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Chair

Mr. Ed Komarnicki

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

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• (1100)

[English]

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

We have two panels this morning. Our study is on exploring employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. We're fortunate to have representatives with us today from the panel on labour market opportunities for persons with disabilities.

We welcome you here. We have with us this morning Gary Birch, Mark Wafer, and Kenneth Fredeen, the chair of the panel and general counsel. Mark has a bit of a hearing impediment so those who are going to speak and ask questions should look at Mark when asking the questions and speak a little slower. He'll pick it up himself. If not, Mr. Birch has said that he will be picking that up and speaking to Mark to make sure that we're in good shape here, but keep that in mind as you go forward.

We also have Cameron Crawford, the director of research for the Institute for Research and Development on Inclusion and Society. So we'll have both groups here with us for the first hour.

We'll start with our first presenter.

Mr. Fredeen, please, go ahead.

Mr. Kenneth Fredeen (Chair, Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, and General Counsel, Deloitte LLP): Thank you very much for having us today. Sitting at this end of the room, I have a better sense of hearing impairment, because I have trouble hearing you. This will be a good opportunity for me to learn a little bit more about that disability.

Mark will need some help. If you're speaking, speak loudly and speak so that he can see your face. It will make it easier for all of us.

I'd like to thank you for having us here today. When we received the call from the ministers last July, all of our reactions were the same—it's an honour to serve the public. People like us don't get this chance very often, and we take it very seriously when the chance presents itself. I know all of you are serving the public, and I'd like to thank you for your leadership, because that's how things work. This was sort of a small tidbit of what we could do to serve the public.

I'd also like to thank you for having us speak before lunch. Usually we have to speak after lunch, so we tend to lose our audience. It's a pleasure to be speaking before lunch. I hope we'll have a more interactive session with you.

My intention was not to speak for long about the report. I assume all of you have read it. I read it on the plane coming up from Toronto this morning, and I have to say that I'm pretty proud of it. I'm proud of it because of how it reads. I'm proud of it because of the group I had the pleasure to work with, which was able to create something quite compelling. I feel good about it. I feel good about the report, and I hope you feel the same. This would never have been accomplished without some absolutely wonderful people, and two of them are here with me today. I'll briefly introduce them. My intention, then, is simply to open up the floor for questions so we can have a dialogue with you about what's on your mind, and maybe you can tap into what's on our minds.

Mark Wafer owns a number of Tim Hortons franchises. We had some good humour about the value of Tim Hortons coffee and Timbits over the course of our six months of working together. He's a great example. Not only does he actually hire people with disabilities, he also talks about it all the time. He gets the message across that hiring people with disabilities is good for business, and it's something he does all the time. He's a small-business owner who is doing an incredible amount on this issue, and we're extremely proud of him.

Gary Birch is a well-known person who has worked long and hard. He's the executive director of the Neil Squire Society, based in Vancouver. It goes without saying that he's the leading specialist in employment and adaptive technology for people with disabilities. Gary was a huge asset to our committee.

The one member who could not make it today is the vice president of human resources at Loblaws, Kathy Martin, who was a phenomenal addition to this. She comes from a different sector of employment, but she has experience in diversity and inclusion.

I'm general counsel with Deloitte. You might wonder how a general counsel from a professional services firm ends up chairing a panel for the ministers. It's a long story. As I said, it was an honour to be asked.

I do a lot of work on inclusion. I chair our firm's diversity council. I'm also the executive sponsor of the gay-lesbian group at Deloitte and have been involved in something called, Legal Leaders for Diversity. It is a group of over 60 general counsels across the country who are supporting inclusive behaviours and an inclusive legal profession. As I said, it's an honour to be here today with you, more than anything, get your feedback on the report and maybe answer some questions.

I would like to read to you only one small paragraph from the report. It's in "The Challenge". This is what we had set out to do, and I think this is what we've accomplished.

By connecting directly with employers, our panel set out to discover what can be done about the unemployment and under-employment of qualified people with disabilities in Canada. We explored the barriers – some physical and many attitudinal – but chose to focus on the positive. Our goal is to shine the light on best practices and successes among Canadian employers who have welcomed people with disabilities into their ranks. Their examples can help us learn and do better.

The important thing from our report is that hiring people with disabilities is good for business. It's good for the economy. This is an approach most people don't take on this topic. We firmly believe it's true. The evidence we were able to collect from employers proved this to us time and time again. The research work done by our friends from human resources, who are here with us today, was incredible. Again, it proved that point.

• (1105)

We believe we're on the cusp of something great within Canada, and that's why all of us have committed to carry on in our roles to talk about this issue, starting today with this committee.

Again, on behalf of the panel, thank you very much for your support.

The Chair: Thank you for that presentation and the report, and for some of the advice that's provided in it.

Does either of the other two gentlemen wish to make any comments? If not, we'll leave it to questioning later.

We'll have Mr. Crawford present and then we will open it up to questions and answers.

Go ahead.

Mr. Cameron Crawford (Director of Research, Institute for Research and Development on Inclusion and Society): Thank you very much for inviting me here. It's quite an honour.

By most people, the Institute for Research and Development on Inclusion and Society is called IRIS, so let's go with that. It has been around for quite a while, doing work under one brand or another in the voluntary sector. An important focus of the work for the last 20 years or so has been on employment and disability.

As you know, a great many people in Canada have disabilities—more than 2.5 million working-age people, based on the participation and activity limitation survey of 2006. Depending on the survey you look at, that number is even higher. It is more than five million working-age people, based on the survey of labour and income dynamics, or SLID. So we're talking about a lot of people.

We're also talking about an employment rate that has lagged behind that of non-disabled Canadians for many years. Based on the most recent version I could get my hands on, which has data for 2010, the SLID shows that 47% or thereabouts of people with disabilities were employed full-time all year in 2010, compared with 67.2% of people without disabilities. The lag has consistently been at about three-quarters of the employment rate for people without disabilities.

While there have been some improvements over the last number of years for people with disabilities, in the very recent few years, coming out of the recession, there has actually been a fall-off in the employment rate of people with disabilities. So there is a struggle.

That struggle is particularly difficult for people with some types of disabilities. I'm thinking here of disabilities in the area of the cognitive and the emotional domains. People with developmental disability, communication disability, learning disability, or mental health issues have had very low employment rates for many years, and lots of people want jobs.

Why don't they have them? Well, there are many factors external to individuals that help account for this. There is an education gap and limited access to training, which has persisted, although there have been some improvements on that front. There is a lack of the supports needed on the job, whether human support or technological support—built environmental factors, accessible transportation—and a lack of employer awareness and comfort level in dealing with disability in the workplace, whether of new recruits or of people who become disabled and need some sort of attention in order to be retained in employment.

There are problems with income security systems at the provincial level that can create real penalties for people who even consider working, such as loss of drug benefits, housing, and basic income security, which can be very difficult to achieve in a highly volatile labour market. Differences in local economies can make it hard to find jobs for anyone, especially if you have a disability. Information may not be available to people who need it in accessible formats. Community transportation may not be there. It goes on and on. It's a complex challenge to sort out, and there is no one silver bullet.

Then there are things that are internal or intrinsic to individuals, such as their age, their gender, whether they're aboriginal people or visible minorities, and the particular type of disability they may have. We can't do anything to change those factors, but those factors are definitely associated with lower than usual levels of employment.

Despite all the doom and gloom, there are lots of people who have jobs and have had them for a long time, and they make decent money. How do we account for that?

A long-standing interest of mine has been in explaining how it is that we manage to pull a rabbit out of a hat despite the obstacles to doing so. When I look at the research and listen to stories, I think there are essentially three key things being done that we need to do more of.

One is to strengthen the capacity of individuals in terms of their opportunities to participate in paid employment. If we were to look at training and education in particular—this is a huge issue and has been for a long time—although the education and training gap between those with and without disabilities has been narrowing in recent years, and that is good news, a gap persists, and there is a significant gap.

The better educated people are and the better their access to training, the more likely it is that they're going to have jobs. This suggests to me that we need to place some focus on making sure that people get those kinds of developmental opportunities to ensure not only that barriers are removed to accessing education and training but that people who are in post-secondary institutions know what they're doing with respect to disability and have the resources they need. We need skilled people, with the resources they require.

Also, at the elementary and secondary school level, often parents don't have much of a vision, and educators may not know what to do with people when they leave school and how to prepare them for that point. Parents and educators need to be engaged in good, effective transition planning that has a view to futures with employment for people.

• (1110)

I've spoken with provincial officials who have indicated that just getting that vision in the minds of young people is a challenge and without that vision, young people aren't going to go for it. Creating practical pathways that enable young people to achieve that vision is another area that requires priority attention.

The second major area would be strengthening the capacity of employers to hire, retain, and promote people with disabilities.

A lot of things are required in the workplace in order to make it possible for people to work, such as modified work hours, work duties, and so on. These are procedural matters, but other things can cost money. I'm thinking here of built environmental modifications, assistive technologies, ramps and all that kind of stuff. These can be real deterrents, especially for small and mid-sized employers, to not only making the outlays needed to bring more people with disabilities in as employees but also to better serve their disabled customers. Something is needed to make it possible for small to mid-sized employers to access low-hassle, low-grief financing so they can make investments in the modifications required to bring and keep people in employment who have disabilities and to do the same for their customer base of disabled people.

Employers often lack knowledge, comfort, and expertise, although there is a lot of knowledge out there among employers. So how do we employ that knowledge so that employers can network with employers and listen to the success stories and hear about how challenges were overcome? That's another area for priority attention: enable the knowledge there in our companies to get out and circulate more fluidly within the community of stakeholders who can do something to improve the employment situation of disabled people.

Third, strengthen the capacity of community organizations doing a good job on the employment front. Without my going into all the difficulties community organizations face, I'm sure you've heard more than your fair share of a lot of those. The funding for these

organizations—even for very good ones—can be highly tenuous, which creates real disincentives for people to stay in the sector and to keep the brain trust alive and growing.

So how do we keep people attracted to this work, which can be very challenging? One way is to ensure that they have a job over the long term. Those funds can't be completely unconditional, and one understands that, but there are ways of reorganizing the funding so that accountability can be achieved with a measure of stability in the supply of the good quality supports that employers and disabled individuals need.

We also need to create incentives for organizations to work with people who face complex challenges in the labour market. Right now, a great many organizations find incentives to work with people who actually don't need much effort and who are fairly straightforward to place. Then they get their quotas up and everybody's funded and everybody's happy, except for people—and there are a lot of them—who have a significant level of disability and face a myriad of labour-market challenges, who get set to one side and therefore the low-employment rates continue on and on.

There are other considerations on top of those three, which probably as a federal group there is not much that can be done. Provincially, however, we can build on the successes of income security programs and social assistance programs, increase the earnings level exemptions, remove some of the penalties, and encourage and support individuals who want to make the transition from social assistance into the paid labour force.

Another measure is to extend access to health and dental benefits and those sorts of things, once people leave the social assistance system. Doing that for a few months is maybe not enough for people with complex needs.

We can't do much about changing age and gender in particular, but we can design programs that are more responsive to the needs of folks who present multiple challenges.

So a range of things can be done and are being done, where good practice is in evidence. I think we just need to roll up our sleeves and find ways of working together to do more of the good that is already being done.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you for that presentation. We have heard from community organizations and on strengthening their capacity as you suggested.

I know we need to be involved early on in the schools, and good, effective transition planning creating practical pathways is very important for sure.

We will now turn to some rounds of questioning. We will start with Madam Perreault.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Fredeen.

I know the idea behind the panel was to study the employment of people with disabilities. Aside from your recommendation of creating a Canadian employers forum do you have any other recommendations for the government, regarding its policies and programs to better help people with disabilities enter the labour market?

There have already been numerous consultations. Surely, recommendations on how to help people with disabilities join the labour market emerged following the consultations you conducted, aside from the employer forum.

[English]

Mr. Kenneth Fredeen: I think we believe strongly that the strength from solving this problem, if you will, can come from the private sector with support from levels of government. For us, I think one of the issues is around education and leadership within organizations, and also I think within government focusing their energy and resources on the right things.

One thing that we spoke about was that we do not agree with subsidization of people with disabilities. We believe there can be forms of assistance to different groups or individuals, but at the end of the day the employer gets the benefit associated with a long-term, committed, engaged employee, and that's a private-sector opportunity.

We did recommend that there could be some funding for an employers' network that could create a forum for sharing best practices around training and skills. That was accepted and funded in the most recent budget.

I've been asked to serve on the board, as has Mark, and we believe that's a very critical part of it, a national organization of employers.

Mark, do you want to comment further on that?

• (1120)

Mr. Mark Wafer (Member, Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, and President, Megleen operating as Tim Hortons): Thank you.

I'll back up a little bit. As Cameron mentioned, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities is 47%. That's actually a StatsCan number. We know the real number to be much higher than that, so the significance of this problem is much greater than one may think.

There are 800,000 job-ready Canadians with disabilities looking for work right now, but if you look at the population of Canada and who has a disability, that's 16% of the population. That's the entire population of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta combined, so it's a very large number.

We know that the reason we have such a high unemployment rate is because business owners, especially larger corporations, buy into a series of misperceptions and it's those misperceptions that we have to change. They are the greatest barrier that a person with a disability faces in order to get into the workplace. For example, business owners believe that people with disabilities are going to work slower, they're going to be sick more often, they're going to take more time off, they're going to be working less productively, they're going to be less innovative, and so on.

When we subsidize workers to get into the workforce, if the business owner doesn't understand that those are actually myths, the subsidy becomes free labour and that person with a disability will work for 12 weeks, 5 weeks, 26 weeks, depending on the province, and then they're let go because they simply become a burden on that company.

The opportunities fund, which is now going to be moved up to \$40 million as of 2015, is an excellent source of resources for companies that do want to hire people with disabilities, but it has to be used in a more constructive fashion. We need to be able to use that money for accommodations that could be costly and also for any extra training, because as we know, people with disabilities, even if they're Ph.D.s, quite often get into the workforce and they're lacking soft skills.

So there is extra training and extra mentoring that is required. That is an expense to a company, so we need the opportunities fund and other funds like it to take that step back from the work subsidy mentality and get into using that money in a more constructive fashion.

The Chair: Okay.

Thank you for that.

[Translation]

Ms. Manon Perreault: I understand that the wage subsidy problem—

[English]

The Chair: Excuse me, but your one question prompted a fairly lengthy response and your five minutes are up. But I think Mr. Birch wants to respond to that. We'll conclude with his response.

Go ahead.

Mr. Gary Birch (Member, Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, and Executive Director, Neil Squire Society): Very briefly, I just want to say that when it comes to the exact recommendations in the report, we stuck very closely to our mandate, which was to report back about what businesses can be doing. I think that's part of the answer to your question.

To echo some of the other pieces, working with employers and making them more ready to hire people with disabilities and getting rid of the myths, etc., a disability forum, the employers' forum, is an excellent way of doing that. There are a lot of other pieces that need to be placed, including disability supports and training, and all those kinds of things. There's even a place, I believe, for very carefully done wage subsidies, which are really more like paid work experiences. That's as long as the employer really understands what's going on and what their commitments are.

There's a broad array of activities that needs to be put in place. This report is primarily aimed at business.

Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

We'll move to Mr. Shory.

Go ahead, please.

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

Thank you, witnesses, for coming to enlighten us this morning. For me, this study has been very educational, and inspirational as well. I thank all the witnesses who have come in the past and who will be coming in the future as well.

It's a little confusing. On one hand, I heard that individuals like Mr. Wafer, the business people, strongly believe in hiring people with disabilities. It seems like they are the advocates for that group. On the other hand, in the hospitality business, we have brought in so many temporary foreign workers to the businesses.

I was struck by your comment, Mr. Fredeen, when you said that hiring people with disabilities is good for business and good for our economy. I would like you to expand on that.

• (1125)

Mr. Kenneth Fredeen: I'll say a few words, but I would like Mr. Wafer to comment on that because he has the first-hand experience.

When we did our consultations with companies in Canada...and some of us were fortunate to tour the Walgreens distribution centre in Connecticut, where over half of the people are people with disabilities. That's its most successful, most productive, best distribution centre, and we saw first-hand how it works. We understand the power of the business from that.

It comes down to the fact that there's a huge talent pool out there that we have not tapped into in ways that maximize the abilities these people have. We focus too much on the disabilities and barriers to them. What we learned from the great corporations in Canada—and I won't name them—is that the ones we saw that really got it right were some of our most successful businesses in Canada. We think it's quite clear that if you develop a strong strategy of inclusion within your organization, you're going to be a more successful business.

We tapped into research done, by a Canadian actually, who lives in New York. Rich Donovan has done a lot of work on that. There's actually proof now of the importance to your business of getting this right. We think it's better understood, but we need to do a better job of educating businesses in particular that this is good for your business.

In terms of the economy, whenever you have somebody working and paying taxes rather than accepting government funding to stay at home and not work, it's a no-brainer. It's good for your economy. If you add into that all of the people who support that individual who is at home not working, and the drain on society in general, it's kind of a no-brainer that everybody benefits by this if we get it right.

Mark, you have some direct experience.

Mr. Mark Wafer: Your original comment about quick service restaurants, or fast food restaurants, bringing in people from other countries through the foreign worker program is a very good one because in Alberta we do have issues. Even in my business at Tim Hortons we have problems finding staff, yet in Alberta the unemployment rate for people with disabilities is 70%. It's 47% according to StatsCan, but we know the number to be much larger.

It all comes down to the same thing. What do employers believe? Either they buy into the series of myths and misperceptions, or they don't. They're enlightened. The only way they're going to do that is to have people with disabilities actually work for them. I own six Tim Hortons stores and one Cold Stone ice cream shop. In the last 18 years I've hired 85 people with disabilities. Every single one of those was in a meaningful and competitively paid position. Today 36 of my 210 employees have a disability, and that's in every department.

If you look at the benefits from my operation, first of all, I have the lowest turnover rate of any Tim Hortons operation in the GTA. I have 35% turnover rate versus 75% for anybody who is doing just as good a job as I am. It's not because I'm a great operator. I like to think I am, but it's because I hire people with disabilities.

You see the key—and this is what Walgreens really picked up on—is that I have 180 employees who do not have a disability so what happens is it changes the mindset of the other employees by being inclusive. It actually changes the way that your employees think about who they're working for, or what they're working for.

If you look at the other benefits, you have absenteeism, which we've now found to be 86% lower than for people who don't have a disability. You have innovation. I can assure you that we would not have had a police escort up to the front door of this house of Parliament today if it wasn't for this very innovative man here in a wheelchair who managed to do that. I couldn't have done that and Ken couldn't have done that, but if I have a person with a wheelchair with an innovative spirit working in one of the drive-throughs of one of my stores, I can guarantee you I am going to have more sales and I'm going to have more crowds coming through there because that innovative spirit is brought over into the workforce.

If you look at productivity it's a huge one because businesses believe that if they hire somebody with a disability, productivity is going to be lower. I know that productivity is at least the same, but in many cases productivity is higher. I have one particular instance that I tell everybody about because it's so profound. I have a deaf person who is working as a baker who replaced a person who was working for nine years. Her productivity is 18.4% better than the person she replaced.

There are so many benefits. There is no downside to disability employment. We have to get business owners to understand those benefits. Once they do, when they get it, believe me they're not going to go back.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you, your time is up. Certainly the response has been very insightful. You outline some of the benefits that business can have, which is important for business to know.

We'll now move on to Mr. Sullivan.

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): I really appreciate your time here and the fact that you have good stories to tell, but good stories haven't changed the big picture so far. We've been hearing these. There has been study after study at the federal level about how to employ more people with disabilities, and the rates haven't changed in 35 years so we're not doing something right. You have the right story to tell, but somehow it's not getting out there, and somehow the myths and misperceptions, as you put it, are more dominant than the good stories. That's one issue, the issue of education of employers, which the federal government could play a bigger part in.

Another issue you talked about is income security programs. Income security programs are not well suited to persons with disabilities. They are not designed for episodic disabilities. EI, Canada pension, and disability pensions do not permit going on and off, on and off, and there's no medical or dental support. We have heard from other panels that persons with disabilities choose not to be employed, even after being offered a job, because they don't have access to medical and dental benefits and can't afford to move that way.

The EI program has been changed to force individuals to take lower wages if they're on it long enough. A person with a disability will generally need longer to find a job, just because their job opportunities are so limited. They have to start looking for a job with a lower wage much sooner than someone else, which I would find discriminatory.

We think there needs to be some redesign of these programs, some redesign of the income support systems, which are largely federal, and of the health and dental systems, which are federally supported but provincially delivered.

Can you give us some indication of what you would do if you were in our shoes?

The Chair: Mr. Sullivan certainly took some time to ensure he developed his position and got all his questions in. We're ready for a response.

Go ahead, Mr. Wafer. I see there are at least two others, Mr. Birch and Mr. Crawford.

Mr. Mark Wafer: I would like to answer the first question. That is, you talk about the stories and that you've heard them for many years. You have, but you haven't heard them from businesses. You've been hearing them from the sector. Business owners want to hear from business owners in a peer-to-peer fashion.

In the last 40 years the unemployment rate for people with disabilities hasn't changed. Percentage-wise, it's been at 47% to 50% since 1970. That hasn't changed. Yes, there have been a lot of reports done. Yes, there have been a lot of committees struck, but every single one of those was sector. This is the first time that the report has actually been business mandated and business driven. This is why the national strategy, when we do get it off the ground, will be business driven and business membership only. Business owners are going to listen to business owners.

I started a program four years ago called the "Rotary at work" program. I'm a Rotarian, and all I do is speak to other Rotarians about hiring people with disabilities. I speak to them as a business

owner to a business owner. In the last four years we have found work for 189 people with disabilities—full-time, permanent, competitively paid, meaningful jobs.

Yes, in the past we were probably spinning our wheels. What we're seeing now is a lot more momentum by speaking from a business point of view. In fact, in Toronto, where I'm quite close to many of the community partners, the community partners come to me when they have a new business in town. They come to me as the business champion and say, "Mark, would you phone on our behalf? They'll listen to you. They won't listen to us." That's exactly what we need to do going forward. You need business champions to step up and say, "Hey, I'm making money doing this. I'm not losing money. It's affecting my bottom line positively." I think that's the difference now going forward.

• (1135)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wafer. Indeed that business-to-business approach is a great one.

Mr. Birch, go ahead.

Mr. Gary Birch: I wholeheartedly agree with what Mark was saying.

You were talking about why this hasn't changed. I think there are many factors at play. You talked about some of them, but I've seen a disturbing trend where a lot of the funding that's been targeted to people with disabilities and employment.... Sure enough, the economic disincentives you talked about are real, and we need to reform that. It sounds as though you already know a lot of what needs to be done.

A lot of the programming, I would say more recently, over the past five or so years, has been more and more targeted. You've probably heard other witnesses talk about "creaming". That's a real problem. It's funding that's focused on helping to get back to the workforce those who happen to have a disability and who probably need the least amount of help. It's not that they shouldn't be served, but for those with more complex, multiple barriers, or longer-term disabilities involving more barriers to overcome, because of the way the funding is set up—they are paid by the milestone or whatever—those folks are not getting the same opportunities. I think it has become a big problem. I see the programming becoming more and more like that.

We need to ensure there are processes to support people with disabilities right through the continuum, from those who have complex multiple needs to those who may just need a little push in the right direction to get a job.

Then there are a lot of issues around disability supports, etc., that also need to be addressed.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Birch.

We'll conclude with Mr. Crawford.

Go ahead.

Mr. Cameron Crawford: I'll pick up on Gary's point about disability support. I didn't mention that in my presentation, but that's been on the horizon for disability organizations for 15 years or maybe 20 years, certainly in the last decade. They have sort of given up, frankly, because they just don't see much interest or will on the part of the political leadership in the country to do much about it.

If you could imagine a system of supports for people who have disabilities—technologies, wheelchairs, hearing aids, the whole gamut of things, medications, etc.—that are currently available to a lot of people only if they're attached to the income security system, i.e., provincial welfare, then you could create a different gate. If you make those supports available to people regardless of their labour market situation—so if you're employed, you still qualify, and if you're unemployed, you still qualify—then access to those supports does not become a deterrent to moving into the labour force. I would argue it's one of the key barriers.

You can have the most informed, knowledgeable, and supportive employers in the world, but if the private sector, employer-based insurance plan is going to be inadequate to cover the ongoing costs of disability and they can be covered outside of the system by remaining unemployed, where are you going to go? You're going to stay out of the system, because it's just not a good idea. Your life may depend on it. That's it for a lot of people. Their lives depend on having access to the supports they currently have.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that intervention. You did well on your time for sure.

Go ahead, Mr. McColeman.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

It's my first chance to thank you personally, on the level I'd like to, regarding the report that you worked so diligently on and brought forward. It truly was an inspiration.

In the spirit of full disclosure, I have a motion in front of Parliament to take some next steps. I am under no illusions that we're going to change the world overnight, but we need to elevate this even further, and the opportunity is there. I'm also a 25-year business person. I owned my own company and employed 20 people before I got into politics in 2008, and I have a 26-year-old son who is intellectually challenged.

I suppose this is directed to you, Mark, more than anyone else, but anyone else, please weigh in on it. Now that you know the background, the essence of my questioning really is about the pragmatics of a business person who doesn't really understand the dynamics and understand that there is a business case for this. I'm a former Rotarian as well, so I'm aware of your work within Rotary, and the business champion model appeals very much to me, peer to peer.

Certainly government has a role to play with supports, as we are doing generally for the unemployed through, most recently, the Canada job grant that we came forward with, and possibly with some future initiatives that would enhance that for persons with disabilities. I'm not sure that's in the cards from the government's point of view, but I'm just kind of daydreaming or dreaming a bit here about how we attack this, from a government point of view.

More from the small and mid-sized business point of view, Mark, what's the importance of a mentoring program within your company? When someone arrives that you'd like to hire, that you'd like bring into your workforce, how important is it that there be someone within the company—in my case, I was in construction so it would be someone like a carpenter—who would mentor his assistant who might be a person with a disability? How important is that in practical terms?

• (1140)

Mr. Mark Wafer: It's actually very important and there are a number of reasons for that. One of the things that we've discovered over the years is that people who have disabilities, when they get out of school—even if they came out of university—are lacking in soft skills. When they come into the workforce, whether it's a minimum wage job like my business, or Deloitte, there's going to be extra mentoring required, not just for the job but for life skills. In fact, we were just talking about this before we came in, and we had a couple of funny stories about it. It is definitely something that every company should set up in some way. It's not something that needs to be formal and it's not something that needs to be costly.

Mentoring works in many different ways. Eight of my 36 employees who have a disability happen to have an intellectual disability. They don't necessarily need mentoring, but they definitely need coaching. That's where the relationship with the community becomes crucial. When I bring in a new employee who has come from a community-living organization or something similar, my expectation is that the job coaches and the job developers will develop a relationship with me that is ongoing. This way, these people can act as my consultants. They will be experts who will come in and help me to get through whatever the issue is, whether it's related to work, the home, or the disability.

Mentoring is good but I will caution that there are too many companies out there that use mentoring for free labour. We have to be very cautious of that. Take a person coming out of university with an M.B.A. who happens to be in a wheelchair. Getting him job experience is very important because he probably doesn't have anything on his resumé. He probably didn't have a paper route or work at Tim Hortons. He has a blank resumé. So having him work in a company that has a mentoring program can be very beneficial and important, but there have to be start and end dates. We can't have people in mentoring situations that go on forever, because that's free labour.

Mr. Phil McColeman: I'm glad you made the bridge to coaching. You spoke of community partners, which I would assume are organizations within the community. I know you were recently in Brantford and spoke with Lisa Hooper, who runs her own little business. She's doing that as a private enterprise, as an entrepreneur. We've been focusing in the past on certain directions for funding. Do you see this as the most helpful way the government can use our resources? Is the coaching function something that's available to you when you need it?

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you, and we will conclude with your response.

Mr. Mark Wafer: Yes, that is absolutely crucial.

The cornerstone of my success in hiring people with disabilities has been community partners. There are nuances that come with hiring a person with a disability. Every disability is different. Every disability is a spectrum. It can be a little challenging sometimes for a business owner. Community partners are experts, so we need them to be in there.

We have talked to the Ontario government many times about how it should work, what the standards should be, and what we should do with organizations that don't have very high standards. There have been some issues where we tried to raise the standard level of community partners so that they can meet the needs of business owners. One of the key areas where government can really help is to fund these agencies so they can be successful. In Ontario, for example, we just removed some of the funding for pre-work training. Pre-work training happens to be extremely important for a person who has an intellectual disability. You can't just take a person with an intellectual disability, drop him into a Tim Hortons, and tell him to go to it. There are areas of resources where the government can be very beneficial.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that comment.

We'll move to Mr. Andrews. Go ahead.

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to our guests.

I want to follow the same line as Phil. As you know, one of the biggest obstacles for people with disabilities is the lack of job experience. How do they get that job experience so they can get good jobs?

I'm curious, because I know in Newfoundland and Labrador we have the opening doors program. I assume that other provinces have similar programs. From your experience, when people go through these programs in the provincial government and try to get a job in the private sector, does it help them? Do these programs deliver the work experience they need in the private sector?

Mr. Mark Wafer: That's a difficult question. I would say not really. There are some very good programs out there whereby people with disabilities have had mentoring that has led to full-time work or to a job or pre-training—whatever you want to call it. After a 20- or 25-week program, the candidate then comes back to square one. You're still faced with getting into the private sector. You're still faced with CEOs and HRs who are still going to be buying into their myths and misperceptions. That's the greatest barrier. We have to fix that first, and that's going to take education. The government can definitely help in that regard. We have to remove those barriers first.

Training is a great idea: coaching, mentoring, training, pre-training, whatever the case. Absolutely it's going to help, but it's not going to help them get into a job because you're still going to have that barrier of myths and misperceptions.

Mr. Kenneth Fredeen: Mr. Chairman, if I could, I'll comment on that question as well.

Again, I think we learned from the private sector we consulted that there's a real interest in doing that type of thing—coaching, mentoring, internships—to allow people with disabilities to gain access to experiences that others get naturally. Those programs do exist, and they were interested in doing more of them. I think you have to look at it holistically.

The other thing is that—and maybe this isn't quite on the point you were talking about, but I think it's important—everybody in this room is going to be a person with disabilities at some point. Certainly, as the workforce ages, as mandatory retirement no longer exists, you will need to learn how to be better at creating an inclusive workplace. To that point, what's different? I think it's natural. I think there are a lot of things moving at the moment that will create a different scenario for employers. That requires them then to look beyond, into such things as coaching and mentoring, where they are already involved.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Kenneth, you mentioned four best practices. Could you explain a little more about best practices, how we compile them, and then how we ask people to use them?

• (1150)

Mr. Kenneth Fredeen: It's difficult to ram something like this down somebody's throat. This is something where I think education is hugely important. I think more collaboration by the various groups involved—in particular, employers taking a lead, which is going to happen through this newly funded employers' network—is going to be very important for employers to develop best practices around training, around approaches that can occur.

We learned there isn't a great cost in terms of accommodation. It's simply opening your mind to possibilities that you wouldn't have thought of before. Usually there's no cost to accommodate 57% of the people who are disabled. The rest of the cost is \$500, on average. It's a small investment. I think it's really around education.

Again, I think employers listen to employers. When they see success in business coming from hiring people with disabilities, others are going to want to know how they can do that, how it works, and share best practices. When you do that, you'll simply ratchet up the best practices that employers will employ.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Thank you.

The Chair: You have a few seconds left. I think it would be great to conclude with Mr. Crawford. Certainly, I think Mr. Wafer as a businessman has indicated some of the benefits. When you hear a businessman speaking to a businessman, you certainly understand where they can take their business.

Mr. Crawford, could you conclude with your response?

Mr. Cameron Crawford: I have two responses in terms of whether or not programs work.

Programs are often played broadly in terms of how they're designed. They're created to create incentives and wiggle room for an array of organizations to do all kinds of things. I believe there was an evaluation done in Newfoundland and Labrador a couple of years ago on several organizations that have been involved in the kind of work that you raise the question about. The result, as I recall in the research, was that it depends. It depends on the organization and how they're structured, their organizational culture, the skill of the staff, and their values. There are a lot of ingredients that can lead some organizations to be more effective at getting people with disabilities embedded in the local economy than other organizations.

In terms of who does the work as an employer, employers have many levels. You have the CEO, the owner, the manager, people working in human resources, and so on. A person going out and being like a champion is one thing and it gets people established in a comfort level. You can get some informal connections and maybe some questions answered. In terms of where the rubber really hits the road, sometimes it's people who are focusing more on the personnel in an organization that really understands how that works.

An idea that we floated at the Roeher Institute a number of years ago was to make it possible for people working in organizations that are doing a good job at helping to integrate disabled workers and keep them there once employed, to get out and share that knowledge with other people in business. In order to do that it means that whoever runs the company has to free that person up. The thought was that perhaps some funding could be there for organizations to enter into that sort of altruistic work to help their other labour market partners do a better job of integrating people. It's just one idea.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Crawford.

Did you wish to go ahead, Mr. Daniel? We'll conclude with your questioning.

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

Thank you, witnesses, for being here.

My question is in two parts. One part is that we see a lot of focus on all the research on the disabled folks, and that's wonderful. But in Canada over 80% of all the businesses are small businesses. So, Mr. Wafer, the exemplary work that you're doing with disabled folks is phenomenal, but we have over half a million small businesses in Canada. We need to get that message of employing people with disabilities to those.

Apart from your going out to all the businesses across Canada, which will be quite an exercise, how else can we as a federal government assist in getting the message across that disabled people play an important role in our society and can contribute particularly well?

I'll ask my second question before I run out of time. Have you looked at any for-profit social enterprises that focus on disabled people creating their own businesses and actually employing disabled people through that process?

• (1155)

The Chair: All right.

Kenneth, go ahead.

Mr. Kenneth Fredeen: Maybe I'll just add a couple of comments and let Mark weigh in.

We consulted with the Small Business Association when we started and we're going to go back and meet with them again, and Mark will be in tow with me when I do that. Small business is a huge employer. They have advantages and disadvantages in terms of hiring people with disabilities. We'll talk about the advantages for their business in doing it. Again, it's an education thing. Large businesses have advantages but they also have disadvantages. A lot of it comes from the top in terms of it being driven top-down into the organization. You need to see that leadership. When you're a small business owner you are that leadership and you can choose to make it work, just as Mark has done.

The second question is around social innovation. That's one of the things that's changing right now. When you take technology, opportunities to collaborate in ways that haven't occurred before, and the globalization of the economies, all of these things lead to great opportunities for people with disabilities in ways that didn't exist before. We didn't do consultations into that sector but that's one of the growth areas for this group.

Mr. Mark Wafer: First of all, education is going to be massive. If you look at all the people with disabilities who are participating in the workforce today, only 7% are working for large corporations, 93% are working for small to medium-sized businesses, and there are significant reasons for that.

If you look at a bank, for example, a Canadian bank can have 100,000-plus employees. The CEO and the senior executive, they do get it. They don't always get it for the right reason, but they do get it, because it comes back on them from a society point of view. The bank manager on the street corner, he gets it, because people with disabilities are using his bank, so he hires people who have disabilities, somebody who may be deaf or somebody who is in a wheelchair. But there are 96,000 employees in the middle and they are the people I call the permafrost because they are the ones who are very hard to change. Education is going to be key.

Like Ken says, if you are a small-business owner like me, I make all the decisions. I can make a decision today and have everything changed tomorrow, whereas BMO and TD, they make a decision today, and it's like turning the *Titanic* around. It's three years before they even get started.

Mr. Cameron Crawford: On social enterprise, it's interesting that community economic development is an area of activity where people take control of their own economic destinies, and yet people with disabilities have really not been on the radar in a major way. Arguably, that would be something where government could pay some attention and try to foster the involvement of disabled people in community economic development initiatives.

On the social enterprise front, there is support for that kind of thing in Quebec. I forget the names of the organizations, but quite a few of them do employ disabled people, not as the only folks who are working but as a significant contingent of the people who are working within the organization. They do work that has kind of a green or a social justice edge to it, but it is a business and they make money.

The Chair: Thank you. This may be a good place for us to stop.

Thank you very much for your valuable and informative responses, and for taking the time to share your views and valuable insights with us. We'll certainly take that into consideration.

We'll suspend now to hear from the second panel.

• (1155) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1205)

The Chair: If I could, I'll call the meeting to order and have members take their seats. We have three groups that will be sharing with us today, so we do want to get started for sure.

We have here with us Bonnie Brayton, who I've met with previously, and Carmela Hutchison from DisAbled Women's Network Canada, DAWN. We also have with us Keenan Wellar from LiveWorkPlay, and Frank Smith from the National Educational Association of Disabled Students.

With that, we'll start with the presentations.

Bonnie, are you going to start to present, or is it going to be Carmela?

We will start with Ms. Hutchison and her presentation. Go ahead.

• (1210)

Ms. Carmela Hutchison (President, DisAbled Women's Network of Canada): Thank you very much.

I want to acknowledge the territorial lands of the Algonquin peoples that we share here today.

Thank you for having us.

I'm going to start with recommendations because experience has led me to believe that is the most important thing, so we'll start there and amplify from there.

DAWN Canada's specific recommendations for employment and for women with disabilities is as follows. First off, priority across all programs must give priority to women who, as you will hear today, have the highest rates of unemployment. Within our population we understand that immigrant, racialized first nations and aboriginal women are experiencing triple discrimination.

Affordable child care is an issue for every parent in this country and for women with disabilities in particular. We must address this as part of a broader national child care strategy.

Disability supports that make employment possible, including deaf interpreters, deaf readers, home supports, and attendant care must also be provided in order to support the role of women in the workplace. Income support programs for women with disabilities must be enhanced, flexible and transferable. EI sick benefits, in

particular, represent a key support for women with disabilities who represent a significant majority of people suffering from episodic illness. Women with breast cancer deserve income supports throughout their treatment.

I refer you to a longer discussion of EI benefits and disabled women presented to Status of Women Canada on March 12, 2009, in which I commented and drew quite heavily on a report of the Caledon Institute of Social Policy.

Finally, accessible and affordable transportation is essential to successful workplace participation.

To begin, I did take a bit of a look at some of the previous testimony and tried to also address some questions that I felt didn't, perhaps, have a full answer. One of them in particular was the definition of "disability". The Council of Canadians with Disabilities, when they developed their bylaws, actually took the preamble and article 1, basically recognizing that people with disabilities face attitudinal barriers. That's part of the preamble. Then the piece from article 1, paragraph 2, talks about the fact that people with disabilities have physical or mental impairments that make it difficult for them to participate in daily life. So those two together comprise what we feel is the best definition, even though no true, established definition of "disability" exists.

Going from there on the issues facing women with disabilities in Canada, the social determinants of health have enormous impact on the economic prospects of women with disabilities. Canada lists 11 determinants of health: income and social status, social support networks, education and literacy, employment and working conditions, physical and social environment, biology, genetic endowment, personal health practices, and culture. We recommend that transportation be added as well to the determinants of health. Further to that, specific to people with disabilities, disability supports are absolutely essential for women with disabilities to maintain their health and should be added as a social determinant as well.

Much of the data available is not current because the participation and activity limitation survey, the survey of labour and income dynamics, and the long-form census data are no longer being collected. This needs to be urgently addressed in order to increase our understanding of how policies and practices are working, or often not working.

A new product has been developed but is not yet providing any data sets that inform policy, and we're not quite sure how that's going to compare backwards to the other data. The Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities provides important insights but does not provide a real strategic plan that maps our future.

•(1215)

By far, the highest rates of unemployment and lowest levels of income belong to women with disabilities, regardless of age, of any population in this country. It is estimated that currently more than 3 million working-age Canadians have a disability and that disability is much more common among older Canadians. Of course, women living longer means that we're more likely going to be in that aging and disabled category. I know I'm certainly looking at that as I get a little snow on the roof and notice further changes to my own disability.

There was an observation that there was a desire to fund employment, but there has also not been a consistent, sustained effort in terms of employment of people with disabilities. We notice that the BUILT Network, which was a very successful program of the National Network for Mental Health, was not funded in 2008-09. The opportunities fund also has had many cuts to it. Notably, Opportunity Works in Calgary, where I live, was not funded through regional OF funding.

Also, when DisAbled Women's Network of Canada revitalized itself in 2006, we were funded for violence against women with disabilities and for the exploration of housing. But the third strategic priority, which was employment, was also not funded. This is really important for policy decisions to come out. If there is a goal of actually sustaining employment for people with disabilities, the money has to follow those initiatives.

Basically, there are also restrictive program requirements that were referred to you. People are not eligible for EI. This was a real problem in the BUILT Network program. If people had some labour force attachment and had EI eligibility, or they had long-term disability eligibility, then they were excluded from the program. Some of those people with previous labour force attachment should have also been given some equal opportunities to build up their employability.

There are lots of programs that are only for people with intellectual disabilities, or only for people with psychiatric disabilities. Again, if the programs are restrictive, it can be hard, especially when a person has more than one disability, which might cause them to be excluded.

Even in treatment of people with disabilities, while I do not work at paid employment I was not allowed brain injury rehabilitation because I had a mental illness. I also was denied access to any rehabilitation because I had too many things wrong with me. I couldn't even get a functional assessment at Foothills hospital. That situation has not changed.

People with episodic and chronic illnesses often do not have enough time to qualify for benefits. There's a lack of flexible supports for chronic illnesses not deemed severe enough. Very often we see people who are struggling to maintain employment while undergoing cancer treatment, or they have MS and again they're struggling. If they take a lighter schedule, then their funding for their disability is cut to that lighter schedule. Other people have talked about being considered too disabled for one program or not disabled enough for another.

On the UN convention and the collective responsibility of upholding it for public, corporate, and private citizens, we also refer to article 6 on women, article 27 on work and employment, article 32 on monitoring, and 32(b) on the enhancement of community organizations to monitor.

•(1220)

The Chair: If you could bring your report to a conclusion, I'd appreciate it.

Ms. Carmela Hutchison: Yes.

Basically articles 6, 16, and 28 are all addressing issues related to women with disabilities and sustaining their employability.

We're very grateful for the opportunity to present, and would like to express our willingness to serve as a resource to the Government of Canada in order to achieve equality for all Canadians through addressing the issues of women and girls with disabilities. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that presentation.

We'll now go to Mr. Wellar. Go ahead.

Mr. Keenan Wellar (Co-Leader and Director of Communications, LiveWorkPlay): Thank you very much.

I appreciate those comments. Ditto for much of that.

I will also echo the sentiment that we need to look at targeting those with the greatest barriers, recognizing that certain disability subgroups, such as people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, face more serious and severe attitudinal and systemic barriers. Those barriers are unlikely to be overcome in a significant way if we approach the employment of people with disabilities as though they are a homogenous group. They are not. They are very different individually, but also as groups, and sometimes the groups merge and are complicated.

My experience is as a local provider, not only of employment supports but of supporting people with intellectual disabilities to live, work, and play in the Ottawa community. Part of that is helping people find employment and helping employers welcome them to their workplaces. Through that experience, I've seen a lot of what works and what doesn't work, and that's what I'd like to talk about.

I'm also a volunteer with United Way Ottawa. I'm one of the first focus-area champions. I go out and speak about the advantages of hiring people with disabilities and promoting attitudinal change in that area.

With respect to employment, I just want to bring home some of the local context, because right now, within sight of this great building, down at the Westin, one of our LiveWorkPlay members is actually at work in the accounts department. To move a little bit west on O'Connor Street, we support an individual who runs a small business, where he works with Accenture. To go south on Bank Street to The Works Gourmet Burger Bistro, we have someone there right now helping out with the lunch rush. Just to give you some local perspective, that's what we do. They're real people right here in your local community.

We are a local organization with a local focus, but we try to inform our work by best practices from across the province, the country, and the world. Some of the gentlemen you had sitting here—in fact, right in this seat you had Mark Wafer, and you also had Cam Crawford—are people who I'm very familiar with. Again, I would echo many of their comments, so I'm grateful that I don't really need to bring that context. We need more Mark Wafers in Canada. Our country would be a much better place, and a better place for people with disabilities.

We also work with the Ontario Disability Employment Network. I know that Joe Dale testified here as well. We're quite aligned with those comments.

Locally, we're part of the Employment Accessibility Resource Network, hosted by United Way Ottawa. It's bringing together about 30 service providers and employers. I think it reflects well what the panel was saying in their report, not only about promoting the benefits of hiring people with disabilities but also about how to connect with people like ourselves who know these individuals, can connect with an employer, can help communicate the benefits, and can find the right job for the right person.

I see how fast time flies, so I'm going to skip ahead.

There's one thing I want to do. I know it's common to talk about best practices, but I want to talk a little bit about worst practices, because I think that's important. In these times when it's a constant dialogue of scarcity of resources, I think we can't only emphasize the positives. We have to look at where our resources are being used perhaps ineffectually or even in a regressive manner.

One of the things that certainly concerns us and our partner organizations is segregated and/or sub-minimum-wage work environments. In the field of developmental services, as it's labelled in Ontario, we see scarce government dollars continuing to flow to practices and activities that not only fail to support community inclusion but in fact create barriers and have regressive impacts. A lot of this is covered in the CACL report on achieving social and economic inclusion, where they note:

Although enrollments in sheltered workshops are slowly declining...segregated day programming and enclave based employment persist as a dominant model of support for this group in Canada. With below minimum wage compensation, they constitute a form of financial exploitation and social and economic exclusion with substantially lower quality of life outcomes...

This has certainly been our experience, having supported people who have been in these segregated situations and who perhaps have been told that it is because they do not have opportunities, a future, or a possibility in the real workforce. This has been proven wrong time and time again. The greatest barrier was in fact that message to them and to their family members that they would not have success with employment, so this segregated work-like arrangement was what's best for them.

• (1225)

I would note that in some ways the Government of Canada does support that practice by sometimes contracting with these agencies where basically you have a salaried staff member like myself who is supervising a bunch of people with disabilities who are being paid at a sub-minimum wage to perform a task. I would encourage looking internally at what goes on there and dealing with that, because it's

wonderful that there's this talk about best practices, but I think leadership through demonstration is critically important.

Another worse practice—this is more of a fear I guess—is going forward again in a dialogue of scarcity. Sometimes there's a tendency toward one-size-fits-all. It sounds economically efficient. Let's send everybody with a disability who is looking for a job to the same place, and then we'll save on various costs.

The problem is that tends to incentivize the marginalization of those who are most difficult to serve because the metric by which performance of those career centres is usually measured is simply how many jobs. So it's not a one job equals one job situation. If you have a person with an intellectual disability who is in a group that is facing 75% or higher unemployment, and they get a job, that is a very different outcome from someone with a Ph.D. who sustained a workplace injury and has been supported to return to work. I'm not saying that is not important, just that it's very different. If you count those two things as the same outcome, then the most marginalized people are unlikely to benefit from that perspective.

Years ago a young man came to our office—actually his mother, but he was there too. She was in a rage because her son had been assessed by a career centre as having a 3 out of 100 score in employability. That is not a very good message to receive. Long story short, he has now been working for a TD bank locally here in Ottawa for more than a decade, has a full salary, pension, everything. That is obviously not the outcome nor the destination that had been determined for him through that initial assessment, so we need to be wary of that.

If we do have people going through the same door, we have to make sure through the other side that there are people who understand the particular needs of different disability groups and subpopulations because those are very specialized skills. What we do in terms of the work we do with employers and developing those relationships is not the same as helping someone prepare a resumé and look through job postings. That's one type of job support.

The Chair: I'm going to ask you to bring it to a conclusion.

Mr. Keenan Wellar: Sure.

Worse practice three is wage subsidies. The opportunities fund tends to require that people like ourselves would use wage subsidies in our program delivery, so that pretty much excludes us from being involved because we will not do that. It is not an effective practice for us. It gives the employer the message that the person is worth less than another person. They have to be used very carefully and not applied exclusively to people with disabilities.

On a positive note, I have provided a briefing of about 16 pages with many different positive stories from small businesses, franchises, and corporations that are all working effectively and employing people with intellectual disabilities because it's a good business case, and also because they believe that a workplace should reflect the communities around them.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, and thank you for presenting your brief. It certainly contained a lot of information. It's an interesting perspective looking at ineffective and regressive practices as well. It's something we need to keep in mind.

Mr. Smith, go ahead.

Mr. Frank Smith (National Coordinator, National Educational Association of Disabled Students): Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before the committee today to discuss the employment of persons with disabilities in Canada.

This is an important issue for our organization. It's of fundamental importance to the work that we do. Since its founding in 1986, the National Educational Association of Disabled Students has had the mandate to support full access to education and employment for post-secondary students and graduates with disabilities across Canada. We represent the more than 100,000 persons with disabilities studying in Canadian colleges and universities.

The organization is consumer-controlled and cross-disability-focused, and it responds in all the work that it does to the educational and employment needs of post-secondary students and recent graduates with disabilities, through a variety of projects, resources, research, publications, and partnerships. The organization is governed by a board of directors that represents all the provinces and territories. We are an autonomous organization, but we are also a member group of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities, the CCD.

We focus on three important areas for our constituents: student debt reduction, student experience in class and on campus, and student and graduate employment both after post-secondary education and while in school. Within the mandate we have, the organization functions collaboratively with post-secondary stakeholders, other non-governmental organizations, employers, disability service providers, and the various communities that improve opportunities in higher education and the workforce for persons with disabilities.

We as an organization provide ongoing expert advice to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and to provincial and territorial governments. The association's primary activities include maintaining a website, which is fully accessible, and we have developed a financial aid portal, which is a unique resource.

Our financial aid portal includes comprehensive information on national, provincial, and territorial government funding programs offered, with around 350 disability-specific bursaries, scholarships, and awards, and on other funding sources through colleges and universities, private sector funders, and non-governmental organizations. We are trying to do our part to support information sharing on funding programs.

It is important to note that NEADS serves as a member of the Human Resources and Skills Development Canada national advisory group on student financial assistance, along with other stakeholder organizations, to advise the federal government on the Canada student loans program.

NEADS provides information referrals to hundreds of post-secondary students with disabilities through its national office each year. We also respond to requests for information and advice from

employers, provincial and federal government departments, service providers, and faculty members—teachers on college and university campuses.

Since 2005, it's important to note, we have held 25 transition from school to work forums across Canada. These were first called “job search strategies” forums and were delivered through a funding partnership with BMO Capital Markets. In the last two years, we've been calling them “strategies to employment” events. These interactive conferences have included the participation of some 2,000 college and university students and graduates with disabilities, private sector employers, career professionals in the post-secondary community, employment agencies, and other non-governmental organizations.

More recently, through another private sector partnership, with Enbridge, we delivered a strategies to employment forum in Edmonton in 2012. In the last fiscal year we have also, with Service Canada funding, delivered employment or transition from school to work events in British Columbia—three events in British Columbia—and we partnered with a number of community organizations and the provincial government in Nova Scotia to help deliver the symposium on inclusive education and employment last December in Halifax, which attracted more than 300 delegates.

The other thing we're doing as an organization with respect to financial assistance is that we have our own national student awards program. It's important to note that this program, which receives funding from many private sector companies, has given out 57 scholarships of \$3,000 to outstanding Canadian college and university students with disabilities in undergraduate, diploma, and graduate programs.

• (1230)

This program is funded by corporate supporters representing various sectors of the Canadian employment market. It is our hope that if a company gives out a scholarship to a student with a disability for outstanding academic and community achievements, that same employer may look to hire the scholarship recipient when they graduate.

In the past two years we have been engaged in a project to consult career and employment centre professionals who work at Canadian colleges and universities in order to find out how they support and accommodate students through their centres and what could be done to improve these centres as they serve the unique needs of this population. This career centres initiative has been funded by TD Canada Trust.

So we're trying to partner with a number of private sector companies and with employment agencies to do our work as an organization.

The recent federal report, “Rethinking disAbility in the Private Sector”, from the Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, identified an alarming statistic:

...of the 795 000 people with disabilities who could be – but aren't – contributing to our economy, almost half (340 000) have post-secondary education.... These qualified, capable people can play an important role in filling the forecasted two-thirds of all jobs requiring higher education.

At the same time, the overall labour force participation rate for working-age adults with disabilities is around 60%, compared with around 80% for those without disabilities. Yet, according to the 2006 participation and activity limitation survey, persons with disabilities are better educated than in the past, and their educational profile is generally similar to that of those without disabilities. We notice, however, a slight decrease in the percentage of persons with disabilities who are acquiring certificates, degrees, or diplomas. It is 3% less than for the rest of the population. As well, persons with disabilities are more likely to possess an apprenticeship or trade certificate or diploma by 4%. Of course we know that there's a demand in the economy in the skilled trades.

About 14% of persons with disabilities had a university certificate, degree, or diploma, compared with about 20% of the total population. Additionally, 23% of persons with disabilities had less than a high school education, while 23% had some post-secondary level of education, equal to the level for the total population.

I note that in their earlier presentations to this committee, the Council of Canadians with Disabilities cited a series of relevant statistics pertaining to education rate, employment, and poverty. To quote the CCD brief:

For example, 28.7% of people with disabilities who don't have a high school graduation certificate are in low-income households, compared with 14.2% of their counterparts without disabilities. The two to one spread in low income rates between people with vs. without disabilities is similar for people with a high school graduation certificate (20.2% vs. 11.1%), trades certificate or diploma (17.8% vs. 9.2%) and a college certificate or diploma (17.0% vs. 8.3%).

However, the spread decreases where people with disabilities earn a degree, diploma or other certificate from a university. Here, 12.4% of people with disabilities and 8.2% without live on low incomes, a spread of 1.5 times instead of twice the rate of poverty.

These statistics are important.

● (1235)

The Chair: If I could get you maybe to wrap up, that would be great.

Mr. Frank Smith: It's important to stress as well that employment is an enshrined right through the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Human Rights Act. As Carmela Hutchison had mentioned, there are certain obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

I just want to mention a couple of examples here before I go to the recommendations. As with post-secondary access, those with the most difficulties within the system and the employment market are often folks with severe physical and episodic disabilities, those with mental health conditions, and deaf individuals. The high cost of sign language interpreters on one hand may discourage an employer—particularly a small private sector company—from hiring an otherwise job-ready person who's deaf.

On the other, an employee with an episodic disability, such as multiple sclerosis, may go through periods of relative health when they can work full-time, then have a relapse. In the post-secondary setting this might lead to a reduction in course load from full-time to part-time. On the job, this person may require adapted or reduced work schedules with a capacity to work remotely from home. Persons with mental illness may also require modified work

arrangements. They may be reluctant to self-identify the disability for fear of poor treatment or stigmatization in the workplace.

I'm just going to move on quickly to the recommendations. I just want to acknowledge as well that in budget 2013 the government announced the extension of the labour market agreements for persons with disabilities, which we applaud, and that the opportunities fund and the enabling accessibility fund—two important programs delivered by HRSDC—have become permanent programs.

From our perspective there are a number of recommendations that we would make to the committee. The federal, provincial, and municipal governments should encourage the hiring, retention, and promotion of persons with disabilities across all sectors of the Canadian economy with the disability supports accommodations required to enable Canadians with disabilities to be successful in the workforce.

The federal government should strengthen support for post-secondary study through the Canada student loans program, particularly the Canada student grants and other measures such as repayment assistance for persons with disabilities after graduation.

The federal government should work with provincial and territorial partners to ensure that financial aid programs are working in concert to best support the post-secondary studies of students with disabilities. Such measures will increase post-secondary access and will ensure that disabled persons can compete in today's economy.

There are two more things. To reiterate a recommendation by the Council of Canadians with Disabilities, there should be a specific strategic investment or investments for youth with disabilities—that is, persons 18 to 30 years old—to support the transition from school to work so they don't become permanently detached from the labour market.

Finally, to also echo the CCD advice, the Government of Canada needs to develop a five-year strategic plan to address the employment needs of persons with disabilities in this country. We support the development, as does CCD, of a technical advisory committee made up of members of the national disability community to work towards the development of a strategic plan for the government with respect to employment and persons with disabilities.

Thank you so much.

● (1240)

The Chair: Thank you for that presentation.

We'll now go to Madame Perreault.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Manon Perreault: I'd like to thank our witnesses for being with us today.

Of course, hello to Ms. Brayton.

Since I never have enough time to ask all the questions I'd like, I'm going to fire them all off and then let you answer them. I'll start with Mr. Smith.

You said earlier that reducing the course load of students with disabilities allowed them to study remotely, from home. I recently spoke with a student by the name of Stacy; she is studying communications. She told me that having that option in university, to some extent, put more distance between her and the labour market. She said it was even harder for her to find a job. Stacy still doesn't have a job today. It's got nothing to do with her education, and she's incredibly smart. But it's hard for her to find the same advantages she received as a student in the labour market.

I will now go to Ms. Hutchison.

We talked about women with disabilities. We agree that they are in a difficult situation. It was said that people with disabilities offer employers many benefits, including the fact that they are hard-working. However, you raised a few issues that we should perhaps come back to.

I would simply like to know this. What would you say if you could make just one recommendation to help women with disabilities enter the labour market?

I am going to digress for a moment. We talked about episodic illnesses, but I would also like to talk about women who, at some point in their life, had some sort of accident that forced them to leave the workforce for two or three years. What happens when those women want to return to the labour market? When people have two- or three-year gaps in employment on their resumes, they have an even tougher time finding work.

I'll hand the floor over to you on that.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Perreault. Obviously, you've learned from the first panel to put in all of your questions in the first round.

Go ahead. Who would like to start? Mr. Smith.

Mr. Frank Smith: I guess the question has to do with the difficulty of studying through distance education and not on campus. I agree with you on that. I think the objective is for all students to have full access to college and university programs on campuses where they can study, go into the classroom, interact with fellow students, and that sort of thing.

In the 27 years I've been with the organization I've seen a tremendous improvement in the level of services, accommodation, and supports on college and university campuses. There are a number of schools that are offering attendant care services. Carleton University, here in Ottawa, has a 24-hour attendant care service in residence. That's a rare type of program.

I think with the network of disability service centres at schools right across the country, the objective is to have those students attending and participating in post-secondary studies on campuses. There still is a value to distance learning and some people can't study otherwise, but I think that's not the objective we would have.

• (1245)

The Chair: Ms. Hutchison, do you have a remark there? Go ahead.

Ms. Carmela Hutchison: Thank you.

Women with disabilities have a 75% unemployment rate. Every program that is servicing people with disabilities must have a gender focus. As well, the medium and sick term disability benefits for EI, as reflected in the Caledon institute report, particularly option two that I presented on in 2009, are also strategies that we embrace.

The Chair: There is still time left if you have any other questions, Ms. Perreault.

[Translation]

Ms. Manon Perreault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is simple. As the critic for persons with disabilities, I have the opportunity to meet with many of them, of course. Something came out during recent discussions with groups I was meeting with. People told me they were seen as good volunteers, but when they would apply for a job, it was a different story.

I'll give you an example. I met a woman who did accounting. She volunteered her accounting services for seven years. She, of course, had the skills and education necessary to do the job. When the time came to hire someone, they hired someone who was, quote unquote, normal, and I hate using that word.

She found that decision incredibly frustrating, because she had been volunteering her services. On top of not being paid, she felt as though her value was being diminished because she was good enough to volunteer but not good enough to be an employee.

And if the many organizations whose main mission is the employment of people with disabilities are anything to go by, more and more groups will make that their main focus. Have things really improved over the past few years?

Is my question clear?

[English]

The Chair: Would anyone wish to respond? Ms. Brayton.

[Translation]

Ms. Bonnie L. Brayton: Thank you, Ms. Perreault.

To be perfectly frank with you, there's been no improvement in the situation of women with disabilities. When you look at the figures, you see that that segment of the population still has the highest unemployment rate in Canadian society.

[English]

We're talking about, as Mrs. Hutchison said, 75% unemployment. No, things haven't improved. Until we have a solid strategic plan.....

Again, the CCD recommendations are something you've heard from all of us. We've been repeating over and over again that it's really critical that the government develop a strategic planning partnership with national disability organizations. This is not something that's a quick fix. This is not something that we can give you quick recommendations on. Fundamentally, what we're talking about is inclusion.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Mayes, go ahead.

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

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

I'd like to direct my first question to Mr. Wellar. In your opening remarks you spoke of different disability groups—you used that term. The one thing that struck me is whether the programs out there today are disability-specific in their application. Do you see the need for a more specific target for programs for people with certain disabilities? Are there any success stories you could provide as a framework for future initiatives for the government to take that would be supporting that?

Mr. Keenan Wellar: Thank you very much for your question.

Yes, there are obviously many different disability subgroups. Ideally we're going to arrive at a point in our society where not only is disability not a factor—we're all just citizens—but we're not going to have these subgroups. Right now, though, you can't discuss employment of people with disabilities without realizing that you're also discussing human rights and discrimination.

There are certain groups historically that are just now approaching the start of citizenship. People with intellectual disabilities are one of those groups. They're just starting to live in our neighbourhoods. They're just starting to shop and work and travel in our communities. Within that context, it's quite different providing employment supports to such an individual. Not only will there be different attitudinal barriers, but they will have different ways of thinking about work. Most likely those entering working age have not had, for example, summer job experience, or perhaps did not even go through school with the idea that they will one day have a job.

As a provider, a lot of our work starts with that, with “Yes, you can work”, as opposed to maybe a career centre where what qualifies someone to be seeking a job is a long resumé and these sorts of things. For us, what qualifies them is “I want to work”. We operate on that basis. I think that's why you see these differences. It kind of depends on where you are on that whole developmental spectrum as a person with a disability, and on where you are in that human rights scale.

I'm sorry, what was the second aspect of your question?

•(1250)

Mr. Colin Mayes: Are there existing programs, or have you put together some programs, that have provided some guidance for the government in terms of being more specific with regard to the funding or programming?

Mr. Keenan Wellar: Sure. I think the Ontario Disability Employment Network—it was Joe Dale who testified here—would have some excellent examples of that. They are providers like ourselves, but they have a collection of these stories. We have some excellent local stories we can certainly share, but there you'll find a lot of best practices. There will be a lot of commonality throughout those.

A lot of it will have to do with the fact that we look at it as developing a relationship with employers. For us, it's not so much about searching job postings and fitting a candidate. There's often a lot of work to be done in developing a relationship with an employer who has said specifically, “We believe in a diversified workplace here, and we realize that we have excluded this group to some

degree, or even completely, so we have chosen to work with you to change that.”

Mr. Colin Mayes: I just want to commend all of you for the work you do. I have an older sister who has a disability. I can recall as a 16-year-old driving her and two other ladies to a workshop. It was interesting, because one of the ladies had actually been kept in the attic in her home for most of her younger years. There was a stigma around having a child with a disability.

So we have come a long way. Our government, by taking the initiative to do this study, shows that we want to go further and be more inclusive. I think we should be commended on that rather than criticized for not doing enough. There are limited funds, but we're looking at ways that we can communicate to business, to organizations, about the opportunity to hire people with disabilities and make it a more inclusive society.

I would like to direct a question to all of you with regard to communication. I appreciated the example of Enbridge and what they're doing. Is there an initiative that you have taken forward to business corporations or groups that could influence awareness of the opportunity that people would have?

The Chair: We'll conclude with those responses in terms of Mr. Mayes' time.

Go ahead.

Mr. Frank Smith: Perhaps I could respond to that.

I think I mentioned in my presentation that since 2005 we've held 25 what we call “strategies to employment” events—previously, “job search strategies” events—right across the country. In some cases we've been in one city two or three times. These events are all about successful transition from school to work.

The audience is post-secondary students and recent graduates with disabilities. They interact in these forums with representatives from private sector employers, with career and employment centre counsellors who work on the campuses with employment agencies. All the issues that have been presented at the table here and have been discussed by the committee have been discussed in that context, in terms of when to disclose, whether to disclose, how accommodation should be provided, and what are the rights that a person with a disability has in a workplace.

Getting back to some comments that were made earlier, it's not really very useful in a lot of ways to.... We're a cross-disability organization, so to look at individual disabilities and focus on them specifically is not our approach. We figure that when our members graduate from a college or university program, they are qualified to move into the Canadian labour market. What they need is a chance.

•(1255)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Smith.

Ms. Brayton, do you have a short closing comment? Go ahead.

Ms. Bonnie L. Brayton: Thank you.

In respect of the reality that the government has made commitments, you've heard from a lot of us about the EI sick benefits. I understand the government's concern about cost and what the cost would be with the change in EI sick benefits. But I think it's important to understand the cost benefits of making this investment in EI sick benefits in the medium and long term. The fact that a significant number of people would be able to stay in the labour market through EI sick benefits changes is a really important thing to consider.

The second thing I would point out is something that Minister Finley put in place under Canada's economic action plan when it was launched—an apprenticeship program for youth with disabilities. We had the benefit of having two of those young people, and I can tell you that this is a really important way to give employers a first-hand opportunity to hire a young person with a disability. It's also an excellent opportunity to provide work experience for young people with disabilities. This was an initiative under Canada's economic action plan in the first budget. I certainly hope that you guys will support the idea of getting Minister Finley to look at that again.

The Chair: Thank you for that short concluding response.

We will conclude with Mr. Cuzner.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): My thanks to all of you for being here today.

My first question is to Mr. Wellar and then I'm going to Ms. Hutchison.

Mr. Wellar, you talked about the segregated wage subsidy programs and the sub-minimum wage jobs. Could you talk about the work being done by those workers now? What should we be doing differently? Could you talk a little bit about that?

Ms. Hutchison, I'll throw the question to you as well. Sometimes when governments make bad decisions, it's not uncommon for one segment of the population to bear a disproportionate amount of the pain, the hurt. When the OAS requirement went from age 65 to 67, I would think you, who represent a group whose unemployment rate usually hovers around 75%, would be at the epicentre of hurt on a change like that. I'd like to know what ran through your mind when you first heard of that, and also what you've heard from the people you network with across the country.

I'll go to Mr. Wellar first.

Mr. Keenan Wellar: I think this points to why we need a somewhat disability-specific lens, because there isn't any other population that is working in a sub-minimum wage situation. With Ph.D.s who use a wheelchair, there is a law against them working for less than minimum wage, but we've somehow found a way to make this acceptable for certain people.

Where's that happening? Well, here in Ottawa some of the jobs are involved with the recycling of paper. Also, there's a program for watering plants in government buildings. I found most people employed in the federal government were unaware that those individuals are working for a dollar an hour or whatever the current wage is. I would encourage some internal exploration of what's going on there.

The best practice would be to find out how we can directly employ those people as federal government workers, as opposed to this current arrangement. If they need support, that's what an employment support provider is for—to help them get to where they need to be to do the job competently. The “Obstacles” report in 1981 talked about these arrangements, but now it's 30 years later and it's still going on. I realize there are wonderful things happening, but we need to—

The Chair: I think there is a point of order.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): I have a point of order. I may have misheard you, and please correct me if this is the case. But I thought I heard the witness say that the federal government was setting wages of, like, a dollar or \$1.25. Just so we're clear, the provinces set minimum wages. It is not the responsibility of the federal government to set minimum wages. They're set by the provinces. So I don't appreciate—and maybe I misinterpreted you—the innuendo that the Government of Canada was paying individuals a dollar or \$1.25.

• (1300)

The Chair: I'm not sure that's a point of order.

I don't know whether you would like to make a clarification, but carry on.

Mr. Keenan Wellar: Just to clarify, what I'm saying is that there are contractual arrangements whereby there are people on federal properties doing work for very low wages, however that came to be. I realize they're not federal employees.

The Chair: Fair enough.

If there is anyone else who wishes to comment, go ahead, and then we'll conclude with that.

Go ahead, Ms. Hutchison.

Ms. Carmela Hutchison: I know that in some provinces there is legislation that permits the practice that Mr. Wellar referred to, and that does sadly happen. It also happens for people with mental illnesses who are working in psychiatric settings.

The Chair: That sort of emphasizes the point made on the point of order, that some of this is regulated by provincial legislation. Nonetheless, we want you to know that we certainly appreciate your taking the time to appear before this committee and to present.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Chair, the question I posed to Ms. Hutchison wasn't five minutes. The point of order would have eaten up the time.

The Chair: I appreciate that.

If you want to respond, we'll conclude with that.

Ms. Carmela Hutchison: Mr. Cuzner, everyone has been scrambling—and I thank you for this question—to figure out what the impact is going to be. I am caught in the epicentre of this. As a person with a disability, I am the main income earner for my family. I do pay taxes. I have long-term disability insurance and I also have CPP disability.

I am terrified about what will happen to me personally now that the age is increased, and also what's going to happen to all of the women across the country who will live longer and possibly have a long gap between benefits, and also outlive their benefits. This is very much a concern for all of us as we come to grapple with this.

I would hope that we will see perhaps another study on this particular issue, and some interpretations and more dialogue.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

Thank you for appearing before this committee and presenting. It's very useful information.

The meeting is adjourned.

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