



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 046 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, September 27, 2012

—
Chair

Mr. Ed Komarnicki

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

Thursday, September 27, 2012

•(0845)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC)): Good morning, everyone.

We will recommence our study.

We are looking at two parallel studies, I guess, with respect to current and anticipated skill shortages in high-demand areas and the difficulty faced by employers seeking to hire people for low-skilled jobs as well, specifically in the service sector.

We are happy to have with us today Cheryl McDonald, the director of the First Nations Human Resources Development Commission of Quebec. We also have Mary Ann Desjardins, director for development with the Vocational Training Centre for Aboriginals in the Construction Trades.

Each of you will present, but I understand, Cheryl, you'll present first. After both of you have finished presenting, we'll have questions from each side, going back and forth, until we're done for the hour.

Welcome to the committee. Relax. Feel free to start your delivery, Ms. McDonald.

Ms. Cheryl McDonald (Director, Support Services, First Nations Human Resources Development Commission of Quebec): Good morning, everyone. It's my pleasure to be here.

I've been with the First Nations Human Resources Development Commission for the past 20 years, half of the time in the community of Kanesatake, a Mohawk community of which I am a member, and I've been with the regional level in Kahnawake for the last almost 10 years, so this is near and dear to my heart.

I'd like to thank you for this opportunity you've given me to address some of the important issues related to first nations employment and training.

FNHR is responsible for the development of the labour market in 29 first nations communities in Quebec. We also have four urban centres as well for the off-reserve population in the cities of Montreal, Quebec, Val-d'Or, and Sept-Îles.

The First Nations Human Resources Commission has been around since the RBAs and the AHRDS, generations one and two, and now the ASETS, and over the years we've been a natural counterpart of the province with regard to employment and training of first nations.

It's important to note, however, that if this allows for better dovetailing with other labour market stakeholders, it does not necessarily reduce the size of the challenges we face. It goes without saying that chronic underfunding and administrative overload are issues that we cannot ignore. Every year our service points—and there are 33 of them—must refuse clients due to lack of funds before the end of the fiscal year, and in some places as early as the third quarter.

Analysis shows that between 1999 and 2014, the cumulative reduction in budgets provided by HRSDC to the FNHRDCQ will have reached \$16.8 million. If we express this amount in constant 1999 dollars and take into account inflation, this equates to a cumulative loss of \$46.8 million in purchasing power. Even including the additional funds received from HRSDC between 1999 and 2012, losses in purchasing power had already reached \$22.9 million at March 31, 2012. Given the high population of first nations between 1999 and 2012, our capacity for intervention represents only 51% of its 1999 capacity, decreasing money allocated towards a working-age individual from \$614 to \$314.

Regarding the administrative burden of the new ASETS, I will simply note that the number of reports requested by HRSDC and Service Canada throughout the year, the quality of new information to be provided, the number of amendments to be made, and the number of actions and decisions to explain and justify ensure the continuous increase in the workload related to accountability. We wonder if there is no limit to what the federal government will require in return for the funding provided through ASETS. Worse still, the latitude given to those who require and validate these reports and who are responsible for interpreting the requirements as we go along also seems unlimited.

The irony here is that all these measures that are meant to ensure the profitability of the ASETS end up reducing its effectiveness, since the impact of accountability measures is mostly felt on the front line, in our service points, where the lack of human resources continues to lead to the difficult choice between quality services and administrative duties.

We are aware of the strict guidelines that must be implemented by the department considering the size of its investment in the ASETS, but if having a balance between control and flexibility is a principle of good governance, it is also the basis of any mutually beneficial relationship. Considering what we have achieved so far and what we expect to achieve in the coming years, it would be in everyone's interest, including the department's, if we were to be seen as a true partner and not as some dependent entity. Repeated evaluations—all positive—over the last 15 years, at the very least have helped strengthen and renew our relationship so it can become one of equals.

We also wish to emphasize here that our ability to build partnerships with third parties in order to increase external investment in first nations employment and training has improved in recent years, but greater federal involvement remains necessary.

● (0850)

Partnerships represent an investment in the order of \$2.7 million from third parties—provincial departments, the private sector, non-profit organizations, and other federal programs—in addition to the \$17.9 million obtained from HRSDC under the ASETS for the 2011-12 fiscal year, which is an increase of 15%. This means that for every \$100,000 invested by HRSDC in our organization under the ASETS, over \$115,000 is invested in the training and employment of aboriginals and first nations.

It should be stated here that despite the increased funding through partnerships, the organization remains largely underfunded. These additional funds are tied to specific objectives within the frameworks of specific agreements, mostly non-recurring, and many local and urban needs remain unanswered.

That being said, let us now address our main subject, which is the role of each party—federal and provincial governments, the private sector, educational institutions, and aboriginal organizations involved in employment and training—in our efforts to favour aboriginal employment in high-demand or low-skill occupations.

We saw earlier that there is better dovetailing between the FNHRDCQ and other actors in the labour market, but an organization like ours is regularly thrown into a state of jurisdictional uncertainty. On one side is employment training under provincial jurisdiction, and on the other is the federal government's fiduciary obligation to aboriginal people. For years, Quebec and Ottawa have referred us to one another, forcing us to take care of our own business. But the relationship with the province is changing, due in part to the current economic situation, with shortages of labour and land development. The private sector needs labour and our people need to live on and from the land. In some more fortunate regions marked by major economic development, agreements have been made with big business to train and hire first nations workers, but this does not guarantee that the workers will remain employed, since they often face resistance from other workers regarding culture and language, when it is not outright racism. We need to work with unions and employers to implement awareness programs for workers and social integration of our participants. Efforts have been undertaken by us with the Université du Québec in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region to adapt one of their programs to meet our needs.

When there are encounters between potential employers and service points, the questions we are asked are how many trained and certified workers we have and how many participants are ready to register in vocational training. In other words, how many have the required prerequisites and have expressed an interest? This is where underfunding prevents us from establishing labour force profiles for each community. Yet this was part of the financial plan FNHRDCQ submitted in March 2010. I've given you copies of these reports. This was the directional plan we submitted when talks of the new ASETS were coming. That directional plan was scrapped in favour of the generic formats imposed by the department. In any case, the issue of academic prerequisites and vocational training is crucial.

With regard to high-demand jobs to provide quality services tailored to the needs of aboriginal participants and in accordance with the empowerment principles that lead to self-determination, the FNHRDCQ established its own institutions in the fields of adult education and vocational training. They were based on the recommendations of the two studies conducted with the help of the department of education.

The problem remains with the funding of these institutions. Although they play a vital role in our employment integration efforts, and although they represent an investment in the economic development of the province and the country, it is extremely difficult to obtain financial commitments from departments for the implementation and sustainability of the centres. Ms. Mary Ann Desjardins will speak to this issue in a few moments.

I would like to conclude my presentation by establishing a link between low skills and high-demand jobs. From the point of view of an organization that works daily with clients, we all know that a significant portion of our population is uneducated. I have already stressed the importance of the social integration of indigenous workers in the industries.

● (0855)

In a world where each party is willing to invest at the level of its interest, the FNHRDCQ would obtain a firm commitment on the part of unions, employers, educational institutions, and various levels of government to develop a training system, either in the workplace or in the area of cooperative education. This would recognize prior learning and accreditation so as to route the workers hired for low-skilled jobs toward high-demand occupations. This would provide individuals with an opportunity to find a job, remain employed, and improve their work situation in a gradual and natural manner.

I'd like to thank you for listening to me. I'd like to say that in our experience in trying to integrate our people through adult education and vocational training...it's a really long process to take them from where they are to where they want to be. As I said, it's robbing Peter to pay Paul, and choosing one client over the other.

I really hope that what I'm telling you and what Mary Ann will present will change the next agreement. We're already strapped within this agreement, and we're really hoping that you will ask us to help write the next agreement, because we know the needs of our people; we know the challenges that exist. The most important thing we need to do is to be the ones to help them. With social integration, as I mentioned, it's easy to take a client through an institution where it's a one-on-one learning process. Real integration is challenging when it's in a social environment, taking a youth from an isolated community into a workplace that isn't ready to receive him or her.

I would like to thank you.

● (0900)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I know you were a bit anxious before you presented, but you've done very well. You were able to well exceed your time and make a very interesting presentation.

We would like to recognize that the member from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup has arrived.

We'll now move to the next presentation.

Go ahead. We'll hear you now.

Ms. Mary Ann Desjardins (Director for Development, Vocational Training Centre for Aboriginals in the Construction Trades): *Bon matin.* Good morning.

It's an honour and a pleasure for me to be here this morning to talk to you about the Vocational Training Centre for Aboriginals in the Construction Trades.

This vocational school was the project that was created and funded by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, HRSDC, under the aboriginal skills employment project, ASEP. Pursuant to the project mandate, the Vocational Training Centre for Aboriginals in the Construction Trades was created to provide skilled training and the forms of diploma leading to employment.

I will be doing my presentation in French, but I will be pleased to answer all the different questions.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The mission of the Vocational Training Centre is to develop an Aboriginal workforce with the skills required to practice the trades and occupations of the construction industry and all other related sectors. The centre offers Aboriginal training services in French and English while respecting their values and cultural specificities. It is inscribed within a perspective of economic, social and cultural development of Aboriginal communities.

The result of a collaborative effort between the Commission de la construction du Québec, the Kahnawake Mohawk Council and the Conseil des Montagnais du Lac-Saint-Jean, the plan to create the centre responds to the need observed by these stakeholders to include Aboriginals in the construction industry by creating a qualified and skilled Aboriginal workforce. Supervised by the Commission scolaire de Montréal, the centre offers training every-

where in Quebec, wherever the communities in an area express a need.

We work in cooperation with all our partners and with all the school boards in Quebec. The centre's team is largely Aboriginal and creates added value to the traditional Aboriginal approach. The centre is operated by a management committee. It has representation from the Aboriginal community, from unions, from employers, from the Commission de la construction du Québec and from the school board. There are 26 trades and six specialized occupations in the construction industry. Programs last from six months to a year and a half. Training is offered with the assistance of various school boards in the province of Quebec.

I have provided you with an information kit. Information on the left is in English, information on the right is in French. Inside, you will find all the programs we offer. As this is a national school, training is offered in English and French. The services provided by the centre are indicated. You will also find all the service agreements we have with the various school boards. We have also included a summary of all the training courses offered in Quebec between 2009 and 2012.

To date, 148 students have graduated and 55 will do so soon, either in October or November. That is a total of 203 students. We have trained 305 Aboriginal students in ASP Construction and 112 in CCGIC. So we can say that we have trained around 700 Aboriginal students since the Vocational Training Centre opened.

In a way, we are the victims of our own success. It took some time to make ourselves known and to develop working relationships with people, but, nowadays, community members and school board staff are calling us with a view to working with us to provide training all across the province. To date, we have offered courses in drilling and blasting, carpentry, heavy equipment operation, plastering, preparing and finishing concrete. In Maniwaki, we have offered linesman, drilling and blasting, and carpentry courses. In Listuguj, we have offered another linesman course and a course in heavy equipment operation for forestry.

● (0905)

There was also a carpentry course in Natashquan and courses in trucking, drilling and blasting, surveying, and heavy equipment operation in Havre-Saint-Pierre.

This was also the first time that we offered linesman and heavy equipment operator courses in the province of Quebec.

For each different kind of training offered in each community or nation, the tables also show the numbers of students to complete, or about to complete, the various programs. At the very end of the document, you can see all the ASP Construction courses that have been offered in the various Aboriginal communities. You can also see the success rates. When we start courses with 25 students, we finish them with 20 or 23. The retention rate is excellent in terms of the continuity of the various programs.

In my opinion, a factor that contributes to the success is that, as each cohort begins, we always have follow-up or development officers who monitor the Aboriginal students. We also offer an Aboriginal life skills course before each cohort begins.

I think the fact that we have partnerships with different unions, with employers, with Aboriginal communities and with school boards really contributes to the success of the centre.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much for the presentation and the material you've provided to us. It's very relevant to our study.

We'll start the first round of questions with Madame Boutin-Sweet.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions are mostly for Ms. Desjardins.

As you know, our present study deals with labour shortages in certain occupations, including construction. We have heard from a lot of witnesses from all across Canada. They have told us that one of the problems they are experiencing is the difficulty of working in remote areas. One of the proposed solutions was to look for groups that are under-represented in the workforce, and the witnesses gave Aboriginal groups as an example.

You provide training for Aboriginal workers in construction and you offer courses to workers from remote areas. To me, that seems ideal, in terms of the study we are currently conducting. Additionally, as you have said, you do so while respecting their Aboriginal values and culture. I repeat that this seems ideal for our study. You said that the success rate is excellent. You mentioned that, out of 25 students, from 20 to 23 pass.

I have a few questions for you. First, could you tell us about the demand compared to the places available. Finally, if I am not mistaken, the project was for three or four years. Am I correct?

Ms. Mary Ann Desjardins: It is a five-year project.

• (0910)

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: In March 2012, the funding you had been receiving from the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development came to an end. Could you tell us how that affected what you do?

Ms. Mary Ann Desjardins: First of all, it is true that, as of March 31, 2012, we no longer receive funding. As a result, we have no new cohort of students, in spite of the requests we have received.

What you mentioned earlier is also the case in remote areas. I had the opportunity to go to Schefferville and Matimekossh to meet with six mining companies who were ready to hire people. Aboriginal people living in Schefferville are not all able to go to Montreal, Quebec City, or other places to study. We did something that cost a few bucks, but that was very helpful. We created a course in heavy equipment operation for forestry. We shipped all the equipment to Matimekossh and Schefferville and we trained 24 Aboriginal students. They all passed the course and they are now working up there.

We are trying to work in partnership with the different communities. At the moment, three communities are working together: Obedjiwan, Manawan and Wemotaci. We are giving a

heavy equipment operation course for the Department of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. We brought the three Aboriginal communities together in Roberval where the course is being given. We shipped the equipment there. It works well because people are close to their homes and their families. They take the training, they receive their diplomas and they get jobs in the area.

We are also working with the Plan Nord. A lot of jobs will be created soon. A lot of people will be needed. Our goal is to train people and give them qualifications so that they can work for any given company in any given place.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: You said that you have received a lot of requests from school boards. Are you going to be able to respond to those requests with the money you have left?

Ms. Mary Ann Desjardins: I will be honest with you. At the moment, we have not been allocated any federal money. Funding stopped last March 31. But we still get a lot of requests for training: for trucking in Natashquan, for heavy equipment operation in Sept-Îles, and for carpentry in Forestville. The requests keep piling up but we keep waiting. The only money that we have received comes from the Quebec Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones. They gave us \$500,000 for the Vocational Training Centre for Aboriginals in the Construction Industry payroll. In other words, for the development officers who are monitoring our current students.

We have a surveying course in Wendake, a heavy equipment course in Vaudreuil and a course in Roberval. So the money goes to pay for the development officers, for travel, for the employees at the centre itself and for everything related to the students' work expenses and support. We pay for the students' manuals, their uniforms, their work boots, their hard hats and their safety glasses. We equip the students at the start of their training. We just want them to take the training and get their diplomas. We want them to be able to get into the workforce.

We work with unions and employers. They tell us where the labour shortages are and we then train people in those areas so that they can get a job.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Ms. Boutin-Sweet, your time is up.

We'll move to Mr. Daniel.

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for being here.

My questions are mainly for Madam McDonald.

You have 33 institutions, you mentioned. How many places for training do you have in all of these?

Ms. Cheryl McDonald: We distribute the money that comes in through the assets to the 29 first nations communities. We also hold an urban agreement that funds the four urban centres for the clients there. Of course there are administrative costs, because we don't have O and M dollars, and language we pay out of program dollars.

We're situated like that.

Mr. Joe Daniel: But how many students do you actually take each year, in total?

Ms. Cheryl McDonald: I don't have the operational plan, but I think we're at about 2,000 just in the urban milieu alone. In the communities it would be probably double that.

Mr. Joe Daniel: Can you tell me a little bit more about the graduation rate in terms of how many people are graduating and how many are actually dropping out?

Ms. Cheryl McDonald: We just had the opening of the French adult education school in Lac-Simon, which is near the Val d'Or area, and we're working on an English adult education centre. So basically all the first nations, whether they're in an urban milieu or from a community, are going to provincial adult education centres. I would say that they're probably still at 60% graduation.

The challenge with us is that they're often below grade 3 education, so moving them through adult education to get to vocational training, the centre that Ms. Desjardins was talking about, is long and costly. We lose a lot of students because of that—the moving around, the trying to integrate into the urban from a community, or the urbans struggling to make ends meet with what allowances we can give them. You know, we're always trying to spread the money, but it's getting thinner and thinner over the years.

So we do still have challenges.

● (0915)

Mr. Joe Daniel: Your directional plan talks about improving planning, placement, and capacity. Can you tell us a bit more about how you're actually doing that and what you're doing to improve some of these dropout rates.

Ms. Cheryl McDonald: We wanted to have our own adult education centres, because the vocational training centre was already in place and we could see that by having aboriginals together in cohorts, the success rate was higher. We also wanted to provide them with the cultural component and the student support services to monitor them as they go along so they don't drop out, because our students face a variety of social and psychosocial problems that interfere with their wanting to continue in their education or staying in a job. We struggle with that.

Our focus is a lot with training, adult education and vocational training, and we're trying to merge into the area of employment integration, moving the trained ones into jobs that will receive them and guide them during that six-month to three-year time for them to stay in the job. That's equally an area that demands money. If we go into vocational, we're missing adult education and we're missing employment integration. Wherever we go we're trying to put three fires out at the same time, and they all work hand in hand.

Mr. Joe Daniel: Your directional plan also talks about job retention assistance. Can you explain a little more about what you're doing in that area.

Ms. Cheryl McDonald: We're finding in our employment integration committees, which we've been launching in the first year right now—we're focusing on the areas of Plan Nord, which is the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region as well as Côte-Nord, because there's a high demand there—that, as I said, getting them through adult education and vocational training can be the easiest part sometimes because it's a one-to-one learning process. Finding the

employer willing to commit the time to make sure they integrate well and that they know the job.... For many first nations, language is a barrier, not only for the anglophone communities but often for the communities who speak their first language and French is still a second language.

There are cultural and social differences that hinder that, and we are working with employers to help them understand who our people are and what challenges they face, so that we don't see our people going all the way to being trained and then walking away when a first incident happens. No one's there to intervene the way they have in vocational training, so they leave and the employer doesn't know why.

There's the cost we put towards that person, and they might come back and say, well, I want to try this vocation now. They want to work, but we're seeing that we need to support them in employment integration so that they stay in the job, and in a job that they love, not a job where they're saying, well, my friends are going into construction. That's great, but does that person want to go into construction or did they want to use adult education as a vehicle to pursue post-secondary?

Mr. Joe Daniel: In your opinion, what do you think the retention

The Chair: Your time is up, so you can maybe catch it on the next round.

We will now move to Monsieur Lapointe.

● (0920)

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): I am going to try to get a specific handle on what you do, especially with the news you have just given us that the federal government has stopped providing you with any financial support at all.

Ms. Desjardins, as I understand it, in terms of the cost of the training you do, the retention rate, the success rate of people getting a job, is over 80%.

How much does that kind of training cost, that “on location” training, if you will, that means you go off to Schefferville to be with them? How much does it cost to train a student in that way?

Ms. Mary Ann Desjardins: First, the training is paid for by the Government of Quebec. The Ministère de l'Éducation pays for the students to be trained.

When we work with various school boards around the province, we get involved by helping them with the operational costs, given that training is not offered everywhere. If I use the example of Matimekush-Lac John, we had to ship all the equipment there for the heavy equipment course.

Instead of taking Aboriginal people out of their areas to study, knowing that the retention rate is not good and that they are going to be working in their communities anyway, where the jobs are, we move all the equipment so that we can offer the training. So those are extra costs that normally get added to the training and that are not reimbursed.

Mr. François Lapointe: I suppose you could call them extra costs, but here is what I think. There are extra costs, but clearly, a need is being met. The north needs workers.

Ms. Mary Ann Desjardins: Yes, it does.

Mr. François Lapointe: So I do not see them as extra costs, or as a loss. They are potentially an investment. Let me try to get this all straight with you. If we have a cohort of 20 people and 18 of them get jobs, what could the extra costs mean? What kind of wages will those 18 young Aboriginals be making? It all has to be balanced out; it all has to be clear. Yes, there is a cost, but do the results pay off, in general, over a five-year or ten-year period? At first glance, I think they do, but I would like to establish that with you in more detail.

Ms. Mary Ann Desjardins: That depends on the type of training and where it is given. For a heavy equipment course, there are a lot of big machines. By comparison, for a carpentry course, there really are not many operational costs.

Mr. François Lapointe: Because the equipment is lighter.

Ms. Mary Ann Desjardins: Exactly. We have given them in Maniwaki, for example, and in other places, and there are really not a lot of major costs. For a drilling and blasting course, we have had to send our clients off to various places. There were not a lot of operational costs for the linesman course either. There are not really any operational costs for the equipment course we are giving in Vaudreuil at the moment. The costs are really for a follow-up officer to go with the clients to make sure that they really are successful at the end of the program and that the clients will get a diploma and a job.

Mr. François Lapointe: Take an example of a cohort of 20 students. If we did things the other way around, if we did not make that extra investment to do the follow-up and hold a course “on location”, how many successful people would we have instead of 18? In your experience, might we only have ten people passing the course?

Ms. Mary Ann Desjardins: I cannot give you an answer because this is the first time for the vocational training centre. Our success comes from the fact that our cohorts are made up of Aboriginal students only. With Aboriginal students scattered all across the province in various school boards, they begin the training, but some drop out. Our cohorts are made up solely of Aboriginals, with a follow-up agent who goes with them and makes sure that each student finishes the course.

Mr. François Lapointe: About how long has your first cohort been in the workforce?

Ms. Mary Ann Desjardins: You can see in the document that the first cohort was in 2009. The training was held in Sept-Îles. It was a carpentry group.

Mr. François Lapointe: And they had a similar success rate, over 80%?

Ms. Mary Ann Desjardins: They did. If you look at the documents I gave you, you can see that, in that group of 25 students, 20 completed the training and four did not because they had to take some modules again, or do make-up exams.

Mr. François Lapointe: So 20 people out of 25 are now in the workforce?

Ms. Mary Ann Desjardins: Correct.

Mr. François Lapointe: And that program did not cost a lot because there was no heavy equipment?

Ms. Mary Ann Desjardins: Exactly right.

Mr. François Lapointe: So those 20 Aboriginal students are now paying taxes and contributing to society.

What reasons were you given to justify stopping the federal funding for your projects?

Ms. Mary Ann Desjardins: When we got the funding for the project, it was for five years. In the first year, the consortium was put together and there were no activities. Then we had to advertise all over Quebec in order to make ourselves known, we had to identify and recruit clients and put the various training courses together. The deadline was March 31. The feds had given us \$5 million to start with, but it was never possible to spend it all. We had to give \$2 million back to them. So we had spent \$3 million to set up the centre and our organization, to get the cohorts going, to look after the kids and everything. But we have still trained 700 people.

Mr. François Lapointe: Still, was it those \$2 million that justified cutting...

• (0925)

[English]

The Chair: Monsieur Lapointe, your time is up. If you have a short question you want to ask, you're welcome to.

No, you're good.

All right, we'll now move to Mr. Shory, and you're sharing your time with Mr. Butt. Go ahead.

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, as well.

My question will be for Madam Mary Ann Desjardins.

I'd like to thank you for doing some good work in the field where our study is headed, with the mandate of providing skills training and skills specialization to aboriginals, whom I call my Indian cousins.

I need some clarity. What I heard from following up the last question was that there was five-year funding of \$5 million, of which \$3 million was spent and \$2 million was returned. Is that correct?

Ms. Mary Ann Desjardins: Yes.

Mr. Devinder Shory: Would you be able to clarify this \$3 million in five years? How many students were enrolled and how many have successfully completed their education or training?

Ms. Mary Ann Desjardins: In the document that we gave you, the upgrade for ASP Construction, 305 trainings were completed. At CCGIC, 112 were completed, and there were 203 students for the DEPs, the *diplôme d'études professionnelles*—148, and 55 who are doing it at the moment for a total of 203.

I would say approximately 700 people were trained by the vocational training school. We've got a *comité de gestion*, and the people on the *comité de gestion* asked the Commission de la Construction du Québec how many of them are currently working in the construction file. We're waiting for all the information at our next committee meeting.

Mr. Devinder Shory: I believe I heard from one of you that you follow up with the trained workers as well, so the workers who complete it successfully. What percentage would you say are actively involved in construction work and are pursuing that area?

Ms. Mary Ann Desjardins: At the moment we're waiting for the information from la Construction du Québec, because as soon as somebody has a diploma and is employed with La Commission de la Construction du Québec in different projects in Quebec, they can give us that information. At the moment, I cannot give you the information because I don't have the exact number.

Mr. Devinder Shory: Can you please send it to us when you...?

Ms. Mary Ann Desjardins: Yes, I will.

Mr. Devinder Shory: Even though I heard that you have some communication connection with the construction commission of Quebec, obviously these workers, these tradespeople, most of them, I would say, would get involved with the construction industry in the private sector. It benefits the private sector as well to have all the skilled trades.

During the past five years, has your centre made any effort or had any connection with the private sector to encourage them? They need the workers. Is there any involvement with the private sector, any encouragement, or any financial or non-financial or community-based...any contribution? Have they been approached? If they have been approached, was there any response? If there was a response, was it positive or negative? If there was a positive response, was there any action?

Could you elaborate on that, please?

Ms. Mary Ann Desjardins: I'll give you an example.

At the moment, there is a big construction project called la Romaine, near Havre-Saint-Pierre. Different companies are involved in that project—Hydro-Québec, the different companies building *le barrage* and other things there—so they're asking us to train the students in different fields depending on which training programs they need.

They tell us their needs and we do the different programs for them. We work with La Commission de la Construction du Québec to know which of the trades we should train them in, and also which projects are coming and in which field there is going to be employment.

• (0930)

Mr. Devinder Shory: Basically they are involved in guiding you as to what trades are required.

Next is whether they are encouraged to be partners in this program, because they are the ones who will ultimately be getting the benefit of these skills.

Ms. Mary Ann Desjardins: Different things were done to help the graduating students get a job. I'll give you an example. Hydro-Québec gives credits to employers who are going to employ aboriginal students.

The Chair: Mr. Shory, your time is up, so I guess you won't be sharing.

We'll move to Mr. Cuzner.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): I won't be sharing my time with Mr. Butt, either.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Thanks to both of you for being here today. I appreciate your interventions and certainly your success rate.

Just off the top of my head, I think it's probably better than most non-aboriginal institutions. You should be pleased with that.

Ms. McDonald, could you give us a profile? You've been involved with this now for quite a period of time. Give me an indication of the funding, how it's grown, and the genesis of the funding prior to the cutbacks, because I would think that as your organization developed you would have started to realize more about yourself, more about the demands, the opportunities out there. Obviously the funding would have grown, and you were able to do more.

Could you maybe profile the funding over the last 10 years? When did it peak, and when did you start to lose funding trying to do the same things with the same amount of funds?

Ms. Cheryl McDonald: I wish my finance guy were here, but in a nutshell, the money is distributed at the national level. It's based on different variables of remoteness, language, education levels, things like that, so it's disbursed to the different regions. Quebec gets a certain amount, and what we do is redistribute that based on our communities. There are similar variables to allocate that. Each community receives an annual allocation. The base amount that comes into Quebec has always been fixed. We have no control.

When we started the directional plan, we said wow, we're going to have an opportunity to write a business plan based on our needs, to put in the costs of moving our people from where they are to where they need to go.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Excuse me just for a second. You said you've lost \$17 million from the base amount?

Ms. Cheryl McDonald: We lost those amounts because the cost of training has gone up, the demand for our services has gone up, the youth population is increasing.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: So the amount's been fixed, but just...

Ms. Cheryl McDonald: It's the demand. Also with McIvor, we've seen new people coming. And with the introduction of the urban centres, there's been a new demand as well. That's what's happening.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: The funding has been constant. It hasn't grown, just the demand has grown.

When the students come to you, Ms. Desjardins, where are the gaps? What are you seeing when they come to you? Is it life skills? You commented that English as a first language has been a challenge. Is there something that can be done even to increase your success ratio—which is impressive, but before they get to you, is there something you can...?

[Translation]

Ms. Mary Ann Desjardins: Let me try to answer that.

Upgrading is very important before training starts, so that the student gets going and is set up for success.

Let me give you an example. For the surveying course, we really have to ask the instructors to check the mathematical concepts required, the ones the student has to know in order to be able to successfully complete the training. Before training starts, we do three weeks of life skills. That is also when we work on the students' mathematics. Those are services that we provide. And if the students do not have the prerequisites, we also help them in terms of coaching them through instructional development tests.

● (0935)

[English]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Good.

You mentioned Hydro-Québec as a pretty good partner. What we're seeing is that a lot of apprenticeships aren't being realized, for example, going through and becoming a full-fledged journeyman. A lot of it is in the tracking of that individual after they leave the institution. It goes off the rails there in a lot of cases.

You indicated that you have some good partnerships with industry. What companies out there are doing a really good job, are committed to the same types of outcomes as your organization is? Who can we use as a template to say who's doing it right?

[Translation]

Ms. Mary Ann Desjardins: When the consortium was set up, various companies signed a memorandum of understanding, including the Quebec Ministère des Transports, Hydro-Québec and TransCanada. Those companies committed to hiring our students when they graduated.

Let me give you an example. It was the first time we gave the linesman course in English. The students who graduated from it all have jobs today. Companies call us at the centre asking for our Aboriginal clients. With some contracts, companies have to hire a certain percentage of Aboriginal employees. Unfortunately, most of the students who have diplomas also have jobs.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Cuzner, your time is up.

We'll move now to Mr. Armstrong.

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

Mrs. McDonald, I just want to clarify your conversation with Mr. Cuzner. You said the base funding for your organization has not been

cut from the federal government over the last 10 years. You've had the same base funding; it's been frozen.

How many employees does your operation have?

Ms. Cheryl McDonald: We have about 45 spread all over Quebec. There are some in the regional office in Kahnawake and consultants, and we have three to four in each urban service point.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Has that been consistent for the last 10 years or has your employee base grown over the last 10 years? Is it roughly the same?

Ms. Cheryl McDonald: I would say it's been pretty much the same. Maybe we have had five new employees.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: So over the last several years...you said there have been several cost drivers that have increased the pressure on your base funding. Can you elaborate on some of those? What is causing the stress on your funding? If the funding has remained consistent and your employee base has remained consistent, is it an increase in salaries? Is it fuel costs? What is driving the cost of your program up?

Ms. Cheryl McDonald: It's the lack of O and M dollars. Administration for our organization comes from the allocation that comes to us from the province. We have language training for people. You could have an anglophone go through with that program and be the best linesman, but he's going to be challenged to find a job in Quebec. That's the reality. So there are training costs. There are child care costs. There are relocation costs and allowances. All of those costs factor into making our dollar worth less now.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: But these costs would have existed when you first started your program, correct? Is it that there are additional expenses within those costs? What is driving those particular costs up? For example, let's take language. Language skills training I'm sure is an issue that you've always faced. Has there been an upward pressure in the costs to deliver that language training?

Ms. Cheryl McDonald: I think the real bulk of the cost is that we're getting more and more people who need a longer duration of intervention, and in that time, if we had the ability to be more proactive instead of reactive, we could be going into the school system and teaching the young children in primary and secondary and saying, "Do you know what the trades are in this region?" We're not able to do those things, because we're dealing with the bulk of our clients.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: You're saying that 10 years ago the client you were attracting came to you with more skills and fewer social needs than they are coming in with today, which might be a reflection of the economy. There are all kinds of other factors in there. So the difference really is not the cost pressures, and it's not the amount of base funding. The difference is in the clients you are now attracting. There's probably a broader range of clients with more needs. Am I accurate in saying that?

● (0940)

Ms. Cheryl McDonald: Yes, there are more needs coming in, social needs for supports and things like that.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Really what you need is an expansion of the services your program can offer to be more proactive, to try to meet some of these needs earlier before they actually get to you.

Ms. Cheryl McDonald: For example, even publicizing who we are is something we want to do, but at the same time, if we say, “If you want to find aboriginal workers, come see us”, our fear is that our people aren't ready. It's a long process and employers have to be willing to partner with us on that path to get that person to become their employee.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: I just want to talk about a couple of barriers. I think one of the largest barriers facing the first nations community is literacy. I'm an educator. I've had a lot of experience in education, in particular with a first nations background. It goes back to literacy.

Do you find that's a big barrier to success within your program and also success when they leave your program? Is literacy a big challenge for you?

Ms. Cheryl McDonald: Yes, it is, and we're just starting to get into the essential skills and those kinds of programs to get them before they start looking at what kind of schooling they want. That's the reality. Even when it comes to a work ethic, if they're coming from a household where education and the work ethic aren't there, then we have that burden of trying to work with them to get them there. It's a real challenge for us, and our schools are underfunded in comparison with the rest of the province.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mrs. Desjardins, I have a similar question for you.

The students you're graduating—and you said there are several hundred that have graduated—would obviously face similar barriers of literacy and basic life skills, which you said you're trying to provide to them. Do those create a barrier to their labour mobility out of province? Do those provide them a barrier to actually finishing their apprenticeship? Are they facing larger challenges once they leave work that are causing them to drop out of the labour market?

Ms. Mary Ann Desjardins: At the moment some of our students have left Quebec and they're working in other provinces as linesmen. We've had students who have left to go and work in Alberta and places like that because there were needs. But at the beginning of the program, it is a fact—they need the prerequisite to get into the program. Some of them don't have it, so they have to go for *formation générale des adultes*—adult school—to get it before coming to the vocational school.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: So before they—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Armstrong. Your time is up.

We've appreciated both Ms. McDonald's and Ms. Desjardins' appearing before us and sharing their thoughts with us. We'll certainly take them into consideration.

With that, I'm going to suspend for a few moments and we're going to go in camera for some future business.

We thank you for appearing before us.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

MAIL  POSTE

Canada Post Corporation / Société canadienne des postes

Postage paid

Port payé

Lettermail

Poste-lettre

**1782711
Ottawa**

If undelivered, return COVER ONLY to:
Publishing and Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5

*En cas de non-livraison,
retourner cette COUVERTURE SEULEMENT à :*
Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5

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

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Additional copies may be obtained from: Publishing and
Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5
Telephone: 613-941-5995 or 1-800-635-7943
Fax: 613-954-5779 or 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the
following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

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

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

On peut obtenir des copies supplémentaires en écrivant à : Les
Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5
Téléphone : 613-941-5995 ou 1-800-635-7943
Télécopieur : 613-954-5779 ou 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à
l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>