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Chair

Mr. Bryan May

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

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• (0850)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.)): Good morning, everybody.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, June 13, 2016, the committee is resuming its study of poverty reduction strategies.

Today we have a full slate of witnesses as well as somebody who is appearing via video conference.

From the Canadian Council for Career Development, we have Liz Bezanson, executive board member.

Ms. Lynne Bezanson (Executive Board Member, Canadian Council for Career Development): It's Lynne.

The Chair: It's Lynne. Sorry about that.

From the Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada, we have Rachel Gouin, director of research and public policy, and Achan Akwai Cham, volunteer and alumnus.

Did I totally butcher that? I'm sorry.

Ms. Achan Akwai Cham (Volunteer and Alumna, Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada): It's okay.

The Chair: It's okay? All right.

From the Canadian Teachers' Federation, we have Heather Smith, president, and Robert McGahey, director of advocacy and labour rights.

From Canadian Labour Congress, we have Emily Norgang, senior researcher.

Coming to us via audio only, from Pathfinder Youth Centre Society, we have Orville Lee, president and co-founder, and Ruth Lee, executive director and co-founder.

Welcome, everyone. We are going to get started right away because we have so many witnesses today.

Starting us off is Lynne for seven minutes.

Go ahead, please.

Ms. Lynne Bezanson: Thank you, Mr. May, and thank you for the opportunity to be here this morning.

I represent the Canadian Council for Career Development, which is a voluntary coalition of leaders in career development from all provinces, who help Canadians of all ages to navigate learning and work successfully.

We all know that the best routes out of poverty are through education and work, but accessing both has become increasingly difficult in Canada.

First, I'd like to set the context. Canada rates first among industrialized countries in the proportion of our citizens with university or college degrees or diplomas. That is the very good news. We also have the highest rates of post-secondary education degree-holders in the OECD who are working in jobs from which they earn half or below half of the median income, which is the commonly accepted cut-off point for poverty. Indigenous and immigrant youth face even greater challenges, as do youth with disabilities and youth already living in poverty. There is increasing evidence that many youth are beginning to question the value of any kind of post-secondary education, and that should worry us very much indeed.

A Sun Life study in 2012 also found that 86% of 18- to 24-year-olds report excessive stress attributed to underemployment or the prospects of employment or the lack thereof. The direct links between stress and mental illness are absolutely indisputable. In its 2014 report, the Chamber of Commerce stated that improving the pathways for youth from education to employment is of national importance, if not a national emergency. There is ample evidence to demonstrate that career education and support services over the lifespan as well as workplace learning opportunities produce positive education and labour market outcomes, not in isolation but as key components, and in Canada they are traditionally underused as accessible and affordable labour market and poverty reduction strategies.

I don't have time today to draw attention to some of these research results, but I'd be very pleased to give you references for your review later.

There are also, of course, major challenges. Access to career services, especially for those in transition between school and work, or between work and work, are not consistent and they're not coordinated. Career pathways for youth are fragmented, and there are huge gaps in collaboration among stakeholders, primarily educational institutions and the business community. Entry standards and clear pathways to employment in areas of skills shortage remain very unclear. Entry-level jobs are increasingly less a first step and more commonly a dead end, offering precarious work and low pay.

A review done by *Maclean's* in 2014 reviewed job advertisements and entry-level positions on three major career websites and showed that even for these jobs, employers were demanding two to five years of work experience. Work experience is very hard to come by, and everybody blames everybody else. The employer community blames educators for not giving them the graduates it needs. Educators blame business for not giving graduates opportunity, and inflating job qualifications. Career services are blamed for using tools that result in all of the horror stories you've heard about—things like computers spitting out that we should all be undertakers. And, of course, everybody blames governments. The blame game is getting us absolutely nowhere.

So how do you move forward and how can leadership from the career development community support you? I turn to this now.

Number one—and this is a big one—we need a national school-to-work transition strategy that is built on a solid foundation of what has worked in other countries and what is being done in pockets of excellence across Canada. We currently have no mechanism to bring the critical partners together in order to build that foundation on what has already been done and what is known to be working. Critical partners, of course, include educators, employers, career leaders, social service leaders, the mental health system, and provincial and territorial governments. We can't build such a strategy overnight, but it can be built strategically and systematically and co-operatively, and it could move us out of the blame game towards a strategic planning game.

Bringing these stakeholders together is something the federal government can do without tripping over jurisdictional boundaries. It has been done before by our own career development community and many others. There are many pockets of excellence here and internationally that we can draw on. This is likely a five-year strategy, but it's a most worthwhile one and certainly one that could begin to bring optimism to youth and marginalized groups, and at the same time it could tackle some major contributors to poverty.

The second burning issue we want to raise with you is the importance for youth to have opportunities for workplace learning. Access to work experience or co-op programs at both secondary and post-secondary levels is very limited, as is access to paid internships. Even volunteer organizations are increasingly asking for experience from those seeking to volunteer. Researchers in career development have studied access to workplace learning across Canada and have uncovered consistent trends.

• (0855)

The problem is not a lack of good programs; we have excellent programs. The problem is with access, implementation, and sustained funding.

We also have very few incentives to encourage employers to hire young graduates and to provide them with some job training to help them be successful. Our rate of job training for young people is way down in this country compared with in others.

We need a way to bring the business community forward so we can hear their challenges and hear about what is needed for them to be able to open more opportunities for youth, disadvantaged or otherwise. We also need to begin to work to address some of those barriers.

We'd also like to recommend consideration of programs modelled after successful former initiatives such as Youth Service Canada or maybe Katimavik, or new spinoffs you can come up with, that provide young people with practical work experience but that also benefit their communities.

This could be part of a demand-focused strategy providing young people with experience in areas of potential growth and opportunity, such as the environmental green sector.

An idea to consider would be some form of debt forgiveness. Maybe there could be one year of tuition forgiven after six months or one year of volunteering at a community-based work experience that pays them only minimum wage. We're convinced there would be enormous long-term cost savings from this kind of initiative in moving forward.

These two initiatives, creating the mechanisms for developing a national school-to-work transition strategy and building work experience in demand sectors of the economy, if undertaken in the collaborative spirit I've tried to describe, would go a long way to mitigating against what the Chamber of Commerce termed a national emergency. That may be a slight overstatement, but it's not far off the mark.

We simply can't have a labour market that's increasingly difficult for Canadians to navigate, that sets up impenetrable barriers such as no job without work experience and no chance to get it, that turns entry-level jobs into permanent precarious jobs leading to poverty, and that creates pessimism and absence of hope for the future.

We need to focus on making the school-to-work transition less fraught with dead ends. To tackle this we need to build on existing excellence, we need a framework, and we need to have mechanisms to bring the critical stakeholders to the table to help us make this happen.

Our council for career development will be allies in helping you move forward.

I thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Lynne.

Now, from the Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada, we have Rachel Guin.

Dr. Rachel Gouin (Director, Research and Public Policy, Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for having us today. We're honoured to be part of this discussion on poverty reduction.

I'll let Achan kick us off.

Ms. Achan Akwai Cham: Good morning, everyone. My name is Achan. I'm a Boys and Girls Club alumna. I went to the Ottawa Clubhouse, but there are 650 locations across Canada and over 250,000 youth who are served throughout the country each year.

My involvement began in 2002 when I moved to Canada as a refugee from Sudan. The club was a safe place for my siblings and me to go to because we lived in a high-risk community, and the club provided educational recreational leadership programs. I was able to get my first job as a youth worker at the age of 16, so I went on to study social service work, working in addictions a little bit out in Calgary. It was a really great experience. I'm now a post-secondary graduate and advocating for equal education opportunities for people in my community and across Canada.

It's really important for me to speak to you about the role of education in reducing poverty, because I see many people in my community who don't have the opportunity to reach their full potential. They don't have access to resources such as summer camps and homework help, which I think would be really helpful for especially children and youth. My hope is to see the government invest in more programs for young people to find different ways to go to school, whether that would be colleges, universities, or apprenticeships, just to find different creative ways to also encourage them. Children and youth who are living in poverty are exposed to difficult social environments, housing insecurity, and food insecurity as well, which makes it difficult for them to succeed in education, whether that be elementary or high school and so on and so forth. Sometimes you just need a little bit of encouragement as well.

At the Boys and Girls Club, I was able to have my mentors sit down with me each week to give me information about which programs to apply to, how to get scholarships, and what to expect when you first move away for school. That was really important for me. My twin sister went on to study art therapy. She still is going strong and finding her way. I'm really excited for her. I am currently job hunting like every other post-secondary graduate in the country and trying to find.... I'm just keeping busy with my volunteering.

I think the most important thing I want you guys to take away from this is that by providing educational opportunities, we can ensure that young people across Canada can do better for themselves and for their families as well, and can help this country move forward.

Thank you.

• (0900)

Dr. Rachel Gouin: I would just add that addressing low income as a source of disadvantage is certainly important, but more is needed to close the gap in educational outcomes. Programs for young people and access to recreation, arts, and leadership opportunities are things that enrich communities and make sure that kids have all they need to succeed. After-school programs are important, and summer camps help reduce learning loss during the

summer. They give young people the support they need, so that they can at least achieve at the same level as their peers or they're not falling behind. After-school programs are recognized for their positive impact on emotional and physical health and education. That's well documented. Boys and Girls Clubs has partnered with Rogers Communications to offer Rogers Raising the Grade, which is a program that helps young people get through high school, identify their career objectives, and figure out how to apply for post-secondary education—everything that Achan was talking about.

I think that access to after-school programs is an important component of a national poverty reduction strategy, and we're hoping to see some thought given to how we can support access to such programs in impoverished communities.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we go over to Heather Smith from the Canadian Teachers' Federation.

Mrs. Heather Smith (President, Canadian Teachers' Federation): Thank you very much.

Thank you for the opportunity to present today. We're pleased that the government has committed to developing a national poverty reduction plan and, while our focus today will be on education, I do believe there needs to be a broad, more societal, multi-faceted approach. I'm here representing close to half a million teachers in Canada, but I'm a teacher. I have seen poverty first-hand. I was in a school until 2015, and I have over 34 years of teaching experience within the public system in New Brunswick. I've bought food; I've bought school supplies; and I've clothed kids, so when I'm making my points today, I have faces in my head. Teachers see children living in poverty on a daily basis.

Certainly addressing poverty means addressing family poverty. These children are not there on their own for the most part; they have families that are struggling as well. As teachers, we do that as well. We reach out to families and try to provide some of that support.

We congratulate the government on taking a step in that direction with the Canada child benefit, but we really need to look more broadly than at just youth and schools. We need to talk about affordable housing, rental housing, addressing precarious work and underemployment, and we've heard about it right here. We do need to invest in our families, because those are the children who are our future.

Schools can be a hub for the provision of these services. In the education sector we're hearing about cuts and school closures. There is space in schools for the school to be a community hub for the provision of these services. I'm familiar with a school in New Brunswick that actually has done that. When their health centre was going to close, the community lobbied to have those services there. Not only are the services provided in the school, parents don't need to drive, and they don't need to worry about transportation costs. They don't need to worry about taking time off work to get these services for their children, because they're right in the school building. Students are not losing much learning time. The school and the community health centre work together, and the professionals within the centre work together.

We need to have a plan to address issues involving students that addresses hunger and youth and child mental health. Schools can be an entry point. I think schools are already an informal entry point for this, but the services just aren't there for us to provide to students. Education is the key to lifting children out of poverty. Children need access to education that's free from impacts of privatization and other forms of social streaming.

Really, K-12 schools are preparing children for a workplace that may not even exist yet, for jobs that are not even developed yet. We have no idea what they'll need to do. They need a broad base of skills like critical thinking and problem solving, which we call soft skills. They are not the hard academics of reading and math that seem to be where we have put the focus. International standardized testing has done some of that, but schools are much broader. We need to have social programming, and there are all kinds of opportunities that we're missing.

Speaking of access to higher education, we had a pilot project here in Canada called Future To Discover. We had students in New Brunswick and Manitoba who were offered voluntary after-school career counselling. They were also offered funding if they enrolled in post-secondary. They needed to be in their second year to access that funding, but these students were offered the funding when they were in Grade 10.

The initial cost-benefit analysis showed low administrative costs. For every dollar spent, the return was between \$2.40 and \$3.00. That project is there, and it's a longitudinal study, so they're still following these students as they go further in their life, and we have some of that pilot project work here Canada.

They also found, for students who were involved in this project in high school, that it affected their choices of courses, and it also affected their engagement in school. They were more apt to graduate, so it not only affected their post-high school years; it affected their high school years as well.

● (0905)

Public education is a societal good. We call it the great equalizer. To some extent that's true, but I think it could be more so.

Students transition from K-to-12 schools into the workplace, but really school is not the place to provide that training. Employers need to provide that on-the-job training. Schools need to provide the broad base so students can continue that learning once they enter the workforce.

We talked about facility in another language. We believe all students in Canada should have the opportunity to learn a second language. We are a bilingual country. All students need to have that opportunity, and not just in specialized programs.

There are apprenticeship possibilities that happen within schools. At present there are co-op programs and there are apprenticeship programs in education sectors across the country. There is a bit of a challenge to this, though, because it's up to the apprentices to find the experienced masters who are willing to take on the apprenticeships. We have teachers who are beating the bushes to make sure they have enough placements for students within the areas in which they have an interest, but they may be reluctant to take on an apprentice. I think the governments could focus more on how they could provide incentives to do that.

That brings me to financial literacy. It seems that everything people think kids need to know, schools need to do. We've been using financial literacy for years. I taught elementary school. I used money to teach. We counted nickels and dimes, and that's how we counted. We counted by fives and tens, because it's tangible. We've done a lot of that in high schools. That extends even further.

In conclusion, Canadian teachers see the effects of poverty on a daily basis in the children and the youth that are right in front of us. As I said, I have faces in my head as I say this. Actually, we owe it to these students, we owe it to their families, and we actually owe it to our country to address this need.

Thank you.

● (0910)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

My mom's a teacher, so I totally understand where you're coming from and I appreciate the work you have done.

Now from the Canadian Labour Congress, Emily, go ahead for seven minutes, please.

Ms. Emily Norgang (Senior Researcher, Canadian Labour Congress): Thanks for the opportunity to speak today and for asking the CLC to speak about our research report on young workers in Canada. One of the most important poverty reduction strategies is the assurance of decent work for young Canadians. Education and training are cornerstones of this, and there is a lot that governments and employers can do and really should be doing to strengthen these links.

It really has been a tough few decades for young Canadians. We've seen global trends like the growing service sector, the rise in non-standard forms of employment, globalization, and technological change and innovation, and they're truly transforming the world of work. There are a lot of opportunities here and great potential, but because of a lack of regulations, policies, and programs, precarious forms of work have risen, economic inequality has expanded, and young people have been disproportionately affected.

Canadians are the most highly educated people in the world. We rank first among OECD countries for post-secondary education completion rates. While enrolment in universities, colleges, and apprenticeships continues to rise, so do tuition fees. More than at any other point in history, students are now balancing school and work just to make ends meet. Despite this record number of students holding part-time work, they're still carrying record levels of debt, and student debt continues to balloon.

Each year, hundreds of thousands of young Canadians are coming out of school with record debt, but they're unable to find decent work, and certainly not work that is making use of their skills and expertise. The job market is truly failing young Canadians, and student debt is quickly transforming into family debt. Our report found that now young people in record numbers are forced to live with their parents, are delaying marriage, and are delaying having children.

The youth unemployment rate is double that of the core-age unemployment rate. Underemployment has now reached 26%. One in four young Canadians is underemployed. Almost one-third of young people are now in temporary work. This compares to about 10% of core-age workers. About one-half of young people are in part-time employment. We need to bust the myth that they're in part-time employment by choice. This is the case for some, but one in five is in part-time employment involuntarily, because there's just nothing else available.

For these reasons, young people are also more likely to hold multiple jobs, especially young women. Young people are unable or are very unlikely to have access to workplace pensions and benefits. Only 9% of young workers in their early 20s have a pension plan. This compares to about 37% of those in their early 50s.

We are also seeing a drastic rise of employers misclassifying workers as self-employed. Doing this is really shifting the costs and risks of owning a business onto the workers themselves. It also denies workers basic protections like minimum wages and hours of work. This trend is also impacting access to employment insurance and other social services. This is especially problematic given the rise in temporary employment and that fact that young people aren't able to access EI between periods of this kind of work.

Precarious work has become the new norm for people in Canada. The impact on youth poverty is drastic. Today the total amount of debt carried by young people is double what it was in 1999, and 15% of Canadians between 20 and 35 now live in poverty.

The labour market is failing young people. It's scarring them for later in life. The consequences are higher risks of poverty throughout life and the expansion of numbers of working poor.

The federal government has taken some positive steps toward improving training and the labour market for young people. The Canada summer jobs program is an excellent step, and it's exactly what we need to be doing, but it should go beyond just the summer months. It needs to continue year-round. We should be exploring a youth guarantee, such as they're doing in Europe. This would guarantee all young Canadians either training or employment. It would really help to smooth and bridge the transition into the workforce.

Although registered apprenticeship is on the rise, it still only represents about 2.5% of the workforce, which is a very small percentage of the workforce, and completion rates remain very low.

●(0915)

This means that people who are going through apprenticeships are not actually benefiting from the wage premium that comes out of completing and certification.

Women and people of colour are drastically under-represented in apprenticeships, and this is something that needs to be addressed. Women represent only about 14% of apprenticeships, and if you remove some of the lower-wage positions, such as aesthetics and hair styling, women represent only 4% of apprenticeships in Canada.

Both employers and governments need to be doing more to support and promote apprenticeship training, and we need to be doing more to support young workers once they're in the workforce. Government should be exploring legislation that bans two-tier contracts, and reviewing and revising employment standards and labour laws to ensure that they have really kept up with the changing nature of work.

Within this picture, it's very important to remember that Canadian youth are the most diverse generation in history. We have growing numbers of newcomers, young people of colour, and aboriginal youth. There is also a growing awareness of the presence and needs of LGBTQ youth, and youth with disabilities. Although it's not as present as within the core-age population, discrimination continues to exist in terms of access to education, in hiring practices, and within the workplace.

It is essential that strategies to reduce poverty through the realization of decent work take into account this diversity and ensure equal opportunities for all.

Thank you for this opportunity. I look forward to answering any questions about our report.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now via audio, we have Orville and Ruth Lee from the Pathfinder Youth Centre Society.

Mr. Orville Lee (President and Co-Founder, Pathfinder Youth Centre Society): Good morning.

Ms. Ruth Lee (Executive Director and Co-Founder, Pathfinder Youth Centre Society): Good morning.

The Chair: Good morning.

You have seven minutes. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Orville Lee: Thank you. Good morning, committee and Mr. May. Thank you for inviting us.

We are a non-profit organization that works with at-risk youth and youth in care. Our demographics are our programs deal with employment retention, life skills, and mentorship. We find that the key to our programs or the mentorship component.... I'm also joined by Ruth, our Executive Director, so I'll have her explain our skills links programs, which we offer through our organization.

Ms. Ruth Lee: Good morning, everyone.

We currently run two programs that serve the Lower Mainland but focus on different communities. We are servicing Surrey, which is the highest-growing city in Vancouver, as well as Maple Ridge.

We want to be more solution-based. In terms of the demographics we service, we see a lot of mental health issues, people recovering from drugs and alcohol, homelessness, and the cycle of families remaining in poverty. Our programs bring things back to basics. We try to service the emotional, physical, and mental needs of an individual, so all the programs are customized to address their particular situation. We try to build them up, and build up their self-esteem and self-confidence. We find that once we can build that strong relationship, we can move forward in implementing their work experience and knowledge and can deal with the soft skills, so when they go into a job, if somebody upsets them, they can go into conflict resolution.

All our programs have them leave with a tool box that they can go back and dig into so they can address situational things that happen at work. We find that the 24-hour mentorship we provide is probably the key to the success of these programs. Needs and issues don't stop at 5 o'clock. Right now, because of limited resources, it's Orville and I who capture what happens to them after they leave work or after our office is closed. There is an emergency number that ties directly to us, so there's continual 24-hour support.

It's very challenging to deal with the youth we deal with, because we are trying to undo 19 or 20 years of habit, as well as cultural, historical, and family cycles and issues, and we are trying to undo those in 17 weeks. We actually started this out of our basement. In the first program we were blessed with, through Service Canada, they allowed us to work with the youth for six months. As we transitioned, it just kept getting shorter and shorter, so our limit to try to address the issues started to become really challenging. More time....

We encourage community involvement. It takes a village to raise a child, so that's the mantra we hang on to as an organization. We can't make one individual perfect, so we need the help of the government. We need the help of employers who are willing to give these youth a chance, a foot in the door, just so they can expand and grow.

One of the things we just handed in is a program that we want to start, which is opening a thrift store. It's addressing sustainability for our organization. It's kind of like a workplace learning centre. Instead of getting them out right away after five weeks of being in class, we are going to keep them for another five weeks so that we can address the workplace issues they have. Our staff will be there to watch and monitor how they work and their work ethic. We want to make them as perfect as possible as employees, and then we go out into the workforce and get the community involved with different employers.

The issue we really find prevalent is mental health. If we can get more services dealing with mental health.... That seems to be the key factor in people progressing and choosing other options to try to figure out how they are going to deal with poverty. We have a good number of youth who steal, because they don't have food to eat.

● (0920)

They try to go into survival mode. Eating is a basic need, and again we try to address that by having an in-house food bank. If any youth walks by and looks hungry, or we see that they have a need, then we provide food for them; they don't even have to be in our program. It's been challenging to help them, to funnel them back into the bigger food banks, because food's very scarce. People aren't donating to the food banks the way they used to, so we try to address that in house, and we try to give them clothing too. We do drives to get interview clothing and clothing just for day to day.

As you can see, all our programs just address basic needs, and so it's a holistic approach. It's bringing it back to basics, really, but if we can get more mental health supports.... We as an organization don't have the finances or the ability to hire psychologists and stuff like that, so we use our community to help address that, but it's getting limited. We have kids who want to commit suicide, but they call the hotline and they're put on hold, or they have to wait three weeks before they see a mental health worker.

The Chair: Ms. Lee, I'm sorry to interrupt, but we're running a little over time. Could you come to a conclusion?

● (0925)

Ms. Ruth Lee: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: I'll give you another 30 seconds.

Mr. Orville Lee: In a nutshell, we want to stress the fact that the key to all the programs we've been running for the last 13 years is the mentorship component. That's the key and that's the glue that brings everything together and gives us the success we do have, and hopefully we can continue doing what we're doing, which will definitely assist in breaking the cycle of poverty.

Ms. Ruth Lee: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much. I really do regret having to cut you off—

Ms. Ruth Lee: That's okay.

The Chair: —but we do need to stay on time today.

Before we get started with questions, we are getting notice that there will be a vote this morning, so we are going to have to cut things a little short. The bells are going to start shortly after 10. If we can carve an extra 10 minutes out of that, obviously I'll have to ask for unanimous consent at that point. In the interest of trying to give everyone an opportunity, there was a really good suggestion from MP Warawa that we switch from six minutes to five minutes, and I will be incredibly diligent to keep everybody on time.

Are we in agreement that we can move forward with that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. Without further ado, Mr. Warawa, you have five minutes.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Just on a point of order, so the clock isn't starting, the focus of every one of the witnesses today was on youth. Was the purpose of this section today to focus on youth poverty? I understood that the study was going to be just on education broadly, and didn't necessarily have to be focused on youth. Is that correct?

The Chair: That's correct.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Okay. My time can start.

The Chair: Go.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Thank you.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here. I listened closely.

With the environment of poverty that youth find themselves in, would the family likely be also in poverty? I think we can make an assumption, very safely, that if youth are in poverty, probably the parent or parents who are raising those children are also in poverty, so the source of the poverty would be the family setting. I'm going to start from that premise. It would be nice if the family could be removed from poverty and if we could help address that situation.

I have a question for the Canadian Council for Career Development. Each of the presenters was presenting a perspective on the importance of youth poverty, and while the mandate of the Council for Career Development is, I think, to work with people of all ages, my focus is poverty for seniors. This is where I'm trying to fit this puzzle together.

I received an email yesterday from a lady by the name of Christie Lane. She has a company she started three years ago in the Kamloops, B.C., area called Happy to Help, a community outreach support for seniors. She started off as a business of one person and now has 14 employees. Her company is helping seniors who need help so that they can age in place.

The Canadian Council for Career Development has the mandate to focus on helping people in all age groups. We have a growing population of aging Canadians. We cannot afford to build housing for this aging population, but we can afford to take care of them and have them age in place. There's a huge opportunity for our youth to be trained in home care, geriatrics, and palliative care. This is a great opportunity to take people out of poverty, both the parents and youth, for whom there are great employment opportunities.

My question is to the Council for Career Development. They mention that the blame game gets us nowhere and that we need a national strategy. What I've heard from across Canada is that we need a national seniors strategy, and under that broad national seniors strategy will be other strategies.

Would you agree that we need to have a strategy that provides education, training, and employment opportunities in the "demand sectors", I think you called them? The senior sector, that aging population, has a huge potential, a demand sector that we can actually encourage training in.

Thank you.

● (0930)

The Chair: Thank you.

He's left you about a minute.

Ms. Lynne Bezanson: Wow!

Our focus in our field is on helping people navigate learning and work. I agree with you that we have not had a focus on the issues of seniors, because they are not necessarily accessing the labour market any more. There is, however, a whole movement called third age

career development. which we have not been very active in but which is looking at how you meaningfully engage seniors.

I want to make a comment about your reference to all the opportunities in the caregiving sector. I think there is potential there. I don't know the stats, but maybe Emily does. I think, however, that we really would have to look at the wages that are offered for people who are in positions of giving care, because usually those are minimum wage positions, and usually they offer very limited benefits, so they're not the answer for most young people.

I don't know all the stats—if Emily did, I'd appreciate it—but I think you need to be very careful about saying that this is an answer and that there's a lot of demand there. There is demand there, but whether we can build systems so that there are actually opportunities for young people is another question altogether. A lot of abuse goes on in that system, and the abuse is low wages, no benefits, long hours, and actually quite intolerable workplaces. I think we need to be very careful about this. I'm not at all saying that seniors do not deserve help, but our focus is not on seniors.

May I just give one example, however, of something—?

The Chair: You can have 10 seconds. Go ahead.

Ms. Lynne Bezanson: One example that we did work with—again, it's in New Brunswick—was with social assistance. We worked with single mothers who were interested in the future of their children, and they were offered workshops that would help them become coaches for their children to get them out of social assistance.

These were very short interventions and very inexpensive, but the interesting thing was that they got a heck of a lot out of them. The fascinating thing was that these women said that, "Not only is it helping me with my child, I'm going to move myself out."

The Chair: Fantastic.

Ms. Lynne Bezanson: I think one of you mentioned the importance of encouragement and mentorship. It all ends up being the same thing.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Lynne Bezanson: It's somebody who really helps you take a step towards optimism, and we need to have help to make that happen.

The Chair: Thank you, Lynne.

Ms. Lynne Bezanson: Sorry.

The Chair: No, that's okay. That's why I get paid the big bucks, so I can cut you guys off.

Monsieur Robillard, go ahead, please.

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): I will take only one minute for my question in French.

The Chair: Okay.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Robillard: I understand, Ms. Smith. Given my 16 years of teaching experience, I know that teachers are often the first to see family problems, such as poverty and its effects on children in class. You are right to encourage the Government of Canada to improve learning opportunities in order to reduce and eradicate poverty among children in Canada.

Can you tell us more about this point and the innovative possibilities you were referring to?

[English]

Mrs. Heather Smith: To begin, I just want to say yes, teachers are often the first to identify, but they're also the first to have that sincere interest.

In 2014 we did a survey at CTF that asked teacher respondents what they felt CTF should be advocating for at the national level. The first thing was child and youth mental health, but second was poverty, including child poverty. Well over 90% of respondents said that was where we needed to put our focus.

I know the opportunities for apprenticeships within schools are there—they are in pockets in some places, and they are better in some provinces and territories than in others— but the other thing is—and I go back to the standardized international testing and other standardized testing in schools and those have narrowed the curriculum. They've narrowed the curriculum and narrowed student choices within schools, because they have requirements to graduate. If students are looking to move to post-secondary education, they're really choosing those subjects along the way and that limits their opportunities to choose apprenticeships, to choose co-op programs, or to choose some of those other opportunities that they might otherwise choose.

I can say that, having had the experience of my own three children. They were gearing towards post-secondary and they wanted to have some of those opportunities in schools, but they just didn't have them.

Again, we want to make sure we don't target students in high schools so there is an expectation that this is the career they have to do. Education at K to 12 levels is broad-based so students can experience other things but also develop those skills that will help them in any workplace and not target them or stream them into a particular career.

● (0935)

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you very much.

I'll share my time with my colleague.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Tassi.

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Thank you.

Ms. Bezanson, I want to ask you a question quickly. I like this notion of the school-to-work transition strategy. What exactly would it look like? Could you present that in writing to the committee subsequent to this? Could you tell us who the partners are and what the timelines are, recognizing that the focus would be on how, in the current environment, this strategy is going to help? Our government

is committed to investing, to growing the economy, and to creating jobs, but with the current market as it is, how does this strategy help us make the connections that you're proposing we make? If you could provide that in writing after, that would be great.

My question this morning is to representatives of the Boys and Girls Clubs.

I heard you say that you need increased access, or that it would help with the work you're doing to have increased access, to after-school programs. You spoke about encouraging success in education and how those after-school programs are successful there. Can you speak about some of the other programs—the youth social justice programs or the meal programs—and how these programs aid in poverty reduction and prevention? I'm thinking of areas of mental health and physical health.

Would you also be able to share any statistical data on the success you have had?

Dr. Rachel Guoin: I don't have the data for you. I will find it for you today.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Thank you.

Dr. Rachel Guoin: One of our former board members, Sid Frankel, has done research on how quality after-school programs mitigate the impacts of poverty. Some of the examples are lack of adequate food and nutrition, access to nutritious food, and food literacy programs. We have just received funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada to deliver a food literacy program that is pan-Canadian. It's a very big initiative, with partners in the media, so we're looking forward to changing that culture and teaching young people how to cook food, because a lot of young people who live in poverty may be responsible for food or meal planning in the family and they don't have those food skills. That's one way.

The Chair: Go ahead very quickly, please.

Dr. Rachel Guoin: They mitigate the family's stress by offering support. After-school programs are not just for kids. They're for families as well. They provide care for kids after school in cases where parents are working. They address inadequate opportunities for health-promoting activities. A lot of kids want to participate in sports or leadership programs, and their parents can't afford to send them to those programs.

All of the programs of the Ottawa Boys and Girls Club, for instance, are free. Some of our clubs are like that, and if they're not free, they're barrier-free.

The Chair: Thank you. I have let you run a bit over there. I'm sorry.

Hopefully, we'll have a chance to come back and you can finish your thought. Thank you.

For five minutes, Ms. Ashton, go ahead, please.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Thank you so much.

Thank you to all of our witnesses who are here today to speak to this important issue.

It's not lost on me that many of you talked about the impacts of rising precarious work, particularly amongst young Canadians in the millennial generation, a generation that I'm part of as well.

I've actually been involved with a national tour across the country looking at this trend, but also at something that many people are referring to as a national emerging crisis. I thank you for a number of very strong recommendations in terms of trying to deal with this and what this means, not only for today's young people but also for our country as a whole.

I do want to direct my questions to Ms. Norgang from the CLC. Unfortunately, we do have limited time, but thank you so much for sharing very clear recommendations coming out of the report by the CLC entitled "Diving without a Parachute—Young Canadians versus a Precarious Economy".

In that report the CLC talks about the need for deep structural change to truly address climate change, inequality, precarious work, and the future that we ultimately want to achieve. Could you expand more on the deep structural changes that the CLC and many people are talking about, that are necessary in order to deal with these challenges ahead?

● (0940)

Ms. Emily Norgang: As I already mentioned with regard to the questions on deep structural training change, over-qualification in Canada and our high enrolment rates in university and education point to the fact that access to education is certainly not the sole recipe for success. It's also not simply a problem of skills mismatch. What we really need to be doing is thinking about the sorts of jobs we're fostering for young people and the way in which employers and workplaces are using these skills and these graduates' capacities.

Mr. Warawa's question pointed to connecting this to the growing population or the aging population in Canada. He pointed to jobs in home care. We're looking at a shortage of hospital beds ahead. That's simply not the right avenue for a lot of our older population.

Part of the problem, as you mentioned, is that those jobs tend to be low-wage jobs. They have unpredictable hours, and they have a lot of health and safety risks. Part of this is that workplaces are changing. They're much smaller workplaces, or people are working individually. We have to make sure that labour laws and employment standards are changing along with this. By doing so, we can make sure that these types of need-connected jobs are good and decent jobs.

Canadian labour relations are based on the Wagner model, which was based on large workplaces. How can we explore broader-based bargaining to give these workers the tools they need to advocate for good, decent work? We also need to think about the question I posed earlier about self-employment. Are employers misclassifying workers as self-employed? If so, workers in these desperately needed fields don't have access to basic standards and minimums.

The other piece, again, is apprenticeships and making sure that these apprenticeships are connected to the jobs that are needed. I did mention that we have very low completion rates, and part of this is

that employers just aren't doing their part in hiring, training, and taking on these apprentices. In order to complete an apprenticeship, you need a certain number of hours to actually achieve certification. However, only one in five employers who need these skilled workers—so about 19%—actually hire and train apprentices. This is very low.

Since 1993, employer investment in training has decreased by 40%, so employers just aren't doing their part in training the workers for these jobs that they need. Government investment in training has also decreased, which actually ranks Canada near the bottom of the list of OECD countries.

I think you make a really good point—and it's come up again—when you say that we should really foster the jobs that we need and make sure that those jobs are good, decent jobs.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Do you think that the federal government also ought to be a model employer? We do know, of course, about the use of unpaid internships within the federal government and the emergence of two-tiered workplaces, much of which is being fought over at the bargaining table.

Do you think that, both in-house and beyond, the federal government ought to be setting a higher standard for young workers and putting an end to the rise of precarious work?

The Chair: We're actually over time, but I'm going to give you about 15 to 20 seconds to summarize that, if you can.

Ms. Emily Norgang: Absolutely. The federal government needs to do more. A lot of people used to see the public sector as full-time, permanent employment, but that's not the case anymore. Many young people are entering the federal public service, and they are working contract to contract, sometimes indefinitely. We also have a fiasco right now with the Phoenix pay system, and this is very problematic.

We need to really consider the imposition of two-tiered contracts within the federal public sector. Right now, there is a movement in Quebec. The Quebec government passed a resolution to ban the imposition of two-tiered contracts. Now we're waiting for them. There's a big push for them to actually create legislation to do this, and this is—

● (0945)

The Chair: Sorry to interrupt, but we're way over time.

Mr. Ruimy, go ahead, please. You have five minutes.

Mr. Dan Ruimy (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, Lib.): Thank you, everybody, for presenting some really great presentations that are going to contribute to this study. I'm looking forward to seeing how this is going to turn out.

I'm going to direct my comments to Ruth and Orville from the Pathfinder Youth Centre Society.

As you know, I'm a big fan of your organization. Attending your classes is one of the best things that I feel I'm contributing to. You talked a lot about mentorship. The two hours I spend with each of your classes have been especially rewarding for me. There are about 20 of them in the classes, and they're talking about the challenges they face and where they're going forward.

I want to focus on a few things for your program. I want to begin with this question first, though. You have the funding model. Do you know how many people you put through on a regular basis in a year?

Ms. Ruth Lee: It depends on when the federal government approves the contracts. It really varies and there are times when we'll have one or two intakes and there are times when we'll have three. Time is really a question of when we negotiate that, and there's nothing ever set in stone. Every intake, we service probably anywhere between 10 and 20 youth. Again, it depends on financial situations, federal government budgets, and time.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Do you find yourself turning anybody away?

Ms. Ruth Lee: Yes. For every intake we probably have anywhere from 80 to 100 youth apply, and we'll have only 10 to 20 seats.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: How do you think the federal government can change that? When we look at that funding model, you mention that every year you wait for the funding to be announced to you.

Ms. Ruth Lee: Yes. We post multiple-year contracts. Consistency is key, being able to rely on that service every time. I think when Orville and I started this there were probably about 15 other service providers that were there that you could funnel off to. If it didn't work for your program, there was another service provider to capture that youth. But now I believe that just in our Maple Ridge community there are only maybe two or three of us, so there's a lack of services for them.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Okay. In your opinion what are the most significant barriers youth at risk are facing to successfully enter the job market?

Ms. Ruth Lee: I would say mental health and poverty. Mental health is the biggest factor. Schooling completion is what we try to focus on as well. As they go through the program, they realize that they need to further their education. We work with youth who have a mentality of grade eight or grade nine, but they're 22. They realize that, and then they go back and they complete their GED or their Dogwood.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Okay. It's great that you have the opportunity and that the federal government is reaching out here. Are you working with any local businesses as part of a partner strategy to tackle some of these issues?

Ms. Ruth Lee: No. We call on them for the work experience component only. No one's really stepped up to say they really fully want to take on a partnership role with us. Also, a lot of employers get burned out because there wasn't enough time to resolve the issue of why they can't keep a job. Again, it stems back to mental health and addressing that first before we can move forward. That is key.

• (0950)

Mr. Dan Ruimy: I have about another 30 seconds here. I know that when I'm meeting some of the folks who are there, they're actually really good people who have struggled along the way, but I think one of the biggest challenges I see is the lack of somebody

giving them that opportunity. Is there anything you think the federal government can do, in conjunction with private businesses, to encourage this to move forward?

Ms. Ruth Lee: I think we started a good thing by having a wage subsidy. It really encourages employers to, I'll say, "try before you buy" during the probationary period of work. It helps them with their financial situations, too. We find that the bigger corporations have too much red tape to go through. When you deal with the middle-class, momma-poppa organizations, they're more open to receiving our youth, for sure.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Thank you very much, Ruth, and you are doing fabulously.

Ms. Ruth Lee: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll go over to MP Long, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses. It's nice to see a New Brunswick connection with a few.

My questions I think will be to you, Ms. Smith, and to the Boys and Girls Clubs' Ms. Gouin and Ms. Achan.

I want to talk about early learning and how important that is to break the cycle of poverty. I know in Saint John there's an early learning centre in the south end, St. John the Baptist, that is having some success. It's my belief that as a federal government, aligned with provincial governments, we need to have a higher degree of early learning in our schools. I just wondered if you could elaborate on early learning, Ms. Smith, and how important that would be. Can I have your thoughts on that?

Mrs. Heather Smith: I can begin by saying I taught kindergarten for 13 years in Bathurst, and that is certainly my experience. I know we see the discrepancy in skills of students arriving in kindergarten, and the statistics are there, because the assessments are done. My experience is in New Brunswick, but we register them a year early so that we can assess them, and then we provide supports for families to access these programs. However, there is no requirement, and not all families are able to take advantage of that.

I'm familiar with St. John the Baptist. I've been there, and certainly they are doing some fabulous work. Early learning is essential. We know that in the first five years of age, stimulation is needed, as are access to reading and literacy, that one-to-one strong relationship with an adult, speaking skills, and language acquisition. All of that is essential. I think we really do need to focus.

I had a teacher one time say to me, “I don't know what you do in elementary, but they come to us and they can't do this, and they can't do that.” I said, “You know, really, they don't come to us equal.” Kids are not coming into school with equality of skills and equality of experiences, and we certainly see that, and we try our best to—

Mr. Wayne Long: I'll just jump in. If you look at some Scandinavian countries, they have three- and four-year-olds in their system. Germany, I believe, takes two-year-olds into their system. So, can you envision a system in Canada, or even some pilots initially, in which we take three- and four-year-olds and put them into the school system? It doesn't have to be totally structured, but it could kind of capture those young minds and develop them there.

Mrs. Heather Smith: I think what you said is essential, that it not be totally structured.

Mr. Wayne Long: Right.

Mrs. Heather Smith: I entered teaching kindergarten when New Brunswick brought in in, and it was, I'll say, totally an experience-based grade. That has transitioned. Kindergarten really is the new grade one. Kids are expected to leave reading. I always say they come in as babies and leave reading, and that's a big transition for those kids. Some of them can't even step up into those school buses. I think it's essential. I would say yes to a pilot, but I think we need to move cautiously to make sure that structured academic learning doesn't get pushed further and further to younger ages.

Mr. Wayne Long: Sure.

Can I get comments from you too, Ms. Guoin?

• (0955)

Dr. Rachel Guoin: Some of our clubs offer early learning programs. The bulk of the youth we see are between six and 12. After-school programs should also be part of an early learning strategy in the sense that it can't all happen in schools. Community organizations have a role to play.

I would just caution that I think the needs of zero to five are very different from those of six to 12. Six- to 12-year-old kids benefit from being outside of school as well, and from making connections with community members. Those are important things. If we put them all together, then we don't meet the needs of the older kids. Also, while having early childhood educators is very important for zero to five, the six to 12 benefit from having young leaders, such as Achan, who don't necessarily have an ECE degree but who can contribute and who want to give back to their communities. Having that flexibility so that you can create youth employment or youth jobs that can serve the community and youth can be mentors for young people is also very important.

Mr. Wayne Long: Okay.

I'll go back to you, Ms. Smith.

The Chair: You have about 30 seconds.

Mr. Wayne Long: I want to get your comments on financial literacy and how important you think that would be in the school system.

Mrs. Heather Smith: It needs to not be a stand-alone thing. We have to teach financial literacy. We have to look at how we can incorporate it within what is already happening. It's happening informally now, but I think it can't be an add-on, because there is just

not time in the day or time in the structure of schools. It needs to be worked into what we're already doing with math or those kinds of areas.

The Chair: You have two seconds.

Dr. Rachel Guoin: We have a partnership that is offering financial literacy in the after-school hours, so we can help schools.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to MP Zimmer for five minutes.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll just tell you a bit about myself. I am a former teacher from northern B.C. One of the things I did as a former carpenter was work in trades, but I also have two degrees, so I understand both sides of the experience, and I actually wrote some of the courses that Lynne talked about, on transitioning from school to trades. I wrote a course actually explaining that and helping kids to bridge that gap.

I'm really interested in what you talk about in terms of the strategy, because this is an important gap.

One concern I have, which I think is paramount to many of us here, is aboriginal education specifically and the barriers to post-secondary education.

This is my question for Cham. The AFN website lists some barriers to post-secondary education. Number one is the lack of money or government funding, listed by 27 out of 100 people; 14 list problems with alcohol, drugs, and pregnancy; another 14 say that post-secondary education is not being encouraged. Ten are not used to living out of the community. Concerning lack of academic qualifications, meaning graduating from high school—and we talked at the last meeting about that as a significant barrier to the next level—seven say they are not very interested; another seven are not prepared for post-secondary education; six say it is too far away; and two list “other” as the problem.

I see organizations such as the Boys and Girls Clubs especially helping with that gap.

Here is a simple question. Do you monitor...I hate to say success rates, because we can measure this factor in so many ways. When a kid who really had no future becomes a kid who has a big smile and just loves life, that's success too. Do you measure that transition from being a student who you would consider to be in poverty to one who is moving on to post-secondary education? Do you as an organization measure that?

That's a big one for...

Dr. Rachel Gouin: We are implementing new ways of measuring that across the country. We have 96 clubs, and it's difficult, but we are working on better tracking.

We have data on the Rogers Raising the Grade program, which is measuring outcomes like that. I don't have the stats with me.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: That's okay. I'm just glad you do measure this, because I think it justifies your role in this gap.

Dr. Rachel Gouin: Absolutely. We have a model for success that identifies where we want to go, and we want to measure how we as a movement are delivering on it.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Perfect.

I see this as part of what Lynne was saying about a strategy. You're a key part of it.

Lynne, I have a question for you. I want to ask you for more of an explanation. You talked about this school-to-work strategy. You talked about it being necessary.

Can you inflate that a little for us here? What would it look like? Do a bit more for us.

Ms. Lynne Bezanson: I have to write a paper on this, apparently.

It's the key question. Countries have done school-to-work transition strategies. It's not rocket science, but there are multiple pieces to it and multiple players in it. One of the biggest gaps in the transition is the transition from school to work. Whether it's from post-secondary or from secondary, people fall through those cracks. If you come out of the educational system in which you can have some supports and you don't go on to post-secondary and you're not in work, there's a huge gap around how we manage that.

• (1000)

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I was just going to say that one thing we ran into as a school—I taught high school for seven years—was that the key thing we needed to do was to give trades training for the last two years that students were in high school, because that's a key period of time. We have them at their desks and in their chairs. Why aren't we educating them there? We want to educate them after school even more. Why don't we do it there?

It was because there were little fiefdoms around, and we didn't want to step on colleges' toes and take any students away, and all these little things. But if we just looked at our need to have success, whatever is in the way we would need to deal with.

Ms. Lynne Bezanson: I'm going to come back to your question about what a strategy looks like. The bottom line answer is that nobody has the perfect solution, but we do need to be able to identify one, and there are pockets of excellence from which we can begin.

What are the components in the strategy that have worked in other countries? One component would be how you engage employers in a meaningful way to provide work experience. What would be some mechanisms for doing so?

It's not prescribing to provinces or regions that they need to “do it this way”; it is saying, “This is a strategy that needs to be part of a national strategy. We need to find a way to engage employers and build work experience. Here are some models that have worked

elsewhere. Here is what has worked; what will work in your jurisdiction?”

We need to look at how we build services for young people who are in between—and not just young people; it can be seniors.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I'm sorry to cut you off. I have probably less than 30 seconds. Are you saying that the strategy still needs to be built? You're not saying you have it; you're just saying we need one.

Ms. Lynne Bezanson: Of course.

There are models, and we need to bring the stakeholders together to say what is already working, ask how we build that into a structural approach that really does engage the critical people, and then build it together. It's a very big question and I'm having trouble answering it in thirty seconds.

I don't think I could really go much further except to say that it's not that we are sitting here with the answer on a school-to-work transition strategy. We have a problem. Other countries are addressing it, and other countries are doing a lot better at it than we are.

For instance, there's an example from the European Union countries. They have a youth guarantee program, which means that if students are out of school and not working, so neither employed nor in school, they track them. They track them for the first year and they pull them back. They pull them in to ask why they are not doing one or the other. Either they provide them with some volunteer experience that builds some skills or they encourage them to go to training or they give them some connection to how to get re-engaged, and maybe it means going back to school. But they don't leave them adrift. We leave them adrift in Canada. There are no support systems for that group.

We need a strategy for how to build the supports and services for those who are in between. That would be a critical piece of a national school-to-work strategy.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Lynne Bezanson: We need to identify are all those pieces and identify why employers aren't really engaged. That was brought up by Emily. Why are they not providing on-the-job training? What do we have to do to give them the incentive to do that? That's a piece of the strategy.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Lynne Bezanson: So it has to be developed by Canadians.

I'm sorry.

The Chair: That's okay.

We do need to move on.

We now go over to MP Sangha.

Go ahead for five minutes, please.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all witnesses here today.

My question is again to you, Ms. Bezanson.

You have given a concept of a national school. I cannot grasp from your statement the idea of a national school. Could you provide us an idea of what you mean by national school? If it's a lengthy one, you can give it in writing. I understand you have many ideas to give today. If you feel that you can't explain it in a short time, you can give it in writing.

• (1005)

Ms. Lynne Bezanson: I will certainly follow up. There's no doubt I will. It's not going to be a doctoral thesis, I can guarantee you.

It's not a national school. It's a strategy. We have worked before on creating some.... You were talking about a national strategy on poverty, I think. It's to bring the players together to say we have examples of programs that are going on in B.C. We have inspired New Brunswick, which is connecting young people to employers when they're in grades 10, 11, and 12. We have Nova Scotia establishing a business education council, in which they really are focusing on economic growth sectors and building co-ops. There are examples across the country of people who are getting it right, but nobody knows about it. If you ask people in Alberta if they know anything about what's going on in Nova Scotia, they have no idea.

We need to bring those pockets of excellence together, and out of all of those we need to identify the building blocks and then build that strategy together. Then people will go back and make it happen in ways that fit their own communities, including indigenous communities, which would look quite different from any kind of prescribed national strategy.

That's really about the best I can do, Mr. Sangha, around trying to give you some concrete examples. We have no mechanism for bringing excellence together and building together toward something that would make sense. This is not an overnight strategy. We're talking about a minimum of five years to do something concrete.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: I agree. Can you just provide us with your total statement in writing?

Also with regard to the strategy planning, are you suggesting today to the committee that there should be some incentives to employers so that they are happy to employ students from the schools?

Ms. Lynne Bezanson: I have had the privilege of meeting with you and I know that in fact, in your own work, you've already offered those opportunities to young people. I think the first thing we need to understand is what the problem is. Why are employers not...? I'm sure they have many issues and many problems, but until we understand what we need to do to make it a.... Employers in Canada are investing less in on-the-job training than are employers in any other OECD country. Why is that?

I don't have the answer to that, but we need them to tell us what government needs to do to bring them to the table in a much more proactive, constructive way that really helps people. That could help people of all ages, including seniors who are very eager to do something meaningful with their third age. I know that. I'm still doing meaningful things.

I think that's probably where I could take that now. We need to understand the employer perspective, and in our field, they are very

difficult to bring to the table. It's not that they don't care in some ways, but it's a very complex picture.

Piece one is to understand what they need, and then let's see what is affordable and what is not. Can we allow them to be doing unpaid internships non-stop, and if they are, what do we need to do?

We now do the top employers in Canada. That's a start, but Australia actually rewards employers who have good work practices towards youth and at-risk youth. They have a reward system so that they get recognized. People love to be recognized.

Maybe it's not rocket science. Maybe we could do some creative things, without necessarily spending all the money in the world, that actually profile what a good employer does. We make them feel a sense of encouragement, and then other people say, "I want that too." We need to get smarter, not necessarily always more expensive, just smarter.

The Chair: Thank you, Lynne.

That was very passionate testimony and I thank you.

Ms. Lynne Bezanson: Yes, I am a little passionate about this issue.

The Chair: We have almost 27 minutes before we have to be in our seats.

I know a few people want to move now because of mobility issues. I would suggest they go now if they wish to.

To continue, I need unanimous consent from our group. I would like to finish the round. We have two more speakers. We need about eight minutes, approximately, to get that done.

Do I have unanimous consent to move forward to continue?

No? Okay.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Can I offer an alternative? Can they be shorter, about three minutes?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Yves Robillard: I have to go. I'm sorry.

The Chair: You can go. I'm just saying that in order to finish the round we can do that.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Just make it shorter.

The Chair: We can make it shorter, no?

• (1010)

Mr. Yves Robillard: No.

The Chair: Okay. I'm sorry.

Ladies and gentlemen, I do appreciate you being here today. I apologize that we have to cut it short. 'Tis the job.

I do really appreciate the opportunity. If there are any written submissions that you haven't already made, and you would like to, please share.

I would like to thank all of those who made today possible, the folks to my left and right, the translators and all the technical people, and of course the Pathfinder group that came to us via audio today.

Thank you, and have a great day.

The meeting is adjourned.

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