HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

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

HUMA • NUMBER 013 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, February 25, 2014

Chair

Mr. Phil McColeman

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

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● (0845)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome and good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

This is meeting number 13 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Today is Tuesday, February 25, 2014, and we are continuing our study concerning opportunities for aboriginal persons in the workforce. Today we have a split panel of witnesses to provide their testimony.

Before we move on to the introduction of the witnesses, I'd like to inform committee members on two fronts.

We will need 15 minutes for committee business at the end of our session, which will necessitate cutting each of the panels down to 50-minute instead of 60-minute panels, and that will cut the amount of questioning from members.

Second, a document has been distributed. It's in front of you in a blue folder. It is not translated. I would like the committee's approval to accept the document in a single language; otherwise we will remove it from the table. It was provided by one of our first panel witnesses.

Do I see any—?

Madame Groguhé.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Chair, would it be possible to obtain a French translation of this document? We would be most grateful to have it in French.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. So you are accepting it today?

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Yes, for now it's okay.

The Chair: It's okay for today. Okay, thank you for that.

Let's move on to our witnesses.

First I would like to introduce Beverly Blanchard, the acting director of labour market development for the Native Women's Association of Canada. Dan Peters is the coordinator of partnership and outreach for the Native Women's Association of Canada.

The second group is the National Association of Friendship Centres. We have Jeffrey Cyr, the executive director, and Sonya Howard, their policy analyst.

Third in the first panel is the Métis National Council. David Chartrand is the vice-president, and David Boisvert is the senior policy adviser.

Thank you for being here.

We'll move to Beverly Blanchard as the first presenter.

You have 10 minutes.

Ms. Beverly Blanchard (Acting Director, Labour Market Development, Native Women's Association of Canada): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. We're extremely pleased to be here to give to you our experiences with aboriginal programs in the area of workforce employment and training.

No one has a crystal ball to accurately forecast what the Canadian economy will be like in the 2015 to 2020 time range. Historically, there have been forecasts that have painted a rosy picture of economic growth and stability, only to be revised after the fact to reflect significant downturns in the economy and changes in labour market trends. The current interrelatedness of Canada within the global economy has also created an environment in which economic models can no longer be forecasted in isolation.

Over the course of the past 20 years, the troubling socio-economic outcomes of aboriginal women have been well documented. The multiple barriers they face in entering and retaining employment in the labour market are numerous. When comparing non-aboriginal women with their male counterparts, the statistics all demonstrate that aboriginal women have lower income levels and work in lower occupational categories.

The most recent release of the 2011 national household survey revealed that gaps in the labour market outcomes between aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities continue to persist, and this is particularly heightened when aboriginal women are looked at as a separate category.

Highlights of these statistics as they relate to aboriginal women and the labour market are as follows. Nearly twice as many aboriginal women as men have a university education. This translates into women accounting for 65% of the university-educated aboriginal labour force, compared with 52% among non-aboriginal people. For the Canadian population as a whole, approximately 57% of total university enrolments were female. This share is likely even higher in the case of aboriginal involvement.

Although aboriginal women have higher educational rates, education and health care tend to be the predominant fields of study. This gender bias persists in the broader labour market as well, in which Canadian women are heavily over-represented in areas related to the public sector while men are concentrated in those high-growth industries related to resource extraction and construction, industries that have higher levels of income. Among aboriginal peoples, this gender divide is even more glaring. Females represent 82.3% of aboriginal employees in health care, education, and public administration, compared with 70.4% among non-aboriginal employees.

For aboriginal women, this high concentration of employment in the public sector likely points to other barriers that are impeding their access to the labour market. Since there is no concrete research, one can assume based on anecdotal information that some of the barriers could be lack of job opportunities due to geographical barriers, discriminatory hiring practices, and poor labour market choices for making informed career decisions.

Among aboriginal people aged 25 to 64, 28.9% had no certificate, diploma, or degree, while the proportion of non-aboriginal people in the same group was 12.1%. The proportion of aboriginal people aged 25 to 64 with a high school diploma or equivalent as their highest level of educational attainment was 22.8%. In comparison, 23.2% of non-aboriginal people in the same age group had a high school diploma or equivalent as the highest qualification.

The proportion of aboriginal women aged 35 to 44 who had university degrees in 2011 was 13.6%, compared with 10.2% of those aged 55 to 64. Aboriginal women have a tendency to go back to school in later years, and most of our programming is directed at youth. This poses a bit of a barrier for older aboriginal women, who aren't really that much older, when you consider that the category is for those aged 35 and upwards.

Among aboriginal men, there is no difference between the age groups in the proportions who held university degrees. It was 7.6% for men aged both 35 to 44 and 55 to 65.

In 2011, younger aboriginal women and men were more likely to have college diplomas than older ones.

● (0850)

Among aboriginal women aged 35 to 44, 27.1% had a college diploma in 2011 compared with 21.4% of those aged 55 to 64. With a proportion of 18.3%, aboriginal men aged 35 to 44 were also more likely to have college diplomas than those aged 55 to 64, where the proportion was 14.1%.

There's a shift that has been taking place over the past 20 years as we have more aboriginal youth and more individuals attending colleges, universities, and gaining degrees. It has been said that education is the key to higher incomes.

In some cases, it's not necessarily key to higher incomes because we have multiple barriers that do play into the whole process, namely being able to be mobile and move to different areas. We have those issues, and we also have the issue that despite your university degree, it may not be the one that's necessary for the qualifications that are being sought after within the Canadian labour market.

NWAC has been delivering the ASETS program, which is the aboriginal skills and employment training strategy, since 2011. As a national ASETS holder, we deliver the strategy through a network of provincial and territorial member associations. Located throughout Canada, these PTMAs, through subagreements with NWAC, deliver the program at the regional grassroots level.

Where we do not have a PTMA or where a PTMA is not ready to deliver the program, NWAC, through its labour market development department, delivers special projects or works with the PTMA to increase its capacity. We have done this with quite a few of our PTMAs. In one case in Saskatchewan, we delivered truck driving training to aboriginal women. In another, in New Brunswick, we worked with a reserve in terms of dealing with training in the area of early childhood education and health practitioners.

Our ASETS programming primarily provides funding to assist all aboriginal women, and when I say all, I mean that we are status blind. We work with Métis, first nations, non-status, and Inuit in employment and training initiatives. It is based on individual needs as well as the community needs reflecting regional realities.

The types of employment and training interventions we provide include individual training purchases where we will purchase for an individual education, such as college or individual training in terms of needing a course to finish their degree. We have job creation partnerships. We have self-employment benefits where we can assist an individual in creating a small business. We have targeted wage subsidies. We just recently signed a spirit of cooperation with a corporation that has offices across Canada and was looking at retaining some of their aboriginal workforce. They work both through the south and the north, and they work with Nav Canada in their training programs. We are currently in negotiations with them regarding targeted wage subsidies to ensure that they can retain the employees. We also do community and group training.

Since its inception, NWAC has worked to uphold the three pillars of the ASETS program. In the area of accountability and results, we have implemented tighter fiscal and financial controls with our subagreement holders in order to ensure our accountability to the Government of Canada.

In addition, we have transitioned to a more user-friendly database system in order to effectively track and report on our training and employment successes. Over the course of the past two years, we have sought out partnerships with a variety of educational institutions, federal government employers, such as Correctional Services Canada, and first nation governments to provide aboriginal women with enhanced employment and training opportunities.

As we enter the final year of the programming, we have stepped up our efforts to seek out private sector partnerships as we believe that partnerships are a stable ingredient in ensuring employment and training opportunities for aboriginal women. We also recognize that in order to develop the appropriate labour market matches, we must make employers aware that aboriginal women are a viable option to their employee requirements.

● (0855)

The linking of aboriginal women to demand-driven skills development has posed some difficulty for us, but once again we've recognized that in order for us to fulfill this government priority, we must develop partnerships with a variety of public and private sector employers. We must recognize, however, that although some aboriginal women can match these skills, we need training and employment options for aboriginal women who are facing multiple barriers to gaining access.

To date our program has assisted 463 clients. Of these, 111 have gained meaningful employment following their training interventions and 72 have returned to their studies.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Blanchard.

Mr. Cyr, you have 10 minutes, sir.

Mr. Jeffrey Cyr (Executive Director, National Association of Friendship Centres): Thank you.

Mr. Chair and distinguished members of the standing committee, thank you for this opportunity to present on opportunities for aboriginal persons in the workforce.

First, l wish to acknowledge the Algonquin nation, whose traditional territory we are on today.

As you know, my name is Jeffrey Cyr. I'm a Métis from Manitoba and the executive director of the National Association of Friendship Centres.

Today l'd like to share three things with you.

One, l would like to give you a brief overview of the friendship centre movement and the urban aboriginal population of Canada.

Two, I'd like to present you with a proposed effective service delivery model designed to enhance and improve labour market opportunities for aboriginal people living in urban environments in Canada.

Three, time permitting, I'd like to share some of the best practices that friendship centres have developed over the last 40 years of developing and sustaining partnerships with all levels of government and building bridges with industry to deliver labour market programing to Canada's urban aboriginal people.

Let me begin. Seventy-five per cent of Canada's aboriginal people live off-reserve. Nearly 60% of those people live in urban areas. Furthermore, the aboriginal population is growing at a faster rate than the non-aboriginal population. This means there are approximately 840,000 aboriginal people living in Canadian cities.

The Canadian aboriginal population is also young—we've heard it from your previous witness—with approximately 50% under the age of 24. There is a tremendous pool of aboriginal youth in this country wanting to acquire the skills to find employment. Not only does this represent a growing segment of Canada's labour pool, but it is also a segment seeking to develop the resiliency for real, meaningful, and lasting careers. It's the topic I keep coming back to of economic resiliency.

As Canada' s original and community-driven urban aboriginal strategy, the friendship centre network is Canada's most significant off-reserve aboriginal service delivery infrastructure. With 2.3 million client points of contact nationwide, 119 friendship centres in cities and towns across Canada delivered over 1,490 programs and services to approximately 840,000 urban aboriginal people in 2011 and 2012. That's regardless of a person's nationhood, status, or band affiliation.

As you may have heard, under a recent urban aboriginal strategy funding realignment by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, the National Association of Friendship Centres now has the responsibility to deliver a further 43 million dollars' worth of programs and services out of a total of $50.8 million under the new urban aboriginal strategy. So in partnership with the Government of Canada, we are developing a new model for service delivery under this new aboriginal strategy. This realigned UAS funding helps friendship centres to not only increase services but also, more importantly, helps build and expand on partnerships between all levels of government, organizations, urban aboriginal communities, and other stakeholders to support urban aboriginal people taking part in Canada' s economy.

For over 40 years friendship centres have been acting as brokers—and I'll come back to that term—for Canada' s urban aboriginal peoples by identifying a pool of urban aboriginal labour and connecting them with the right education and training to help guide individuals to the right jobs. Friendship centres helped over 28,000 urban and off-reserve aboriginal people take part in the labour market in 2012 and 2013.

Friendship centres have achieved lasting client success using a holistic, culturally based approach, supporting individual development with a suite of wraparound services, including, for example, on-site child care in Val d'Or, addictions counselling in Yellowknife, or on-campus mentorship at Grande Prairie Friendship Centre's regional college location.

What makes friendship centres unique is not only the range of wraparound services delivered through an extensive network but also the fact that centres have over 60 years of experience working directly with Canada' s urban aboriginal people.

Just as important as wraparound services has been the ability of friendship centres to form deep partnerships with small, medium, and large enterprises, industry, the resource sector, colleges, high schools, trades bodies, chambers of commerce, and business associations to connect clients to careers.

Drawing on the friendship centres' proven, successful history in labour market program delivery, the National Association of Friendship Centres proposes an enhancement to urban aboriginal labour market delivery. Essentially, the friendship centre labour market strategy—which is in English only, but I can table it with you, if you would like, and have the translation come later—expands and streamlines urban aboriginal labour market programming by supporting 85 friendship centres across this country to continue doing what they do best, and that's to be brokers.

In this broker role, friendship centres connect Canada' s urban aboriginal people with the right education, training, and wraparound supports, not only to help guide individuals to the right jobs but also to build long-lasting and meaningful careers.

● (0900)

This model would allow for the harmonization of existing wraparound services provided by friendship centres from municipal, provincial, and federal levels, like aboriginal head starts, child care services, education and literacy-related services, and a broad array of social supports ranging from health to housing.

Friendship centres are not interested in duplicating services done more effectively by others. This model does not focus on specialized skills training. Rather, it draws on the friendship centre movement's pre-existing partnerships with service organizations, training and education institutions, trades and apprenticeship bodies, industry, businesses, and other aboriginal organizations like ASETS holders, which we have around this table.

This model proposes one contribution agreement administered nationally through the National Association of Friendship Centres to provincial and territorial associations for local friendship centres service and program delivery, and I've shared the model directly with the departmental officials already.

This model would provide a unified program and reporting structure that can reach 85 communities from coast to coast to coast through a well-established, well-governed, and accountable network that has over 18 years of experience delivering and reporting on nationally managed programs like the previous cultural connections for aboriginal youth and Young Canada Works for the Government of Canada.

Further, this model is based on a flexible delivery approach that is responsive to national, regional, local, and remote community realities. At the heart of this model are partnerships. Partners from private sector, industry, education and training institutions, chambers of commerce, youth representatives, and other organizations would be actively engaged in program management and refinement through labour market tables at the friendship centre, regional and national levels.

The national partnership table we are proposing would identify national and regional labour market trends, and identify ways they and others in their sectors could support urban aboriginal peoples' participation in Canada's economy. The national table would represent the NAFC, the private sector, industry, trade unions, educational institutions, government, and aboriginal youth.

The friendship centre network is inherently scalable. We can say with certainty that at least 30 centres across Canada would be ready to go within a year. An additional 35 centres could be effectively up and delivering labour market programming by the end of year two. A final additional 20 centres could be up by the end of year three. So if we want to do ASETS and labour market programming delivery differently, then there is a way. This phased approach would ensure there is adequate time and support for capacity development and any systems, reporting structure, and implementations necessary. We have reams of experience in doing this. We do it every day now across the country.

We know this phased approach would work because friendship centres have already delivered federal labour market programming under pathways to success, which is the ASETS and AHRDS precursor. Further, friendship centres across the country are currently already delivering labour market programming with a mix of provincial and federal funding.There are 13 subagreements that friendship centres are delivering now.

This model would also help ensure that there are few, if any, gaps in service delivery during any transitions periods, as friendship centres across the country can draw on their formal and informal partnerships with their local ASETS holders. These partnerships are already in place across the country, be it formally through third-party funding agreements, working together to deliver training programs, housing an ASETS employment counsellor at the friendship centre, or informally by referring clients to friendship centres or ASETS holders based on the client's needs.

I recognize that there are many examples of excellent labour market programming already in place across the country, and I know we'll hear more of these examples today from some of the other presenters. The friendship centre network has the partnerships, wraparound services, infrastructure, and experience necessary to enhance existing programming and expand opportunities for urban aboriginal Canadians to develop the tools, skills, and resiliency for meaningful engagement with the labour market. In my last interaction with the Prime Minister, we discussed how best to use the friendship centre network fully to deliver more services to more urban aboriginal people in Canada. We intend to follow through with that.

Thanks very much.

● (0905)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cyr.

We will go now to Mr. Chartrand for 10 minutes, sir.

Mr. David Chartrand (Vice-President, Métis National Council): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to start off again by thanking the committee for allowing us to be here today. I apologize that our presentation is not translated into French. I do apologize. With more time, we'll make sure that happens in the future.

We've given all of you a kit, and in the kit you'll find the full presentation of my full report, which has more detailed statistics about the rise of GDP and the investment and how it changes the market not only for the Métis but for Canada. You'll also find my speaking notes, which I'll try to keep to 10 minutes, as well as a Calgary chamber study and Métis works. So when you have the opportunity, please take the time to read it.

I'd like to acknowledge our president, Clément Chartier, who is here, and our five provincial Métis affiliates who deliver the ASETS program. We had a meeting here yesterday so this was great timing.

With regard to national Métis women, we have a national Métis women's organization that belongs, in fact, to our Métis National Council board, and provincial Métis affiliates from Ontario west, who are full participants in our governance, in our infrastructure of services. It should also be noted that although my presentation will zero in on the ASETS program pertaining to the Department of Employment and Social Development Canada, the Métis governments of Ontario west to British Columbia deliver a wide spectrum of services, from housing to health programs, to mandated provincial child services, to colleges, to educational and economic development, and so on.

It's down to my speaking notes. There is no more important matter for Métis people than securing a better future for themselves and their families. That is what the aboriginal labour market development is all about. Our presentation is a little too long, so as I said, I put it into speaking notes.

The Métis are one of Canada's aboriginal peoples. Métis are not just mixed bloods, a product of unions between Europeans and first nations. In the territory of the Old Northwest, a region we call the Métis nation homeland today, we constitute a unique people, distinct from both Europeans and first nations—a Métis nation.

The Chair: Mr. Chartrand, could I just ask you to slow down?

Mr. David Chartrand: Okay, I'm thinking about my 10 minutes. Let me squeeze in an extra minute and I'll be very pleased. I'll slow it down. Thank you very much.

The Chair: We're having some translation issues, sir. Would you slow it down a little bit. Thank you.

Mr. David Chartrand: The Métis National Council was formed to represent the Métis nation at the national and international levels. It is composed of five provincial Métis governing members: the Manitoba Métis Federation, of which I'm president and also vice-president, nationally; the Métis Nation of Alberta; the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan; the Métis Nation of Ontario; and the Métis Nation British Columbia.

Each of the MNC's governing members have been involved in managing and delivering labour marketing programs to their respective constituencies since 1996. Only five of the 85 ASETS holders across Canada are MNC affiliates. Together, we currently receive $49.8 million per annum from the ASETS, less than 15.5% of the total ASETS budget, although we account for over 25% of Canada's aboriginal population.

Up to this point, federal aboriginal labour market development strategies have been renewed in one form or another every five years. We believe it is critical for the Government of Canada to renew the strategy once again and I shall explain why.

In terms of the continuing relevance of aboriginal labour market development, Canada has an aging population, with ever-increasing numbers of the baby boom generation set to retire in the next decade or so. Canada's aboriginal population, on the other hand, is a very young population. It is also the fastest growing population. While the growth rate of the Canada's labour force is expected to slow—and in some scenarios, actually turn negative over the next 15 years—Statistics Canada's latest aboriginal population projections indicate that Canada's aboriginal population could reach 2.2 million by 2031, a 57% increase over the current levels.

In the prairie provinces, Métis account for from 33% to 44% of the aboriginal population, and in Ontario and British Columbia, roughly 30%. Métis are a very significant part of the aboriginal population in all the regions represented by the MNC and its provincial governing members.

We are also the fastest growing segment of Canada's aboriginal population. Between 1996 and 2011, Métis identity counts increased by 121% nationally. An important awakening is taking place. People who had submerged their Métis origins for so long, as a result of over a century of political and cultural repression, are now finding the courage to stand up and be counted as Métis. There can be no doubt that Métis constitute a very significant part of Canada's aboriginal population today and will continue to be a significant part of that population tomorrow.

It makes sense that a growing and youthful aboriginal population should help fill the shortfall in the labour market due to the attrition of older workers and the growth of the Canadian economy. But to have this happen some major obstacles have to be overcome. The fact of the matter is that aboriginal peoples—first nations, Métis, and Inuit—share a history of having been marginalized and excluded from the mainstream economy. This is reflected today in lower levels of educational attainment, higher proportions of the population outside the labour force or unemployed, lower skill levels, lower incomes, and fewer job opportunities. This is where aboriginal labour market development initiatives become very important.

In terms of a successful strategy, we are not starting from scratch. As far as the Métis are concerned, federal strategies since 1996 have succeeded in two major ways.

First, an infrastructure has been put in place that reaches aboriginal people.

If you want aboriginal people to participate in labour market programs, two major conditions have to be met: first, delivery mechanisms have to be specific to each of the aboriginal peoples of Canada, first nations, Inuit, and Métis; and second, they must reach them in the communities where they live. Programs must be delivered by institutions with which the community is familiar and consider their own.

Since 1996, federal aboriginal labour market development programs have, in fact, been delivered on a distinctions-based basis, and that's a very important aspect. In the case of the MNC, labour market programs are delivered to Métis in Ontario by the Métis Nation of Ontario; in Manitoba, by the Manitoba Métis Federation; in Saskatchewan, by the Gabriel Dumont Institute, which is a college; in Alberta, by the Rupertsland Institute; and in British Columbia by the Métis Nation British Columbia.

Each is a province-wide organization with a network of offices and delivery sites throughout the province. In total, there are 49 delivery sites providing labour market programs and services to Métis in the Métis homeland.

This is important because, across the Métis homeland, 45% of Métis live in what Statistics Canada classifies as “small urban centres” or in rural areas. Another 42% live in large urban centres, and 12.5% in medium population centres. There's a half of a per cent missing, but those are the ones who live on reserve. We have the infrastructure in place to reach our people wherever they live.

Second, programs are achieving results.

Aboriginal people are not all the same. For example, in the case of Métis, more of our young people complete high school than is the case for Inuit and first nations, although proportionately much fewer than in the non-aboriginal population.

● (0910)

The 1996 census figures showed, however, that a smaller percentage of our people had university degrees, 4.1%. That was the case even for first nations at 4.5%. Métis do not have access to the post-secondary assistance programs that Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada provides to first nations and Inuit post-secondary students. To address the situation, we negotiated special provisions in our labour market contribution agreement that allows us to create endowment funds, fund clients for courses up to 64 weeks in length, and support apprenticeship training for the full duration of the apprenticeships. Only our Métis agreements have these agreements.

Métis endowment funds totalling $32 million have now been established at major universities and colleges in Manitoba, Alberta, and Ontario. These endowments have been created on a matching dollar-for-dollar basis with post-secondary institutions. To date they have generated over $4.8 million in revenue, which has gone to provide bursaries to close to 4,000 Métis students. It will continue to provide bursaries for our post-secondary students well into the future, surpassing the initial investment.

Most new jobs require post-secondary education and many university degrees. We want our people to succeed in the labour market, so we support our clients in a course of up to two years in duration to enable them to obtain college and university certificates and diplomas. This is not training for the sake of training, but rather the best way to ensure that clients obtain credentials that will lead to meaningful employment.

Employment remains the ultimate objective as the key measure of program success. Since the beginning of ASETS in 2010 to December 31, 2013, we have together served 9,945 clients of whom 2,221 were still in the process of completing their interventions as of December 31. Of the remaining 7,724 who completed what is known as an action plan, approximately 58% had found employment within 12 weeks and 22% had returned to school, which translates into an 80% success rate. That is not failure, my friends, but success.

Moving forward, spending on aboriginal labour market development is an investment. A number of independent studies have been published in recent years, showing the fiscal impact over the long-term of investing in improving educational and related labour force outcomes for aboriginal people. I encourage you to read the longer version later, and you'll see what the study concludes in increased GDP and so forth, if Métis people are given an extra opportunity. They are cited in our presentation. The results are truly astonishing.

Investing in aboriginal education and skills development is a win-win proposition. It improves the lives of our people. It raises income. It enables first nations, Métis, and Inuit to address Canadian labour market needs. It adds to GDP and increases tax revenues.

Moving forward, we've set out five points of our current federal labour market strategy that could be improved. Métis should no longer be excluded from one important element of the ASETS strategy, which is the support for child care currently only available to first nations and Inuit. It's not available to us. A one-size-fits-all approach will not work. Labour market strategies must be adjusted to the realities of each of the aboriginal peoples of Canada. This means changing the current approach, the strategic planning, and adjusting the terms of the contribution agreements to reflect the realities of each of the aboriginal peoples of Canada.

The Government of Canada must do more to encourage provinces and territories and the private sector to partner with ASETS agreement holders. Although we have had success with partnerships, the Government of Canada should do more to promote ASETS to the business community. We'd like to discuss this with regard to how an aboriginal component could be built into the proposed jobs grant. We believe that provinces, which have done next to nothing to partner with us, should be required in the next generation of LMAs to work with asset holders to optimize delivery of aboriginal labour market programs, including for the Métis. We've echoed that loud and clear, that the provinces have not included us in any of these discussions that are taking place on job grants, yet they're saying the aboriginal people are benefiting. I've yet to see that anywhere in the Métis homeland.

I'll conclude shortly, Mr. Chair. There must be some recognition of the rising costs of education and the burgeoning aboriginal populations. More funding is needed and rather than cap funding levels, an escalator should be built into the program. A more balanced approach must be taken to the accountability regime imposed on ASETS holders. Finally, ASETS and its predecessors have provided the Government of Canada and the aboriginal people of Canada with the basic framework to address aboriginal labour market issues. Programs have been successful, but certain improvements can be made. On behalf of the Métis nation, we can hopefully state that this has been one of the best programs—I'll repeat myself, one of the best programs—we have ever been involved with. It has proven itself over and over. We must continue to improve labour market outcomes for our people and the process will benefit Canada as a whole.

Thank you.

● (0915)

The Chair: Thank you. Mr. Chartrand.

I did give you an additional almost two minutes there, sir, so thank you for slowing down.

Welcome back to the committee, Ms. Crowder. You have the first round of questions from the NDP for five minutes.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses. I only have five minutes, so this is going to be tough because you've all presented very good information.

I think you're probably well aware that this committee has actually done previous studies, which I sat on, where we heard from resource industries about the importance of first nations, Inuit, and Métis to the future workforce, and encouraged the committee at that time to take a look at continuing to support programs like the ASETS program.

Mr. Chartrand, you alluded to this, and so did Ms. Blanchard.

There are a couple of issues that I've heard consistently from ASETS holders. First of all is the lack of adequate child care, because as Ms. Blanchard pointed out, oftentimes students returning are older students and they have family responsibilities. Mr. Chartrand, you pointed out the Métis nation doesn't have child care in its agreements.

The second piece that I've heard is that there is inadequate funding with regards to labour market research to make sure that your students are connecting with the jobs that are out there.

The third thing I've heard consistently is lack of adequate resources, and that the funding agreements haven't substantially changed over the last decade or so.

The fourth part, which Mr. Chartrand alluded to, were the challenges with forming partnerships, particularly with businesses, but also that there's an absence of accountability with regard to provincial governments stepping up and recognizing those targets.

There was one more, the reporting burden.

Can you comment on those points, and would you have specific recommendations to address that?

I'll start with Ms. Blanchard.

● (0920)

Ms. Beverly Blanchard: In terms of funding for research, you raise a very good point. The problem with a lot of the labour market information is that it's dated. Even in terms of finding information to speak about the changes that are happening within the aboriginal population, we have stuff from 2006, and it's changed. We can't accurately reflect that.

The other is in terms of labour trends. In some cases we are directing students into educational tracks that are not going to produce jobs. We have to look at better ways to forecast what's coming down the pipe in terms of labour market programming.

In terms of partnerships, what we have discovered at NWAC is that we also have to become very proactive in getting out and letting individual companies and corporations and governments at all levels know that we have training dollars and are willing to move forward to put together partnerships that are mutually beneficial for all groups.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thanks. I'll move on because my five minutes includes your responses.

Mr. Cyr, can you respond to any of those points?

Mr. Jeffrey Cyr: Sure. The Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres runs an ASETS program. We have several running special projects fund, or SPF, projects as well as ourselves here at our national office. One thing that's quite clear is that there is still a heavy reporting burden without a lot of clarity. In our opinion, it needs to be simplified and a uniform reporting platform needs to come into place. Perhaps Mr. Chartrand can comment, but I believe that the federal government is not pursuing contact for the reporting system that was previously in place in favour of having individual agreement holders pursue it on their own, which I'm not sure makes for greater clarity or not.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Contact for...has created great problems.

Mr. Jeffrey Cyr: Yes, I would agree. I've seen it and it would.

On the research side, there's clearly a gap between what I call the supply side of the urban aboriginal labour market and the demand side of industry and jobs. I think that's something that probably is going to come up in the Canada job grant. It would be great to see how, as Mr. Chartrand pointed out, the aboriginal side gets portrayed within the job grant. I don't think there's yet enough detail to say.

At the National Association of Friendship Centres we have an urban aboriginal knowledge network, which is a $2.5 million SSHRC grant, which is looking at issues in the urban environment for aboriginal people.

I'll try to be quicker. I see you looking at me.

We've also made overtures toward the department to put in place under their special projects initiative looking at the supply side of the labour market, data collection on that. It's actually incredibly weak, and it's very dispersed. It's not uniform at all. So in there, there needs to be research and the ability at a local level to connect supply and demand.

I'll stop there, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cyr.

Now on to Mrs. McLeod.

● (0925)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I have to make a quick comment. Although I know that we're really focused on natural resource industries and opportunities, I want to still give a shout out to the people who decide to commit to health care and education. We talked about there being a lot of women who head into that field. It certainly pays better than it used to and continues, of course, to provide absolutely critically important opportunities for the men and the women who choose that path.

I'm going to focus and maybe take it from the macro to the micro level, because to be quite frank, I think it can get a little confusing. Let's say we have a mine that's proposed for North Thompson Valley. We have a very strong, active Métis association there. We have a friendship centre, an ASETS holder, and some provincial programs. Talk to me about how a young woman—and in this we'll use a young woman who's now living in the Kamloops area—is going to decide which door to go through. Do we really have things that are overlapping too much?

I'll open that up to everyone, because it seems like we have BladeRunners, BCAMTA, and ASETS holders. So how does the individual young woman decide what she's going to do and where she's going to go?

I'll start with Ms. Blanchard.

Ms. Beverly Blanchard: I think one of the ways has to be that the ASETS holders have to market themselves so that individuals know that these services exist. I think there's a definite problem, not just with the ASETS holders but with the non-aboriginal government programming in that individuals don't know what's available to them. In order for that to be overcome, in some cases we have to start using social networks.

We have to start looking at the Internet in terms of reaching audiences and reaching the audiences that we are targeting to help. We also have to look at partnering with all the various players, because sometimes we can provide one form of training for somebody and one of the other ASETS holders, the friendship centres, or the provincial governments can provide something else.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Cyr, could you talk to that?

Mr. Jeffrey Cyr: Absolutely. I'll try to brief, Mr. Chair, in trying to get a word in.

Quite simply, that person would walk into what they know; aboriginal people tend to go where they know. Our experience is they'll either walk into the friendship centre or the Métis local they know. Otherwise, you're advertising to bring the young people in.

Friendship centres are excellent at what I call brokering. That's why they were created by aboriginal people for aboriginal people. You come in the door, and here's where you need to go. Here's the ASETS holder who is going to provide that linkage, that education, that training, or that skill if the friendship centre itself is not doing it. Then what usually happens is that young woman may also need child care, education, and housing, all those other wraparound services that I spoke about. That's where we come in and say, “Okay, here is the other set of services”.

One thing I want to be clear on is that we're not proposing to take away from ASETS holders who do their job well. We're quite clearly in the situation where we want to direct there. We're not going to recreate things that have taken 15 to 20 years to set up in terms of skills and training. So it's more of a directional service where people find out where they go. Where's the door? A lot of people will know friendship centres. They may know their Métis local. They'll walk in and now where do they go? So that referral service is what you're getting at in that capacity.

Mr. David Chartrand: Oh, wow, thank you.

In our system it's quite a simple process. In fact, if a woman walks through our door, we have an intervention system that would look to her skill set, where she's at right now, and what would she need. We'd also be sitting down with the union because when you deal with a bigger industry, the union's always involved, so you have to figure out how to make sure, because there are specific rules in a union. So we sit down with the union and establish the process of partnership to ensure that the young lady would find her position somewhere in there.

We have a mechanism where we sit down with the actual client and we establish all the necessary skills. Then we also partner with the mining industry in the sense of making sure of the area where the person would be needed most. We would then gear that person, and if we have to go to levels of trade to reach that particular level, then we'll work there.

Where the challenges lie are on the apprentice side because the provinces.... For example, I made reference that I was going to speak on job grants. There is no reference to aboriginal at all in the job grants transition; it's actually the provinces. In the past the province never had to collect data; we always collected data on every dollar that was invested in every student. Provinces did not collect data. I'm hoping that this time they'll be forced to collect data, because in the job grants that they're talking about on the apprentice, that lady would probably fit that position if the $5,000, $5,000, and $5,000 was available for long-term guaranteed employment.

From our perspective, as I've seen in evidence in my province, there is no relationship with the province when it comes to the so-called money, LMAs and LMDA money that comes into our province. There is no relationship with the Métis. So when this outcry comes that aboriginal people are losing out, that's not true, because we're not getting anything from that money. In fact, they tell us to use our own money, the federal money that we receive.

● (0930)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chartrand, I'm going to have to cut you off. Sorry, sir.

Now we'll go on to Mr. Cuzner for five minutes.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Thanks very much.

I appreciate that the three presentations were thorough. We do appreciate that, and I'll look forward to getting that supplemental document that you have there, Mr. Cyr.

I'll start with Mr. Boisvert and then go to the others. You're saying, in the Métis situation, it's clear that access to funding is the single largest barrier that's not allowing you to fully succeed as a nation.

Mr. David Chartrand: We're doing very well in the sense of the ASETS itself, where we've ranked the top 10 out of 85 holders in this country. We've ranked the top 10 for the last 15 years, and we're doing very well. Where the challenge lies, of course, is that we don't have child care, for example. There is no child care for us so we have to take whatever dollars we presently have and use that not just as a training investment to the private sector in our educational institutions, we have to use that also for child care. It diminishes the amount of dollars there. As pointed out earlier in the first question that was asked, there's never been an increase in this program, for several decades now. That's been a downfall. While everything else is increasing, the cost of living, etc., there's never been an increase. So it's been a massive challenge for that aspect of it.

I think, overall, there are so many different components that you'll see in our larger brief, where just the investment alone, both on the educational side and the employment side...how this country will benefit from the great rise in GDP in respect to the earnings and profits that'll come. It shows there, and I want to set out this point for everybody. We as Métis people paid $1.6 billion last year in taxes, so this is not a charity. This is our taxes that they've given back to us in some form or fashion. It's very important that's understood.

In general terms, it must also be noted—I would encourage every member around this table—this is one of the best programs that I've ever seen come out of Canada, and I've been in politics for a long time.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Great.

This is probably for Ms. Blanchard and Mr. Cyr. When we measure success for native women, for example, are we able to break down the success between those who are living in closer proximity to urban centres and those who are living in rural or remote communities? Are there those types of measurements out there? Anecdotally, we can see that some rural and remote sectors in the non-aboriginal community are facing very similar challenges. Might I be able to get some input as to whether or not that's being measured?

Ms. Beverly Blanchard: We haven't necessarily had any research that segments the marketplace and segments where the successes are aligned. We have individuals, and everything in success is deemed in terms of a point, the individual. The problem with a lot of the successes and the problem, as you say, with non-aboriginal communities, too, that are rural...and it's the proximity or the closeness to what you're calling an urban centre. Even within an urban centre you have major difficulties. If you look at Toronto, where in certain areas you have individuals living, it's very difficult to segment out that whole success pattern, and then you also have... where are the jobs? We have resource development that is happening now so we have some potentials and some possibilities there, but we also have a lot of communities, aboriginal and non-aboriginal, that are having the brain drain to urban centres like Toronto.

● (0935)

Mr. Jeffrey Cyr: I guess it all comes down to your definition of "success", first of all, exactly what you're going to measure. If your measure is quite simply an output of that person going through a program and getting a job, then that's fairly straightforward. You can use the national household survey or performance census data, a breakdown by data dissemination there. You can sort of get there. I'm not sure what that's telling you at the end of the day, though.

I would say that success is more likely long term. It's more likely longevity of a career path, or what I call economic resiliency. So how long has that person been in the economy? In what way do they participate? One of the problems with some of the measures coming out of government ASETS is kind of like that. It's an output measurement as opposed to a pure outcome measurement. So an output measurement wouldn't measure over a period of time, and that's a complicated thing to do. It's not easy. We do it under some of our youth programming to measure over periods of time. I think that's where it has to go because what you're looking for is what the demonstrable change is that we're making in the lives of aboriginal people.

So it may be okay to get a job for $140,000 working in the oil patch, but if you're out of that job in four years—you bought your shiny four-by-four, and then you get into all kinds of issues, maybe with substance abuse and other stuff, which we see at our centres all the time, in Fort McMurray and Lac la Biche, and all these areas—then we have a different problem. So there's success at one level, but long-term success is a little bit different. I think we're going to need to get smarter about how we measure that.

Those are the sorts of conversations we're hoping to have.

The Chair: Great. Thank you very much. That's right on five minutes.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here. This is a study that we'll be engaged in for a number of weeks, and we appreciate your input. We also appreciate your coming to Ottawa and sharing your views with us.

Committee, we'll break while we change over to our second group of presenters.

● (0935)

(Pause)

● (0940)

The Chair: Welcome back to the second round of witnesses today on our study of opportunities for aboriginal persons in the workforce.

In the next hour we're joined by Mr. Scott Wells, the acting chief executive officer and manager of finance with the Kakivak Association. From Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, by video conference, we have Charlie Evalik, president of the Kitikmeot Inuit Association, and also by video conference, Mr. Stephen Crocker, director of aboriginal employment strategies at the PTI Group Inc.

Welcome to our witnesses.

We'll get started right away with your presentations. You each have 10 minutes. I'll give you a signal with approximately one minute left.

We'll start with Mr. Wells.

● (0945)

Mr. Scott Wells (Acting Chief Executive Officer and Manager of Finance, Kakivak Association): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before I begin, I ask your leave to distribute this document. It's a bilingual tumbled document, but the languages are English and Inuktitut, as opposed to English and French. I would ask your leave to distribute the document, even though the French is not included, if that might be possible.

The Chair: I would need the unanimous consent of the committee members for that distribution.

Do I see it? I don't think I do.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Chair, clearly, not having a document in French always places us in a fairly delicate position. People are always told ahead of time that documents must be bilingual.

Since I already accepted a unilingual document during the first round of questions, I will also accept this one. However, as far as I am concerned, in the future it is out of the question for me to accept a unilingual document.

[*English*]

The Chair: I believe that means that we have unanimous consent for the distribution of that document.

It will be the last time, though, committee members, so you've been just informed of that.

Mr. Wells, please proceed.

Mr. Scott Wells: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, committee.

Kakivak Association is located in Iqaluit in Nunavut. We serve the Baffin region, the Qikiqtaaluk region of Nunavut, 13 fly-in communities, sparsely populated. Our smallest community is 138 people. Our largest community is 7,000 people, the capital Iqaluit. We are an ASETS holder. We are an AFI, an aboriginal financial institution, and the programs we deliver are very much dependent on federal program financing.

We deliver the YES program, the Youth Employment Services program, that prepares individuals, young individuals, to start thinking about continuing their education beyond school and high school into post-secondary for some type of career training, some type of employment. We deliver the FNICCI program, the first nations and Inuit child care initiative. That's very important for our clients in order to continue their studies. They need child care in order to enter the workforce, so that's a very important program.

As an ASETS holder we deliver employment training and wage subsidy-type programs. If you look at the statistics for Nunavut, of the 17- and 18-year-olds in our territory we have 50% attendance in grade 12. Obviously the graduate rate from my school is in the 40%. We are getting a group of people beyond high school who really need to be taken a long way in order to commence training for post-secondary education.

That puts a big strain on ASETS dollars, on training dollars, on resources in general. We'll get people out of high school who we will have to put into a pre-trades training program to elevate their math and science skills in order to go into welding or plumbing or carpentry or anything of that nature.

As an AFI, an aboriginal financial institution, we rely on the CEDP program, the community economic development program, that's administered up our way by CanNor. That allows us to work with businesses. We do three things with businesses. We do a lot of pre-work opportunity identification, assisting businesses with things like business plans, feasibility studies, and things of that nature.

Then when it comes to financing the business, we have resources that we can call into play to assist with the formation or purchase of the business. We have Inuit land claims dollars money, the Sivummut and Makigiaqvik funds. We have the aboriginal business development program-type funds. So we have assistance that we can leverage along with our own dollars to partner with other organizations, other agencies, in order to get a business started, or purchased, or expanded.

Then there's the aftercare of course. We work with a lot of businesses for aftercare. Our success rate with businesses in the last 10 years has been about 80%. So that's a significant success rate with respect to businesses.

With respect to our post-secondary education training, we believe that our measures and HRSDC's measures are not quite in sync because...basically you heard a little bit previously about the reporting burden. I don't wish to use the word “burden”, the reporting requirements I guess. It doesn't quite tell the story. With respect to post-secondary education for our folk, we have to bring them a long way as we're dealing with a multi-barrier. A lot of clients are multi-barriered. They don't have a lot of attachment to the workforce. They don't have high school graduation. So there are a lot of issues to deal with. We have to move them a long way.

● (0950)

The monitoring and reporting requirement is six months after their graduation. We would train individuals, for example, for the Baffinland mine, which I'm sure you've heard about. We might train heavy equipment operators in September and October, but they might not go to work there until the next August, so that's not captured.

Because we operate career centres, individuals walk in our door and we deal with clients, redirecting people. As the previous presentation indicated, they go where they know. The Kakivak Association has been a name in Nunavut in the Baffin-Qikiqtaaluk region for 20 years. People know our 800 number, 0911. Call 911 when you need help is our 800 number.

People come to us. They call our 800 number. We deal with our parent organizations that have a liaison officer in every community. We have a small resource centre in every single one of the 13 communities we serve. They're not connected by road. It's fly-in only. They go to them. They connect with us. People know where to go, and we assist them with their applications for post-secondary education. We assist them with their applications for the territorial financing called FANS, financial assistance for Nunavut students. We do a fair bit of work.

A lot of that is not captured, you know, the ticking of clients that we serve. It's the contacts we have, but people know where to find us and they know the programs. They know the youth employment strategy. They know where to come when they want summer employment program assistance. We have a program called the Inuit youth work experience program. We try to get high school and young adults into an Inuit youth work experience program, so they can see the opportunities out there and the requirements that they will have to fulfill to get a job in that field.

It's a considerable amount of work over a large geographical area with a small population that has multiple barriers in a lot of cases, that has limited opportunities in the community itself.

The question was asked in the previous presentation is budget the biggest impediment to our success in moving our success further along? The YES program, the youth employment strategy, was cut 18% this past year. That obviously didn't help. We have nearly 20% less for summer student employment, 20% less for the Inuit youth work experience program, and that certainly didn't help.

Money is not the total issue. We need employer partnerships and we work to build those. We rely on those. We need partnerships with other organizations similar to ours, with training institutions, and we work to build on those.

The biggest impediment is money, and it's certainly a concern. If we had more dollars we could hire more staff. If we had more dollars we could put more resources into programs, but the fact remains that we have a high school program that our premier, Peter Taptuna, realizes needs work. The new premier's emphasis is education. Kids need to get up in the morning and go to school and he recognizes that.

No matter how much money Kakivak would provide, we need a partnership with parents and with high schools and communities to get the kids into school. Less than 50% is unacceptable, so money is not the total problem. We need to overcome a lot of barriers.

● (0955)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we move on to our two witnesses by video conference. First to Mr. Evalik from Yellowknife, sir, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Charlie Evalik (President, Kitikmeot Inuit Association): Thank you.

First of all, thanks for having me. I'm Charlie Evalik. I'm president of Kitikmeot Inuit Association.

I'd like to make a presentation to you. I'll give you a little bit of background of our region and our organization as well as on Inuit employment, touching upon the labour market, major employers, and future opportunities. Then I'll touch on Inuit education from kindergarten to grade 12 and on post-secondary and adult education as well as the aboriginal skills employment strategy, which is known as ASETS.

As background, we are the westernmost of Nunavut's three regions. There are two other regions: Kivalliq region, or X0C; and Qikiqtaaluk region, or X0A. Kitikmeot has five communities, all of them predominantly populated by Inuit. The total population of the Kitikmeot region is 6,472, based on the 2013 statistics. The beneficiary population of the Inuit is 5,554. The languages spoken in our region are English, Inuktitut, and Inuinnaqtun. We have year-round access only by air, with marine access during the summer.

As for the background of our organization, Kitikmeot Inuit Association was incorporated in 1976 to represent the interests of the Kitikmeot Inuit. The initial years were spent pursuing land claims and political empowerment. With the signing of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement in 1993, KIA's focus shifted towards program delivery, social and economic governance, and management of Inuit-owned lands.

KIA's mandate is to represent the interests of the Kitikmeot Inuit by protecting and promoting our social, cultural, political, environmental, and economic well-being.

As to the governance structure of our organization, it is governed by a nine-member board of directors. Directors are elected to four-year terms by Kitikmeot Inuit beneficiaries. We have an executive committee of KIA comprised of me as president, a first vice-president, a vice-president of finance, as well as a vice-president of economic development.

KIA is organized into four departments: planning and communications, beneficiary services—this is the key one for our discussions for today—finance, and lands and environment. We have a total staff of 28 across our Kitikmeot region.

Beneficiary services' education and employment plans and delivers programs that enhance Inuit culture and language and advance wellness, education, and training. It provides community economic and business development programming and funding, and manage allocation of KIA contributions, scholarships, and grants. We access third-party funding for programs and services delivered, including the ASETS program.

Concerning Inuit employment and the Kitikmeot economy, Inuit in the region moved to the wage economy within the past 50 years. Historically, the fur trade and distant early warning sites were major sources of income for the Inuit. In the modern economy, the region is highly dependent on government jobs and government transfer payments.

Private businesses in the region battle high costs for materials, labour, utilities, and capital. All are more expensive than in the south. Mining has been part of our economy in the past. Currently there are no operating mines, but we have promising properties in the Kitikmeot region.

As for our labour force, labour force statistics show that Inuit have a harder time finding work than non-Inuit. Employment rate estimates are 46% for the Inuit.

● (1000)

The unemployment rate estimate is at 19% for the Inuit. The labour force is young and growing rapidly; 30% of the Kitikmeot population is under 14 years of age and another 20% is aged between 15 and 24 years. This means that half of our population is 24 years old or younger. These statistics are from the Nunavut Bureau of Statistics, by which “labour force” is defined as all aged 15 and over.

Major employers include the government sector, which is estimated to account for 50% of all employment; retail trades, another sector, estimated to account for 12%; accommodation, construction, mining, and exploration, together estimated to account for 15% of employment in the region. Arts and traditional, though hard to track, are an important part of our economy: trapping, fishing, hunting, clothing, and art production. Fisheries are a major source of employment but are centred in the east.

As for future opportunities, you may have heard that the Canadian high arctic research station, known as CHARS, will offer employment and business opportunities, mostly to Cambridge Bay residents. A recent impact study will help community and other organizations to prepare and to maximize benefits.

Among mining projects, the Hope Bay gold belt is under development. Among other products, commodities include base metals and diamonds.

Growth is expected in mining, construction, tourism, and other sectors. Under business and economic development, KIA supports Inuit businesses through two funding programs. Funds are from Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, which is our parent company. Self-employment and small businesses are important options that need to develop further in the years to come.

Concerning Inuit education, schools in every Inuit community provide kindergarten to grade 12 education. Schools are operated by the Government of Nunavut's Department of Education. Some of the major issues include attendance rates, which are around 70%—three out of ten students are not in school. Graduation rates are low in Nunavut, at 37%, and the Kitikmeot community has the lowest in the territory at around 22%.

Concerning social conditions, many students suffer because of poverty, lack of food, and overcrowded homes. Other issues affecting education include that the residential school system is still being felt in our region.

For adult education, Nunavut Arctic College provides post-secondary and adult education programs across the region. The regional campus is located in Cambridge Bay. Student support funding is through the Government of Nunavut as well as through our organization, KIA.

Among the issues is funding. Many Nunavut Arctic College programs are not core-funded. The search for core funding is a constant challenge. The infrastructure deficit includes adult education. For example, a long-planned mining training centre in Cambridge Bay has been delayed once again.

Not enough trades training is taking place. There is a lack of skilled Inuit journeypersons. As to post-secondary education, KIA encourages Inuit to continue their education following high school graduation. We offer graduation awards and scholarships to the Inuit.

● (1005)

The Chair: You have about one minute, sir.

Mr. Charlie Evalik: Thank you

We need to increase post-graduation enrolment. The need to increase the number of graduates in our K-to-12 system is essential.

We deliver ASETS as well—that is, the aboriginal skills employment and training strategy—and we do it through our partnership with the Government of Canada. Some of the recent programs under it have been culinary arts, midwifery, Nunavut Sivuniqsavut. This is demand-driven programming. ASETS is driven toward jobs that might be available once training has taken place.

In conclusion, the KIA is committed to supporting Inuit employment and education in our region. The challenges facing Inuit in our region are significant. There are upcoming opportunities that could improve the lives of our beneficiaries. It is only through strong partnerships with our partners that KIA will help Inuit move forward.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you this morning. Thanks very much.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Now, from Edmonton, is Stephen Crocker.

Stephen, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Stephen Crocker (Director, Aboriginal Employment Strategies, PTI Group Inc.): Thank you for inviting PTI Group to make this presentation to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

I am director of aboriginal employment strategies with the PTI Group. I'd like to first provide you with a brief overview of PTI, who we are and what we do, as this provides an important context regarding our aboriginal engagement. Then I'd like to share our experiences working with ASETS in western Canada, identify some barriers, and finally, make some recommendations.

PTI was incorporated in 1977, in Peace River, Alberta, and stands for Peace Trailer Industries, and provides camp rental accommodations to the oil and gas industry in Alberta. Since then PTI has grown into one of the largest most remote site accommodation companies in Canada.

Based in Edmonton, Alberta, PTI Group is a publicly traded, vertically integrated remote site accommodation company. We design, manufacture, install, and operate over 18,000 remote site accommodation rooms in western and northern Canada, the United States, and Australia.

In Canada many of our facilities are located on first nations traditional lands. In many cases PTI Group must enter into aboriginal consultation with first nations and Métis groups for new site developments. Many of our customers have entered into impact benefit agreements with first nations and Métis, and in some cases there are contractual requirements that we engage aboriginal people, in whom our customers have an interest. Having good aboriginal relations is an important factor to our growth.

As we all know, aboriginal people are at the wrong end of many social indexes and I don't need to reiterate those details. Canada is facing a labour shortage in many industry sectors and in many regions of the country, especially in remote locations. We all know aboriginal people are the fastest growing segment of our population. Our collective goal is to harness this potential labour resource, thereby alleviating skill shortages.

Because of the nature of what we do and where we operate, PTI Group has unique opportunities to engage aboriginal people. We have employment opportunities at our corporate office in technical areas, such as engineering, electrical, mechanical, architectural, IT, management, and sales. At our factories we require carpenters, electricians, plumbers, general labourers. In our remote site accommodation facilities we require kitchen workers, housekeepers, and front-desk clerks. Overall, PTI aboriginal workforce participation rate has been as high as 9.8% and in some of our remote site facilities the rate is over 20% and growing.

We have forged excellent working relationships with many first nations and Métis groups to provide us with employees. We have close relationships with many ASETS holders and work very closely with their human resource and development training personnel. Since 2010, and in partnership with ASETS holders, PTI has hired over 500 aboriginal people and we have successfully delivered seven aboriginal camp cook programs involving 64 first nations and Métis participants. Thus far we have achieved an 84% graduation rate, with all the graduates attaining kitchen positions at PTI. Aboriginal Camp Cook 8 is planned for the summer of 2014 with an ASETS holder.

Working with Oteenow Employment and Training, the urban ASETS holder in Edmonton, we delivered an introduction to trades program in 2013. The graduates all obtained trade positions at our factories in Edmonton and a second program is planned for this year.

Through our direct recruitment with first nations and Métis, we have obtained a measure of success, and PTI Group is committed to building upon our successes by employing and training more aboriginal people. We are active participants with the Aboriginal Human Resource Council, using their services and products to industry to enhance aboriginal inclusion at PTI.

Over the past four years we have learned a number of lessons. Not all aboriginal people are ready for employment. Many lack basic literacy and numeracy skills. Many have never experienced the rigours of having full-time employment. Careful selection of employees is required and we heavily rely on ASETS holders to assist us with making the right selections.

● (1010)

Living and working in a remote site location away from family and friends and community has different workplace dynamics and stresses and challenges than a position where the employee is home every night. In the process we have identified a number of barriers to employment with some first nations people.

In our opinion, the major barrier is transportation from home to work or from their community to remote site locations. This became evident during our first aboriginal recruitment when we asked the applicants if they had a driver's licence. One half had licences and no vehicles, and the other half had vehicles and no licences. We realized we had a transportation barrier. But working with the ASETS holder we found a solution. In order to move aboriginal people from social assistance living on reserve to financial independence in an industrial setting, we need to build a bridge with each ASETS holder. Industry can only build part of that bridge and ASETS holders need to be involved.

As you well know, no two first nations are alike. Some are small. Some are large. Some are remote. Some are close to urban areas. Some are very successful and some are very, very poor. Therefore, the needs of each first nation are different and the bridge that I mention needs to be customized for every first nation. Industry can't build those aboriginal bridges to financial independence alone. Our experience is that when ASETS holders are working closely with us, retention rates go up. They help us make the right selections. They provide the necessary supports and encouragement after the person has been hired. There's ongoing dialogue to solve problems and overcome barriers, and they are providing transportation to the work site in order to keep the person employed.

Certainly, programs like ASETS need to be continued and enhanced. Without ASETS, hiring the number of aboriginal people we have would have been much more challenging for us, and we certainly would not have been able to run the training initiatives that we have undertaken thus far. Any new program needs to be flexible for ASETS holders and industry. Opportunities come and ASETS holders need to be able to respond quickly or the opportunity will pass them by. Commodity prices greatly affect resource extraction industries and although industry is planning many projects that potentially could employ thousands of people, a drop in the commodity prices may put a development on hold. ASETS holders may have to readjust their work plan quickly.

We have encountered severe literacy issues in some communities and in some cases many individuals can't read a safety exam. They are willing to work. They are ready to work. We would like to hire them but they're unable to work. We cannot hire someone who cannot read or fails a safety exam. Literacy in first nation communities is not the responsibility of industry, but is rather a barrier for first nations to move their members from social assistance to financial independence.

Funding needs to be flexible as no two first nations are the same. The funding model should be flexible enough to be able to address the particular barriers of that community and to seize upon the industry opportunities that are available in their region. In our case, there are ongoing activities by the ASETS holders to keep their members working, to provide a source of contact for us, ensuring transportation arrangements have been made, and helping the individuals in times of crisis. These are but a few examples. All of these aftercare support services to keep people employed come at a cost to the ASETS holder.

● (1015)

The Chair: You have about one minute, sir.

Mr. Stephen Crocker: Industry too has training initiatives that can provide opportunities for many aboriginal people. In some cases, these training initiatives, such as apprenticeship training, require a funding commitment over three or perhaps four years. Long-term training programs with ASETS holders or other federal government department training and employment initiatives are required.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Now we'll move on to our first round of questioning.

Madam Groguhé from the NDP leads for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It was pointed out—and previous witnesses have also briefly mentioned it—that aboriginal nations face systemic barriers. I think the time has passed to go over these difficulties. We are familiar with them. Much literature exists on the subject.

However, there is one issue that has been troubling me since the beginning of this study, and I would like to hear your thoughts on the subject. For that matter, we have already raised it. We spoke of the importance and the need to offer first nations adequate basic education, which takes into consideration early childhood. We must also consider the issue of housing, which is catastrophic, as well as endemic social problems such as alcoholism, drug abuse, etc. There is also the issue of women, which in our opinion must be dealt with in a specific way. We are talking about gender here, and it is important to determine a specific context for women.

That being said, in the recommendations he has submitted to us, Mr. Crocker mentioned the need to apply flexible and distinct programs.

I would like the other witnesses, using their own expertise and taking into account the number of years these programs have existed, to tell us which recommendations they would like us to submit above all others so that an effective strategy can finally be implemented.

● (1020)

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Wells: Thank you for your comments and your question.

First and foremost, I tried to present the importance of the programs we deliver, as the others did, I'm sure: the youth employment strategy for the young folks; FNICCI, the first nations and Inuit child care initiative for people who need to be in training or work; the ASETS program for employment wage subsidy-type programs, employment training; and of course, the CED program, the community economic development program, which CanNor delivers.

So recommendation number one is these programs are very important to our operations, to the people we serve, and to the way we do business. We will soon be in the last year of ASETS and a new post-ASETS arrangement will be coming forward. The CED program is currently in program renovation; it has been for four years now. As I mentioned, unfortunately the YES program was cut by 18% this year.

We are touching people, we are serving people, and we are reaching people with the programs we deliver. We are getting success from those programs.

It's been mentioned that we are unique, each of us is unique. Our region, Nunavut, is unique. It's very different from a southern first nations reserve. But we still have similar problems, similar challenges, and we have tried to be flexible and use the ASETS program and the YES program.

For example, two years ago we partnered with Baffinland Iron Mines and with the Government of Nunavut to do a work readiness program. The people who were going to be hired to go to Baffinland Iron Mines would have to go through a two-week soft skills training program. They would have to do things like money management. They would have to deal with issues like being away from family—three weeks in, one week out—drug addiction, alcoholism, gambling, things of that nature. All of those soft skills issues, nothing to do with their occupation. That was a pilot program we devised and wrote in Nunavut, a made-for-Nunavut program that Baffinland has now adopted and is continuing.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Now we move on to the Conservative Party.

Mr. Armstrong, you have five minutes.

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Wells, you had in your presentation talked about how your organization supports the purchase of businesses to employ first nations people. Could you explain and maybe give me a specific example of how your organization supports that process?

Mr. Scott Wells: Yes, certainly. Thank you for the question.

We administer the Aboriginal Business Canada program, the ABC program, and as an aboriginal financial institution, we have a loan fund there as well, the Makigiaqvik loan fund.

What we would do if a client comes in, or we identify opportunities, we would start working with the client. In a lot of cases, we work from the very beginning, helping them with their business plan, helping them with a feasibility study. We have a small grant program, the Sivummut fund. It's a parent organization...land claims dollars. We give a grant to assist them with a feasibility study, with a business plan, and that sort of thing. Then we start working with other organizations, Baffin Business Development Corporation —organizations like that—and with Economic Development and Transportation, Government of Nunavut, and we start leveraging funding from other organizations to assist them to either start their business or to purchase a business, for example. Then we would move to the aftercare phase, where our staff would assist them with the operations, with their accounting processes, and that sort of thing.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: So if clients came to you and had an interest in purchasing a business, they could pretty much walk through your doors and in one-stop-shopping have access to all of those programs—you would help to facilitate that—and they could get some funding from your organization as well.

● (1025)

Mr. Scott Wells: They would get some funding from our organization. They could probably get a maximum of maybe $30,000 to $50,000 in grants, $150,000 in loans, and then we would assist them in finding other sources as well.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Thank you for that.

Mr. Crocker, these are the main things I'm hearing from you. We need some programming to make sure we do proper recruitment of employees to support businesses, and ASETS has been working on that. We need flexibility within the system so we can meet the needs of various different types of reserves and communities that provided those employees. Also at the end, once the employee has been hired, trained, and on the job, we need to have some aftercare to make sure some of the barriers they may face to maintaining their employment are overcome.

Am I accurate in saying that's the crux of what you presented to us today?

Mr. Stephen Crocker: Yes, absolutely, they are the three key messages that I wanted to bring. In Alberta and on the prairies, the smallest first nation in Alberta has under 100 members, and the largest has over 14,000. So the capabilities of those two groups are completely different, and their needs are different, so that's why the programs have to be flexible.

We found that it's really important, especially in remote-site accommodations, that we help the individual get over three rotations —three weeks in, one week home—and then the family gets used to it. They get used to the rigours of employment and they get used to the job. It's those three rotations, so three months of providing supports, that is really critical in terms of long-term retention.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: So you would say that if you were able to provide these supports at the front end of employment, after roughly three months you're able to acclimatize that client, that employee, so then you can wean them off those supports and put that focus on the new employees who are coming in and following them. Am I accurate in saying that? That's kind of the barrier, that three-month transition period.

Mr. Stephen Crocker: It is. It's so easy to slip back. In three months the financial aspect of having a full-time job in a remote site kicks in. Everything is provided for the employee, and after three months the family gets used to having new boots, new coats, and being off social assistance and having their own money. They enjoy financial independence, and it's important to provide those supports for that period of time. Once they're financially independent and the family is used to their mom or dad, or both, going to work in a remote site, everything kicks in. We do have husband-and-wife teams from first nation communities working at our sites.

The Chair: Mr. Armstrong, that's the end of your questioning.

Now we move on to the Liberal party with Mr. Cuzner for five minutes.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Thank you.

Thank you to the witnesses.

I'm just going to keep on with Mr. Crocker if I could. Most of the three weeks in and the week out rotations are in bull cook or kitchen positions for your first nations employees. What would the salary range—

Mr. Stephen Crocker: There's also housekeeping.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Yes. What would the salary range be there? Is there an hourly rate? Is there a premium rate for everything over 40 hours? Could you give us an estimation of what kind of money they're making?

Mr. Stephen Crocker: Yes. We have no grade 12 hiring requirement so for someone with no education or experience, and we've hired many, we start them off at $20 per hour. On top of that they receive $4 an hour that goes into an RRSP fund beginning at hour 1. All benefits such as medical, dental, eyeglasses, and prescriptions kick in after 30 days. There is a transportation allowance to get from their community to the site. After three rotations there's an automatic $2 increase. After another three, there's another $2 increase. So in the first year they can work themselves up to $26 an hour.

At site they generally put in 10 hours per day, so every hour over 8 is at time and a half. Because they are working 21 days the breakdown would be 120 hours at regular rates and then another 90 hours would be at time and a half. We've done the calculation and gross income is somewhere between $95,000 and $100,000 for somebody to be washing dishes or cleaning a room at our remote-site accommodations.

● (1030)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: I might dust off the resumé here.

I would think the lion's share of your camps are zero tolerance as well?

Mr. Stephen Crocker: We have three levels. It's really determined by the customer. Some are dry, where alcohol is not permitted. Some are what we call damp, where alcohol is allowed in the room. For some we have full-service bars, which are highly monitored and highly restricted. There are limited hours of operation and rules of one drink at a time. If there is any notice of somebody becoming intoxicated they are immediately cut off.

We have found that the dry sites are where we have more problems than at the wet sites.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: If I could just get your comments on retention rates and what they would be.... Are there opportunities there for first nations to move up into management positions or pathways into trades opportunities?

Mr. Stephen Crocker: The company does offer apprenticeship opportunities. The person would have to complete their probationary period, show an interest in that particular trade, and then go through the internal process. Of course because of apprenticeship requirements we are limited on how many apprentices we can take on at any given time. There is a ratio between journeymen and apprentices. But we do offer apprenticeships and we have a number of aboriginal people engaged in the program.

Also, all our jobs are posted internally and on our website. We do encourage people who have been working at site to move up into supervisory positions. We have some that are going up to supervisory. Some people don't want to take on responsibilities like that. They would just rather do their job and not have the problems that go along. They just want to work and go home and they're happy.

Right now I believe we have somewhere around 15 individuals that are in senior management positions throughout the company. Some are in sales. Some are in human resources. Some are managers and operations managers and they are first nations and Métis.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That ends our time for questioning. We thank the witnesses for taking the time today to be with us to help us along with this study. As I mentioned to the previous group of witnesses, we'll be undertaking this study over the next number of weeks. If you have any additional things you'd like to submit to the committee, please do so in writing to the clerk of the committee.

Again, I appreciate your taking the time. Thank you very much.

Committee members, please remain in your spots while we go in camera for our committee business section.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]