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Chair

Ms. Raymonde Folco

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

Tuesday, October 25, 2005

•(1110)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.)):
Good morning.

[Translation]

Pursuant to the agenda, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities is holding its Meeting No. 47 on this Tuesday, October 25, 2005.

As noted on the agenda, we will have a videoconference pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) as part of a study on the Summer Career Placement Program.

We have with us witnesses from a number of cities. First of all, from the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, we welcome Ms. Debbie Walliser.

[English]

Ms. Walliser is in Estevan. Are you there, Ms. Walliser? We'll come back to Estevan.

In Weyburn, is Mr. Gregory Bloor there? Obviously we're not in touch with Weyburn right now.

We'll go on to the town of Coronach and Mr. Murray Setrum, administrator. Mr. Setrum?

Mr. Murray Setrum (Administrator, Town of Coronach): Yes, I'm here.

The Chair: Am I hearing your voice? I don't see—

Mr. Murray Setrum: Yes, I'm at Weyburn.

The Chair: Okay, good, Mr. Setrum is there. Thank you very much, Mr. Setrum.

From the Town of Kipling, Mr. Bert Roach, community development officer. Mr. Roach? Wave your hand, Mr. Roach.

Mr. Bert Roach (Community Development Officer, Town of Kipling): Yes, I'm here.

The Chair: Stand up, or do something. No? Okay, not yet anyway. Did somebody move? Is that you, Mr. Roach, standing up and moving around now? Welcome.

Obviously there's a delay of a few seconds between our speaking and your receiving the message. Thank you very much. This is going to be fun.

South Burnaby Neighbourhood House, Ms. Antonia Beck, executive director. That would be the other screen. Let's wait a couple of seconds for Ms. Beck to reply. Okay, I'll come back.

As an individual, we have Ms. Rebecca Finlay, Bachelor of Social Work student, who is on the other screen also.

What we're going to do, obviously, is start with the people who are there, which seems a logical thing to do. We'll start with Mr. Murray Setrum from the Town of Coronach. You have three minutes, Mr. Setrum, for your presentation.

He will be followed by Mr. Bert Roach, the community development officer. You also have three minutes. And then hopefully by that time the other people will have arrived.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Madam Chair, I see that Debbie Walliser in fact is there, and so is Gregory Bloor.

The Chair: I see. You recognize them, do you? Okay.

So could I start again with Ms. Debbie Walliser. Could you wave your hand, Ms. Walliser? There she is.

Mr. Gregory Bloor, could you wave your hand? All right.

So we have four people. That's wonderful, thank you.

I remind you that we'll start with Ms. Walliser, then Mr. Bloor—this is the way I have them on my list—then Mr. Setrum and Mr. Roach. You have three minutes each, after which we'll go to South Burnaby. And when all the witnesses have done their presentations, there will be questions from the members of the committee.

Are there any questions on the way we are working from the people in Weyburn? Everything is fine.

Would Vancouver say a few words so we know whether you're there or not?

Mrs. Antonia Beck (Executive Director, South Burnaby Neighbourhood House): Yes, we're here.

Ms. Rebecca Finlay (Bachelor of Social Work Student, As an Individual): Hello, we're here.

The Chair: So you're all here. Did you hear the message I just gave, which was that we would start with Ms. Walliser, Mr. Bloor, Mr. Setrum, and Mr. Roach, and then we'll have Ms. Beck and Ms. Finlay? There will be three-minute presentations each, and when Ms. Finlay has finished, we will then go around to the members of this committee to ask you questions.

Seeing that we have to move across three screens, really, including our own, I would ask that when you answer the questions, please say who you are, because it will take a second for the screen to move from one place to another.

Okay, is that fine with our technician? Stay off mute so that when you speak, your voice will carry across immediately.

Ms. Rebecca Finlay: Thank you. I would like to make one comment. We were told we had five minutes.

The Chair: Let's put it this way. You yourself have fifteen minutes to organize your five minutes into three. I'll stretch it a bit—that's not a problem—because we like to give as much time to our witnesses as we can, and if there's anything you haven't said in your presentation, try to put it into one of the responses that you'll have to the questions.

Ms. Rebecca Finlay: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll start with Ms. Debbie Walliser, manager, Service Canada, Estevan, in the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development.

• (1115)

Ms. Debbie Walliser (Manager, Service Canada, Estevan, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development): Thank you, Madam Chair, and good morning, committee members.

My name is Debbie Walliser. I am the manager of the Service Canada office. I'm joined today by Greg Bloor, our manager of the Service Canada office in Weyburn. I will be presenting today on Greg's behalf as well.

Thank you for inviting us here today.

Each of you should have a copy of my slide presentation. If you'll turn to slide one, first, I will provide you with a brief overview of our service delivery network for the summer career placements program; secondly, I will narrow the focus to the Saskatchewan region; and finally, I will outline the summer career placements budget allocation and process for the Souris-Moose Mountain constituency.

Our local offices are responsible for the delivery of the summer career placements initiative. This includes the assessment, recommendation, approval, and project monitoring. As well, we respond to employers throughout this process, and we manage the MP concurrence process.

Regional offices are responsible for communicating the summer career placements budget information to each of our offices, communicating and distributing all of the summer career placements delivery and administrative information and tools, and providing functional advice and guidance to local offices.

The national office is responsible for obtaining the approval of the national SCP budget allocation, for allocating those funds to the regions, developing the national program directives and tools, and providing functional advice and guidance to the regional headquarters.

On page 3 of the presentation, we talk about having 14 constituencies in Saskatchewan. As well, we have a network of 11 human resource centres for students in the summer, all of which are co-located with the main Service Canada centres. We hire student

employment officers to help the students find jobs and to help employers hire students.

Our regional allocation for summer career placements in Saskatchewan in 2005 was nearly \$2.8 million, which included the 30% increase, and in 2004 it was just over \$2.6 million. Of that, Souris-Moose Mountain received just under \$193,000 in 2005, including the additional 30% cap, translating into 148 approved applications. In 2004 we received just over \$275,000, which translated into 201 approved applications.

Estevan and Weyburn are the two Service Canada offices in this constituency. However, the constituency boundaries actually cross into three other Service Canada offices, including Regina, Yorkton, and Moose Jaw.

There are two key variables in the summer career placements allocation model: the student population and student unemployment rate. From the Canada Census data, the student population in this constituency decreased from 5,075 in 1996 to 4,175 in 2001, or by about 900 students. The student unemployment rate in this constituency decreased from 12% in 1996 to 9.7% in 2001, an improvement of 2.3%.

[*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

• (1120)

The Chair: Could you get closer to the microphone, please.

Ms. Debbie Walliser: Due to the reduction in the summer career placements budget in 2005-06, some communities within our constituency did not receive any summer career placements funding. In past summers the department provided funding to a higher percentage of employers. As well, fewer summer work experiences were provided to the students in this constituency this fiscal year.

Some of the factors that affected the budget allocation included the fact that the number of federal constituencies increased from 301 to 308 in 2004, the constituency boundaries changed in many areas, and the 2001 Statistics Canada census data were used.

We're pleased to have had this opportunity to outline the delivery of the summer career placements program initiative at the local level, and we would be happy to respond to your questions.

We're committed to ensuring the best possible summer work experiences for our students.

This concludes my opening remarks.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Walliser. We apologize for the poor quality of the sound, but I think the message came across very well.

Now Mr. Gregory Bloor, manager with Service Canada in Weyburn.

Mr. Bloor.

Mr. Gregory Bloor (Manager, Service Canada, Weyburn, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development): As Ms. Walliser stated, our presentation was one and the same, so I won't be giving a separate presentation.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Bloor, I think we've got lots on that.

We now have Mr. Murray Setrum, administrator for the Town of Coronach.

Mr. Murray Setrum: Yes, this is Murray Setrum here. Good morning, Madam Chairman. Thank you for letting me speak to this committee. Can you hear and see okay?

The Chair: The sound is perfect.

Mr. Murray Setrum: I'm the administrator from the Town of Coronach, which is a small community on the west side of this constituency. I'm also a member of the Red Coat out of Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan. Employment is one of the key factors we want to try to keep ongoing in our area. We do have a Poplar River power plant and mine, which creates a lot of employment. We have younger people there with children who are seeking youth employment, and that's where your student employment program is very viable in our area. In fact, if the student employment grants are not available, we're two hours from a bigger centre, and the students have to travel to these centres to work through the summer; therefore they have to stay in other accommodations, which costs money. The student employment grant really gets eaten up in rental and things of that nature. The benefit to the student is not too much monetary; they do get the benefit from the work, which is part of the program.

Where I'm coming from is that if the local students can stay at home in their communities and work, it's a benefit to the employer, the student, and also the parents. It does get to be very important. The loss of grants in our community was substantial this year. Due to the centennial funding, we did get funding for a few projects. I do believe the students, for the most part, were hired this year and carried on. In the future—next year—I can't foresee that. It's going to depend on budgets at that time, but I really foresee that if your funding formula for this grant stays in place, we won't have the students employed. In fact, they will have to go to the larger centres, which is not good for our local communities.

I deal a lot with the local community groups as part of my administration with the Town of Coronach. Promoting tourism is fairly important in our area because we do have the big money badlands, which entails Station One on the Outlaw Trail, the Sitting Bull story, and so on. We're not overly populated, but we are seeing a number of people from all over the world coming to our communities. That's one of the key things our student employment grants basically help fund and assist. It's amazing how it is growing; it's very surprising. Regionally it's working better, too. These student grants may not seem like a lot to people, but I think they really do have a large effect in the smaller areas, and they do keep local children, students at home. They gain some experience, plus we're creating some employment, which helps keep the rural centres going.

I don't have too much more to say. I would really like to point out that we do have to invest in our youth. The youth are the people who are going to be sitting at this table and that table, and we have to give them some funding and help to get trained properly. I think this student program is a very valuable program. If there have to be cuts in some areas, I would like to see the cuts in some other places. That's about where I'm coming from. I'm trying to give you a grassroots perspective of how things are affected when you do cut the grants. Our students have to leave, and it doesn't help our local communities.

I think that's it for my presentation. I thank you for giving me the time to speak, and I'll answer any questions.

•(1125)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Setrum.

Certainly we're very much aware of the population problems, particularly in Saskatchewan, in terms of both numbers and the distribution away from the rural centres into the urban centres. Your presentation was very welcome.

Now I go on to Mr. Bert Roach, the community development officer for the Town of Kipling.

Mr. Roach.

Mr. Bert Roach: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I actually represent two positions. I'm the community development officer for the Town of Kipling, but I'm also the economic development coordinator for the Moose Mountain Central Rural Development Co-operative. That includes a number of the local RMs around Kipling, as well as the village of Kennedy.

I do have a prepared statement that I would like to read from at this time.

Madam Chair, committee members, fellow presenters, and guests, as the representative for the Moose Mountain Central RDC, I welcome the opportunity to bring information to Parliament on behalf of the RDC members.

The members of the Moose Mountain Central RDC consist of the following: Rural Municipality of Chester #125, the Rural Municipality of Golden West #95, the Rural Municipality of Hazelwood #94, the Village of Kennedy, and the Town of Kipling. The total population in the RDC area is approximately 3,000 persons.

As in most rural areas in Canada, the retention of young people to reinforce family ties, ensure the continuance of local culture, and also to ensure the continuation of a healthy and thriving local economy is of the utmost importance. Residents of our area recognize that creating the possibility for young persons to return home and earn a reasonable income during the summer months when they are attending a post-secondary institution helps to create a stable environment for them to pursue their educational goals. Having the opportunity to live at home with family at no or low cost is essential for most families in order to meet the rising costs associated with post-secondary education today.

We do have an excellent regional college system in place here in Saskatchewan. Our area is serviced by the Southeast Regional College. Through this system, students can attend a variety of classes either in person or online through Ed2Go programs. However, there are no post-secondary schools located in our area that allow students to pursue university degrees or most major technical certificates to their completion. As a result, students wishing to complete post-secondary programs must relocate outside of our area. This creates the possibility that the number of students who are actually seeking summer employment may be under-represented for our area, and hence not reflected in the new funding formula.

With this information in mind, there was a feeling of great disappointment this year in our area that there were no positions created as a result of the summer career placement program. Our research indicates that for the summer of 2005, at least fifteen applications were received from businesses and from government organizations located within the Moose Mountain Central RDC.

The number of high school graduates from our school ranges between 25 to 30 students per year, according to the five-year average. This year we had 29 graduates from Kipling High School. Of these graduates, at least three were either unemployed for the summer or seriously underemployed. Our research also found that at least two students had to locate to other areas in order to find employment for the summer. Approximately 10% to 17% of our graduates experienced some difficulties in finding employment for the summer in our area.

There certainly was, and is now, a will on behalf of the local businesses, government, and non-governmental organizations to employ these students within our area. Furthermore, there is also a strong belief that if they are given the opportunity to earn an income over the summer and live at home, many of the post-secondary students who currently reside outside of our area would return home.

We see many factors at work today that put young people at risk. We know one of these dangers is removing people from environments with which they are familiar and in which they are surrounded by family and social ties. I am certain that the members of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities see the many benefits in allowing students to live at home with their families during the summer months while they are pursuing post-secondary education. It is with great respect that I, on behalf of the residents of the Moose Mountain Central RDC, ask for changes to be made to the allocation formula for the summer career placement program.

Thank you very much for your time, Madam Chair. I would certainly be willing to answer any questions that you have.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Roach.

We'll now move to the second screen, and I'll ask Ms. Antonia Beck, executive director of South Burnaby Neighbourhood House, to make her presentation.

Mrs. Antonia Beck: Hi there. My name is Antonia Beck, and I live in Burnaby, B.C. I represent the South Burnaby Neighbourhood House, where I'm currently the executive director.

I've worked with neighbourhood houses for more than 25 years. At each of the neighbourhood houses where I've worked, I've administered the summer career placement programs. In fact, I remember when they were called career challenge grants.

A neighbourhood house is a social service agency. It provides support to the community. It helps individuals and families. We apply for these summer career placement programs to deliver our programs.

My experience has been very similar in each of the neighbourhood houses where I've worked. We apply for the grants, we wait to see

how many students we are awarded, and then we take a look at how many children can register for our summer programs, dependent on the students that we hire.

Hiring students through the summer career placement program allows us to offer a social program to 500 children each summer. The summer program that we offer provides a low-cost program and helps us to address the needs of families that are living in poverty in our community. In Burnaby in particular, the statistics are quite surprising. One in three children lives in poverty in Burnaby, so the need to have low-cost programs is very important. The summer career placement program allows us to hire students to deliver these programs to our community.

Without the ability to hire the students, we would not be able to provide our programs. This is true with many other non-profits that rely on summer student grants to hire students and deliver their programs.

My organization has a positive track record of providing high-quality experience to students who are studying in such careers as education, child and youth care, counselling, social work, and recreational leisure services. We invest our staff resources as mentors and trainers, to enable us to provide the best experience possible. Often students have a lot of learning to do, especially when it's their first job experience working with children. We spend the time needed to make sure that students learn on the job and to ensure that we are able to continue to provide a high-quality service to our community.

This investment of our staff time and resources in the students we hire provides direct, positive results in the work we are able to do in Burnaby and in the number of young lives we're able to touch. We truly see ourselves as a partner in the summer career placement program, in being able to provide the work experience to the students.

Continuing to provide students with relevant experiences in their career choices is a priority for us. In many cases, a student will return for a number of summers and will continue to enhance his or her experiences. We hire high school students in leader and training positions. We hire post-secondary students in leader positions. We also provide the opportunity for students to move into supervisory positions, where they learn about managing programs and staff. We provide multilevel training for the various positions, and we use older students to assist us to train the newer ones.

We support students in their learning every step of the way. The program is working, and students are reaching their career goals when they finish school. So as you're discussing your allocation of funding and other concerns with this summer career placement program, I ask you to keep in mind the following points.

First of all, my experience with the neighbourhood houses over the years has been that students will travel to where the work is. This includes from one constituency to another. They will also travel to where the best job experience is.

The second thing is that students are enrolled in a number of schools throughout the country during the school year, but our experience with the students we hire for our program is that they return home to work for the summer. The summer career placement program provides many students with their first chance at related work experience.

Another thing is that consideration should be given to the track record of non-profits that are providing high-quality training and see themselves as a partner in this project. There are many non-profits that totally depend on the SCP funding to adequately deliver the programs to their communities. Of course, I believe current levels of funding should be maintained, if not increased.

Finally, it should be a priority to fund student positions that not only provide career experience, but also address the social needs within our community.

That's what I have to say, so thank you for this opportunity.

• (1135)

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

I'll now go to Ms. Finlay. I think we have a bit of time, so go ahead.

Ms. Rebecca Finlay: Thank you very much.

My name is Rebecca Finlay. I'm a BSW student currently attending the University of Victoria, in B.C. Thank you for inviting me here today.

In April of this year, I sent an e-mail to the minister's office out of my concern regarding the difficult situation I was facing. An overview of that letter is as follows:

As a mature, full-time student who is over 30, I have been finding it very difficult each year to find summer employment, because I do not fit the criteria for the summer work experience subsidy program. As I am also a single parent, this has been deeply distressing, creating economic hardship for my family. I tried during the first two summers of my degree to find work, only to discover that employers who are not receiving government incentives were unwilling to hire students, even those with a lot of experience such as myself, for positions when they would be returning to school after only four months of employment. I ended up having to apply for income assistance because I did not qualify for EI benefits, and was unable to apply for any of the many positions I qualified for that were created through subsidies to employers in your program. If I had not been excluded from your program due to my age, I could have easily found work and had successful and rewarding summer employment experiences.

Last summer, I decided to continue on with my studies in order to avoid the frustration and economic hardship I had previously experienced. The combination of feeling pushed to continue my studies for five semesters in a row and being required to take a minimum of three courses per term to maintain my full-time student status has contributed to the burnout and stress-related physical illness I'm now experiencing.

At this time I am unable to work or continue my studies. The only alternative I have as a means of support is, once again, income assistance, which does not provide adequately for the needs of my family. I feel very upset and angry to find myself in this untenable situation, where undue hardship is the only reward I can expect for all the hard work I've put into improving my situation.

Having spoken with other mature students, many of whom are also single mothers, I know I am not the only one experiencing difficulties of this nature due to your summer work experience program and other youth employment strategy programs that do not include people over the age of 30. The parameters of your programs clearly show a lack of recognition that the face of the student population has been steadily changing. In fact, according to census statistics, between 1991 and 2001 the number of people over the age of 30 in full-time attendance at school has increased by close to 50,000. If we are expected to become lifelong learners, we will require supports in place for people of all ages.

As well, your program impacts women more than men, and a gender lens needs to be used on this policy. Statistically, more women than men pursue higher education later in life due to family commitments as primary caregivers. Again, in the census statistics for the 10-year period from 1991 to 2001, the number of women over the age of 30 attending school full-time has increased by well over 24,000.

In June 2005, I received a response to this letter from an HRDC staff person, on behalf of the minister. She explained the basis of the summer career placement initiative as one of a number of federal government programs and services, collectively known as the youth employment strategy, to help Canadian youth gain the work experience, knowledge, skills and information they need to facilitate their transition to the labour market.

She also quotes subsection 16(1) of the Canadian Human Rights Act:

It is not a discriminatory practice for a person to adopt or carry out a special program, plan or arrangement designed to prevent disadvantages that are likely to be suffered by, or to eliminate or reduce disadvantages that are suffered by, any group of individuals when those disadvantages would be based on or related to the prohibited grounds of discrimination, by improving opportunities respecting goods, services, facilities, accommodation or employment in relation to that group.

She goes on to say SCP is intended to ensure that there are summer employment opportunities for students with little or no previous work experience and how SCP is not focused on mature students over 30 because these students, in the vast majority of cases, already have labour market experience. I understand that previous work experiences may not be related to a student's new career; nevertheless, they are valuable in recreating and maintaining their attachment to the labour force, is what she said. She goes on to suggest that although my age precludes me from participating in YES programs and initiatives, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada offers a wide range of programs and services designed to help people make a transition to the workforce or return to work.

• (1140)

Many women in my situation would find this response inadequate and unsatisfactory in addressing my concerns. The fact is that single mothers are already marginalized and very limited by the hours they can work, among other things. Also, although they may have had previous labour force attachment, finding short-term employment for the four summer months is still a huge challenge for many of us. I would prefer to focus on what real help there is available for women, and men, experiencing these problems. HRSDC's suggestion that there are programs and services are designed to help people is not specific enough. As students, no matter what our ages, we all just want to have a good experience and feel confident that we are going to be able to find employment for the summer months.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Finlay. Certainly, you raise an interesting question.

We'll now go on to the questions from the members of this committee, and we'll start with Mr. Komarnicki, for seven minutes to begin with. I remind you that if you're going to answer, please identify yourselves, and remember that there are two screens, so give yourselves a couple of seconds.

Mr. Komarnicki.

• (1145)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The question will be directed to the folks in Weyburn, and specifically Gregory Bloor.

Gregory, just to give some context to this, I know you had made a presentation, but in our constituency the funding level was reduced from \$275,000, depending on who you are talking to, to \$103,000 before the cap was implemented. Having said that, I want you to give me some historical perspective of how long you've been with the department and what the funding was like in previous years compared to this year.

Then, could you maybe indicate to me the reaction from the community that you have received following that. Particularly, could you comment on some of the smaller rural areas in the constituency, and I'm talking about Bengough and Coronach, and how they were impacted, and perhaps a bit about what types of businesses were involved in the applications; then, give some summary of the number of applications that were in that were not approved compared to those that were approved.

I've given you a lot there, but please focus your mind to these specific issues, if you could.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, please.

Mr. Gregory Bloor: As you indicated, I have been with the department for 25 years, so my experience with the program goes back quite a way. I was with the program when it was centralized in Regina. It was moved out to the local offices quite a few years ago.

One of the things we tried to do in the past was to approve as many applications as we could, because we realized these were very valuable jobs for all the students and that the employers valued this program highly. What we were always trying to do was to create the most number of jobs we could. In the past we were able to do that, and in most instances we were actually able to approve one job for every application.

That was so for quite a number of the years we were operating the program. It has just been in the last few years that it has started to decrease and the funds are not adequate to cover all of the applications we receive.

As an example, just for the past year, in 2005, we received 271 applications. After the 30% cap, we actually approved 148 applications. So you're looking at approximately 70% of the applications being approved. In 2004, we had 242 applications from our area and we approved 201. If you go further back than that, you'll find that every application was approved for one job.

One of the ways we did that was to reduce the number of weeks that were paid in the past. We would actually approve each employer for six or eight weeks. We found that worked quite well, because most of the employers in the area were most concerned about creating a job. We never really got any negative feedback from that process. It was always very positive from the employers and also from the youth within the area.

In terms of the impact in this particular year, a lot of the smaller towns were hit. We had 16 towns in the initial round that didn't receive any funding, and after the 30% cap, we were still left with five communities that didn't receive any funding on this summer career placement program. After the 30% cap was applied, there were towns like Kipling that had ten applications and received funding for three; Coronach, which had fourteen applications, received five approvals; Bengough had six applications and received three approvals; and Radville had nine applications and four approvals.

I had quite a number of calls this year concerning the program. Most of the areas were concerned about actually creating the jobs in their own communities. That seems to be the biggest thing. That is what brings the youth back to those communities. Also, the not-for-profit organizations, in particular, in these smaller communities, rely heavily on our program for their funding. Without that, they can't operate their programs. Again, they are very concerned that they keep the youth in their areas.

• (1150)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I have another question, Gregory. You indicated that after the cap a number of communities received some applications, but that had it not been for the cap, basically the entire southeast portion—Coronach, Radville, and Bengough—which had heretofore created jobs, would have been left, as I understand from what you're saying, with no positions at all.

You might want to comment on that and the input you've received outside of those communities, even in the streets of Weyburn. Would you have any suggestions for change?

If I still have time, I will pose a question to Debbie Walliser.

The Chair: The answer will have to be fairly short, if you don't mind, Mr. Bloor.

Mr. Gregory Bloor: Yes, that is exactly what it was. A lot of these communities were completely shut out from funding. As I say, I received many calls from these communities. They were very concerned that they were not able to create jobs for their youth, and their youth would then be moving to other areas where the jobs were.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bloor. I think this concurs with what other people around your table have been saying.

I'll now go on to Madame France Bonsant.

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Good afternoon.

Ms. Beck, since you represent a non-profit organization, can you tell me whether you find that the delays between the moment you file a program application and when you receive funding is a problem? This concerns a lot of people. This year, for example, the budget was received in June. I thought that was a bit late because many college-level students in Quebec finish their courses in May. That's also the case for university students.

Do you see any solution to reduce this delay between application and funding?

[English]

Mrs. Antonia Beck: Yes, I really do believe that. I think having the application due a month in advance and also finding out in early May—the end of April or early May—how many students we will be able to hire would really be advantageous for us.

What we do right now is post with the understanding that it's dependent on funding, because if we don't do that, the students are going to get the best jobs, and we want to get the best students to work with our children. I think it could definitely be much more advantageous for us to have the applications ahead of time, at least a month in advance.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: Would you be prepared to file applications before the holidays, before Christmas and New Year's?

[English]

Mrs. Antonia Beck: It would be best for us to have it in January, because Christmas is a very busy time for us. We're doing Christmas hampers and helping people, and having to deal with summer grants.... I think January would be the ideal timeframe for us.

• (1155)

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: Do you think that the 30 hours a week for six to eight weeks is enough, or do you think it's not enough?

[English]

Mrs. Antonia Beck: Traditionally, our positions are about eight weeks, and we hire our students for 35 hours a week. We can't provide a day camp program, a daily program for children, with fewer hours than that, but eight weeks is a good period of time.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: We have a lot of tourism in Quebec. Do you have any in your riding? In addition, are you open to flextime, that is to say the possibility of working on weekends rather than during the week? Would that be another solution to your problem?

[English]

Mrs. Antonia Beck: For our situation, for the community-based agencies providing programs to the community, I think it would be good to have flexibility to allow us to also provide programs on Saturdays. Children need to play on Saturdays as well. I think that would span through tourism as well, for anybody hiring students, it would be good to have the flexibility through the week.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: My next question is for Ms. Walliser, because it concerns government officials. I find it hard to understand why you opted for the employment insurance percentage for youths 15 to 24 years of age, when the program is intended for those 15 to 30. If a youth goes back to school and is hired to work 180 hours in the summer, it would take that person 10 years to become part of the unemployed youth statistics.

Where did you get your percentage of youths 15 to 24 years of age who are not hired? Is there an official who could answer my question, please?

[English]

The Chair: I'm asking Ms. Walliser in Weyburn to answer that question, please.

Did you hear the question, Ms. Walliser?

Ms. Debbie Walliser: Yes, I did.

Those kinds of decisions are really made by our colleagues at national headquarters. They're responsible for those decisions, and of course, they're considering the data from Census of Canada.

Hon. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): I think it would be appropriate to be mindful that these are public servants. We had the people she is referring to before us last week, and I'll remind the witness that she needn't respond on political or policy questions that are outside her jurisdiction.

The Chair: Thank you.

You heard the point of order, Ms. Walliser. It's up to you if you wish to answer the question or not. There was a point of order, seeing as there was a political nature to the question.

Ms. Debbie Walliser: I believe what I've said in regard to national headquarters having responsibility for that is my response.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Bonsant.

Ms. France Bonsant: I want to apologize; I didn't think that was a political question. I thought it could tell me where the statistics come from. Pardon me, madam.

I'm going to let Mr. Lessard ask his question.

[English]

Hon. Peter Adams: Madam Chair, again, I don't want to be argumentative. I simply thought that as they are public servants and they're a long way away, it would be appropriate to remind them of that. I understand, and we did get a response. I thought it was useful. We have two different types of people: we have the clients of the program, and we have public servants. If they were here, it would be self-evident what they should reply to. I wasn't being argumentative.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lessard.

• (1200)

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): I'll be very brief.

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Then I'm going to ask two very brief questions. The first one is for Mr. Roach.

He concluded his presentation by telling us that financial adjustments had to be made to the program. I'd like to hear what he has to say on the nature of those financial adjustments.

My second question is for Ms. Finlay.

She expressed a concern: she would like assistance to be provided as well for people who are studying but are over the age of 30. One can think, for example, of a mother who's going back to school.

I'd like to hear her suggestions as regards the support that can be granted in such cases. I didn't think her argument was convincing enough.

The Chair: Thank you, but there are only seven seconds left.

Mr. Roach, from Saskatchewan.

[*English*]

Mr. Bert Roach: We're here, and thank you very much for directing that question.

The best response I can give you is that if there is going to be a tie now between the funding formula for the program and the census results, then when the census is taken there should be some kind of tie between students in the age brackets we're talking about and the areas they are originally from. I believe that in our community and in our area, the number of young people we had available for employment was under-represented, according to the 2001 census data.

We know there are a number of students, as I mentioned in my presentation, who in order to pursue post-secondary education have to relocate outside the area. We were wondering, when the census numbers are taken, if there is a tie in the census mechanism to show that their residences are actually back within the town of Kipling and within the RDC area. We think that may be why we came up with the lower percentages on the employment numbers. The people who are actually from our area are not being represented properly within the census data.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Roach.

I must stop you, Mr. Lessard. We've obviously gone far beyond the time that was allotted to you, but there will be a second round. That will be an opportunity for you to ask your question again.

Mr. Julian.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Thank you very much.

Thank you all for appearing before us today. I'd like to ask my question to Ms. Beck.

Hi, Antonia, it's nice to see you.

It's regarding the application process for summer career placement for your agency. We've talked a bit about that in response to the question from Madame Bonsant concerning the actual application deadlines, but I'd like to know if you have any suggestions for us in terms of the application process, both the front-end agencies making the application for the summer career program, but also at the back end, the type of reporting back that's required, if it's onerous on the agency and what you might suggest for us to streamline it.

Mrs. Antonia Beck: We don't find the application process very onerous, because we've been doing it for so many years. We just kind of copy the previous year's application and then hand it in. But I was reading in the committee notes from your last meeting the idea of electronic applications. I think that would be very helpful in terms of making it quicker.

In administering the program, it goes very well. We're able to access an advance to help us meet our payroll, and at the end of the program, I think there isn't a whole lot of requirement, other than filling out a form. We fill it out, and they correct it and give us the proper amounts of money based on the calculations.

I don't have any other suggestions, other than that some other contracts that we have are for three years, so we know for three years that we're going to get a certain amount of funding. It would be great for the summer career placements program if we could apply for three years and every summer we knew how many students we would have. That would probably make it quicker all around and save that application process.

• (1205)

The Chair: You have more time, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: And I have a lot more questions.

Thank you very much for that. Those are great suggestions for the committee.

You mentioned that levels should be maintained or increased. I'd like it if you could mention to the committee what you think the impact would be if there were cuts to funding the program locally, what that might mean in terms of services not just from the student side but also from the program side and what the possibilities might be if the program was expanded so that there were more opportunities. Are there needs that you're aware of in the community that could be met if there was more funding available in communities across the country for this type of summer program?

Mrs. Antonia Beck: Yes, I can certainly speak for Burnaby, where I live and work.

This summer's program provided 500 children with an activity program. The advantage of having the summer career placements program is that we're able to hire students to deliver these programs, and we're able to do that at a very low cost. There is a weekly cost, but what we can do is find "camperships" that allow children to access these programs. So families that are living in poverty in our community are able to come to camp basically free of charge. They send their children for free. Having the students enables us to do that.

If you were to cut the funding, we would not be able to hire as many students; and if we don't hire as many students, we're not able to provide as much program to our community. So you would have children who would not be able to access the programs, the same children who would be hanging out in the parks or at 7-Elevens and getting into trouble. The programs we offer are preventative oriented. It's keeping kids active and giving them quality experience.

If you could give us more money, we would hire more students, and we would invest our staff time and resources to increase the number of students that we would hire. That would just provide more opportunity to our community. Right now, we have to limit the number of weeks that a child can go to day camp to two weeks, because the demand is so high. If we were to have more students and be able to provide more programs at various locations, then we could allow a longer period of time for these children. We currently offer day camps at four different sites in Burnaby, but as you know, Burnaby is a very big place and we could offer more.

Thanks.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

I'd like to direct my next question to Mr. Setrum and Mr. Roach. It's about the programs that weren't funded as a result of the cutbacks in Saskatchewan. So I'm interested in getting some sense of what kind of programs could have been offered if there weren't the cutbacks in funding in that area.

Mr. Murray Setrum: With regard to the cutbacks at Coronach, as I did say a little earlier, some of the students were still hired this year because there were grants out there available for centennial celebrations. That money was targeted through committees to help keep the students working. Next year there aren't going to be those grants around, so I really believe that the students won't be hired and we just won't be having those services.

Mr. Peter Julian: What kinds of services are those specifically? What are the kinds of things?

Mr. Murray Setrum: The services I'm more related to are the things with the non-profits, like the tourism committee and our sportsplex, which hires students to work on the grounds around our ball diamond and things of that nature, such as the museum. The Big Beaver Nature Centre is like a museum too; they do tours, which we're trying to promote as an industry, and they stop at those points to see artifacts and get the history of the area. I just don't believe they will hire anybody.

What may happen is that they can get volunteers to do it, but in smaller regions and smaller communities we get fewer volunteers. I can foresee it just not being open, and then we'll lose part of that heritage or part of the locations for people going through the tours.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Adams, please, you have seven minutes.

Hon. Peter Adams: Thank you, Madam Chair.

● (1210)

[English]

I'd like to ask all of my questions to people in Saskatchewan. I want to say to the people in Burnaby, Antonia and Rebecca, we greatly appreciate your contributions. Rebecca, I made a particular note of your point about age.

My questions are mainly to Murray and Bert, but if Debbie and Greg would like to interject, that's fine with me.

Basically, what I'm going to do is make some comments, and then I'm going to read a question from our notes about the particular circumstances of a rural area. I represent a rural riding.

One question I'd like you to deal with from your point of view is this question of date. Would it be better to start the program earlier, and if so, when?

The second one is this. I think you know, and you've mentioned—I think it was Bert who talked about high school graduates—the most striking thing in rural Canada today is the extraordinarily steep decline in elementary and high school students. This is much more dramatic than, for example, the increase in the number of seniors in our ridings. Quite soon that decline in the elementary schools and the high schools is going to be hitting the colleges and the universities

and this program. Bearing that in mind, we have to design a program for the future.

By the way, we have to design a program that will encourage young people, even more than in the past, to stay in the rural areas.

In Saskatchewan you're fortunate. I think upwards of 20% of the population is first nations and Métis, and I think the decline I just described is less in your province because of the percentage of aboriginal young people. I'd like you to comment on how aboriginal people in your community are affected by this program.

The question we have is this. So you will talk about the particular problems in rural areas. Do you think that constituencies with rural student populations are disadvantaged by an allocations formula that is based on full-time student population and the unemployment rate, as some of my colleagues have mentioned, among those 15 to 24 years of age? If so, why, and how would you change the allocation formula to make it more equitable between rural and urban constituencies?

I'd like you to respond directly to the question, but on the other hand, I'd be glad to hear any other opinions you have about making the program stronger in rural areas.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Who would like to answer first, please? Go ahead.

Mr. Bert Roach: Great, I'll go first. Thank you very much for that question.

As I mentioned, I believe the area we're in is under-represented, given the number of young people who are from our area. We do have a number of businesses within the area, some service based, some tourism based, and some based on our primary industries. But overall I think that employment could be provided if a funding program were in place to allow the students from the larger centres in Saskatchewan, specifically Regina and Saskatoon, to come back home for the summers. If the jobs were there, I know the students would come, because we have enough students from our area who have had to relocate to the larger centres.

I think the problem with the current formula is that there's no reflection of the tie between the students and where they're initially from. If the census is taken and they're living as residents in one of the larger centres, I think their numbers are then counted in the larger population centres, rather than being reflected back within their home community.

The suggestion I would give is that if you are doing the census data... I actually had an opportunity to work as a census taker in the 1991 census, so from that experience I'm a little bit familiar with the forms. But if there were a spot on the form to tie someone with the area they were originally from... If you indicate on the census form that you're a student and that you're taking part in full-time studies, maybe we could have a next column or line asking what area or riding you are originally from, and whether you would be willing to relocate there for programs.

That would be my suggestion, to maybe create some kind of tie with the census form—if you're going to tie it to the census data—to make sure the students are properly represented from their home areas.

•(1215)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bloor, do you wish to add anything to this?

Mr. Murray Setrum: I would like to comment, though I might be a little bit outside of the student employment program here.

At Coronach, with the coal mine and power plant in mind, which basically provides power to about a third of Saskatchewan, we do have a bit of a problem with getting the trained people to work at the power plant and to relocate out. There was a cooperative program for students working within the business or industry to get themselves upgraded to work at that job. I don't know if there's any possibility that something like that could be enhanced into the student program here for the career placements, because it is getting to be very difficult to get trained electricians, plumbers, and all of those types of people who work in the trades, into the industry. They seem to want to be in the larger centres, but you can't take a power plant and a coal mine that are 350 kilometres from an urban centre and move them. So the employees have to come back out.

I don't know if I'm getting a little bit beyond student employment, but expanding the program to kind of make it work together with the industry, I think, would really help. Through the Red Coat REDA we're seeing this happen all across the area.

Hon. Peter Adams: Madam Chair, those are both very useful comments.

Would either of you like to comment on the date, or the point about the start of the program? I know it's aside from this program, but am I right in assuming that in your part of Saskatchewan, as well as the province in general, there's a significant number of aboriginal students? And what about employment for them? Would you care just to comment on that?

So the date and the aboriginal students, please.

Mr. Murray Setrum: I'll make one quick comment, and then maybe you can comment.

I'm in the southern part of the province here, so we don't have very many aboriginals. They don't really have that much effect on us in our area.

Mr. Bert Roach: I think an earlier application date for the program itself would certainly be helpful. I know it would be helpful for the students to be able to know by the end or middle of April what they have to do for the summer—whether they have to maintain their apartments or residences in the larger urban centres, or whether they are able to let those apartments go for the summer and then relocate back home. I think a much earlier application date would be beneficial for the program. Everything could then filter through to the students, and they would know exactly what their expenses would be through the summer months.

I was very fortunate when I was in university; I worked for the City of Estevan in the parks and recreations department, and the foreman under whom I worked was really wonderful. Every

February he was able to let me know if I would have employment with the city for the summer or not. That's very helpful, because then you can return, and by the end of March you know you won't need the place. So I think an earlier application date would probably be quite beneficial.

In response to the question about the aboriginal students, in the area I'm from we have several bands as well, located around the fringes, but I really don't have a lot of personal experience with the first nations students either. So I'm sorry, but I can't give too much information or comment on that part of the question.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would like to say, Mr. Adams, that this is an important question, and perhaps we could bring it up in some other context, because I think we don't want to lose it.

We're now into the second round of five minutes.

Mr. Forseth is next.

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam, CPC): Thank you.

I would like to refer back to British Columbia, and just briefly speak to Ms. Beck and Ms. Finlay. As you know, this committee is an official proceeding. It's something like giving evidence in court, or whatever, so to be helpful we need a couple of documents.

Ms. Beck, you said that one in three children lives in poverty in Burnaby. Could you provide your source document, or where you got that from—the reference? That would be helpful.

Ms. Finlay, you quoted extensively from a letter that you received; it would be very helpful if you forwarded that letter to the committee.

•(1220)

Ms. Rebecca Finlay: Yes, I will be happy to do that.

Mr. Paul Forseth: Ms. Beck, you ended your presentation by talking about how the program should be focused also on social needs. You used that term. Could you expand on that aspect? What did you mean by “social needs”?

Mrs. Antonia Beck: The first question is about where I got the statistic that one in three children in Burnaby is living in poverty. There was a study done; Vibrant Burnaby did the research, and I can get you that document.

Mr. Paul Forseth: Thank you.

Mrs. Antonia Beck: That's the answer to the first question.

When I say “social needs”, I'm referring to children who are living in poverty. I'm also referring to the high level of new immigrants now settling in Burnaby. One of the highest populations of refugee children is settling in south Burnaby, so when I say “social needs”, I mean, for our context, the children in the community who would then benefit from the work the students are doing.

Mr. Paul Forseth: Would that mean you want a particular type of student, or just that you want, like everyone, just a larger program?

Mrs. Antonia Beck: No. We're really able to give a high-quality experience to students who are entering the fields of education, child and youth care, or social work. The programs we offer give that experience to those students and match the practical experience with the education they're getting in school.

Mr. Paul Forseth: Thank you.

Can Ed finish off?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The question is to the folks in Weyburn. Specifically I'd like a comment, perhaps from Mr. Bloor, regarding the effect of the loss of students within the rural communities, and whether those jobs are simply lost as the students travel to the larger centres—Regina or Saskatoon.

The second question, to Debbie Walliser, is regarding the application process itself. Has any thought been given to assisting some of the applicants who aren't scoring as well as they might? Have you given any thought to ascertaining how it is that the numbers themselves in the student population have decreased from 5,000 to 4,000? Has there been any investigation done as to whether there has been something happening within the constituency in the last five years that would contribute to that decrease?

Mr. Gregory Bloor: In regards to the rural areas and how it impacts on the youth and the employers, as Murray had said, when they're talking about the trades areas within their...[*Technical difficulty—Editor*]...not being able to attract people and retain them, what we found in a lot of the areas is that the summer career placement program gives students and employers that first job and attracts them into these different occupations. In terms of career planning, the program is a great asset for students because they can actually see what exactly these occupations in their own community offer, and they're more likely to stay. As soon as they are moving out to the larger centres and with the approval dates on our programs, if they're not able to make a decision early enough, then they definitely do make those other arrangements within the centres they're in. So all of those things definitely impact on the rural area.

The summer career placement program definitely gives youth a chance to see exactly what is in their community. Then in terms of career planning, they do stay.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Debbie, do you have a quick response? I think we're running out of time, but there's a question to you.

Ms. Debbie Walliser: Thank you.

In terms of whether we can assist the applicants during the application process, we do provide regional information sheets, as well as application instructions, to all of the applicants to help them complete the forms, and so they understand exactly what information is required. As well, we make ourselves available to any who are struggling with the process, in order to help them out with that.

In terms of whether the numbers of students have dropped in this area, I don't have any statistical information to back that up. I wouldn't be able to respond to that question at this time.

• (1225)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Paul Forseth): Thank you.

We'll now go to Mr. D'Amours.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First, I'd like to thank all of you for giving us your time, for first providing a preamble and now for letting us ask you questions.

I want to mention in passing that I come from a rural riding in northern New Brunswick. When you look at the Career Summer Placement Program, you see that many businesses and organizations are obviously able to take advantage of this program. I graduated from university not very long ago. When I was there, it definitely enabled us, myself and some of my friends, to get certain jobs and acquire working experience.

When you finish your postsecondary education, you look for job offers. However, you're always asked to have work experience. It's hard to have any if you haven't had the opportunity to acquire it while studying at the college or university level.

This program makes it easier for students to get often higher-paying jobs and really to get ahead in life. That also makes it easier for us to pay off our student loans.

So I very much approve of this program. You have to praise this initiative, which enables today's young people to acquire experience while taking advantage, as they should, of the various organizations and businesses that have access to it.

You can be a student at two levels. There's secondary education, where, in my own province, you have young people in grades 9 through 12. Of course, they're looking to the future and want to prepare for a postsecondary education. So they have to save money if they want to limit their debt during their years of postsecondary education. Young people definitely benefit from the program in this regard.

Postsecondary students can also take advantage of the Summer Career Placement Program, which lets them minimize the impact of the costs of their education for the following year.

Without calling on any one person in particular, I'd like to have your opinion on these two groups, secondary-level students and postsecondary-level students.

I firmly believe that we must continue to help these two groups because we want to ensure they have a better future. I'd like to know whether you believe it is still a good thing to be able to help these two groups of young people or whether you feel that, at some level, some of them should have more advantages than others. I'd like to hear your opinion on the subject.

The Chair: Are you putting your question to anyone in particular?

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: No, Madam Chair. As I mentioned, my question is for anyone who wishes to answer it.

[*English*]

The Chair: *D'accord.* Was that Mr. Roach?

Mrs. Antonia Beck: It's Antonia. Can I answer?

•(1230)

The Chair: Yes, please go ahead.

Mrs. Antonia Beck: I would like to say that it is very beneficial particularly for high school students to have this opportunity.

I have a child in grade 10, and he's starting to say he doesn't know what he wants to do with his life. The high school students who we hired also don't know exactly in which direction they may be going, but having positive work experience and gaining those skills make all the difference to success in choosing a career. The skills that they gain through a summer career placement program also provide them with transferable skills. It teaches them how to manage, how to get to work on time, how to stay organized, and how to plan.

My husband has a business, and he hires people as well. He says that young people today don't have a good work ethic. They don't understand the importance of getting to work on time and they'll phone in.

My experience is that the jobs we offer to high school students in particular teach them about a good work ethic. It teaches them about being organized, as well as the interpersonal skills they get when they're working with children, in our particular case. That's for high school students. I think it's really important to always include high school students and give them opportunities through these grants.

For post-secondary students, I think it's important to be able to give them experience. People are going to school and studying to be teachers or social workers. They shouldn't be taking waitressing jobs. They should be given experience in their field. They should be starting on that experience in year one, working with children and working with other people.

I can't express how important the opportunity is. When I was 16 years old, I too was hired as a camp counsellor within a neighbourhood house. It was really what set me in the direction of the career that I'm in today.

Thank you.

The Chair: I'm sorry. There won't be time for more answers, but you did get one answer there.

[*Translation*]

We're now on the third round. Each person has another five minutes.

Mr. Lessard.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Going back to the question I asked Ms. Finlay earlier concerning students over 30 years of age. I believe I understood she had a concern in this regard, that she would like it — she'll correct me if I'm wrong — if the program could eventually take into account their income needs between the two education periods.

Did I understand correctly? If so, based on your experience, what measures should be put in place in order to provide these people with support?

[*English*]

Ms. Rebecca Finlay: Yes. I think I understand your question. I appreciate that you're taking the time to ask me a question about the solutions I might offer.

The answer in part is that I don't believe in taking money away from those who are under 30, but I believe in addressing the issue that the program should reflect the demographics of all the students. It is called a student employment program, and I think all students should qualify.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: With regard to age?

[*English*]

Ms. Rebecca Finlay: Yes, that's correct. It may mean increasing the funding for the entire program in order to include mature students.

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Bonsant: I'm going to share my time. My question is for Ms. Beck again.

Does the Summer Career Placement Program meet your needs? From year to year, increasing numbers of students want to find jobs. I think the program should be improved, not eliminated.

If it's lacking funding, how do you think we should readjust the Summer Career Placement Program budget in an attempt to respond to the largest possible number of applications?

[*English*]

Mrs. Antonia Beck: That's a very good question. Of course, the more money we have, the more students we can hire, and more money could enhance the program.

I remember the days when there was a training allowance that was given with the summer career placement program, and we had money to pay for the training of our students. Now there is no money attached to it. We don't charge any administration fees. We actually pay money ourselves from our fundraising and from our resources from within to train these students.

So I think you need to recognize the commitment and the resources we're already putting into this program before you try to cut it even more. I think you need to provide more funding for this program.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Bonsant: Thank you. What you say is true. When I visited the Summer Career Placement Program sites in my riding, a number of people told me that they were losing a number of weeks of training, and those young people came in and did volunteer work in order to learn their occupations. That's a good point to make for the Summer Career Placement Program. Thank you for bringing it to my attention, madam.

•(1235)

The Chair: You still have one minute left, Ms. Bonsant.

Ms. France Bonsant: I'm going to ask another question.

Do you have anything to add on the subject of the Summer Career Placement Program? Do you want to tell us about your minor frustrations, things that irritate you a little, so that we can see what your situation is? We in Quebec work in one way, and I see you work in another. There are a lot of non-profit organizations in my riding. And I see that municipal officials handle those organizations in certain municipalities. Is there anything you would like to add?

[English]

Mrs. Antonia Beck: There are a couple of points I would like to add.

I would like to support what Ms. Finlay is saying in terms of hiring mature students. I've spoken to colleagues who run non-profits that are dealing with transition houses or other forms of non-profits. For us who are running day camp programs, we want young students who can climb the monkey bars, but in other cases, when you're hiring somebody who's studying social work who's going to be dealing with somebody in a crisis, you would like a mature student, somebody with some wisdom and some life experience.

So it would be very good to have an exception to the rule so if a non-profit finds that perfect student to give them that experience and finds out that they're 31 or 32 years old, there is a process in place you can apply and say, can you make an exception to this rule? This will be a very good experience, and in the end it's going to provide a career experience that will help them form those attachments to the workforce.

Around the administering of the program, one other thing I thought of is that our non-profit operates four different programs in Burnaby. Burnaby is a very big place, and these programs are in different neighbourhoods. We were required to write four applications for this. It would be much more efficient to streamline that and to allow us to apply for four sites for a program all in one application so we can hire the 22 students we hire and place them at whatever location best meets their needs. That's according to where they live, what their skills are, and what they bring to the team, because each of the sites we have has about seven or eight students who form a team to deliver that program.

That's just one last comment.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that suggestion.

Madam Bakopanos.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos (Ahuntsic, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I agree 100% about moving the date we have to file. I've raised that issue many times before, and I agree with all the participants that we have to have a faster process in terms of those non-governmental agencies that already have experience with those programs, especially after they've been in the program as long as you have, Mrs. Beck and others, who have been in it about ten years or whatever. That should seem simple enough; apparently there are variables, but I certainly support that.

I want to pick up on something my colleague Mr. D'Amours asked that you may not have had time to answer, and that's really addressed to Ms. Walliser and Mr. Bloor and the other members from Saskatchewan, Mr. Setrum and Mr. Roach. He raised an issue I thought was very important—it was answered by Mrs. Beck—in

terms of whether we should be focusing more on high school students or on college students and what the ratio should in fact be. Perhaps there should be a ratio where we devote half the projects, perhaps, to high school students and the other half, perhaps, to college students, also taking into account what Mrs. Finlay said about mature students. Perhaps there should be some formula. Do you have any opinion on that?

Secondly, do you have any other variables that should be taken into account in terms of distribution between rural and urban? I know there were some suggestions made, but feel free to add anything.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

● (1240)

The Chair: Thank you.

Are you there, Saskatchewan?

Mr. Bert Roach: Yes, we are.

For the community I'm from, as has been mentioned, it is very important to allow students to have that initial job experience. It does help them in determining their career path, in determining maybe what they like and, more specifically sometimes, what they do not want to be doing for the majority of their lives.

I think that putting part of the program towards the high school students is a very good idea. I know within our community there are a number of high school students who were looking for employment over the last summer who weren't part of the graduating class. We didn't include those numbers along with the numbers I presented today.

Now, it's not just the training and everything they have, but the income can be used as savings for their own post-secondary education. Specifically, in our community one of the events we have coming up for the high school students is a cultural trip planned in two years. Part of the class, the members of the travel club, has as an extracurricular activity the opportunity to travel to Europe. I think that this kind of cultural exchange is also a very important sort of thing.

Right now what's happening is the students are working on a number of volunteer fundraising projects, but the families of the students are responsible for a personal portion of that program. If there was a mechanism in place for job creation within the community, you would certainly see some of that money move into the savings and that kind of thing for the students to go on that kind of overseas cultural exchange.

It isn't just creating the opportunity within the community for the job training, but it's that once you create that income for students, it greatly expands their opportunities for things they can do.

The Chair: Would anyone around the table like to add to these remarks?

Ms. Debbie Walliser: I haven't received any feedback from our other applicants in regard to this. Certainly, if that were the design of the program, it would be something that would work in our community.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: That was my question, actually. Should there be some allocation in terms of secondary and post-secondary and then perhaps mature students? I think that was the point of my question. If you haven't had any feedback, perhaps that's something you should be looking at on the ground.

But I'd like to stop there, Madam Chair, because one of my colleagues wants to ask another question.

The Chair: Well, you have to stop there in any case.

Mr. Julian, you're next.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much.

I have three or four rather short questions for this round. The first is to Antonia.

You mentioned earlier that with the existing funding formula you're looking at limiting kids' access to the summer camp program in Burnaby to two weeks. I want to make it clear to members of the committee that this is not a luxury, by any means. When those kids are not at the camps, where are they?

Mrs. Antonia Beck: I'm not sure where they are, but they're certainly not in organized programs. The families who come to our particular programs are families who don't have the resources to sign up for the swimming classes or the different other camps that are offered by the parks and recreation department. They might be at home watching TV, but if they don't have a TV, as is the case with many new immigrants who have just arrived, they're not doing a whole lot. They're probably hanging out.

It isn't a luxury. Day camp is a way of getting these children participating and learning, and for the new immigrants in our community it's also a way for them to integrate into the community and meet other children.

• (1245)

Mr. Peter Julian: So this program fills a real need, and cutbacks in the program would be taking away from that real need and expanding the program would allow that need to be fulfilled more fully.

Mrs. Antonia Beck: Yes. I can't emphasize enough how important this program is to addressing the needs in our particular community of Burnaby, not only for the neighbourhood house, which relies on the funding to offer day camp programs, but for other non-profits. My other colleagues at other neighbourhood houses all apply for summer student grants to deliver programs in their communities, to be able to provide not just programs but low-cost programs. In the case of Burnaby, that low cost we charge is also subsidized by the Camping Bureau.

Many of the families who come to the program do not pay a cent because they cannot afford it. The parents are making choices between food and clothing. They are not going to send their child to camp if they are making those choices. They need to feed their families and to take care of those immediate needs.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you for that.

My next question is for Ms. Finlay. You gave us some research on the growth in full-time students over the age of 30. You said there are 50,000 more than there were 10 years previously, in 1991, so over

that 10-year period there's been a growth of 50,000. But do you know what percentage of full-time students are over 30?

Ms. Rebecca Finlay: No, I don't have that figure right now, but I can get it for you.

The Chair: While I have you on the line—Mr. Julian, if you don't mind, I'll give you the additional time—I would like to remind you that Mr. Forseth did ask for some documentation from you a little earlier this morning, and so I'd ask you if eventually you could send it on to the clerk of our committee, and she'll be in touch with you in any case.

Ms. Rebecca Finlay: Yes, I certainly will, and I can also include the other information that was being asked for.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you for that, because obviously this is the percentage of students that we're missing in the current configuration of the program. Whatever percentage of students who are over the age of 30, that's a significant percentage overall of students who aren't served currently by the program, or aren't allowed to participate in the program.

Ms. Beck was quite eloquent in talking about why the program should be expanded so that mature students could participate in it. I wanted to similarly ask the folks in Saskatchewan how they felt about this program and Ms. Finlay's presentation. Do you see any downside to opening the program up, or do you support the idea that the program should be open to mature students?

Mr. Bert Roach: With my perspective, we do have a number of people who are residents currently or who have been residents of our area who are mature students. I can certainly see where there would be benefits to those people in allowing them to relocate back to the community for their summer employment needs and that kind of thing as well.

Personally, I think the expansion of the program going in both directions, including maybe some of the kids who are in grades 10 and 11, and then expanding the program to include students over 30 as well, would be very beneficial.

Mr. Peter Julian: My last question is an open one, and it's on the allocation formula generally. We know how funds are currently allocated. It's based on an employment rate for students and population of the riding. Do any of you have further suggestions about how the allocation formula for the program could be improved? That's open to everybody to answer.

Mr. Bert Roach: The only comment I could make would be to reiterate what I stated earlier. The feeling from our area is that the number of our students seeking employment who are attending post-secondary institutions and who are getting prepared for that is in some way under-represented by the current formula.

We know that we did have more people looking for employment in our area and more students who would have been willing to relocate back to the area than were able to do it under the program funding and formula for this year. There has to be some kind of a review or tie-in, I think, to include the students who have moved to the larger urban centres from rural areas where there are no post-secondary institutions. That would be my recommendation, to have some kind of tie-in to say what area you've come from.

•(1250)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll now go on to Mr. Russell.

Mr. Todd Norman Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Good morning to you guys out in that part of the country.

I come from Labrador. To give you a sense of this, in my particular riding most of my communities are under 500 in population. They're mostly remote, and there are no road connections to quite a few of these particular communities. The aboriginal population is probably in the range of 35% to 40% of the overall population in my particular riding.

I was one of those students who found summer employment, and I fully understand the importance of the program and also the synergy between not only the individual's experience but the benefit to the community at large.

I've looked at the formula somewhat, and I'm going to throw this question out. Are there other variables, do you think, that should be included, in terms of the allocation formula, besides the two that are there currently? When I'm dealing with aboriginal programming, there's northern remote, sometimes there's mother tongue, number of single parents, there's a whole range of variables that could be included in a formula. Do any of you want to share what your views might be in terms of additional variables that we could add to the formula? I don't think it's really sympathetic to what's happening in rural ridings.

Ms. Rebecca Finlay: Of course, there is the variable about age that I have already mentioned.

Mrs. Antonia Beck: I would like to also add that I think it's important to take a look at work that's being done—I'm not sure if it has to do with the allocation of the formula—and what has been already allocated and what the outcome is to the community that the students are participating in.

The Chair: Did you want an answer from anyone?

Mr. Bert Roach: Could I make a comment from Saskatchewan?

The Chair: Yes. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Bert Roach: If I could make a comment from here, I know in our area right now we have a specific shortage in some of the skilled trades. Welding is one of the areas specifically where I know some communities have had to look at trying to fast-track immigrants to come in from other countries in order to fill positions. I think that maybe there could be some kind of a variable or a determination brought in to take a look at what industry or skill is being specifically supported through one of the applications. If there's a shortage we know of within a specific industry, maybe some of the funds could be targeted towards creating some of the positions for summer students within those specific industries.

The Chair: Mr. Russell, you still have some time.

Mr. Todd Norman Russell: I have a quick follow-up. This is about a particular situation that I experienced last summer, and I'm going to ask those in Service Canada if they've experienced it as well.

I had a young student who was doing three correspondence courses, who went home to her small community of 250 people to

earn money so that she could go back to the full-time institution in the fall. She was furthering her studies at home; it was cheaper to do it by correspondence. But then she couldn't get on the student program. She wasn't eligible to be on the student program because she was doing three correspondence courses. That seemed to be rather unfair to me. I'm wondering if that situation has arisen in any of the community-based organizations that are witnessing, or in Service Canada.

•(1255)

Mrs. Antonia Beck: I haven't heard of that, but I think it's totally unfair. If somebody is a student, they should be entitled to be working on the student grant, from my experience.

The Chair: Does Saskatchewan wish to reply to this?

Mr. Gregory Bloor: We haven't had that particular situation come up in our area.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll now go on to the very last round, which is three minutes, and I have Mr. Devolin.

Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): I have two quick questions, which are more likely of interest to the folks from Saskatchewan.

I come from a rural riding, and my sense is that the way this data is collected, in terms of when we count the number of students, it is done by StatsCan through tax returns, which ask where one lived on December 31. People live in a small town, they go to college or university in a larger city, and are counted in that community, and yet they return home for the summer for a variety of reasons, actually looking for work in their home town or village—which isn't where they're actually being counted.

So for those of you on the ground, would you say that's a correct assessment or that it's what happens?

Mr. Bert Roach: Yes, from my perspective, that's exactly the situation we see going on within our area.

Mr. Barry Devolin: My second point is that in my riding I tend to deal with the employers or the organizations that are creating the jobs, rather than with the potential employees, or the students of the future. Some community organizations perceive this more as a program where the federal government is assisting community organizations that are doing good things in the community, whether it's creating opportunity for kids in the summer or whether it's a student working at a tourist information office. Therefore, they think they have held up their end of the partnership over the years, putting in an application and creating a position that gives a young person an opportunity, and then all of a sudden someone pulls the rug out from under their feet. They don't actually understand the funding formula or the allocation model. I think it creates a lot of frustration and distrust out there among the employers, who feel they've done their part of the partnership, and all of a sudden the federal government abandons them when the numbers change.

Would you say that's a fair assessment of what you're hearing from employers in your rural communities?

Mr. Bert Roach: Yes, I would have to say I agree with that as well. I know that within our area there was quite a bit of disappointment, and I would have to agree with your use of the word “abandoned” as well. There were a number of employers who did feel exactly that way.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We've come to the end of this part of the meeting.

I would like to thank everyone in Saskatchewan and B.C. It hasn't been easy, but we worked out the technical difficulties; we're moving

into the 21st century for sure, and perhaps the next time we come together across the screen, things will be a little better.

Thank you again. We appreciate very much the suggestions you made to us, and we will of course be presenting a report to the minister in due course. This report, I hope, will certainly reflect the comments we have heard from B.C. and Saskatchewan this morning.

Thank you very much.

This is going to be the end of this meeting.

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