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 014 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, March 4, 2014

Chair

Mr. Phil McColeman

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

Tuesday, March 4, 2014

● (0845)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC)): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

I call the meeting to order. This is meeting number 14 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Today is Tuesday, March 4, 2014, and we are continuing our study concerning opportunities for aboriginal persons in the workforce.

Today we have another split panel of witnesses to provide testimony.

For our first hour we are joined by Ms. Denise Amyot, president and chief executive officer of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges, and Anna Toneguzzo, who is the government relations and policy research manager with the Association of Canadian Community Colleges.

From the Canadian Electricity Association we are joined by Mr. Jim Burpee, president and chief executive officer.

We also have Mr. Joe Heil, who is the director of first nations and Métis relations at Ontario Power Generation Inc.

We welcome our witnesses.

I will now turn the floor over to our witnesses for their 10-minute opening presentations.

I believe Mr. Burpee and Mr. Heil are going to split their time.

We will start with Ms. Amyot, for 10 minutes.

Ms. Denise Amyot (President and Chief Executive Officer, Association of Canadian Community Colleges): Good morning.

[*Translation*]

I am happy to be with you today.

[*English*]

I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are in the traditional territory of the Algonquin Nation, and I'm honoured to greet and thank them.

[*Translation*]

Good morning to all of you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I hope that you will find our comments useful and that they will contribute to your study on opportunities for aboriginal persons in the workforce. As you know, we need to find ways to improve the socio-economic situation of first nations, Métis and Inuit people.

[*English*]

The Association of Canadian Community Colleges, which I represent, is the national and international voice of Canada's publicly funded colleges, institutes and polytechnics working with industry and social sectors to train 1.5 million learners of all ages and backgrounds at campuses serving over 3,000 urban, rural and remote communities from coast to coast to coast. Our 132 members are committed to supporting indigenous learners and communities.

We have provided folders to each of you with ACCC's most recent publication on how colleges serve aboriginal learners, as well as a process model of the holistic approach our members and partners have identified as essential to providing effective support.

Today I would like to begin with a brief overview of that holistic approach. There are four key elements of that approach.

First is proactive recruitment starting with K to 12, because of course ensuring the success of indigenous students in K to 12 is crucial to future achievement at the post-secondary level.

Second is open and supportive admission policies and culturally appropriate assessment services.

Third is a broad range of education and training programs, such as adult upgrading, essential skills, post-secondary programs, aboriginal-specific diploma and degree programs in high-demand fields of importance for aboriginal communities, and community-based and partner organizations. For example, Nicola Valley Institute of Technology in British Columbia, the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology in Alberta and the Cambrian College in Ontario, all have mobile trades training trailers that provide hands-on training in aboriginal communities based on the needs identified by community leaders and industry partners.

Fourth is wraparound support services, such as tutoring, day care, aboriginal gathering places, financial assistance, etc. Of course, support from elders is also important as they help ensure that first nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures are reflected across the institution.

Through the leadership of an indigenous education committee led by one of our presidents, Ken Tourand, who is president of Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, we are now developing an indigenous education protocol that our members will sign to affirm their commitment to supporting indigenous learners and communities.

I would like to address the federal government support programs, starting with the aboriginal skills, employment, and training strategy, known as ASETS, and the skills and partnership fund, SPF. Some colleges and institutes are training providers for ASETS organizations and are involved in partnerships funded by the SPF. The ASETS and SPF are important and successful programs that enable aboriginal organizations to meet local training needs tied to employment opportunities. These programs are needed to provide targeted upgrading, essential skills development, and pre-employment skills training.

To improve efficiency, we recommend the following.

First, in rural and remote areas and jurisdictions where there are numerous ASETS organizations and a large territory to serve, it can be challenging for colleges to meet training needs and at the same time capitalize on volume efficiencies. If training activities were allowed on a regional level, ASETS organizations could pool their students and render the program even more cost-effective.

Second, interventions are sometimes too short and are geared to direct employment. Many aboriginal learners require upgrading because they have low literacy levels, did not graduate from high school, or have been out of school for a long time. If funding were approved for longer periods and criteria were more flexible, ASETS could more effectively address the upgrading and essential skills development needs.

I would now like to speak to the importance of adult upgrading.

● (0855)

[*Translation*]

We believe that the federal government must focus primarily on improving the K to 12 education system for first nations and Inuit people, implement funding mechanisms that are on par with provincial and territorial education systems, and in time, improve outcomes.

[*English*]

I want to acknowledge the funding that was provided recently with respect to K to 12. This was a welcome addition to support first nations, Métis and Inuit.

However, we must recognize that a significant proportion of the aboriginal population has not completed high school and will be challenged to improve their employment prospects without post-secondary education.

According to the 2012 aboriginal peoples survey, 28% of first nations people living off reserve, 58% of Inuit, and 23% of Métis age 18 to 44 were not attending high school and had not met the requirements for a high school diploma. By comparison, from the 2011 national household survey, the figure for the non-aboriginal population was 11%.

More must be done to address this gap. Colleges and institutes are the main providers of high school equivalency programs and adult upgrading for indigenous learners across Canada.

The northern adult basic education program, known as NABE, is a successful model to serve the adult upgrading needs in northern and remote areas. Through the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, $27 million over five years is being invested to improve adult basic education capacity at Aurora College, Nunavut Arctic College, and Yukon College.

The goal is to increase the number of working-age adults with basic workplace and essential skills needed for the labour market or to benefit from occupational training.

In December 2013, Canada's territorial colleges reported that this funding is making a difference. The 85% to 90% of learners participating in upgrading programs supported by the NABE program are aboriginal. The colleges report that they have: first, developed enhanced and culturally appropriate prior learning assessment and recognition services; second, increased the number of instructors to deliver the programs; third, integrated support services for learners, in particular from elders; and fourth, developed and piloted literacy and workplace essential skills short courses that are culturally appropriate and in line with employment opportunities of industry.

The Chair: Madam Amyot, you're running out of time. If you could—

Ms. Denise Amyot: I'm almost done.

Another critical area to share with this committee is essential skills development. This must continue to be at the forefront of improving access and supporting learner success. ACCC has led Employment and Social Development Canada to fund essential skills projects in recent years that have demonstrated the impact of essential skills. For example, findings in 17 pilot projects across Canada indicated that up to 60% of learners and workers tested were below level three literacy, which is what is needed to function in society. After some hours, 24 to 40 hours of essential skills training, students and workers demonstrated learning gains and improved performance.

In closing, I'd like to recommend the following to enhance and create efficiencies in the ASETS and SPF programs: more flexibility in program parameters; enhanced and culturally appropriate prior learning assessments; and expanded essential skills development programs.

[*Translation*]

During this committee study, we are eager to work with the Government of Canada to improve access to post-secondary education for first nations, Métis and Inuit learners so that we can improve their employment prospects and contribute to the socio-economic development of aboriginal communities.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation.

We move on to Mr. Burpee and Mr. Heil, for five minutes each, I believe.

Mr. Jim Burpee (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Electricity Association): Good morning.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members, for inviting us here today to share our knowledge and experiences with respect to opportunities for aboriginal persons in Canada's electricity sector workforce.

Aboriginal employment in Canada's electricity sector is characterized by tremendous opportunities, but also persistent challenges and barriers which we continue to address through a variety of ways, some which we will highlight for you today.

I'm pleased to be joined today by Joe Heil, director of first nations and Métis relations at Ontario Power Generation. OPG is an active participant in the CEA aboriginal relations task group, a forum for utility representatives from across Canada to share best practices and collaborate on innovative approaches, particularly on the issue of aboriginal employment in the workforce.

I'll pass it over to Joe to provide some examples of aboriginal partnerships.

Mr. Joe Heil (Director, First Nations and Métis Relations, Ontario Power Generation Inc., Canadian Electricity Association): Thank you, Jim.

My primary responsibility involves implementation of OPG's first nations and Métis relations policy. Given the location of OPG's nuclear, thermal, and hydroelectric operations, we have relationships with over 50 first nations and Métis communities in Ontario. OPG's first nations and Métis relations policy is designed to build strong, mutually beneficial relationships with first nations and Métis communities. It commits OPG to addressing past grievances related to historical development.

To date, OPG has settled over 20 past grievances. On an ongoing basis, each business unit is required to develop plans in the areas of community relations and outreach, employment and contracting opportunities, and capacity building. As well, the policy makes a clear commitment to enter into commercial arrangement partnerships with first nations and Métis communities on new developments.

One of these partnerships involves our Lower Mattagami project in northeastern Ontario. In 2010, OPG and Moose Cree First Nation entered into a partnership for the redevelopment of hydroelectric facilities on the Lower Mattagami River. Moose Cree First Nation will be taking a 25% equity stake in this $2.6-billion project. As well, Moose Cree and other surrounding first nations and Métis communities are enjoying significant employment and contracting opportunities.

The environmental assessment for the Lower Mattagami project required that 200 person-years of employment be provided to specific local aboriginal communities. To meet this target, OPG entered into preferential employment agreements with Moose Cree, Taykwa Tagamou Nation, and the Métis Nation of Ontario. To address the lack of existing service coordination at the time in the region and to meet the EA employment goals, OPG worked with Moose Cree to create a training-to-employment agency called Sibi. *Sibi* is a Cree word for river. Its board of directors includes representatives from Moose Cree, Taykwa Tagamou, the Métis Nation of Ontario, OPG, and our contractor, Kiewit-Alarie.

To date, Sibi has helped to achieve over 400 person-years of employment for the aboriginal people on this project. With more than a year before the construction phase is completed, we expect this number to grow beyond 500 person-years of aboriginal employment. Additionally, more than 70 of Sibi's clients are registered apprentices, and an estimated 25 will complete their apprenticeships by the end of the project. Sibi is providing transitioning to ensure continued full-time employment and program support for its clients beyond this project. The program utilized by Sibi is seen as a best practice across Canada.

The program has cost approximately $16 million over a four-year period. Roughly $4 million was provided by HRSDC through the ASEP program. Success in the program can be accredited to OPG having an equal say with the aboriginal communities in the management of the program dollars. Together we have worked with the contractor and unions to ensure follow-through on the commitments, to provide information on the timing of jobs, the qualifications required, and the most appropriate training programs, etc.

OPG has provided structure, resources, reporting tools, and more.

At a higher level, the greatest success by far is the individual capacity that has been created for the aboriginal people in the region. A significant number of persons who previously did not have their grade 12 now have achieved this, as well as additional certifications and work experience required to continue on a path of lifelong progressive careers.

Over and above these significant achievements, OPG has worked to put an exemplary training and employment service into a place where it did not previously exist. With OPG's partnership, Sibi has created a database of 2,000 clients and has trained and employed over 700 persons in the region. OPG's next challenge is to ensure a successful hand-off of our Sibi model and to maximize the aboriginal employment on other large-scale projects such as our Darlington refurbishment, and to put systems in place to better coordinate with aboriginal skills and employment training agencies, the ASETAs, and other community and industry partners. OPG has begun to do this work to some extent in partnership with the Aboriginal Apprenticeship Board of Ontario, AABO. We look forward to working with the federal government in whatever capacity may be available for assistance in putting such regional training board structures into place.

● (0900)

I'll now pass it back to Jim.

Mr. Jim Burpee: Thank you, Joe.

The Canadian electricity industry supports increased funding for aboriginal education and hopes the first nation education act will help enable them to participate fully in Canada's workforce of the future. Canada's electricity industry has a strong commitment to aboriginal education at all levels, and recognizes that progress depends on strong collaborative relations with aboriginal communities and educators.

I'd like to conclude with a few words about the aboriginal skills, employment, and training strategy, ASETS, because I know you are seeking feedback on that specific program. We believe that a renewal of funding and focusing of ASETS on collaboration with key sectors such as ours would be a positive way forward.

While we are supportive of the program in principle, we have identified an area for improvement that could help address the current disconnect with our industry. The need for improvement is not solely a result of program design and administration. We as industry know that we, too, can do a better job of outreach and collaboration, specifically with aboriginal program partners who administer the program.

ASETS is more infrastructure project focused and less targeted at specific sectors. In light of the tremendous renewal and expansion of physical infrastructure taking place across the country, particularly in the energy sector, this is not a bad thing, and the electricity sector is one of those sectors, projected to undertake close to $350 billion in current Canadian dollars of investment by 2030. However, there is a distinct difference and advantage in the employment opportunities for aboriginal people in our sector when compared to other sectors.

Think of a new hydroelectric generating facility. The completion of construction is only the beginning. Once connected to the grid, the facility begins a long life of at least 100 years. In addition to the skilled workforce required to operate the generating facility, many more are needed to maintain and service the related infrastructure, everything from distribution substations, wires, poles, meters and all other aspects of the system, including the customer service and billing operations. These are deep and substantive long-term opportunities. Better connecting ASETS with our sector would benefit and open up more of these high-quality and long-term jobs to aboriginal people.

As with all aspects of engaging and partnering with aboriginal communities, we recognize that industry has a role. CEA is committed to continuing our work in identifying public policy options for attracting the aboriginal workforce to the electricity sector, and we look forward to working with the federal government to do so.

Thank you.

● (0905)

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation and for being under 10 minutes. It's very much appreciated.

We now move on to questioning. Our first round of questioning for five minutes is with Madame Groguhé.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to welcome the witnesses and thank them for their testimony.

Ms. Amyot, you talked about a holistic approach. Other witnesses who work with aboriginal people have also talked about that. You raised three points when you talked about the importance of being proactive when it comes to education from K to 12.

You also highlighted the importance of acquiring essential skills. Unfortunately, without those skills, people who are outside the workforce cannot get the support they need for secondary and post-secondary education. Last, you talked about the importance of more flexible, longer-term funding.

My question is about renewal of your funding. How often is your funding renewed, and how does that influence your activities? What recommendations would you make about that funding?

Ms. Denise Amyot: I'm not sure I understand the question about our funding because we do not receive any funding.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Let's look at it in terms of the overall strategy.

Ms. Denise Amyot: In terms of the strategy, funding goes directly to organizations, not to our association. I represent an association of colleges.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Okay.

I'll modify my question to focus less on funding and more on learning.

What's your approach to education for aboriginal people? What are the advantages of that approach and what are the outcomes?

Ms. Denise Amyot: I could talk about that for hours.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: You'll have to keep it brief because I have other questions for you.

Ms. Denise Amyot: I'll try to be very precise.

First, we have a variety of models. Colleges in Canada typically work with industry and the private sector to ensure that the courses they offer match workforce needs. It's essential that the courses as a whole prepare students for specific jobs.

I'd like to give an example of how we make sure that courses match needs. In Yukon, they started offering a program called “First Nations Governance and Public Administration”. That course is being offered because it's important for Yukon to have a public administration program to foster a better understanding of the aboriginal element. The program has been very successful. Initially, the program was offered only to Yukoners, but there's now a huge demand for it to be offered more broadly.

Now let's talk about essential skills, which are crucial. As I said earlier, we launched 17 pilot projects. Those projects showed that up to 60% of learners had not mastered essential skills. There are five levels, the fifth being the highest. People need at least level three to function in society. We discovered that a significant proportion of people didn't have that level. To our great surprise, we discovered that it was the same for people who were employed.

We realized that by providing 24 to 40 hours of training, we were able to get those people, including aboriginal people—

● (0910)

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: That's very interesting, but I would like to know what you need to deliver that kind of program.

Ms. Denise Amyot: I'll give a specific example of what would be useful.

We asked Employment and Social Development Canada for $13 million to train trainers, and we're waiting for an answer. Right now, we can't do any large-scale training of trainers in many parts of the country.

The Government of Canada has helped us a lot on the essential skills front. We have developed tools and the training has been a success. Now, to close the loop, we need funding to train trainers.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go on to Mr. Shory from the Conservative Party.

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Thank you, witnesses, for coming here to help us to better understand how we can improve the opportunities for aboriginal people and at the same time address all kinds of skills shortages. Certainly there is a disconnect; I'm sure we all agree. There are thousands and thousands available in the aboriginal workforce, while at the same time we have a shortage of workers. There is a gap.

I see the passion of the community colleges. I'll start with the research you have done in this area. I believe that this has led you to predict certain economic impacts from increasing the levels of education and work for our first nations. I'd like to start by asking you to share your research. What was the outcome of that research? Why do you it will have an impact on the economic outlook?

Ms. Denise Amyot: From a social and an economic point of view, everybody should be allowed the chance to work. To be able to feed your family is a matter of pride, and from the economic side, to contribute to society.

We are finding that if you provide the training for people to be able to contribute to society, to develop skills, then you are able to motivate people to be part of society and be engaged.

Let me give you a very neat example that was done in Yukon. A company needed truck drivers. Many companies need them. Unfortunately, the truck drivers came from the south. There was a big turnover, and they had to start training again. They decided to do a pilot project for 15 individuals who were living in the north and go to their community, so the students wouldn't have to go far from their community. The training was provided on site, and the company said right at the beginning that they were going to recruit 10 people if they were successful in the program.

They were so impressed with the way the students worked that they decided to recruit 12 of them. They said to the three others—all 15 were very successful in the program—that it was a matter of weeks or months before they would be recruiting them. They wanted to have another program similar to that.

The reason I give this example is that this is what is important very often with aboriginal communities, to offer the program, the training, on site. That's why some of our colleges.... There may be one college in a territory, but they have 25 learning centres to ensure training is happening in the community.

It motivates people. They realize that not only did they stay in their community and acquire new skills, but now they're able to sustain themselves and bring money to the family also.

We have many examples like that across Canada, and they have been very successful. It's important to recognize the importance of doing things like that. Sometimes it's difficult because there aren't a large number of people and sometimes people are not sure what skills they would like to have. That's why I mentioned the mobile trades training centres in my presentation, which circulate in different communities to entice people to discover the different trades. Hopefully, it will stimulate their passion for one of those trades.

● (0915)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Shory. That's five minutes. It goes fast, doesn't it, sir?

We move to Mr. Cuzner from the Liberal Party for five minutes.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Thank you, witnesses, for your presentations.

I'm going to try to get in two questions. I'll just throw them out, and you can divvy them up.

You talked about flexibility, and I fully appreciate the significance. You talked about the ASETS program and the inability of the restrictions.... Are there restrictions around pooling? Could you speak to that specifically? Are we able to address that?

As well, what's happening with the students who don't have the prerequisite skills? What are the community colleges doing for those students before they get any training? Are you guys able to do something there?

Ms. Denise Amyot: I'll answer the second one, and I'll ask my colleague to answer the first one because she knows the program better than I do.

We do two different types of things, but if I may, I will summarize because a number of them are explained in this.... We provide upgrading to ensure that people have the equivalent of a grade 12, because often people arrive at our colleges and they don't have that.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: What do you do, test the individuals on—

Ms. Denise Amyot: We do pre-learning assessment. We ensure that it is culturally sensitive. That's very, very important. The colleges are trained to do that.

Once we do that, we assess what is needed: is it more literacy, is it more mathematics, or is it more soft skills, as I mentioned earlier in terms of the essential competencies? We provide specific training according to the needs. We have developed some specific tools in order to assess those essential competencies. As well, specific training can be given.

● (0920)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Okay. Great.

We're time sensitive here, so I apologize for....

Ms. Anna Toneguzzo (Manager, Government Relations and Policy Research, Public Policy and Canadian Partnerships, Association of Canadian Community Colleges): Sure.

In terms of the ASETS program, colleges have told us that, for example, in a region where there are a number of ASETS organizations and a large territory to cover, if different ASETS organizations have, let's say, five learners, it's more difficult to set up training for five learners. But if ASETS organizations could pool their learners, let's say 15 to 20 learners, then it would be cost-effective in terms of developing and delivering—

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Do the current regulations around ASETS preclude that?

Ms. Anna Toneguzzo: Well, in terms of regional coordination, colleges are saying that it would be easier if they could regionally coordinate with ASETS organizations.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: We heard that from the group from B.C. as well, and this just underlines it.

In terms of the Moose Cree project, you identified significant employment opportunities, business opportunities. Are there specific carve-outs for the first nations communities, or targets for the number of workers you want to employ? Are there specific goals, I guess, or specific carve-outs in these projects? I thought it was really neat that the community was taking an equity position in the project; I thought that was neat.

The other thing was that you identified the development program as being nationally recognized. When we're doing this kind of stuff, we want to identify who's getting it right, who's doing it right, and how they can then help other communities. That way you don't have to go back and reinvent the wheel.

How are you getting an opportunity to showcase that and help other communities?

Mr. Joe Heil: With respect to the first question, the carve-outs, what was unique about this project was that actually the EA spoke out to the employment requirements. We had to have at least 200 person-years of employment as part of the EA, but our approach was really to maximize the employment opportunities. If we needed 600 people on site and they could be all aboriginal, definitely that's where we would head. We were trying to maximize the actual amount of opportunities.

With respect to being nationally recognized, OPG has been to Ottawa a number of times to speak about our particular program or what have you. We really are following best practices.

I want to describe quickly, if I could, what we did, just to give you a sense of where we are on this program. We did get the ASEP funding. We initially got two years of funding. We applied for other funding thereafter and weren't successful. With that initial bit of funding, what we did was that....

There really wasn't any employment agency up there that we could work with, so we worked with the first nations, the unions, the contractors. We actually did an inventory of how many people could be employed up there, aboriginal people, and we got an inventory of 2,000 people. Then we asked people, “Who wants to work on this particular job? Who's interested?” About 500 people put their hands up. We did individual assessments for each person who put their hand up. We found out where they were and where they wanted to be. It is true that probably about two-thirds of the individuals didn't have their grade 12, so there was a lot of work there.

As a second part, once we had a job identified, we matched up the individual with the job and ran them through the training program. We did that for 176 individuals. Every single individual who went through the program got a job at the end of the program. We had a 96% success rate on our training. Doing those individual assessments was key to success in the program.

I have a list of best practices. I think the committee is well aware, hopefully, of what the best practices are in this area. Certainly we took every one of them to heart, and there was a lot of support.

The other piece that I really feel is important is that we worked together. We worked with the first nations; we worked with the unions; we worked with our contractors. We worked jointly. That also was, to me, a key feature of why we achieved success.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move now to Mr. Mayes, for five minutes.

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

One of the keys that I see and that our government has identified is the links. The Canada job grant was to link the employer with the educator with the person who needs employment. I want to talk a little about that in regard to aboriginals. You mentioned that, Mr. Heil.

When you go into a community, how do you communicate? Do you have a career opportunities meeting to talk about those things? There's the upgrading, because of some of the outcomes from K to 12. That discussion needs to happen. There's also the support, because with some of the aboriginal communities.... I was part of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, and one of the issues was the cultural shock in going to a learning centre if they have to leave their community. I would like you to touch a little on that.

As far as the educators are concerned, it's great to see the employers connecting with the colleges and the training facilities to identify the needs. I would like the representative from the Association of Canadian Community Colleges to talk a little about that linkage with the employer, and how you work that out.

Also, for the employers, as far as commitment is concerned, you're in for the long haul. What does that entail?

First, Mr. Heil.

● (0925)

Mr. Joe Heil: There are a lot of questions there, and there are a couple of key words.

On commitment, first of all, certainly we have a first nations and Métis relations policy. It's a board-level policy, and our board is very dedicated to that policy. You may be familiar with some of our board members. Our chairman is Jake Epp. He used to be a minister of Indian affairs and is very dedicated to the program. More recently, Roberta Jamieson is now a member of our board. We definitely have a lot of strong support at the top of the house.

The other word I use is “link”. We actually started what we call link committees down in the Clarington area. We have a potential project on the horizon called Darlington refurb. There are about 30,000 person-years of employment that will happen as part of that construction project; it's over 15 years going forward. About 20% of those are going to be apprentices. We've reached out to the aboriginal communities in the area, the Williams Treaties first nations—there are about six of them—and to the aboriginal communities in Toronto so that they can take advantage of these opportunities.

What the link committees are doing at this point in time is bringing the youth to the table, bringing the first nations to the table, and bringing industry to the table so that we can start talking about the opportunities. As part of that conversation, other industries have now started to say they want to join the link committees. OPG just produces electricity, but Hydro One is a company that transmits electricity in Ontario. They're looking at joining. We're looking at other industry partners to come in to share in that and build a body of demand for jobs. Then supply is coming from the first nations.

Where I see a deficit is both up in the Moose Cree area and down in the Darlington and other areas. There seems to be a disconnect between the actual administrative arm of chiefs and councils and these AHRDAs, aboriginal human resources development agreements, or ASETAs. There doesn't seem to be very good communication between those two. We definitely need that communication. We've reached out to the first nations and are trying to facilitate a dialogue between the first nations chiefs and councils, and the ASETAs.

Ms. Denise Amyot: Thank you for the questions. I have a number of points to make.

First, there is a concern right now in colleges that if the funding comes from a reallocation of the funding of the labour market agreement this would be a problem. A good part of that funding in fact goes to persons with disabilities, aboriginal people, and older workers, and this would prevent the training from being offered to those people, whether it is in upgrading or in development of skills.

Second, there is a concern right now that if the focus is on short-term training and that the training is not credentialized, if you will, the people who would benefit from that training would not get credits for it and where would it lead?

Third, what is needed really is flexibility in approach. I believe that with the recent announcement by Minister Kenney flexibility for the needs of the different provinces and territories will be ensured.

One of the things we insist on with respect to the Canada job grant is there's a need to ensure that essential skills will be also be covered in that, because what's the purpose if you develop the skills but you're not able to work as a team, or you're not computer literate, and you don't have those essential skills?

Thank you.

● (0930)

The Chair: Thank you very much. That's long over the allotted time for that round. That's the end of the first round. We move on to round two.

Monsieur Brahmi.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahmi (Saint-Jean, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Amyot, you just answered my colleague's question about funding—not funding for your association, but funding for courses and the colleges you represent indirectly because you're two steps removed from teachers. That was my question, so now I'll ask another.

In your second recommendation, you lamented low literacy levels, particularly among adults who did not complete high school. Literacy includes numeracy and computer skills because the three are generally very closely related.

You also mentioned that the 28% of first nations individuals living off reserve corresponds to the 28% of the population that enters college without the required level, while in the general population, that proportion is 11%. Do you think that number is even worse for first nations members who live on reserve?

Ms. Denise Amyot: Without a doubt.

A lot of people live on reserves. I used to work for Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Unfortunately, many first nations people who live on reserves do not complete high school. Some do not even complete elementary school. That number is much higher.

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: That means you recommend more funding not for colleges, but for K to 12 so that people can achieve the required level of literacy. Is that right?

Ms. Denise Amyot: Absolutely.

Recent funding announcements are a step in the right direction because they will address that problem. However, as I mentioned, providing it for K to 12 is not enough because funding allocated to the post-secondary sector has not gone up in several years even though the population has grown. We now have proportionately fewer students who can continue their post-secondary education.

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: You're suggesting that funding be increased to match inflation and population growth, but also that significantly more funding be allocated per student to compensate for the difference in literacy levels observed at the end of high school. That difference is three times bigger for first nations people off reserve, and it's probably even bigger for first nations people on reserve.

That brings me to another question. Do you think that colleges have a service delivery strategy for students who live on reserve and who are therefore far from the cities where college-level studies are offered?

Ms. Denise Amyot: Colleges have been looking at that issue for years. They use a variety of models. Once a year, there is a symposium where people get together and share lessons learned and best practices. That is why we decided to develop a protocol that will be modelled after LEED certification.

● (0935)

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: It will be a certification.

Ms. Denise Amyot: It will be a kind of certification to make sure all of the bases have been covered.

We evaluate people and assess their specific needs. We use strategies to better meet their needs and ensure that the skills they'll develop will be useful to their communities.

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

We move on to Mr. Butt.

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Good morning, everyone. Thank you for being here.

I'll start with the Canadian Electricity Association. We certainly know from the recent ice storms that we saw down my way the very dangerous work that is done by many of your members, the linemen and the other people involved in this sector. It's tough, dangerous work, and I'm wondering what you are doing to recruit people, not just aboriginal citizens of Canada but others. For the purpose of this study, I'm wondering what you're doing to recruit people who would be interested in working in this very dangerous field, so that they recognize it as a career option for them, given the fact the work is very tough. You're exposed to the elements. You're dealing with electricity. Some of us are afraid to screw in a light bulb without electrocuting ourselves sometimes. I can just imagine the level of danger involved in some of this work.

What are you doing to make this career choice more acceptable to people as an option?

Mr. Jim Burpee: Yes, it's dangerous, but a lot of what the training is about is how to manage the danger and manage the risk, because we don't like to put people out where there is a risk of actually getting harmed. Safety is a key part, and training is a key part.

With respect to the member utilities, you would find that each one actually works very closely with their local community colleges for one thing, for a lot of the trades training, and will have partnerships. OPG would have several, usually community based, in terms of raising awareness. A lot of the companies will work with the high schools to promote what the ongoing trades are and what the opportunities are. There are trades operators and engineering and professional services all the way through the industry.

We expect a turnover over the next four or five years of about 40% of the workforce, so this is a critical issue for us. When we actually look at the aboriginal component—someone asked earlier about commitments and targets—it's not about meeting targets. It's about creating the workforce that we desperately need and is available for our facilities.

Every company will be doing job fairs and working with the community organizations to raise awareness. I'm trying to think of what other associations we work with in terms of promoting the industry for jobs, because they are really good jobs.

Mr. Brad Butt: In the 2013 sustainable electricity report that you published, you indicate that 87% of your member companies have procedures for training and employment of aboriginal peoples. Could you speak to the quality and success rates of these measures?

Mr. Jim Burpee: I think Joe has really represented what a good job OPG is doing, and not just on the Lower Mattagami. They have relationships across the province and have done partnerships in several areas. Manitoba Hydro has been doing this for a long time and has excellent programs, as has BC Hydro. The reason it's 87% and not 100% is that we have a few members that might be in a very urban area, such as Medicine Hat or others, that might not have seen the same issue.

I think also that one of the key things Joe has mentioned is that when we talk about Darlington, that's not a northern Ontario or northern Canada project. That's in southern Ontario. There is a large aboriginal community within the urban settings that we should deal with, but we do have a few smaller members that don't see that connect or need just yet. Anyone who is doing any major project development of northern resources will have a component that looks at more engagement of aboriginals in terms of the workforce out of necessity.

● (0940)

Mr. Brad Butt: My last question will be for the colleges.

You mentioned a program with the truck drivers that went right on site. Fifteen were trained right in that community and bang, literally, there were jobs the next day once the training was complete.

Do you have another example like that, that you would want to share with us? I thought that was a very intriguing way of doing it, actually taking the job opportunity to them, rather than expecting them to get their transportation, etc., out to the training site.

Ms. Denise Amyot: In your booklet there is another one from Nicola Valley that you can see. It's on page 40. The truck or trailer has different types of trades. The students try different types of trades for a period of about 12 weeks. From that they are able to see which one they seem to be more naturally skilled at and which one they seem to be more passionate about. Is it welding, or plumbing, and so on?

What is very interesting, as you can see on this one, is that 85% of the students who have participated in that program pursue opportunities afterward because they discover that they do have skills and they can learn something. It is really to entice them to pursue studies.

The Chair: I'm going to end the first session at that point because we only have a very short period of time and we do have to switch over our presenters.

I wish to thank you for coming today and for taking the time to provide the briefs as you did and your testimony. It will certainly help in our study. Thank you again.

We'll take a short break while we change to the second panel.

● (0940)

(Pause)

● (0945)

The Chair: I'd like to welcome everyone back to the second hour of meeting number 14 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

We continue our study concerning opportunities for aboriginal persons in the workforce.

For the next hour, we're delighted to have with us, Ms. Elizabeth Cayen, executive director with the Nunavut Fisheries and Marine Training Consortium.

We are also joined by video conference from Winnipeg, Mr. Donovan Fontaine. Actually, we're not joined by Mr. Fontaine, as I understand it. He hasn't arrived yet, but hopefully he will arrive. He's a board member at First Peoples Development Inc.

We also have Ms. Joan Harris, a program manager, who is actually on the screen via video conference with us now. Welcome.

Finally, also by video conference from Winnipeg, we have Mr. Kent Paterson, president and chief executive officer of the YMCA-YWCA of Winnipeg.

Thank you for joining us. Hopefully, Mr. Fontaine will arrive as we go through the testimony.

I'll turn the floor over to the witnesses for their 10-minute opening remarks and presentations.

Ms. Cayen, would you begin, please, for 10 minutes.

● (0950)

Ms. Elisabeth Cayen (Executive Director, Nunavut Fisheries and Marine Training Consortium): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of Nunavut Fisheries and Marine Training Consortium, NFMTC, I would like to thank you for the invitation to share a success story with you about a training program with far-reaching effects on the lives of Inuit beneficiaries in Nunavut.

NFMTC was formed to meet the employment opportunities presented by the emerging fishing industry in Nunavut. Our program is an example of how partnerships can work together to bring about change.

Who are our partners? The Government of Canada and the Government of Nunavut provide financial resources. Inuit training organizations provide financial resources and help identify students on a regional level. The hunters and trappers organizations throughout Nunavut help identify students locally and provide assistance with applications. Nunavut Arctic College provides great in-kind contributions, classroom and other space, and greatly reduced rates in accommodation and meals. The Marine Institute is contracted by NFMTC through the college to deliver our highly specialized training. Very important are our fishing industry partners, those companies that hold fishing quota in the waters adjacent to Nunavut. They provide financial resources; they help identify required training; and most importantly, they provide jobs. Without this element, the training would serve little purpose.

NFMTC provides training in the marine industry: offshore and inshore fishing, fish-processing plants, commercial and research vessels. We provide training that is not a made-for-Nunavut solution. Training is mandated and certified by Transport Canada and is internationally recognized.

Training occurs mainly in Nunavut, closer to the homes of our trainees. Only for very advanced training requiring highly specialized equipment do our students leave the territory.

Our training is responsive to industry needs. Yes, Transport Canada mandates what needs to be in the curriculum for their certification, but industry may have additional requirements.

What happens when our students complete their training? This is where the story gets good. This past year we had approximately 300 course participants in some 35 different courses. Our course completion rate is up to about 95%. That's up from some 75 students in seven courses, with a completion rate of about 70% in the early years. We actually have to turn students away now. For every 12 seats, we get 40 to 50 applications.

Are there jobs for our trainees? The answer is a resounding yes. Our industry needs crew for their vessels. In one of our last courses, all 12 students went to sea; that's 12 positions taken by Inuit crew on various fishing vessels. The last few years have seen huge increases in the number of young Inuit going into the offshore industry. This past fishing season was our best so far with 100 Inuit on the various offshore fishing vessels. In the past, we had maybe 20 or 30, so that's a huge increase.

The whole mindset is changing. Our students, having gained successful employment on the vessels, are becoming role models in the communities. In days past if we asked students whether they knew anyone in the industry, there might be one or two in the class, and now every hand goes up. They, too, want to get out of their cycle of poverty and unemployment and have successful careers.

The inshore fishery has grown also. While this is highly seasonal work, the Government of Nunavut reports that there are about 100 inshore fishers. An inshore winter turbot fisher can earn upwards of $70,000 in a three-month period. It's good money.

In full season, 50 to 60 workers in the three processing plants in Nunavut process fish from the inshore fishery and get it ready for the market.

Then there are the cargo vessels. In the last two years our expanded training has assisted eight Inuit in finding employment on these vessels. There are plans by the two large sealift companies that serve Nunavut to increase their Inuit complement.

We've also provided training for a young woman and several young men to work on the RV *Nuliajuk*. That's the Government of Nunavut's research vessel.

With a population of about 30,000 and with more than half that population under the age of 18 years, there are now approximately 275 people employed in the marine industry directly as a result of our training programs, and that's in this past year.

What is the economic benefit of this training to Nunavut and to Canada as a whole?

● (0955)

An offshore fisher makes between $75,000 and $100,000 per year. Most of that is spent in local communities. If there are five fishers in one community, that's about $450,000 of revenue into a very small community of less than 1,000 people. One hundred offshore fishers earning $90,000 per year pay income taxes of about $2.7 million. The Government of Nunavut levies a payroll tax of 2%, so that's another $200,000.

Last year we received $1.5 million in federal and territorial funding. Given these numbers, we can say we're self-funding and in fact helping to balance the budget.

There are other benefits that are harder to measure, such as savings on income support, subsidized housing, and health care. The incidence of violence and crime decreases as income increases. The children of a parent who is able to support those children are much more inclined to finish their education. These are far-reaching results that are very difficult to measure in dollar values.

Why are we successful? There are several integral parts that help us provide meaningful training leading to jobs.

One of the things is a pre-training course. This is a two-week course that helps applicants decide if the industry is for them, and that helps us to screen applicants, the pre-assessment that was talked about, that we heard in the last session.

The second thing is we have realistic industry-driven accredited training. Our training is industry responsive, delivered in an environment resembling very much what the workplace will be, to industry standards. For instance, at nine o'clock the door closes because the ship has sailed. So you don't come to class.

We've added a bridge training simulator to our training equipment, allowing students to experience bridge duties. Many students have never seen the bridge of a ship, so this is a great motivator for students. Our training is accredited by Transport Canada. We work with them continually to improve our training and increase our capabilities. We want to provide training that will overcome every obstacle an Inuit faces in maintaining or advancing in his or her employment.

The third thing that's important is the industry partnerships. They provide not only financial assistance and jobs at the end of the training, but we also have a strong working relationship with them whereby we can help underemployed individuals advance in their training, also allowing new entrants into the industry.

The fourth thing that's important is the flexible funding arrangements that ensure our training program fits into funding arrangements. We're currently an SPF program, and that's working well for us. We need that flexibility to allow for work plan and budget changes during the course of an agreement, as needs change.

It's important to have the flexibility in not being limited to a per-person cost. A student who wants to work on a factory freezer trawler will need a bridge-watch rating. Training in one year can cost up to $45,000. The cost of training in the north is enormous, with the cost of travel making up much of this cost. It costs anywhere between $400 and $2,000 to travel one way between Iqaluit and outlying communities.

With this flexibility we realize there's also accountability, and that principle underlies our program.

The fifth integral component is the students, individuals willing to take a chance in a new industry, willing to leave their communities for training and for employment, willing to open their minds to something new, and wanting something better for themselves and their families.

That's the real success story: Inuit beneficiaries who have taken advantage of an opportunity for real training leading to real jobs in a territory where there are few jobs.

On behalf of those Inuit beneficiaries, thank you to the Government of Canada for your support and believing in our program.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that presentation.

Now we move to Winnipeg. Why don't we begin with Mr. Paterson.

Mr. Kent Paterson (President and Chief Executive Officer, YMCA-YWCA - Winnipeg): Good morning, Mr. Chair, and committee members.

I am Kent Paterson. I am the president and CEO of the YMCA-YWCA of Winnipeg.

Our YMCA-YWCA is part of a federation of 50 Canadian YMCAs dedicated to strengthening the foundations of communities. As well, we are one of 28 YWCAs in Canada. The vision of the YWCA is: women and girls empowered in a safe and equitable society.

On behalf of all of our member associations, thank you for the opportunity to share our perspective on how to improve opportunities for aboriginal persons in the workforce.

I'd like to start by giving you a bit of context for my remarks.

Every year, YMCAs and YWCAs in Canada serve more than 2.25 million individuals in 1,000 communities from coast to coast. We offer programs and services in: child care; camping; employment and training programs; youth leadership development; newcomer services; global initiatives; and health, fitness, and aquatics. Our programs and services support individuals of all ages and diverse cultural, economic, and social backgrounds. This includes services for newcomers, visible minorities, first nations and aboriginal groups, and many children and youth.

As well, for well over a decade the YMCA has been a trusted and accountable partner of the federal government in the delivery of the YMCA federal public sector youth internship program, through which we give many youth the leadership and experiential skills they need to succeed. As youth transition through life stages, our partnership with the federal government helps youth to gain experiential knowledge and support to achieve success. I note that between 2011 and 2012, 93.5% of the youth who completed the YMCA federal public sector internship program found employment or returned to school.

Here in Winnipeg the YMCA-YWCA serves more than 80,000 individuals annually through a variety of programs including health, fitness, and aquatics, child care, camping, and employment training.

We employ 175 persons on a full-time basis, and at any given time have upwards of 700 part-time employees. We are a first employer of many, whether it be as a first employer of young persons or the first Canadian employer of many new Canadians.

Specific to Canada’s aboriginal communities, in 2011-12 as part of our YMCA Canada federation’s collective commitment to address issues of national importance, Mr. Scott Haldane, president and CEO of YMCA Canada, served as the chair of the National Panel on First Nation Elementary and Secondary Education for Students on Reserve.

In addition, as a member of the YMCA Canada federation, we're working with four Canadian youth-serving organizations and six aboriginal organizations on a national awareness campaign to change public perceptions of the aspirations and potential of aboriginal youth.

Mr. Chair, and members of the committee, my presentation today is premised on our years of experience as national organizations helping youth to achieve their full potential.

Through the YMCA-YWCA's many years of working with youth, some of whom are aboriginal, we have learned that youth need both structured and informal supports. They need places where they feel safe and a sense of belonging. They need places where they can find people who see their strengths and their potential. They need support to sustain new and healthier habits over their lifetime.

As the committee explores ways to improve opportunities for aboriginal persons in the workforce, especially in the areas of skills development and educational attainment, we'd like to offer the following recommendations.

First and foremost we believe that programs designed to assist first nations and aboriginal youth should be co-created with aboriginal communities, and should reflect their unique values, needs, and cultural context.

Second, we believe strongly in experiential learning for aboriginal youth. In our experience, important preparatory work and supports are necessary for successful transitions from home to school. Young people must be exposed to opportunities that give them diverse experiences. Internship and volunteer opportunities in this regard can help youth to learn new skills. We find that many youth, both educated and less educated, lack job search and workplace skills to succeed. Many also lack the mentors, role models, resources, and networking skills to overcome barriers in their lives.

There are existing initiatives that the government can leverage to help support skills development for aboriginal youth. For example, in 2010 the YMCA developed a sectorial model for working in the petroleum sector in partnership with the Petroleum Human Resources Council of Canada. Through this initiative, youth would receive workplace mentoring and support to assist them in finding employment in the oil and gas sector.

● (1000)

We believe that a similar model could be extended to other industries in partnership with the private sector and aboriginal-serving organizations to help youth achieve success.

The third recommendation we'd like to make is that a social determinants of health lens be used to support our aboriginal youth. As you no doubt are aware, the World Health Organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, recognizing that health is not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

Health, in our view, is a resource for everyday life, not an object. It's a positive concept that emphasizes social and personal resources as well as physical capabilities.

We believe that any programs to support the creation of opportunity for aboriginal youth in the labour market must take into account the 12 key determinants of health that have been identified and adopted by Health Canada and other public health agencies.

In order to support aboriginal youth progress in the labour market, any employment or educational program must recognize the entire range of interacting barriers and challenges to health that they face and must create opportunities in all of the dimensions of health.

Locally, the YMCA-YWCA of Winnipeg delivers the Youth Now program on behalf of the Province of Manitoba. This program assists youth on income assistance to develop employability skills through training and/or work experience placements leading to employment.

Historically, many of our Youth Now participants here in Winnipeg have been aboriginal, although I should point out that the program doesn't specifically target aboriginal persons.

Through this program we provide paid work experience placements and we support young people as they gain the skills necessary to secure and retain employment. The supports we provide range from mentoring and counselling to providing child care as needed. During their time in the Youth Now program, our participants have the benefit of full access to our health, fitness, and aquatics offerings.

In addition, over the last five years we've been a partner in the North End Wellness Centre initiative in north Winnipeg, an initiative supported in part by the MRIF, the municipal rural infrastructure fund. There we operate a centre of community in partnership with Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata, which is a non-mandated aboriginal family services agency.

While the Y's program there is primarily recreational in nature, we do provide employment and volunteer opportunities to many young people in a neighbourhood with a large aboriginal population. For many of these young people, this is their first employment opportunity.

Together with Ma Mawi we're able to provide young people with the mentoring that will help them succeed. We believe this collaborative initiative has served to improve the employment prospects of the more than 1,700 young people we interact with annually at this centre.

That's a high-level view of what we do and what I believe in. As I say, the Y across Canada has had a long history of working with youth. We believe strongly in providing experiential training, and we have enjoyed the support of various levels of government over the years. We hope that it will continue.

In closing, I hope this has been informative. I thank you for the opportunity to share our recommendations. I look forward to any questions or comments that you may have.

● (1005)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paterson.

Now we move to Ms. Harris, for 10 minutes.

Ms. Joan Harris (Program Manager, First Peoples Development Inc.): Good morning, Mr. Chair, committee members, and colleagues. Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today.

My colleague Donavan Fontaine unfortunately is still not available. He is one of the seven board members of our organization.

First Peoples Development Incorporated, FPDI, administers 34 first nations subagreements through ASETS funding. The first nations develop and deliver their own programs and services, which meet their specific community labour market and employment needs on reserve. FPDI provides the oversight, support, and guidance to assist with the transparency and accountability of the ASETS program.

There continue to be challenges and barriers to be addressed by first nations individuals looking to actively participate in the country's workforce. With the time I have I would like to highlight just a few of those challenges that we are dealing with in Manitoba.

The first challenge is local capacity development. Administration budgets have been stagnant for over 20 years, while activities such as strategic plan writing, proposal development, continual staff development to learn new procedures, policies, reporting methods, and working with clients facing multiple barriers continue to be an expectation.

Continuous capacity building for local first nation administrators needs to be supported financially to allow professional development to be undertaken so the expertise is built at the first nation level to support clients. As an example, continuous case management training for local administrators needs to be part of the overall program, so clients receive expert advice during the training to employment plan. Clients start at a disadvantage when they don't receive the proper support at the onset of their training plan.

As an administrative organization, FPDI also lacks administrative funding to do research and development, proposal development, and to address the increasing reporting requirements.

Contact IV was a free client management system. It was phased out in 2013 by our funder, ESDC. New software was purchased and FPDI now faces significant monthly maintenance fees for the client management system, with no new funding attached. Nonetheless, we strive to work at improving the advice and assistance we provide to the 34 subagreement holders.

We have a number of initiatives that we feel fall within the scope of best practices. This includes digitizing communication for the subagreement holders through redesigned websites that we have undertaken. The website provides reporting templates, success stories, information sharing, operational guides, and links to numerous resources so they're available for them in order to carry out their training programs.

FPDI also conducts client management training sessions on an ongoing basis. We have adopted the practice of reviewing client targets regularly with our subagreement holders. We provide training to first nations on how to develop their own targets based on their demographics, historical training, and labour market statistics within their geographic region.

Over the past four years we have trained over 10,000 clients. As well, there is an effort to refocus the subagreement holders to communicate essential information such as ASETS accountabilities, partnership opportunities, financial position of assets, and sharing of success stories during our subagreement holder meetings.

Another issue is partnerships. Although emphasis is being placed on partnerships, the definition from ESDC is limited and only recognizes formal partnerships. Recognition needs to be given to the many informal partnerships that exist between first nations departments, maximizing the integration of programs for clients. Many of the first nation communities rely on interdepartmental training and employment partnerships for their community members, especially when industry demand-driven employment is not geographically viable in many communities.

Regional differences and opportunities associated with accessing industry opportunities need to be acknowledged. Many first nations are remote, with little to no access to major industries and employers in their region. At the same time, all first nations are competing with one another for the same employer in Manitoba in the same industry. In total, there are over 60 subagreement holders, 34 from First Peoples Development and another 30 with our sister organization, MKO.

● (1010)

Budget considerations ignore the cost of relocation and travel to effectively access the demand-driven job market. There is limited provincial funding available in Manitoba. The provincial government input and support is varied nationally. Master agreement holders such as FPDI need to be involved in provincial labour market development negotiations, so that first nations clients are considered during the planning process. Federal support is needed to leverage provincial partnerships.

Formal partnerships with industry need to be built off reserve. This is a big challenge for most first nations as they also have limited local staffing. There is usually one staff person at the first nations level to network and form a partnership. This is difficult to achieve while staff are also dealing with the demands of addressing the client's needs.

Engaging employers at the front end to improve labour market linkages and build programs and curriculum could prove to be positive for clients.

Industry can be proactive and incorporate on-the-job training components for first nations employees.

Aboriginal awareness and building cross-cultural understanding in the workplace are ongoing requirements that industry partners should be encouraged to make available to all employees on a continual basis.

Most potential industry partners benefit from targeted wage subsidies made available through the labour market programs, but employers also need to contribute to the employment process as an equal partner.

The final topic I would like to discuss is child care, as we are currently involved with licensing our child care programs.

Child care is a fundamental need for clients with children. FPDI funds 38 first nations early learning and child care, ELCC, centres through FNICCI funding, a total of 541 spaces. Approximately 150 early childhood educators are employed at the centre. There are no additional funds provided for qualified staff or children with special needs.

The first nations ELCC centres are not licensed by Manitoba and do not receive any additional subsidies. The 2010 ASETS contribution agreement specified that all Manitoba first nations ELCC centres be licensed or regulated by provincial licensing authorities, except in the case where, by mutual agreement between the province and First Peoples Development, child care centres are monitored by regulatory mechanisms controlled by first nations, which are currently not in existence.

In 2012, FPDI participated in an intergovernmental working group with federal and provincial representatives to discuss child care and meeting provincial standards in first nations communities. The group produced a joint assessment report, which was the study of four first nations, to assess how the existing provincial licensing process applies to first nations, and to identify gaps and inequities.

The next steps include recommendations and options on how first nations should be licensed and monitored by the province or an aboriginal-mandated body. The report also identifies resource gaps, funding formulas, and determining national best practices. FPDI hopes the next steps also include recommendations for further analysis and a more comprehensive study to identify the cost of ELCC operations, funding for infrastructure, capital requirements to meet regulations standards, and liability coverage.

In the meantime, FPDI has established the First Peoples Child Care Association, which is the first step to establishing a Manitoba first nations child care entity and its role in this process for meeting an agreed-upon form of regulation. The challenge we face is the fact that there's no funding attached to this group to sustain it. Assistance from other federal departments, specifically and first nations and Inuit health branch, is critical to support first nations child care. Better integration of programs supported by the various government departments would greatly assist with building quality child care facilities that are regulated and would alleviate a point of stress for clients with children.

In conclusion, there has been a lot of good work done by in providing support to first nations in Manitoba. There is a lot more that is needed to address the challenges and barriers facing individuals entering the workforce.

Continuous learning for administrators at the community level, which FPDI is supporting, needs to continue to be part of the overall strategy for increasing aboriginal participation in the workforce. Partnerships of all types, formal and informal, need to be developed. This is not lost on the first nations we work with. However, as indicated, resources both financial and human present real challenges to building solid partnerships that allow first nations to break into the workforce. Industry should be engaged to help find solutions to allow for success.

● (1015)

Improving and making child care an integral part of the training support programming would assist young parents in taking advantage of training and employment opportunities.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to speak to your committee.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Harris.

We'll move on to the first round of questioning, and Madam Hughes from the NDP, for five minutes.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): I think some of what we hear right now was reiterated in the skills shortage study we did at this committee last year.

I was at the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada convention this past weekend and the issue of skills training was brought forward there as well, especially with the Ring of Fire coming up in northern Ontario.

Thank you for being here, Mrs. Cayen. We've heard comments today with respect to some of the institutes. Teg Educational Institute in M' is also doing some good work, but the fact is that the financing isn't often there for the programming. When it comes to child care workers as well as teachers in first nations communities, there is a big discrepancy in wages compared to wages off first nations communities.

You mentioned a lot of the challenges and the barriers. We heard over and over again about flexibility being needed. It's really important to take note that it's not about centralizing, that it's about making sure the small communities are going to be recognized. There's the differences from community to community to community. Mrs. Cayen, you actually did speak on that.

You mentioned a database that's there now, Ms. Harris, and that having to absorb the costs of that certainly means less money for the people on the ground to be able to train others.

I'm wondering if you could elaborate on the flexibility that should be in place. Also, what are the pitfalls that we should be avoiding?

● (1020)

Ms. Elisabeth Cayen: From my perspective, under the SPF program that we are currently funded by, which will end at the end of March, by the way, we have a very flexible arrangement. I think a lot of that has to do with the fact that we've progressed from an ASEP program and we know what works. The powers that be have recognized that and have said to let them do what needs to be done.

So a young man, and they are mostly men as fishing is mainly a man's world—

Mrs. Carol Hughes: What's the age group? That has intrigued me.

Ms. Elisabeth Cayen: I would say our age group is between 22 and 40. For anyone older than that it's pretty tough to break into the fishing industry. You have to work hard. It's not an easy industry to be in.

We currently have no age limits attached to our funding. It's not youth funding; it's just training money, which is very important. We need to continue having flexibility in the amount that we are allowed to spend per person. That's really important. The cost of training up there is horrible. Flying to here and back costs a touch over $2,000.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: The success that you spoke about, what is the shortage in funding for you to be able to...?

Ms. Elisabeth Cayen: Actually our funding is—

Mrs. Carol Hughes: You said you were turning people away.

Ms. Elisabeth Cayen: We are and that's capacity at this point. We don't want to grow too quickly.

We've had a lot of success in the last two or three years and before we add more instructors and increase our administrative staff, etc., we want to make sure we have something solid going. You have to also remember the industry can only take so many new people per year because it does take time to build up. You start in the factory freezer but then as soon as you start there the next step up requires that you have six months' sea time. Then the next step up requires more and more.

It's a progressive type of thing that happens so we can't say that we're going to train 100 people just for the offshore this year and hope they all get jobs. That's not realistic. You can't put all “green horns” on a boat. The captain would go crazy.

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

We'll move to Ms. McLeod from the Conservative Party.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): I'd like to thank all the witnesses.

It's very heartening to hear the success story of your particular program, and some of the great work that is happening across the country. Things are certainly not where they need to be, but we're hopefully moving in a good direction.

One of the goals of this study is to look at the programs that are working, the models, and the challenges. We've heard about SPF and ASETS. I'm going to ask all the witnesses who care to comment, what are the good and bad in those types of program funding?

I'll start with Ms. Cayen, and then head to the video conference.

Could you speak about the good and the bad about both models, please?

Ms. Elisabeth Cayen: We're not really involved with ASETS. Our Inuit training organizations that help fund us are funded by ASETS, and it funnels that way. We've never had any program turned down by an ASETS program, so that's a huge thing.

To be honest, we've found that the funding is pretty good. It just keeps coming. For the type of program we're running, it's been very successful. Even the amounts that we're getting.... Yes, we can always use more money, there's no doubt, because we would grow more, watching the labour capacity.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Could I quickly clarify my point?

The students are getting some funding to participate through ASETS, but you're getting funding for your organization through SPF. Both forms of funding are funnelling into the delivery of your program.

● (1025)

Ms. Elisabeth Cayen: Yes.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Ms. Harris.

Ms. Joan Harris: Our organization is solely funded under the ASETS program, so it's more limiting. Of the 34 subagreement holders that we have, about a quarter have funding over $400,000. The remainder are very small agreements. Once you factor.... For example, if your agreement is between $100,000 to $200,000 and you only have a 10% administration budget, it quickly becomes very small, so therein lie the challenges I was speaking about.

Within that budget several accountabilities need to be met, including of course the very important statistical tracking of clients. However, successes still exist within that, it just takes a lot more ingenuity to manage your funding. The informal partnerships on reserves that I was speaking to make that funding go further. First nations use their funding, along with funding—the work opportunities program, Active Measures, and those types of things—to be able to provide more training for their clients.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you.

Mr. Paterson, do you have any comments or any relationships with either of those?

Mr. Kent Paterson: Not at the present time, no.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Okay, great.

Ms. Harris, I would presume the new electronic system is providing some fairly reasonable data for analysis. Can you take 30 seconds to share with us what the goals of the new electronic system are designed to do?

Ms. Joan Harris: Yes, absolutely.

We did have to pick a system, and we tried to find one that's user friendly because there are varying levels of experience on the reserves. Everyone would find it easier to use this program. We've switched to a program called an accountability and resource management system. It allows us to regularly track targets. It's online, and it's live. We're not waiting for a monthly upload to government and for those numbers to come back to us; we can view it in real time. It's allowing the first nations to know where the shortfalls are, if any, and what they need to track. It's assisting them to be more aware of what the stats are.

The Chair: Thank you. That's time up on that round.

We move to Mr. Cuzner, from the Liberal party.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Thanks to all witnesses.

I'd like to get a clarification, and you may think this isn't related to the study, but I'll loop it in. I'm taking this out of the archives, from maybe 2001-02, when Nunavut was granted a shrimp allocation and there was no real capacity within that community. I think a problem arose, that the allocation was actually fished by a non-Canadian boat. I think it was a Norwegian boat or something that fished that allocation.

Do we have that capacity now in Nunavut? Are you guys doing your own shrimp?

Ms. Elisabeth Cayen: Absolutely. We're up to an overall allocation of 75% now in the waters adjacent to Nunavut, which is part of the land claim agreement as well. The capacity is there now. We have about six or seven vessels that are either Nunavut owned completely, or owned partially as a majority owner. The number of foreigners on the boats is decreasing, and that's our goal. Our goal is to move our—

● (1030)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: That would have started around 2001-02.

Ms. Elisabeth Cayen: Yes, and it took a few years to get the NFMTC on the ground. Part of that was the guys weren't used to going fishing. They would go fishing traditionally for their day fishing, but not away from home for six or eight weeks at a time.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Yes, I thought I remembered that correctly. It was a revenue stream, but there were no real far-reaching benefits on that.

Ms. Elisabeth Cayen: That has really changed.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: You mentioned that the funding stream is set to lapse at the end of March.

Ms. Elisabeth Cayen: It is.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Are there negotiations going on? Are you getting any of sense of that?

Ms. Elisabeth Cayen: I've secured funding for next year. Not all of it is coming from the Government of Canada. In fact, that's a very small part. I've been able to develop a relationship with the Government of Nunavut, and under their labour market strategy they'll be our main funder for this coming year.

With the new programs coming in 2015, we're hoping to move back to the federal government, but for this year, that's what we're going to do.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: I have a quick question for Ms. Harris.

You work in partnership with program delivery, providing employment and training opportunities through a subagreement with the Province of Manitoba.

Do you know if some of these training opportunities are currently being supported through the ALMA, the labour market agreement?

Ms. Joan Harris: No, they're not. The funding is through ASETS. Some of the first nations do have partnerships with the province, but very few. The majority of them, our 34 first nations, usually partner with other federal funding programs. One of the challenges that I mentioned was that we really would like to have our federal funder facilitate that relationship with the provincial . There's not that significant relationship there at the moment.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cuzner.

Now we go to Mr. Armstrong.

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): I'd like to pick up on that.

What you're saying is that the money, which is all federal money that the provinces administer, you're having trouble tapping into that through the provincial government out there. Is that accurate?

Ms. Joan Harris: That's what I'm saying. What I'm saying is that we do need to work together because our aboriginal clients need to tap into that, absolutely.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: What's the province's reasoning for not allowing aboriginal clients to tap into that? Do you have any opinion on that?

Ms. Joan Harris: There's no indication of the reason. What we're looking for is some consultation at the front end of when programs are being developed.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: What you're asking the federal government to do, as we negotiate the LEAS and the , is to make sure that we talk to the provinces about how we expect this money to be used and allocated.

Ms. Joan Harris: Absolutely. Especially when you're considering capital initiatives, where the province is using those training dollars for capital initiatives, to have some kind of aboriginal input into that, in this province anyway.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Recognizing that these are all federal tax dollars being transferred to the provinces' ministries, you'd like to see the federal government have a bit more control over how those dollars are used. Is it accurate if I say that?

Ms. Joan Harris: That's accurate, absolutely.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Thank you very much.

Mrs. Cayen, I'm interested in your program. I'm from the east coast. Mr. Cuzner and I both know a lot about the fishing industry and the seasonal nature of this work. Before Rodger and I retire and head up there for $70,000 in three months....

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Could you talk a little about that? You talked about the age of your clients going into the fishing industry and how successful they've been in recent years. I mean, they're 20 years old. How do the clients come to you? I know there's word of mouth and they see what their older friends are doing, but is there any way or are there any programs to reach down into the high school level to let them know what programs are there, to try to recruit at that level, before they have this really difficult transition from school to work or from dropping out of school?

That's a really difficult time where, from my experience as an educator, we lose a lot of young people. It doesn't matter if they're first nations or from other ethnic backgrounds. It's a really difficult transition from school or dropping out of school to actually getting into the workforce. Are there any programs or is there any outreach you do to try to attract these people before they back up...?

● (1035)

Ms. Elisabeth Cayen: Yes. We do go into the high schools when we get the opportunity. As I said earlier, the cost of travelling is humongous in Iqaluit and in Nunavut as a whole, so we can't go to every school in every community. That's not practical. However, we do go to the regional centres, and that's often where a lot of the kids end up coming anyway. When they have a career fair, a lot of the kids from the outlying communities will come there as well. Whenever there are career fairs or other opportunities.... In fact, next week we'll be at the Iqaluit high school, and we'll be talking to them about our program as well.

You have to remember that we can't really take anybody under the age of 18 years. That's mandated by Transport Canada. They're the boss and they say no, and that's good, because you know what? You need a level of maturity to be able to be away from home. You have to have cut the apron strings, and we find that generally that's not at 18, but at 25 at least.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: You did talk, however, about the amount of pre-training you do to try to get those basic employability skills. Are there restrictions from Transport Canada that would preclude a program like that being offered to those who are younger than 18?

Ms. Elisabeth Cayen: No, absolutely not.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Could you do that part of it?

Ms. Elisabeth Cayen: Absolutely, yes. That's something we've developed. It's really our screening process for our next level of courses. We are finding that without it.... Students would come to Iqaluit for training, but we just didn't know what kind of training they were getting, because they were missing class. They weren't coming to class. They saw it as a holiday, because.... You have to remember, training in the north is completely funded. That's the model they've used for years and years. There is no financial requirement by the student, so they have a free holiday.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: That's a hard experience to break for them when that has been the tradition.

Ms. Elisabeth Cayen: It's very difficult, yes.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: It's necessary that it be broken, so that these work skills are displayed and they actually learn what it's like to show up on time, to show up and take good jobs. It is difficult, this transitioning from school to work. We see that across the country in all ethnic backgrounds. I do think that the more work that can be done in working with the secondary school system to help recruit, to help do some of these pre-job skills...I think that would be a worthy endeavour, not only from you but also from the schools working with you and the guidance counsellors and others.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Armstrong. That's five minutes.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Now we move on to Madame Groguhé for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Cayen, you mentioned the possibility of asking for an internship that lasts at least two weeks before signing up for a training program. What percentage of the people who do pre-training internships end up succeeding and finding employment? Do you have some idea of that percentage?

[*English*]

Ms. Elisabeth Cayen: I'm not sure I understand the question.

What we have is a pre-training program. That's a two-week program that basically introduces a student to what the fishing industry is all about. We talk about all sorts of things, including lifestyle, etc. We look at their numeracy skills. We do all kinds of assessments with them. It gives us a chance to screen whether they're a person who would be suited for the industry, and it gives them a chance to look at it and ask themselves if they really want to do it.

The number of people who come through the pre-training program and move on to pre-T is not so much related to ability as it is to interest. Some people who come in may think that they want to be fishermen, that it's what they want to do. Then they find out what it's really all about and they say, “No, thank you.” As for the number of people who go from the pre-training to the next class, probably 80% of them do.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Okay.

You also talked about accountability. I would like more information about that. What do you mean by accountability? What kind of challenges are you dealing with there?

● (1040)

[*English*]

Ms. Elisabeth Cayen: Our accountability is straight across the board, from financial accountability.... My personal philosophy is that at the end of the day, I'm a taxpayer, so if that expense is not something I would be comfortable with, then it's not happening. I do that with any kind of funding we get through the program. It's not just the federal funding. It's the same thing for other types of program funding. In terms of financial accountability, that's very important. To me, if you don't have that....

I have another little mantra, which is, follow the money and then you'll find out what happens. If you're following the money and it's going to good training, then it's good; it's money well spent.

The other part of accountability is the job part. If we're doing training just for the sake of training, that's not being accountable, in my view. In my view, that's just not doing anything. There's no purpose to that.

The other thing I should mention is that not everybody who goes to work out of our programs takes even a pre-training program. Not everybody goes to the fishing industry, but they go to a lot of other sectors, because they've just developed some confidence and they say, “Gee, I can learn.” I track those results as well, because I think they're important.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Overall, do you think that accountability does a good job of covering all of the work done, or could it be improved?

[*English*]

Ms. Elisabeth Cayen: At this point, I think we're in pretty good shape. I've done accountability for many years in many different programs, so I would say yes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Paterson, you also mentioned the opportunity for young people and not-so-young people at the YMCA to do internships. There is one aspect you did not talk about though, and that is starting businesses. Can you tell us a little about that, please?

[*English*]

Mr. Kent Paterson: We have a program, separate and apart from the program I described, that is geared towards adults who want to start their own businesses. It's a self-employment program. Individuals who have been in receipt of employment insurance can elect to enter this program. We provide a wide range of counselling to assist people in developing their own business plans. We give them financial training. We give them training in sales and marketing and in legal aspects of operating a business. People go on to start their own businesses, and we provide them with supports as they get going. It's a program we've been offering for some years. We're looking to expand what we do in that regard.

One of our more recent endeavours has been to focus on the newcomer community in Manitoba. I can't say that we have specifically looked at enterprise creation opportunities for aboriginal persons, but certainly the program as a whole has been growing in the last number of years.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That ends the five minutes. It goes very quickly, I know.

This brings us to the end of the second panel actually. First of all, I would like to thank the witnesses for contributing to what I believe was a very fruitful day of testimony. I have just a couple of parting observations.

Ms. Cayen, you used the word “humongous”. I haven't heard that in a long time in my raising of four children. You mentioned 25 is the age at which you cut the apron strings. I can confirm that is true in southern Ontario as well.

Ms. Harris, we wish you the best of luck when you roll up the rim.

The meeting is adjourned.