay, I'll speak quickly.

In my riding office, we meet people who have difficulties accessing employment, from students who are struggling with huge debts to people just being able to access some kind of training. Jane, I think it was you who mentioned the supports that are missing, that are not reflected in policy. I am wondering if you, or whoever mentioned it, would elaborate on that. I'm sure there is a lot more to say on that.

Ms. Jane Worton: The specific example I was thinking of was a phone. In Victoria, on basic income assistance you receive \$510 a month. I know that's a provincial issue, but this touches on the importance of national welfare standards. The average cost of a bachelor suite is \$515 a month, so before you even get to paying for transportation, clothing, and food, you are already in the hole. Of course, people are not accessing the average cost. We know that a phone is a key issue for employability. It's not just having a phone number for people to put on their resumés, but also we hear quite frequently that people who have been out of the labour force for a long time, when they mess up at a job once, are scared to go back. We hear from employers that because retention is such a key issue across the country, but especially in B.C. right now, they'd be happy to call their workers and say, it's okay to come back in; you messed up, don't worry. But they don't have a phone.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Let me drill down, because you used the word "reflected". It hit me in the back of the head. What would that look like in terms of policy? I understand the problem. But what would that look like? I'm sure we could talk about many others.

● (0955)

Ms. Jane Worton: It's ensuring that individuals and families who are looking for work and have work have sufficient dollars to be able to conduct that employment search that's necessary, so it's dollars through that. Then also looking at each of those key supports, I would say, would be a good way of looking at it, and then looking at the programs and services to ensure that those are provided. I would say that the majority of individual supports are not provided, but it's probably dollars to the individual.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Did you want to respond?

Ms. Shyla Dutt: I'd just like to put on the record that what we'd love to see is more of the decision-making and program granting, etc., decentralized to the regional offices and that they be given authority to make those decisions. Right now—

Ms. Denise Savoie: You're talking about Service Canada, for example—

Ms. Shyla Dutt: Or Heritage or any of them, because right now you wait for six months until it goes to Ottawa, and they don't even know the local conditions.

Ms. Denise Savoie: To return to the policy issue, people have talked about learner pathways. It's very difficult to navigate through the system. Would it be useful to have a single portal for learners? Is it even conceivable for the federal government to work with provincial governments on an initiative like that?

Ms. Jane Worton: I'm sorry, can I add one thing to the question you asked earlier?

Ms. Denise Savoie: Okay, maybe it wasn't clear.

People have told us, or certainly me, that they have difficulty accessing training opportunities. They don't know where to go. There are many different offices. Would it be useful to have one single portal?

Ms. Shyla Dutt: Do you mean something like a training authority?

Ms. Jane Worton: I would say instead that we should adopt a policy that every door is the right door. As an example of what I mean, Victoria has 13 different municipalities; when we concentrate

all the services in one place, it presents a huge transportation dilemma for people.

Instead, I'd like to see a way to integrate services, so that when somebody comes to my office with a question about housing, I can also refer them to employment services. What that requires—and this is answering the earlier question about the importance of the facilitative role—is for all of us to know what each other is doing, and because programs come in and out of funding, we need to be in contact regularly. If we all know what each other is doing, we can perform those key referral services, so that if you access food at my organization, I can help you get housing.

Ms. Denise Savoie: That's a great answer. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. That's all the time we have. We're going to move to our last questioner for today in this round.

Ms. Yelich is next, for four minutes, please.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Thank you.

If workplace practice is a priority, should we be having that as the number one barrier to employability, as opposed to some of the other barriers that have been mentioned? Is this an important one?

I also wanted to ask a few questions about the actual part that the federal and provincial recognition of credentials plays. As you know, this is a huge problem in the federal government in our goal to try to recognize credentials, because of the governing bodies and the provinces again.

Geoff asked a good question about the provincial and federal bodies. It's very difficult to get the provinces to go on board. How do you do that if ten provinces and three territories don't really agree on where the federal government should be? Then you put in those who have to recognize credentials. Right now we have some success with the Red Seal program for recognizing trades. That's been helpful, but there are many more out there—about 200.

I'd like to also pose this question to you. How are we going to get these trades and skills recognized when everybody has found this difficulty? There are perhaps 400 different governing bodies across the country. How do you bully the provinces? How do you bully these people into recognizing credentials?

● (1000)

Ms. Shyla Dutt: I can give you a hopeful answer to that.

We were involved with helping one of the organizations that delivered the Skills Connect program very successfully. What we found was that all the local, provincial, and federal bodies were very happy to come around the table. Maybe that's because our skills shortage in B.C. and Alberta right now is so serious that they're absolutely desperately looking for the skills. We had no trouble getting them to the table.

In other words, the point is whether it meets their needs. We have to get away from looking at it in an adversarial way—as long as you have minimum standards and the federal government has established a coordinating agency, we should just get on with the job, rather than constantly getting mired in jurisdictional issues, because at the practical level we've found that they've come to the table. For instance, looking at the construction trades, the B.C. Construction Association, the local trades organizations, and each of the trades associations all came around the table, including the colleges delivering everything from ESL to trades upgrading.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I'd like to interject, because you're right, you've got them around the table. It's been very successful and very well done. We applaud that. B.C. and Alberta have come to an agreement for labour mobility between the two provinces. We applaud that.

Our provincial government in Saskatchewan should be part of it. They have refused. So it seems that when we get the professions on board, then we lose the provincial body, which wants to sit back and watch this. Their main complaint or main problem with that was they wanted to see if it was good for the public good. So as federal representatives here today, we know you can see how difficult it is, because when you get the professions, you don't get your provincial governments; when you get the provincial governments, you don't seem to have the professions. But across the country, the bigger issue is the professions. You might have done this well in B.C. and Alberta—and you have.

Perhaps we'll look at some of the problems in other provinces, which have been talked about, and maybe this isn't as big a problem as we think, but it certainly is when it comes to a referral agency for credentials.

Ms. Shyla Dutt: I've been in the change management business for a long time. It's not an easy task; you're constantly balancing one group, and sometimes it's just as simple as a personality who makes it tough, as they won't come to the table. But I think if you can use some best practices and say that so-and-so is coming to the table, I know it's a technique that works, because people want to keep up with the Joneses, for lack of a better term. So if some key

organizations come to the table, or just a number of the smaller ones, it's very tough to be the odd person out. So I think it's a matter of having the right techniques.

I agree with you that it has been absolutely tough in the past to get the professional bodies to the table. Suddenly we find a change in atmosphere, and I'm hopeful, given the demographics and the spiralling downwards of the workforce, and the skills shortage—which is going to become a Canadian one in a few years—that perhaps we've got that trend on our side. So maybe we should be looking ahead to see what works.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I guess I just wanted to give you some peace. In your opening remarks, you said you don't see foreign recognition of credentials happening. Things are happening, but it's slow, because we're trying to get everyone on board.

Ms. Shyla Dutt: It is.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: That is why I asked about the uniqueness of B.C., because B.C. and Alberta have shown they are anxious. Saskatchewan is anxious, but they don't want to come on board yet.

Ms. Shyla Dutt: Only once the skills shortage hits. Until then, it was absolutely—

And we haven't even talked about labour in this equation yet.

The Chair: We are out of time, actually. We've gone a few minutes over.

I do want to thank the witnesses for being here. As you understand, we believe employability is a huge issue in Canada right now, and it's only going to get worse. That is why we hope we can continue to shed light on this and make recommendations to the government.

It's been very interesting, as we started in the east, in St. John's, Newfoundland; Halifax; Montreal; and Toronto; and today we're in Vancouver; and tomorrow will be in Calgary and then Saskatoon. The different regional perspectives are good, because some things done regionally are actually good ideas that we may include in our final recommendations to the government.

So we do want to thank you for taking the time. We know you're busy individuals, doing lots of things, but thanks for taking the time to travel to be with us here today. Once again, we believe this is a pretty important study we're undertaking, and your input is greatly appreciated.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.