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Chair

Mr. Phil McColeman

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

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• (0845)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC)): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I call the meeting to order.

This is meeting number 15 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Today is Thursday, March 6, 2014. We're continuing our study concerning opportunities for aboriginal persons in the workforce.

Committee members, please cease discussions. We're starting the meeting. Thank you.

Again we have a split panel of witnesses. For the first hour we have the witnesses in front of us to provide their testimony.

Taking part in the first hour we have Ms. Karin Hunt, executive director with the Prince George Nechako Aboriginal Employment and Training Association. We're also joined by Mr. Steve Williams, chair of the Aboriginal Labour Force Development Circle. From the International Union of Operating Engineers we have Mr. Steven Schumann, Canadian government affairs director, and Mr. Brian Pelletier, aboriginal coordinator with local 793.

Before we get into the testimony, I want to mention that we are going to take some time at the end of the meeting, maybe five to ten minutes, to deal with some committee business.

I will now turn the floor over to you, Ms. Hunt, to begin your testimony. You have 10 minutes.

Ms. Karin Hunt (Executive Director, Prince George Nechako Aboriginal Employment and Training Association): Good morning, committee members and witnesses. On behalf of the Prince George Nechako Aboriginal Employment and Training Association, otherwise known as PGNAETA, it is a pleasure and a privilege to address the standing committee.

Our association is mandated to serve the aboriginal community in the field of human resource development in the northern interior of British Columbia. Our primary services are resourced through the aboriginal skills and employment training agreement with Employment and Social Development Canada. The region we serve encompasses 17 first nation communities, one city, and seven rural municipalities. We serve all aboriginal citizens on and off reserve, status and non-status, and Inuit people residing in a rural or urban setting. This is regardless of place of origin. As long as you're

aboriginal and you live in the region we serve, you have access to our services.

We are guided by our chiefs, urban leaders, employment practitioners, and our citizens to work collaboratively to aid the workforce to participate in the shifting labour market in today's economy. We believe that individual growth and development is essential to advancing community sustainability. In an effort to maximize the potential for first nations to achieve greater prosperity, our strategy focuses on three key themes. The first is to build capacity for individuals and communities. The second is to link and develop partnerships with industry and key community stakeholders. The third is to implement innovative approaches and diverse methods to influence positive change.

We offer a suite of programs and services with unique features. We have an experienced and qualified team who are driven by success and a desire to make a difference in northern communities. We offer classrooms, stationary computer labs and mobile computer labs, and our partnerships with local industry attest to our quality of service. This has resulted in the signing of 16 recruitment and retention agreements with industry.

Together with all services provided by our association, in the past four years of a five-year ASETS agreement, we have secured 2,708 job placements. In terms of the impact to federal and provincial social programs, that represents in excess of \$800,000 in savings to the employment insurance fund. It is in excess of \$2 million in savings to both the federal and provincial social income fund. An estimated \$30 million in wages has been invested into the economy.

We are also pleased to join our colleagues and our partners in B.C. There are 13 first nations ASETS holders like ours across the province that form the First Nations Human Resource Labour Council. We have the support of the B.C. Assembly of First Nations, the First Nations Summit, and the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs. We have signed a memorandum of understanding with the First Nations Leadership Council, and we've also signed protocols with the Industry Training Authority and the ministry of housing and social development. The overall goal of the council is to influence social change by working with the Government of Canada, developing strategic relationships leading to partnerships, and lending expertise to labour market development strategies.

When it comes to the topic of opportunities for aboriginal persons in the workforce, there are four primary considerations. One is the labour market supply. The population of working age aboriginals is expected to grow by 72% between 1991 and 2016, compared to the 23% growth of the non-aboriginal population.

The aboriginal labour force in B.C. signifies an available labour pool, with census and statistical data depicting aboriginal growth rates as the highest in Canada, which is certainly a source for new labour market entrants. The aboriginal population in the northern interior of B.C. is younger than the non-aboriginal population. For example, the median age for aboriginals is 29; the median age for non-aboriginals is 42. In contrast, 16% of the aboriginal population was over 55 years of age compared to 30% of the non-aboriginal population. The growth rates for the aboriginal population are 3.5 times the rate of the non-aboriginal population in B.C., creating a future pool of new entrants to the workforce.

● (0850)

Aboriginal youth fall behind mainstream youth in graduation rates and often exit the public school system with leaving-school certificates at lower levels of literacy. Even though we have the highest growth rate in terms of our youth, we also have the lowest literacy levels and the highest dropout rates.

Aboriginals with multiple barriers to employment are particularly vulnerable, and need to acquire the necessary skills to adapt to the changing labour market environment and secure long-term jobs. Aboriginal citizens are the most logical labour pool for growth industries that are situated near first nation villages. Even though we have the growing labour pool, and we have the highest-growing youth rates, we also have some challenges to being able to link them to the workforce.

The labour market gap is the second consideration. The difference in employment rates between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people is particularly large in northern B.C., where, according to the report, 77% of prime-aged non-aboriginals can find work compared with only 57% of aboriginals. The unemployment rates in our region depict a 19.7% gap for employment statistics and a 10.3% gap in unemployment statistics, with a median variance of hourly wages earned at \$4.33 per hour.

Education levels for aboriginal citizens are lower than non-aboriginal, and with the looming technical and trades shortages anticipated, significant work will need to take place to achieve technical competencies. For example, we employment-counselled 6,000 people who showed even a mild interest in trades, and 24% had the required literacy to begin a trade or technical program. Many of them were armed with grade 12 diplomas and functioning far below the literacy level that is required to enter a trade.

With the demand for workers projected to grow in the next 10 years, it is essential to support and continue to resource the aboriginal employment skills training strategy, thereby enabling a diversified workplace, encouraging long-term placement, and closing the gaps.

The third consideration is labour market demand. The trades outlook report for 2010-20 predicts that labour market conditions

will tighten, with labour shortages for the technical occupations and trades sector as a whole expected by 2016.

The labour demand in northern B.C. has grown exceptionally fast in the last five years due to an increase in project development and a rising retirement rate. This is primarily in the field of mining, in some cases natural gas development, and certainly in construction. As identified by the B.C. labour market outlook, 97% of all job openings require a minimum high school education, of which 42% require college or trades certification. Based on this evaluation, the need to increase workplace literacy or education within aboriginal communities is key to their future success.

Growing demand across all sectors and the demand for skilled workers will exceed the growing labour force. That's significant growth in mining, oil and gas, forestry, energy, manufacturing, construction, and infrastructure development. There will be geographically based opportunities with several growth factors situated on the traditional territories of first nation communities in semi-remote and remote locations. There is also the seasonal employment versus the long-term engagement opportunities.

The fourth and final consideration is achieving parity. To increase the standard of living amongst the aboriginal community in northern B.C., it is essential to provide the aboriginal population with the skills needed to attain future employment in sustainable jobs, to fulfill job requirements competently, and to pursue higher learning. Low-skilled jobs often equate to lower pay, poor working conditions, shift work requirements, fewer benefits, minimal chances of advancement, and non-sustainable circumstances. In most cases the jobs are filled by the marginalized populations—those with lower education levels and barriers to higher learning.

Employment-related costs such as day care, transportation, work gear, and driver's licences add to the burden of working for low pay. Within the aboriginal community, a large segment of the labour force resides in rural or remote settings. Transportation, living-away-from-home costs, and suitable accommodations can be a major factor if the jobs are located a distance away from an individual's home community.

● (0855)

To ensure a successful transition of our citizens into sustainable markets, opportunity, resource and appropriate supports are required. The primary focus is to develop the skills and education of our citizens to access sustainable employment, and by providing supports, options, and opportunities to improve their employment situation. This work has proven to be more successful when led by aboriginal organizations such as the ASETS agreement holders.

The Chair: Ms. Hunt, could you wrap up quickly, please? You're just at 10 minutes.

Ms. Karin Hunt: I'll move straight to the recommendations.

The recommendations we have to the HUMA standing committee are, number one, it is absolutely critical that the aboriginal labour market program receive the support of the present government for long-term and multi-year continuance.

We encourage Canada to prioritize increased investments into the ASETS delivery mechanism, rather than introducing new and often similar federal programs to assign additional resources to support the work of the ASETS. We recommend that Canada work with ASETS to correlate policy for social programs, both federal and provincial, and continue to support the flexibility of program design within the ASETS program.

More importantly, a commitment to literacy development at the first nations level is an integral step toward achieving technical levels. We recommend that this be supported by quality, safe, and affordable child care as a priority and by encouraging the labour market agreement holders to engage in meaningful dialogue and partnership with ASETS. Also, we encourage Canada to explore the best practices through the ASETS agreement holders. We also agree to work with the federal government and ASETS holders to design an alignment of federal and provincial social policies to better support the citizens toward education and technical success.

As indicated in the results of the past four years, the business case presents itself through shared resources, leveraged funds, savings achieved through jobs, and positive impact toward social transformation. But relationship building is the foundational piece to underpin all forward action. The services and results showcase one of many ASETS best practices in B.C. on engagement in the field of human resources and labour market development.

The recommendations presented, though not exhaustive, underpin a forward approach for rebalancing the scales of workplace representation by ensuring supports for preparing work-ready employees of aboriginal ancestry—an under-tapped resource pool. Conventional employment and training—

• (0900)

The Chair: Ms. Hunt, I'm going to have to cut you off there, I'm sorry. We're way over time and we want to provide enough time for the other witnesses as well as questioning.

If there are points that you missed providing at the end, you can do it during questioning. The other option is for all witnesses. Because we have to hold to the timelines, if there are other submissions you'd like to make that you weren't able to make, you're able to submit them through the chair at the end of the meeting or any time afterwards during this study.

Now we'll move on to Mr. Williams for 10 minutes, please.

Mr. Steven Williams (Chair, Aboriginal Labour Force Development Circle): Thank you.

Good morning, everyone.

On behalf of the Aboriginal Labour Force Development Circle I'd like to thank the Algonquins for allowing us to use their traditional territories, and thank the standing committee for allowing us the time to speak today regarding the skills and employment opportunities for aboriginal people and in the aboriginal labour market programs.

I'd like to express appreciation for the aboriginal skills and employment training strategy and its predecessors

My name is Steve Williams. I come from the Grand River Territory in Brantford and I am the chairperson of the Aboriginal Labour Force Development Circle. I have been involved in employment training strategy since the inception in the 1980s of pathways to success. Karin and I have been there for a long time and up to the present time; we're still here.

Our organization is non-political and we work with 11 first nations and 9 first nation day cares. We also have an urban agreement with the City of Toronto. Last year alone we served over 8,000 people in terms of soft services: referrals, resumé writing, and job searches. We have a homelessness partnership agreement with the ALFDC as the community entity for the aboriginal community advisory board, CAB, in Toronto. We have over 26 points of service and a population of 95,000 for the first nation population, and another aboriginal population in the city of Toronto of approximately 70,000.

For over 20 years we have been providing employment and training services, and we have seen many changes and many initiatives that have come along. I'm sure you've heard all the pertinent data that you need to hear so I'm not going to bore you with more of it.

As you know, our offices not only take people who are work ready, who have decided to get a job or more training, but we often have to work with people who have decided that they want a life change. For the most part, our people require several interventions. We have no criteria. We do not judge, nor do we lay blame. What we do is accept. We accept the youth, the addicts, the single parents, the elderly, or a person off the street—we start from the beginning.

Some of the components that one must recognize include where our people come from. The majority of our people live in remote areas. The majority of time there are no skills, trade, or training institutions in close proximity to their communities, and there are no large employers who will take aboriginal people to be trained. For our people, to leave the community for the first time is a major issue and definitely a culture shock. There are many of our people who speak their traditional languages. Many of the standard programs and skilled trades or training institutes are not developed to meet the uniqueness of some of our people's training requirements, nor do they have cultural uniqueness attached to them. Transportation to and from the training institutes is expensive and sometimes time-consuming for the majority of our clients.

Our successes are sometimes not numbers or percentages, but the people who come back and who have made a change in their lives. This may be for a year or two or for a number of years. The successes have far-reaching implications and touch our lives and their families and our communities.

The majority of our offices are one-person offices. We function and run our offices pretty strictly. Our central administration office uses 3% of the budget and the other local delivery mechanisms use 12%, so we're at 15% which is probably better than some organizations.

Over the years we have witnessed many new programs, services, reporting formats, newly formed guidelines, and manuals, and we've tried to address them and work with them as best we can.

Since the inception of ASETS, our offices have been developing and have developed thousands of partners. Not many have been recognized as a formal partner, but all the partnerships that have been formed have assisted in some form in employment and training for our people. It may be a very small contribution of hiring a youth to gain work experience, but regardless of the magnitude, our partnerships have helped our people.

Another area and number that have to be mentioned concerns our day cares through ASETS. Many of our people rely on day care funding in order to have a reliable, dependable, professional, and culturally appropriate environment for their children while they're on training or at work. One of our day cares is funded strictly by ASETS funding and closing the day care will be detrimental to working and training classes for the first nations community. Therefore, continuation of the funding of the day care is vital.

Previously, Ontario ASETS holders received aboriginal summer student allocations above the ASETS funding. That changed in 2011 and now our students have to apply to the Canada summer jobs fund.

• (0905)

Members of parliament have the ability to define priorities for summer student funding in their area. Unfortunately, aboriginal students are not a priority. From ALFDC's perspective, we have lost \$158,000 plus 54 summer jobs for the first nation agreement and \$76,000 and 21 summer students for the urban agreement.

With regard to the skills partnership funding, approximately \$20.8 million has been reprofiled, and we are asking that ASETS holders also be involved in the development of the criteria for these programs.

I'm going to go to our recommendations. I know our time is limited.

One of our recommendations is to continue the existing aboriginal skills and employment training strategy. Continue the multi-year funding for ASETS as it greatly benefits career planning, lifelong learning, skilled trades training, and apprenticeship training. Involve ASETS in the development of programs. Doing so would help us to develop a program with you and help us make it better simply because we know what we need in our communities and we can deliver it accordingly.

ASETS should have the ability to develop local training programs such as but not limited to: on-reserve basic education programs, culturally appropriate literacy learning programs, and skilled trades training and apprenticeships.

Establish a forum for ASETS to have access to the decision-makers regarding programs and allocation of funding prior to the

implementation or announcement of new programs, thereby increasing input and the ability to develop programs specific to our needs.

Increase self-employment opportunities funding under ASETS to enhance and create self-employment in first nation communities and for first nations people. The other component of funding for self-employment assistance under ASETS is extremely limited and should be given consideration for expansion.

ALFDC would also like to recommend the redevelopment or development of an aboriginal summer student funding component over and above ASETS funding.

We recommend that work be done with the provinces and territories to extend the apprenticeship incentive grant to cover the third and fourth year of the apprenticeship program and that the amount of the grant be increased and that high school students be included in the incentive as doing so will generate participation. Right now they only look after years one and two of the apprenticeship program and some of those go up to four years. We have a major problem with that.

A provincial engagement process was recently developed. Unfortunately, because of other sessions, ALFDC will not be able to make it, but we hope to deal with them by email.

Continue funding for the child care initiative as that allows our people to have professional, dependable, culturally appropriate programs for our children while we are at work or on training. We would really like to see the child care continue under ASETS.

Reprofile the first nations job fund to involve ASETS and join both funding streams to train those involved in the first nations job fund.

Reprofile the skills partnership funding to include ASETS holders.

I skipped through my presentation quite a bit just to shorten it up, because I had eight pages.

The Chair: You actually have another minute and a half if you want to carry on, Steve. Judge for yourself. If you want to finish there, that's fine too.

Mr. Steven Williams: I'll actually finish with words from a report by the royal commission from 1996, as quoted by the Prime Minister:

As the youngest and fastest growing segment of the nation's population, our Government recognizes that Canada's Aboriginal communities are a critical part of our future. It is therefore in our collective interest to help ensure that Aboriginal youth receive the education and skills training they need to secure good jobs and prosper.

This statement was read by Prime Minister Stephen Harper at the signing of the royal proclamation, October 7, 2013.

I want to thank you all for hosting us.

• (0910)

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation today and thank you for mentioning you're from Brantford. I won't go any further.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Now we move on to Mr. Pelletier and Mr. Schumann.

Are you sharing your time today? Mr. Schumann, please go ahead for 10 minutes.

Mr. Steven Schumann (Canadian Government Affairs Director, International Union of Operating Engineers): Thank you for allowing us to appear before you today.

My name is Steven Schumann. I am the Canadian government affairs director for the International Union of Operating Engineers, or IUOE for short.

With me is Brain Pelletier. He's our aboriginal coordinator for our local 793 in Ontario.

The IUOE is a progressive and diversified trade union with nearly 50,000 members in Canada. Our members operate the tower and mobile cranes, the bulldozers, the graders, and the backhoes that help form and shape the infrastructure and skylines of Canada.

Within the construction industry we provide some of the most highly skilled, safe, and technical positions in this industry. Because of the nature of our work, we are also some of the best paid and highly sought-after positions in the construction sector. We, through our various state-of-the-art training centres, provide rigorous but necessary training to ensure our students become successful and productive tradespersons. Our facilities are registered within their particular province of operation as well as with Employment and Social Development Canada. Our facilities are open to all Canadians, non-union and union, and are considered world leaders in the promotion and development of heavy equipment operation.

Currently, through our local training centres, we provide employment and training opportunities to aboriginal peoples throughout Canada, either directly or through various agreements with companies; first nations, Inuit, and Métis organizations; and governments. The size and impact of these endeavours vary from province to province.

As the committee is aware, the construction sector is facing a shortage in skilled labour. Over 200,000 new skilled workers are required by 2018. We believe through proper training and real opportunities, Canada's aboriginal community can and should be a solution to Canada's skilled labour shortage. We can provide many positive examples of how well this has been working, but for today, I would like to focus on several challenges that must be dealt with to ensure that all aboriginal peoples have the opportunity to obtain recognized industry credentials and be part of the Canadian workforce.

Some of these challenges that I will touch on briefly include improper training, training availability, cultural challenges, need to improve life and essential skills, mandated quotas, and referral hiring systems.

We believe there are too many organizations offering inadequate training that does not meet the need of the industry, nor provide aboriginal peoples with the necessary training to be properly prepared for employment in the trades. From our perspective, we think time, effort, and funding would generate greater results if only training centres recognized by the provincial government and ESDC be allowed to provide training that is government-funded.

We also understand there are concerns about the lack of accessible training. This, unfortunately, is a fact. In our industry, training on heavy equipment is very expensive. We have permanent training centres that may not be ideally located for some individuals, but we cannot have multiple training centres in a province. It's just not cost-effective. In some cases, we work with groups, like the Nunavut government, to send their students to our school in Ontario. We also have other examples that Mr. Pelletier can cite. We know this is neither cheap nor does it work for every group. But we've also worked with our employers on major projects to develop on-site training through project labour agreements. We also have been developing training models that allow us to make our training more mobile.

We recognize the need for a successful training model that meets the needs of first nations, Inuit, and Métis communities, but this model needs a long-term commitment and also financial support of the federal government. We also believe training centres need to do more to address aboriginal culture and improve the life and essential skills that are required by aboriginal peoples to enter their trade. Training centres must work with the various aboriginal communities to understand these challenges. Our training centres have taken some measures in an effort to remove some of these barriers. These include offering a pre-course to prepare individuals to take the trade entrance exam, implementing orientation sessions for potential candidates to determine whether or not heavy equipment trades is a career for them, and employment readiness courses to provide students with the tools and techniques needed to find and achieve employment in the construction industry.

Our school in Morrisburg, Ontario, has a campus that provides living conditions similar to living in a work camp, to give students a first-hand account of what life is like on the job site. Also, hiring aboriginal staff and developing an aboriginal engagement strategy is important.

Another significant challenge for the construction industry is to encourage aboriginal peoples to leave their community for periods of time to work on projects away from home. The problem is, once a particular job is done in their community, in most cases, the individual returns home and would rather be unemployed than travel far for work. We are reaching out to aboriginal organizations to play a role in providing solutions to this challenge.

We have tried to address it through mentorship and role models. Those aboriginal peoples who have made a career in the trades are the best spokespersons. We believe success will breed success.

●(0915)

Another problem is that we also believe that mandated hiring quotas, or a referral system, as some may call it, may not be the best solution. Some contractors do not abide by these hiring systems and will use avoidance techniques not to hire aboriginal workers. However, we believe if the aboriginal worker possesses industry-recognized training credentials from an accredited training institution, it would be a good first step and would make it more difficult to be ignored.

We are also strong advocates of ASETS. The approximately 83 agreement holders throughout Canada have built the capacity to find solutions to aboriginal human resource issues. They must continue to receive and have authority to spend the budgets as well as the authority to design and develop labour market programs to meet aboriginal individual and community needs.

We sincerely wish that we could do more in providing opportunities to aboriginal people, but despite being leaders in training, we face challenges of exclusion from government programs because we do not employ the tradesperson—we just train—and some groups, like contractors and some bands, are unwilling to work with us because they see us as a union.

We have the capacity to support first nations, Inuit, and Métis people to find self-fulfillment through work and become self-sufficient. The best social program is a job leading to a career.

The IUOE is working with aboriginal communities to accomplish this goal. Our approach benefits aboriginal communities, our industry, but most important, it makes Canada stronger. We just need some cooperation to allow us to reach our potential as trainers.

We would like to thank you for allowing us the opportunity to present today. We hope you have found this information useful, and we look forward to answering any questions and expanding on what we have said.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Schumann, for wrapping up in that amount of time.

I'll just mention to you that my background was as a contractor before coming here. I had my own business for 25 years and because of my proximity to the Six Nations of the Grand River, as Mr. Williams is here to be a witness for, my experience was that some of my best employees were first nations people in the trades. I'll just make that comment because I think it fits at this moment after your presentation.

Now we'll move on to questioning.

Ms. Crowder, you have five minutes, please.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Great, thank you.

Thank you to the witnesses for coming.

Mr. Williams, I just wanted to point out that if you could submit your full presentation to the chair and the clerk, we will all get to see your full presentation.

The study, when it was laid out, was talking about a study on opportunities for aboriginal persons in the workforce and supports

available to them. We can all agree that there are plenty of opportunities for first nations, Inuit, and Métis in the workforce. I don't think we need to talk about that. There are sufficient studies out there indicating that, particularly in rural, remote, and northern communities, the aboriginal population are the ones who are there and available but they don't meet the requirements of industry for a variety of reasons. So I'm just going to take off the table the opportunities. We all agree there are opportunities. There are lots of studies out there that support this, lots of studies that talk about investment in education being the way to move forward.

I want to come to the barriers. There are a couple of points that you have all made but I just want to reiterate those.

My question is this. Is there a recognition by the funding programs that are available that in many cases the first nations, Inuit, and Métis who come to use, for example, the ASETS program, are perhaps older? They're not fresh out of high school. They perhaps have multiple barriers to employment, will often have dependants requiring child care, and may have a very spotty work history. In your view, does the funding currently available to you address those issues sufficiently?

I'll start with you, Ms. Hunt.

Ms. Karin Hunt: No, it doesn't. While it's true that the majority of the participants in our programs are between the twenties to late thirties age range, there is an increasing number of youth exiting the high school system with a leaving-school certificate or a diploma who are functioning far below the competency level that is required to be a success in a trade. So we are having to play catch-up and there are additional resources that are required to develop the workplace literacy that is required in addition to providing them with the other types of essential skills and the industry soft skills that are necessary to be successful in maintaining a job.

In British Columbia we've not seen an increase in that resource level since I think 1997, so we're trying to do more with less. It has been extremely challenging, but we're up for the challenge.

●(0920)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Before I go to Mr. Williams, Ms. Hunt, I live on the Cowichan people's traditional territories, and have worked with the Coast Salish Employment & Training Society, and of course they've represented those very same issues.

Mr. Williams, do you have a comment on that?

Mr. Steven Williams: Yes, it doesn't work for us either.

There are so many barriers, especially in the city of Toronto where people are coming from the remote areas. They come down here, and it's a culture shock. They don't even have their grade 10 for carpentry.

We're trying to get them upgraded to grade 10, or grade 12, so they can get into a training program. If they get into Toronto, they may get into alcohol problems, drug problems, so we have to get all those things cleaned up before we can do that. If they're homeless, it's even worse, because now we have to get them out of that situation as well, and try to get them in some kind of accommodations.

There are a lot of barriers there. We don't have a lot of money to be able to do that. We're doing our best. We're working with the City of Toronto for the homelessness issues. Especially this winter when it's been so cold all over the place, it's really been tough but our staff has been trying to do it. All the organization has volunteered time to be able to go out and try to find people and take them off the street.

The issue of employment training is always that we have a number of interventions to get to that stage, before they can get employment.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I still have time, right?

Mr. Schumann or Mr. Pelletier, are you aware of any supports to employers to help that transition from training into the workplace?

Mr. Brian Pelletier (Aboriginal Coordinator, International Union of Operating Engineers Local 793, International Union of Operating Engineers): Good morning and thank you.

We work very closely with the ASETS holders, and we work with the ones here, particularly in Ontario. We work with them to design an assessment process as to the client that we need, and what they have to come with before they arrive at our training institutions.

We want to see success, and we don't want the aboriginal client just to come for the sake of training. We'll work with the ASETS holder, again, to assess the client, but also to do the research as to where the employment is, whether the employment is in the community or out of the community. We work with contractors, and we do have sensitivity awareness within our own organization to work with aboriginal, first nation, Métis, and Inuit people.

We want to see success. We're not just in the business to train people for the sake of training. We're not just after the money. We are after a skilled worker. That's what we want, a skilled worker. We want someone to come with the right attitude, a good work ethic, and most importantly, show up. In our industry there may be eight dump trucks waiting to be loaded, and if that excavator operator doesn't show up those guys driving those trucks aren't too happy. They get paid by the load.

This is why it's important that we work with the ASETS holders.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Now we move on to Mrs. McLeod, for five minutes.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you to all the witnesses, and this has been a very important study that our committee's undertaken here.

I want to start by asking Ms. Hunt a question. I'm from the Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo area. I think we're warmer out in our area than it is in Ottawa right now.

Your recommendation two is what I really want to zero in on, which is where you want to prioritize the ASETS holders in terms of what the government's doing. In the area I represent, of course the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council is an ASETS holder, and has done some great work.

It's certainly also no secret that some of the chiefs have really supported some opportunities through the skills and partnership fund and things like B.C. AMTA. We heard about the Nunavut, the

marine...so some really successful models that were outside the ASETS holders.

Can you really tell me why you made that recommendation? Is it widely endorsed? Because we have heard of some other models creating success, and one of our goals as a committee is to explore some of those different opportunities.

Ms. Karin Hunt: First of all, we support and encourage any process that is going to advance and develop aboriginal people and get them ready for the workforce in long-term, meaningful careers. With the ASETS agreement, it is more flexible in terms of working with a broader cross-section of industries, so it's not just one specific industry. For example, the 2,708 job placements that our ASETS has had over the past four years is in all industries, whether it's health, mining, natural gas, energy, construction, transportation, tourism, or hospitality. We have the statistics and data on where each of those 2,708 job placements were.

You can see how any time there is even new industry growth in any particular area, there are going to be subsectors and there's also going to be growth in other sectors. For example, with mining, it is transportation, automatically. We've been able to work with industry in each of those sectors, so I suppose that's why we see ASETS as a shining example in B.C. of what can be done when you're community-based and able then to work with all sectors in a particular community.

• (0925)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you.

I can leave my next question open. It might be for the International Union of Operating Engineers, but it is for anyone who would like to explore this. I see opportunities in terms of also the Canada job grant and where that's going in terms of aboriginal people and opportunity. Can you maybe talk a little bit about how you see these intersecting together? I don't know who wants to jump into this.

Mr. Brian Pelletier: What we've been doing is wherever there is a major project—and we can just go down the road here to Akwesasne, that international bridge. They built a new bridge, it's open, and they're going to tear down the old one. So we've brought in Mammoet, who was bidding on the contract, and they met with the first nation community. There were chiefs in the room, there were economic development people, the people in the community who have an influence as to changing the conditions. We think that the job is critical, so Mammoet has made a commitment and we as a union have already taken in six Akwesasne citizens with the appropriate skills, and they're working. Some are working now. The employers are now asking for those people, and they're going to Midland. They're taking them to other projects around the province.

The commitment is that we're bringing the contractors in, and they're meeting with the community. They're having some dialogue, and they're identifying the skills required, the process to become a union member, the process to acquire the skills, the process to be hired by the company. So that's happening and that's one example in Akwesasne. It's the same with the Highway 400 expansion. It's going through about six or seven first nation territories. We brought Aecon in the room, we got the first nations in the room, and it's the same thing. We talk about process, we talk about the employment opportunities, we talk about what you need to get these jobs. This is before they even put a machine on the road. This is all part of the tendering process. The commitments are being made, and quite frankly we're walking the talk.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Now on to Mr. Cuzner for five minutes.

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

Thanks to the witnesses for being here.

There are a couple of things. Steve has referenced it and it has been referenced before, just with the culture and some of the considerations around culture. I think every workforce has its own culture. The guys on the bus were saying they brought in a new fleet of rookies and security guys. One of the guys showed up 10 minutes late with a Starbucks in his hand, so he had enough time to stand in line for the Starbucks, but he was 10 minutes late. I should say, he's a former cadet. So stuff like that is part of the culture that you have to understand.

When I worked in Fort McMurray, for a couple of guys who worked with us there was an accommodation made. Every year when trapping season would start, they'd be able to take time off. It was a really cool thing that there was no problem with adapting. They were excellent workers and important members of the crew, but that accommodation would be made.

Are we getting better? Ms. Hunt, you say you have 16 relationships now. Are companies getting better at recognizing the importance of accommodating some of the cultural aspects of aboriginal first nations workers?

• (0930)

Ms. Karin Hunt: Culture works both ways, of course. We work toward being able to provide awareness to industry and to employers about the aboriginal culture, but we also work very hard to prepare our young folks for the culture of the industry. Every industry has its own culture, so it's necessary to do that cross-awareness.

We have discovered that over time—say, the last 10 years—there has been a significant improvement in terms of industry, employers, trade unions coming forward and wanting to do business with the first nation communities, wanting to engage our labour pool and prepare them for their particular placements. We have found that trade unions in particular have been very eager to sit down to talk with us about preparing our folks for their particular industries, and the majority of the agreements that we have are with trade unions.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Williams, you talked a little bit about the summer job situation and the loss of summer jobs.

Did your group have particular access to program funding? There was a loss of 54 summer jobs, I think you said. Was that under youth employment strategy funding, or was it under a different program that you would have had and now are—

Mr. Steven Williams: It was under youth summer jobs. It was cut in 2011. We lost a number of jobs there, 54 for the 11 first nations in our territory and 21 in the urban area. We lost those jobs because the money was just taken out, and then they had to apply under different funding. That was based on the MP's area and whether they thought it was a priority. Aboriginal people weren't a priority in any of those MP areas.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Obviously it would have been a priority prior to that.

Mr. Steven Williams: Yes, it was always a priority. With some of the students going back to school, the summer jobs were the only way they could get enough money to live throughout the year, because we don't get enough money for tuition on reserve, or their books, or anything else. So that's the money they had to use to try to keep going to school themselves.

That stuff just didn't seem to work. It was cut. It was a good program; it just got cut for some reason.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Finally, I know you have just opened up a new training centre at Fort McMurray. Is there a target for bringing in first nations students? Do you have people from the first nations community on staff there to help with the training, if there is a component there to help with first nations training?

Mr. Steven Schumann: Currently, training in Alberta is very different from what it is in the other provinces. A lot of it is run by SAIT and NAIT in Alberta, so we're very limited right now in the training we can do. Up in Fort McMurray, too, we're quite aware of the cultural awareness issues up there. They currently do not have an aboriginal coordinator. This is something they're looking at with the new centre opened, which we're expanding. It is something we're reaching out to.

But Alberta is a prime example of a place where we have some issues and concerns around unionized training centres, for various reasons. There are some misconceptions out there and some work we still have to do. Alberta, unfortunately, is one area that we and unions as a whole need to work on.

The Chair: Thank you for that round.

Now we move on to the last questioner in the first round, and that would be Mr. Shory.

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

Thank you, witnesses, for coming here and assisting the committee to complete this very timely, needed study of how to improve opportunity for aboriginals in the workforce.

Mr. Williams has made a comment quoting Prime Minister Harper. We all agree, as Ms. Crowder said as well, that definitely there is a gap. Concerning the gap, my question will be to Ms. Hunt, about your organization.

Would you share with the committee what your organization is doing within itself to help bridge the gap between aboriginals and the workforce? We certainly have a demand. We certainly have a segment that could be very useful in getting to those highly paid jobs that were mentioned. They are pretty highly paid jobs.

What is your organization's role to bridge the gap?

● (0935)

Ms. Karin Hunt: We work with industry in the different sectors. For example, we will host sessions just for the industry in transportation or in construction or in the energy field. We bring them to our table, feed them, and then provide them with information on the kinds of services we have available, the kinds of training that we develop specifically for them. So we work with the industry to develop a training product just for that industry.

We have discovered that these are the most successful programs of all, because the industry then sends their team to work with mine to develop a product that is going to make the transition into their workforce much smoother.

One key example has been the relationship with CN Rail, through which their staff and mine developed the training tool we would use. As a result, our people feel very comfortable when they go into the interview process with CN Rail. They're acing those interviews, and CN Rail is hiring quite a high number of them and sending them on to be conductors in Edmonton and Winnipeg.

So we have proven that the model whereby we develop the product in partnership with that industry is the one that works.

Mr. Devinder Shory: Certainly it establishes that you have links with the private sector. It seems that you have a good relationship with the private sector and it seems that it is effective as well, from your last comment.

What are the participation rates in urban versus rural areas? Is there a significant difference in the impact on local economies in these differing areas?

Ms. Karin Hunt: There is a difference in terms of participation between the urban and the rural, primarily because the training locations can often be situated in the urban setting, which requires people to come to the city to take the training program.

There is work being done, and we are hoping to encourage government to provide the resourcing, to see the training programs take place in rural and semi-remote settings. As you can appreciate, the cost of doing this is significantly higher than the cost of having training in the urban setting. But growth is going to be taking place or is taking place in a number of different economic sectors on the traditional territories of the first nations people. In cases such as these, the first nation communities are really the logical place to look for an available labour pool when, for example, it comes to building natural gas pipelines or mining or exploration on traditional territories. All of this is work that first nations people can engage in. It's in their backyard.

It is critical, then, to enable the opportunity to let the training take place in the rural setting. The cost, as I said, is certainly higher for doing so, but then you're not faced with the other challenges of

people coming to the urban setting. There is housing, there's child care, there's transportation, all of which become added factors.

I'd like to see more programming right in the rural community.

The Chair: Mr. Shory, five minutes goes very fast, sir. I know you understand that and I appreciate your respecting the time. Thank you.

Mr. Devinder Shory: I was just about to ask a question about Brantford.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Well, maybe in that case....

I am ending the morning session just a little short because we have to take time at the end of our meeting today and I want to be fair to the second panel that's about to provide testimony.

But first of all, I would like to thank you on behalf of this committee for your taking the time to be here today and providing input into this study. It's a very important study. As we've heard from many witnesses, the untapped potential of first nations people, with whom many of us have had experience in life, as I mentioned earlier—they are some of the best employees you could ever have on a job. It's important that we have your input, and we thank you for it today.

So thank you for being here. We'll suspend, not adjourn, for a time to switch groups.

● (0940)

(Pause)

● (0945)

The Chair: I'd like to call the meeting back to order.

Welcome back, everyone, as we continue in our second hour of meeting number 15 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

From now until approximately 10:40, we are grateful to be joined by Ms. Heather McKenzie, president, and Ms. Rhonda LaBelle, executive director, from the Cariboo Chilcotin Aboriginal Training Employment Centre.

Did I pronounce that correctly?

A voice: Correct.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Good job, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cuzner. You're very complimentary these days.

We're also joined by video conference from Regina by Mr. Jeff Ritter, chief executive officer with the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission.

We'd like to turn the meeting over to the witnesses.

I believe it's Ms. LaBelle who is going to be doing the presentation from her organization.

Please proceed for 10 minutes.

Ms. Rhonda LaBelle (Executive Director, Cariboo Chilcotin Aboriginal Training Employment Centre): Thank you.

On behalf of CCATEC's board and directors, it's a pleasure to be here this morning presenting in front of the standing committee.

I've been asked to talk today about best practices, opportunities in our region, some success stories, what's working and what's not, and the help required.

As some background on CCATEC and our best practices, we've been delivering aboriginal programs for over 20 years. With these years of experience, we've been able to respond to the needs of first nations and of the labour market within our region. Services are provided to unemployed aboriginal people living in the Cariboo Chilcotin. We're centralized in B.C. I've attached in our packages for you a marketing package that lists our programs and services so I won't go into detail. Further on, you may have questions in regard to that.

We have long-term directors on our board with various skill sets who are well-informed about our programs and services. Accountability...we're very accountable. Over and above our ASETS requirements, we hold annual community forums with our first nation communities and we report on our activities and our program funds. All aboriginal leadership are invited and we also share this report with our program partners. I've brought a sample of one of our reports for you to also take a look at for your information.

We have good accounting financial practices in order. We've also recently received a quality assurance monitor from Ottawa and we receive high praise for our program file management and for our internal controls. We have the ability to leverage funds from various service providers and various funders.

At CCATEC we share our resources with other ASETS across Canada, such as our business plans, our operational plans, and our internal forums. CCATEC is a member of the First Nations Human Resource Labour Council in British Columbia and we also sit at the technical working group here at the Assembly of First Nations.

As for some of the opportunities in the Cariboo Chilcotin, we're very resource-based with mining, tourism, forestry, and agriculture. We have a great need for trades, labourers, environmental monitors, business providers, administration services, health, and...in all areas. It used to be that there weren't a lot of opportunities for aboriginal people in remote and rural areas aside from band administration. But now with the burst of economic development in the resource industry, there's a wealth of opportunity for us in the Cariboo Chilcotin region.

Employers are coming to us and want to hire aboriginal people as opposed to importing workers from other places. They're seeking good job referrals from our ASETS at CCATEC office. We've implemented a new tracking system, ARMS, and now we can link the employer directly to the client.

Some of our success stories—we've had the ability to design and deliver results-based programming in partnership with local employers, public and private training agencies. That allows us to respond to the real labour market need. I'm just going to share a few of our success stories with you today. We recently designed a sawmill

program in partnership with the Tolko sawmill, West Fraser plywood plant, and the Williams Lake pellet plant. We hired a training agency to deliver the program. As a result, we had six real jobs out of the 12 people finishing. We've incorporated cultural components into all our mainstream programs, thus making the program more attractive and highly successful.

We hold cross-cultural workshops. One specifically was for the Gibraltar Taseko mine and we opened one to the city of Williams Lake, with Mount Polley, Horton Ventures, and the RCMP all in attendance.

We recently just completed an early childhood diploma program with 15 of the 16 employed. Many of them are employed at our day cares on reserve, which is critical. Some of the long-term jobs have been secured. Seven years ago, we ran a women's job readiness program. One of the ladies received a job at the 7-Eleven. It was an entry-level position. Seven years later, she is a day manager at the 7-Eleven. When I go in there, I still see her and she thanks CCATEC for that opportunity.

Another real good success story is that we ran an office assistant program five years ago. The young lady received a job at an employment agency and she's still employed, so the long-term employment is critical for our aboriginal people.

We continue to support trades. We have one fellow who is in his third year of electrical and he looks forward to finishing next year. We still struggle with our trades opportunities in our region.

CCATEC receives a small budget of \$2.2 million annually. In 2013, we provided skill development to 1,396 aboriginal people who participated in these skill development programs.

● (0950)

We secured 413 jobs for our small region. Many were part time and seasonal, but we did receive some full-time jobs. We had 199 return to school also with our summer student program. This demonstrates cost effectiveness with the limited budget we do have. We're competent in monitoring systems and follow-up and that has resulted in higher success in completion rates and return to employment.

Among the things we see that are not working is the federal government contracting with other groups under the skills partnership fund that are in essence duplicating the work of the ASETS agreement holder. This creates a lot of confusion for the clients and employers.

In Williams Lake there's probably a population of 15,000, and 30,000 with the surrounding area. We have a skills partnership across the street from us, and the clients are often coming in asking what's what. Employers are also asking who they should work with for the aboriginal communities. The reporting guidelines under the skills partnership fund are nowhere near as rigorous as the ASETS reporting guidelines, and it's frustrating to see the difference in accountability.

The labour market agreement has not been favourable for aboriginal people in British Columbia, as the aboriginal training dollars seem to be awarded to the colleges and the universities. Client assessments are not being completed on the labour market agreement clients, resulting in clients coming to our agency, as they're losing their income supports from employment insurance and social assistance. There seems to be no holistic approach with those assessments.

Also not working are partnerships with the province and the labour market agreement holders. The reporting burden has exhausted our staff, with ongoing requests for additional information and ongoing requests for the same information in different reports. Also the labour market agreement funds do not cover administration.

We're finding it difficult to meet targets with a 1996 budget with increased tuition, wages, and just the general cost of living.

What's working? CCATEC is successful, and I'm very proud to work with this organization. Our board and our staff and our communities are accountable and cost effective, with really good results. The support of our first nations is also working locally, provincially, and nationally, as is our ability to provide flexible programming that leads to employment. We thank the federal government for that opportunity.

Multi-year funding has provided long-term planning and delivery. Our board goes into planning every second year. We plan for our budget and the activities we're going to undertake based on the labour market need.

We're working with other ASETS agreement holders on common interests, such as a technical working group and the First Nations Human Resource Labour Council. Communities, employers, and aboriginal organizations support our ASETS and want to see us continue.

We're able to meet employment targets on a stretched budget, and we've established really good partnerships.

Help is needed. A 10-year strategy would be great, enabling ASETS holders to focus on the aboriginal employment needs, increasing the participation in the labour market. We need more help to develop strong essential skills and trades programming. Grade 12 and driver's licences are the two number-one barriers for the Cariboo Chilcotin.

We need capacity development with more interaction with federal staff at the local and regional level via ASETS workshops and information sharing. For example, we recently received the NARAM survey from HRSDC in Ottawa. Many of the ASETS as well as CCATEC do not have the capacity to undertake these tasks.

Business and operational plans need more support from regional staff, such as having regional meetings with ASETS holders to review. We used to have those meetings on a regular basis. This would eliminate unnecessary calls to HRSDC.

An administration budget that would be separate from the current program budget would be great. The child care budget needs to be increased to include off-reserve children. Urban funds need to be increased, as some aboriginal people are moving to the urban centres.

In closing, I'd really like to thank you for this opportunity to present the work that CCATEC is doing in the Cariboo Chilcotin.

• (0955)

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation.

Now we'll move to Mr. Ritter by teleconference. Go ahead for 10 minutes, sir.

Mr. Jeff Ritter (Chief Executive Officer, Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I very much appreciate the opportunity to present to you today, especially by video conference.

Saskatchewan and the Government of Canada have a shared interest in ensuring that aboriginal people are full participants in the economy and have meaningful employment opportunities. The Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission—that's a bit of a mouthful to say, so I'll refer to it as the SATCC from here on—has a vision of a skilled and representative trades workforce, which is industry trained and certified. The mandate of our organization is to develop and execute a relevant, accessible, and responsive apprenticeship training and certification system to meet the needs of employers, apprentices, journeypersons, and tradespersons.

In Saskatchewan, the number of registered apprentices in the system continues to grow along with Saskatchewan's economy, which of course results in increased needs for skilled labour. As of June 30, 2013, there were 10,023 apprentices registered in Saskatchewan. At that same time, there were 1,383 aboriginal apprentices registered with the SATCC. This is 13.8% of all apprentices, which is only 1.5% less than the aboriginal population in Saskatchewan.

One of the strategic goals of the SATCC is to encourage under-represented groups to partake in the apprenticeship system and to work in careers in the skilled trades. One of our strategies is to increase the number of registered apprentices in under-represented groups and also to provide more access to apprenticeships for them by removing barriers. Saskatchewan's aboriginal population is increasingly young, growing, and in many cases, located in close proximity to major resource development projects.

Significantly, a large portion of aboriginal youth on reserve is dependent on income assistance. There are currently 17,400 first nation income assistance recipients on reserve in Saskatchewan. Of those, it is estimated that 13% or roughly 2,200 individuals are 18 to 24. Income assistance beneficiaries, including dependants, represent approximately 48% of the on-reserve population.

Supporting aboriginal youth in securing long-term attachments to the labour market will of course benefit aboriginal communities, employers, businesses, and the provincial economy by reducing dependence on income assistance, helping to address persistent labour shortages, and building opportunities for economic growth.

But to be an apprentice, a person has to be employed. One of the biggest barriers to apprenticeship is finding employment with an employer who will sponsor their apprenticeship. This can be a barrier for many reasons, particularly for many under-represented groups, including first nations and Métis, such as lack of essential skills or transportation or available child care.

Of particular note, it's difficult for first nations people on reserve to continue with their apprenticeship training. This is due to lack of employment in close proximity and a tight attachment to their community. On-reserve training requires additional financial supports, as well as opportunities for paid work experience or employment transition.

The Conference Board of Canada estimates that if Saskatchewan businesses employed aboriginal people at a rate equivalent to the non-aboriginal population, economic activity in Saskatchewan would increase by \$1.34 billion in 2015, rising to \$1.8 billion in 2035.

The SATCC's mandate is not pre-employment training. However, the commission recognizes the need for increasing aboriginal employment in the skilled trades, and our organization provides \$400,000 in funding each year to the aboriginal apprenticeship initiatives. These are initiatives that are proposed to the SATCC, and often include pre-apprenticeship training or part of apprenticeship training, which is usually done on reserve or in a first nation community

• (1000)

The Government of Saskatchewan's efforts to engage the first nations and Métis workforce include partnerships to transition people from federal income assistance on reserve into training and jobs, addressing the wait-list for adult basic education, investing in post-secondary education and training for first nations and Métis people, delivery of provincial training programs on reserve, and new support for driver training for youth living on reserve.

A joint task force was established in 2011 by the Government of Saskatchewan with the goal of identifying solutions to address gaps in education and employment outcomes between first nations and Métis people and non-aboriginal people. Public consultations were held and 25 recommendations were brought forward to the Government of Saskatchewan in April 2013.

There are 10 new Active Measures partnerships, primarily including work readiness programs in training and employment centres in partnership with first nations and Saskatchewan colleges.

Linking training with economic development activities is particularly important to first nations and Métis.

As of January 2014, the unemployment rate in Saskatchewan was 4.3%. The first nations and Métis unemployment rate is much higher at just under 11%, 10.9%. While this rate has dropped by 2.1% over the last year, there is still much work to be done to bridge that gap.

There is lots of potential for on-reserve businesses in the skilled trades that could further enhance employment in first nations and Métis communities. Some of those businesses could offer entrepreneurship opportunities, employment opportunities. They would have some competitive advantages, and they would be models of success within the community.

Programs that provide connections with employers and employment, and offer quality training to industry standards, paid work placements, and the commitment to enter and complete apprenticeships will see much success in this province. Examples of these successful programs can be found at the Regina and Saskatoon Trades and Skills Centres.

In closing, we look forward to working with you on future apprenticeship initiatives. The Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission is very well-positioned to work with the federal government to pilot any initiatives that will come forward, especially those that will assist young people to engage in employment opportunities and enter into and complete apprenticeships.

I thank you very much for your time and I look forward to working with you.

• (1005)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ritter.

Now we'll move on to the first round of questioning. The first questioner is Madame Groguhé.

[*Translation*]

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

I thank all of the witnesses and I welcome them.

The study began some time ago. The negative effects and all of the issues related to the aboriginal population were related to us repeatedly. When we look at the whole picture, as you and other witnesses have explained it, we see that the labour force development and training strategy is hard to fit into a continuum.

Let me explain what I mean. I regularly point out that it seems necessary that we have a real strategy that evolves constantly, so that we may talk about the economic resiliency of aboriginal populations. A witness also referred to this. The expression “economic resiliency” is strong and very meaningful. We cannot put this strategy into effect by itself, without considering all of the elements such as early education and all of the measures that must be taken to improve housing, living conditions and so on. We cannot, in the final analysis, claim that this strategy that has been put in place has solved everything.

In my opinion, some very good things are being done and that is all for the better, thank God. However, I think we have to look at this in a much broader way. We have to get a bird's eye view to see the whole landscape clearly.

This seems to me like an important consideration. Some of you referred to that and I would like your opinion.

[English]

Ms. Rhonda LaBelle: Can you just ask the question please? I have a hard time.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Regarding training and labour development, do you think we need to study all of the issues upstream? Should we, in your opinion, consider early education when we put strategies in place, so that we can begin intervening sooner?

[English]

Ms. Rhonda LaBelle: In our region we work with our bands, and I'd say that we work collectively with them. In terms of the early education in our area, we stick with our mandate of employment training for unemployed aboriginal people, but we work with our education coordinators and we work with our day care centres to develop workers for those jobs.

That holistic approach is what all first nations and aboriginal communities look at. We're just one part of that.

•(1010)

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Fine.

My next question is for both witnesses.

I would like to know your opinion on something which has not been touched on at all, which is retaining aboriginal persons who join the workforce.

Could you quantify for us the number of persons who, after having taken training, stay in their jobs? Do you have any idea of what those figures are?

[English]

Mr. Jeff Ritter: Thank you very much for that question.

The Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission undertook some significant research into completion rates. We found that overall for our population of apprentices in compulsory trades.... Those are trades in which you have to be either an apprentice or a journey person to work within that trade. Within our province there are four of those. The number of compulsory

trades varies greatly from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, but we have four in Saskatchewan.

Our completion rate for compulsory trades is running around 74%. For other trades, the completion rate is running about 10 points lower, at around 64%. When we look at the population of aboriginal people within our apprentices, we find that overall completion rates for that population run around 10 points lower in each group. In compulsory trades, aboriginal completion would be running at around 64%, compared with 74% for the average, and in non-compulsory trades running at around 54%.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Okay, but as concerns...

[English]

The Chair: Sorry, that's right on the five minutes.

To committee members, we just received a notice that there will be bells at 10:38 a.m. for votes, so I will stop this panel of witnesses at approximately 10:30 to give us time to deal with committee business in that final eight minutes.

Mr. Mayes, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

To some of my neighbours just down the road from the Okanagan—Shuswap, where I come from, you talked about the outcomes and the clients you have, but I want to dig a little deeper into getting the clients to your office and the outreach. There are some cultural challenges and maybe social isolation, and maybe there needs to be encouragement to bring first nations clients to your office to get that training and get that hope and those opportunities.

Do you take part in any of that activity, or is that done on a local level by maybe the band council or somebody in the band administration?

Ms. McKenzie.

Ms. Heather McKenzie (President, Cariboo Chilcotin Aboriginal Training Employment Centre): Thank you.

As was stated, I'm Heather McKenzie. I'm the president, yes, but I'm also a community member of the Williams Lake Indian Band, which is basically the urban community of Williams Lake. I'm on council there, but more importantly, I've been the education manager for 20 years now. In that time I have not only assisted that early learning to develop into future jobs, but I've watched children over the years graduate, go on to post-secondary, and be hired directly in our very fast-growing economic community.

We have an employment service centre right within our community that works directly with CCATEC, which is more the urban connection there. We also hold career fairs. Those career fairs basically focus on those youth and young adults who will basically grow our self-government treaty. Four Shuswap communities in our area are basically moving on to stage five.

Some of the barriers there include, yes, grade 12 and driver's licences, but we continue to work on those age groups. It is not just from birth on; for people from their forties to early fifties there seems to be more of a barrier. But below that is a group that's growing in education, and I'm just so proud of that group.

We are also very supportive of the language and culture. I think once we overcome those barriers for our people there will be a real pride that we can move forward and overcome any kind of education and employment barriers by knowing our grassroots.

●(1015)

Ms. Rhonda LaBelle: Mr. Mayes, we have 10 points of service within our region, employment services that link the really remote communities to CCATEC office.

We have outreach services. Our program workers do go out to all the reserves, too, so we do have that covered.

Mr. Colin Mayes: That's the client.

Now, as for the potential employer, do you have outreach to various opportunities with employers in the area with whom you work? Are you a contact point automatically for them?

Ms. Rhonda LaBelle: Yes, I am, and we have our two program workers who are also out working with local employers.

What we're finding now—and this is the first time in the 21 years that I've worked with this organization—is that the employers are finally coming to CCATEC. We've been situated there for 21 years. They know we've been there, but now, due to the economic growth in our region, they're coming to the first nations agencies like ours.

Mr. Colin Mayes: What are some of the outcomes?

I had a meeting with the president of the Interior Logging Association. They were telling me that they're working with the college and finding that they would make investments to help students go to college, and then they would find that the students would not stay with the job. This is both for aboriginal and non-aboriginal, so I just want to point that out.

They gave me a case of a non-aboriginal person. They invested \$22,000 into making that person an equipment operator for the forestry industry and the person just didn't go back to work, didn't like the type of job.

As far as the outcomes are concerned once that connection is made, is there a retention there with the job?

The Chair: I'm sorry, I'm going to have to ask that this round be ended. It's at five minutes.

If you wish to answer that in a subsequent round, you're welcome to do that, or provide a written reply to that, if you wish.

Mr. Cuzner, you have five minutes, sir.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Thanks very much.

I will go to Mr. Ritter.

The 74% success rate is pretty impressive, to tell you the truth, and it's lower with the required trades.

Who are you able to develop the partnerships with? Are you seeing the bigger corporations—SaskPower, PotashCorp—as the ones that are taking on the apprentices? Is it a little less likely for small operators, small contractors to take on? Is there a profile you can give us on who is seizing those apprenticeship opportunities?

Mr. Jeff Ritter: An excellent question, thank you very much.

It's actually quite the opposite. Larger employers tend not to participate in the apprenticeship system to the extent that we certainly believe they should. The bigger the employer, the deeper the pockets, the more likely they are to hire experienced journey-people away from small or medium-sized enterprises. My stakeholders refer to them as “poachers”.

Most of the companies that hire and train apprentices are on the smaller side. They're the ones that believe and certainly understand the competitive advantages they receive through training and certifying their existing workforce. Part of the challenge for them, though—and, in fact, one of the reasons they sometimes cite a reluctance to continue participating in the apprenticeship system—is the fear that if they train these apprentices through to journey-people, they'll lose them to a larger employer just for the sake of a few dollars.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: For those dropping out of the apprenticeship programs, are you seeing trends, patterns, or commonalities in the reasons that they are leaving the apprenticeship programs?

Mr. Jeff Ritter: We've completed the completions research and the next stage is to look into the barriers to completion.

Our initial findings suggest it's very much a mixed bag, everything from a decision to leave the trade to pursue something else, to family circumstances, to money issues. The largest single category of reasons for them to exit the apprenticeship system seems to be “other”.

We have a plan in place to undertake more research into that, but that work hasn't been completed yet.

●(1020)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: What do I have for time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have about two minutes left, Mr. Cuzner.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: We've heard from other presenters. Their comments have been around flexibility and the ability to work with other ASETS holders, others involved. Are you seeing that as one of the things that would allow you to do more with what it is you have to work with to maybe eliminate some redundancies, duplication, or whatever?

Ms. Rhonda LaBelle: One example I could give you on that one would be the labour market agreements in British Columbia that are fairly new and under review. It makes no sense for 10 of us or 13 of us to apply for the same funding. Where there is a strategy in place in British Columbia, we could all apply for the same funds.

At the First Nations Human Resource Labour Council table we have undertaken that a little bit with some capacity for the ASETS staff, so we certainly look at that.

If I may comment on the retraining, what we do at the CCATEC office is we have trainees who come back and forth and don't utilize their tickets or something. I just had a file that was brought forward to me yesterday, and we didn't support it. The client hasn't utilized the training. Our mandate is training for a job. My question is: we've done the training, how can we help you get that job now? It's always related to employment.

It only makes sense provincially that we do partner, and have one administration body to look at centralized training for us. We did a little bit more so in the safety department.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Now on to Mr. Armstrong for five minutes.

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

I want to thank our witnesses for being here. Starting with Ms. LaBelle, you talked in your submission that there was a potential overlap between SPF and ASETS funds. Do you want to talk a bit and expand on that a little bit for me?

Ms. Rhonda LaBelle: Like I say, they're across the street from us, and they're mining. CCATEC applied for the same funds. We weren't awarded them, and that was fine. We support all aboriginal dollars coming into our region, except that they're the cream of the crop.

We were looking at doing a heavy-duty mechanics program, maybe six. We're in a very small region to start that training. I get an email that they're running the same program, so we won't do it. Nineteen thousand dollars per seat for 20 heavy-duty mechanics in our region is like flooding the market.

We're held accountable to do business plans, operational plans, so that the federal government, our board, and our staff know exactly where we're putting our dollars and where we're moving forward. To have that makes no sense to me.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: You also talked about—and we heard a bit about this yesterday—the provincially administered LMA money, that it's very hard for organizations like yours that is providing training for the aboriginal population to access that LMA money. Is that accurate?

Ms. Rhonda LaBelle: That's accurate.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Would it not be better if the federal government actually directly provided money to the client, for example with the Canada job grant, so that they can actually reach out and take the training they need to take through, for example, programs like yours?

Ms. Rhonda LaBelle: I feel that we have had some.... We have tried that, our agency, but we find that sometimes the client barriers are very strong and sometimes the training dollars don't get to the training agency.

No, I don't agree with that. I think the labour market agreement dollars in British Columbia should be targeted. We did submit a strategy to the province, to a number of the different ministers and

MLAs, for an aboriginal strategy for British Columbia that complements the ASETS agreement.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Thank you.

Mr. Ritter, on to you. You talked about some of the work you've done reaching out to different groups in the community to try to build apprenticeships and to expand aboriginal employment. Have you done anything with the post-secondary institutions? Is there any relationship there?

● (1025)

Mr. Jeff Ritter: Yes, we absolutely work very closely with post-secondary institutions. We contract a variety of the institutions. The Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology, SIAST, is our largest training provider. So they're a service provider for us.

But I mentioned earlier in my submission that one prerequisite to being an apprentice is that you have a job. That seems to be the issue. In Saskatchewan we're running a 4% unemployment rate. Economists would suggest that's very close to full employment. We have 2,200 unemployed first nations people on reserve between the ages of 18 and 24. For that particular population the issue seems to be in providing the essential skills that would be necessary to allow them to secure that first job, which would then allow them to undertake an apprenticeship through to journey person.

Some of those essential skills, in my discussions with employers, relate to challenges around transportation: not having a driver's licence to be able to drive to work, not having adequate child care if a child gets sick and they can't go to day care, not having a back-up. Some of those very real challenges represent a barrier for their participation in the labour market.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: You also talked about completion rates, and you've done a lot of work on the research. You also said the next step is to look at some of the barriers that cause the completion rate to be lower. We've heard from other witnesses that there has to be some successful pre-training done on basic job skills so that you can actually leave the reserve or community.

We've also heard that there's great difficulty, particularly for someone leaving home for the first time, which many of these young people are who are engaging in this training. It takes a lot of work for the employer as well to reduce some of those barriers, flexible work schedules. Are you finding that some of those programs that employers are doing have been effective?

Mr. Jeff Ritter: For sure.

One of the success stories that I want to highlight, and I mentioned it in my submission, is the Regina and Saskatoon Trades and Skills Centres. They have a formula that should be replicated more. What those two organizations do is, first of all, they offer very short programs. From a pre-employment perspective, they're not 20 weeks long, they're six to eight weeks long.

In those six to eight weeks they do a few things very well. First off, they offer some basic safety training so that the employer knows they're not going to hurt themselves or somebody else on their first day of the job. They give them a basic orientation to the tools so they're going to be somewhat productive. They build that attachment with employers so that at the end of that eight-week period, all of those students are offered a job. The last thing is that they really focus on essential skills. If you don't show up every day for one of the trades and skills centre's courses, they'll fire you, just like what

happens in a real job. They focus very hard in those four areas and they've had great success.

They're a wonderful feeder program for the apprenticeship system because students who complete there go on to get jobs. They ask their employer to indenture them as an apprentice, and then we take over from there. That seems to be a very effective model.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ritter, for that success story at the end.

Thank you for coming, on behalf of the committee. Thank you for travelling. I know it's quite a distance for you. We were originally anticipating being in your territory, but we were unable to complete that, but thank you for taking the time today.

This is an important study. Everyone knows that we need to tap this resource of first nations and aboriginal peoples and we're working towards a very fruitful study. Your input is very important to that, so thank you once more.

I'll suspend for just a brief minute while we go in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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