



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

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

HUMA • NUMBER 017 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, March 27, 2014

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Chair

Mr. Phil McColeman

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

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• (0845)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC)): I'd like to call the meeting to order.

I've been informed by Ms. Sims that she'd like to have a point of order or a comment before we start.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Yes, I would, thank you. It is directly related to the study we are doing right now.

While I was away I believe the National Association of Friendship Centres made a presentation, and one of our MPs said they would like to have them back again. I believe they've been in touch with both the Conservative and the NDP offices and a meeting has been arranged between the Conservative members, but not the rest of us. So I would like to see them being invited back for 10 minutes so all of us can benefit from the new information they have to share.

The Chair: Is this something that you've talked to—

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: We just heard as we were coming in that they now have a confirmed meeting with the Conservative members of the committee. We thought if they're coming to meet with some of us, maybe all of us should meet rather than having separate meetings.

The Chair: I understand what your desire is, and it's an idea that I think should be discussed with your colleagues.

I don't think we should take time out of the witness time today.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: I'm perfectly okay with our having a conversation because I know we're going to find a resolution.

The Chair: So I'll leave it up to you to sort that out and see whether or not there's some agreement there.

Let's begin our meeting.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, thanks for being here. This is meeting number 17 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Today is Thursday, March 27, and we're continuing our study concerning opportunities for aboriginal persons in the workforce. Today is our second last meeting of witnesses giving testimony for the study. We have a number of experts here today to provide their input.

For our first hour from the Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve we have Colleen Wassegijig-Migwans, the coordinator of

the aboriginal skills and employment training strategy. From Acosys Consulting Services Inc., we are joined by the president, David Acco; as well as Jerry Peltier, vice-president of government and indigenous relations.

Finally joining us from Halifax, we have three chairs. If you know the storm conditions on the east coast, you'll understand that they may arrive or they may not. They're driving in from Dartmouth, and we haven't heard whether they will arrive in time to provide testimony.

So can we begin the testimony, and Colleen would you like to start, please?

Ms. Colleen Wassegijig-Migwans (Coordinator, Aboriginal Skills Employment and Training Agreement (ASETA), Enaadmaagehjik Development Commission, Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve): Good morning, committee members.

By introduction, my name is Colleen Wassegijig-Migwans. I'm a band member of Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve. That's located on Manitoulin Island in the middle of Lake Huron. I have been associated with aboriginal human resource programming now for over 20 years. I started as a project officer with the Mnidoo Mnising aboriginal management board in 1993, just one year after the official start of the pathways program, which was the initial strategy to address aboriginal employment and training.

In Ontario, those were our glory years, which witnessed the movement of first nation workers into certified training environments with appropriate supports. Doors to employment were opened for our clients that previously were inaccessible, and as the strategy grew we saw more doors opening as time went on. There was accountability to local communities and local decision-making, alongside partnership with our financial co-managers at HRDC, as it was known at the time, for at that time it was still the department that was cutting the cheques.

Here's a brief history. Accessibility to industry and employers has increased for aboriginal people through the eras of regional bilateral agreements, AHRDS-I, and AHRDS-II. I have had the pleasure of working through these strategies in a first nation environment as well as in an urban environment. There have been learning curves associated with each new strategy. They all take time to run smoothly, and then another one comes along.

AHRDS-I started with six pillars. The concept of pillars was quiet during AHRDS-II, and now ASETS has three pillars. I don't recall that ASETS holders were consulted on what the pillars should be. We were only required to respond to them through the strategic business plans that were submitted as part of the application process.

Through the pre-ASETS period, the first nations technical working group advocated for the concept of parity to be incorporated into the post-AHRDS strategy. Apprenticeship was another key area. That partnership was one of the pillars is so ironic, given that AHRDAs had basically been developing these throughout their history, albeit informal ones.

ASETS holders are basically administrative vehicles. For first nations, the creation of formal partnerships is essentially a political exercise, given that many partnerships are now affiliated with proposed or finalized impact benefit agreements with industry. Adding to the irony is that government has eliminated the funding for the sector councils, just as many aboriginal ASETAs were starting to form meaningful relationships with these entities in the interests of our clients.

The first regional engagement session of ESDC regarding a post-2015 strategy occurred in Little Current, in the territory of the Anishinawbek, at the Ontario ASETS holders quarterly meeting with Service Canada. The session included a presentation on the relationship between government and first nations people. It focused on the history of the relationship that dates back to the Treaty of Niagara, which preceded the Royal Proclamation. It was expected that the tone of this presentation would continue throughout the engagement process, in terms of identifying that the relationship hinges on the fiduciary relationship between government and the indigenous people of this country. Sadly, this is not reflected in the thematic aspect of the roll-up report of the engagement sessions that has been distributed to ASETA holders.

There are only three constitutionally recognized aboriginal groups in Canada. This is where the relationship starts to blur in terms of national program delivery. This impacts how a national formula is dealt with. To address the employment and training issues of these groups, it is imperative that government honour the fiduciary relationship with the constitutionally recognized groups. At our December quarterly meeting, Ontario ASETAs learned that ESDC has met with organizations such as the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, the National Association of Friendship Centres, and the national Native Women's Association many more times than with the constitutionally recognized national aboriginal organizations such as AFN, the Métis National Council, and the ITK.

● (0850)

Government needs to recognize that the members of the interest organizations are also members of one of the constitutionally recognized groups. This duplication needs to end, as the interest groups should be able to work with one or all of the constitutionally recognized groups to address their employment and training needs.

In Ontario, as we moved from geographical delivery under the pathways program to a politicized structural delivery, the urban population was left in a difficult position. While the workings of a revised structure were falling into place, a legal battle ensued, which is referred to as the Misquadis case. I was working in the urban

centre where and when this occurred. The Toronto client brought a lawsuit against HRSDC for allowing the first nation AHRDA that was responsible for his request to deny his access to training and financial supports for that training. The real situation was that the client had been assessed and recommended for an intervention different from the one he sought. Further, the first nation had also not received confirmation of their budget or cashflow to properly allow for approval of funding. Sadly, the first nation was never called to provide testimony at court.

Eventually, HRSDC in Ontario provided a call for proposals for contract delivery of the urban fund. Wikwemikong responded with a proposal in recognition that half of our population is off reserve and living in urban centres throughout Ontario. Further, it had included a framework for aboriginal apprenticeship program delivery, as well as provision for a regional budget for larger inter-AHRDA projects. Wikwemikong was not awarded the contract, as it was obtained by the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres in partnership with Grand River Employment and Training, the Six Nations AHRDA at the time. The partnership became known as O-GI, which covered all of the Ontario urban, off-reserve areas. Another urban agreement, Miziwe Biik, under the Aboriginal Labour Force Development Circle AHRDA, served the greater Toronto area.

As the Misquadis case concluded, clauses for the inclusion of Ontario first nation clients became incorporated into the Ontario urban agreements. This was essentially a breach to the existing first nation AHRDS agreements. Prior to this change, the urban delivery sites were requesting funding approval from first nation AHRDAs. Accountability was now reduced with the new clauses as the urban delivery agents no longer had to request funding approval from the first nation AHRDAs or LDMs responsible for their member clients. First nation AHRDAs had requested roll-up numbers and dollar amounts from HRSDC for Ontario first nation clients funded under the urban agreements, but we have never received these statistics.

Now, ASETA holders are identified as stakeholders within a renewed urban strategy under AANDC, with a goal of increasing aboriginal people's participation in the Canadian economy. Of course this would include skills, employment, and training, but this mandate needs to remain with ESDC and the ASETS agreement holders.

It is so disappointing that the department changed its name and increased its mandate without proper consultation with its constituent client groups. The mandates of the original Department of Indian Affairs have become blurred with the inclusion of the two other aboriginal groups. Indian rights differ from Métis rights. First nation rights to education differ from how the Métis administer education through their ASETS agreements.

Measuring results against targets is usually a good exercise if all the numbers are included. In Ontario, two of the largest first nation communities' numbers have not been incorporated into the regional or national roll-up properly.

● (0855)

In 2010 I requested from the region that the Ontario ASETAs be notified when the AHRDS numbers and the ASETS numbers are included in the roll-up. Eventually we were informed that, apart from the database roll-up, the numbers from Akwesasne and Six Nations would be added under an asterisk.

I do not trust that this is adequate. When statisticians obtain their information from electronic data I believe this so flaws the results at both regional and national levels as to greatly flaw whatever funding formulas may be drawn at both levels.

The Chair: Colleen, can I interrupt you for a second? I think you were informed of the 10-minute presentation. We're over the 10 minutes. Could you wrap it up fairly quickly for us, your presentation?

Ms. Colleen Wassegijig-Migwans: I had more points on employment insurance, savings, the SPF and ASEP, Canada summer jobs, NARAM, and FNICCI, but I believe you would all have the text of this too, so I'll just move forward to my recommendations.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Colleen Wassegijig-Migwans: The recommendations are that the post-2015 strategy be funded as a long-term commission as opposed to a five-year incremental funding, that reparations to Ontario and Alberta under FNICCI be made, that reparations to Ontario and Quebec for the flawed decision regarding Canada summer jobs be made, and that we need to ensure that history and cultural knowledge exchange sessions are written into agreements between the regional office staff of Service Canada and the ASETAs.

Finally, on March 25, two days ago, I attended the urban aboriginal strategy session for Ontario hosted by AANDC. There, I learned that AANDC has obtained ongoing funding for the urban strategy and is not having to endure these five-year funding timeframes as the ASETS program does. It really is time to follow their lead. Perhaps the first nation portion of the post-ASETS strategy should be moved from ESDC to AANDC.

It is so ironic that the federal department that was created to serve Indians has recognized ongoing program funding with urban entities with whom they don't have a fiduciary relationship.

Thank you, committee.

● (0900)

The Chair: Thank you, and perhaps some of the points that you summarized there at the end could be delved into through the questioning around the table.

Let's move on now to the next presenters, Mr. Acco and Mr. Peltier.

Ten minutes....

Mr. David Acco (President, Acosys Consulting Services Inc.):

Thank you very much for inviting me here to appear before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

This is my first appearance before a government committee, so guys, go easy on me.

My name is David Acco. I'm the president of Acosys Consulting. I'm a Cree-Métis descended from Cumberland House, Saskatchewan, and a member of the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan.

I'm joined today by Jerry Peltier, former grand chief of the Mohawk community of Kanasatake and currently our VP of government and indigenous relations. Mr. Peltier is responsible for partnerships with the federal government as well as with the national aboriginal organizations, the NAOs. He also supports Acosys corporate customers with respect to aboriginal relations and policy development.

Acosys is a 100% owned and controlled aboriginal company. We're a for-profit company. Acosys primarily provides professional consulting in information technology, human resources, and aboriginal policy development.

Acosys has a strong social entrepreneurial mission of inclusion of aboriginal people in the workforce at the professional level. Hence, we've been working very closely with government and industry to overcome the barriers to aboriginal people's participation and to enhance the socio-economic outcomes of our people and enable aboriginal persons to contribute and share more fully in all aspects of Canada's growth and prosperity.

On Thursday, December 5, 2013, representatives of Employment and Social Development Canada, or ESDC, and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, or AANDC, appeared before you to share their insights into this important topic. Recently representatives from the aboriginal organizations and groups appeared before you to share their concerns and recommendations with respect to aboriginal persons in the workforce and the funding support available to them through the federal government, including the aboriginal skills and employment training strategy, the ASETS.

They all provided you with their statistics on the aboriginal workforce and the education numbers for first nations and aboriginal people. I will not repeat those statistics or the aboriginal labour market and education information. I think you've already received all that information—which I agree with, by the way.

On November 7, 2013, during the second session of the 41st Parliament, the committee adopted a motion to study the opportunities for aboriginal persons in the workforce and supports available to them through the federal government, including the aboriginal skills and employment training strategy, which is up for renewal in 2015.

This committee has asked me to share my knowledge and experience with respect to the issues of education and employment of aboriginal people, which flows directly from our private sector experience. In our eight years of fulfilling our entrepreneurial and social mission, we have noticed the following recurrent challenges: a shortage of professional aboriginal resources for industry; a mismatch between industry's expectations for aboriginal resources and available resources; an increasing number of aboriginal professionals seeking employment from the public sector due to government cutbacks; the lack of recognition of skills and experience by the private sector from the public sector employees; systemic racism prevalent in Canadian society, which continues to affect aboriginal peoples in terms of openly self-identifying; difficulty securing employment for aboriginal job seekers; and a lack of recognition of the urban aboriginal population.

We believe these challenges are insufficiently recognized in the current available analyses of the urban aboriginal employment gap. Understanding them will help the standing committee to understand the private sector's employment gap in greater depth and address it more comprehensively through policy. At present there are many employment training programs for aboriginal people who are subsidized by different layers of government and other organizations. These programs are short-term interventions that target entry-level and skilled labour employment with limited mobility.

With regard to the recent report entitled "Labour and Skills Shortages in Canada: Addressing Current and Future Challenges", the Honourable Diane Finley, former minister of HRSDC, in her response to this report discussing strategies for reducing the unemployment rate of aboriginal people said, and I quote:

Aboriginal peoples' labour market outcomes must be improved without delay to ensure that a whole generation of Aboriginal youth do not miss out on the opportunities resulting from a lack of skilled workers on major projects operating near Aboriginal communities.

● (0905)

As the Honourable Diane Finley remarks, the way to close this gap lies in helping aboriginal people to their full potential, and she notes that "improving the education and skills of Aboriginal people will be key to ensuring that they can reach their full potential in the labour force".

In response to the challenges that we have ourselves observed that were presented in the report, "Labour and Skills Shortages in Canada: Addressing Current and Future Challenges", and with regard to the response from the Honourable Diane Finley to this report, we developed an aboriginal internship program, which henceforth I'll refer to as the AIP.

To date, the AIP has generated 15 success stories. We believe that this successful program, which has moved beyond the conceptual phase, merits further investment by the Canadian government. The AIP has already been proven successful in helping aboriginal people

find professional employment and management-level careers within top-tier private sector employers. This is a win-win result for our people and for the businesses they now work for. This is also a positive outcome because the program is helping build a stronger and more professional workforce now and for the future.

The AIP is an aboriginal-led vehicle for building aboriginal participation in the private sector at the professional and management levels, for growing role models and business networks, and for creating measurable results for the Government of Canada's investment. However, when we first started this program, there was no financial support from the NAOs or from the Government of Canada. Acosys funded this program from its own profits.

For the past two years, the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples has funded the AIP from the ASETS program. However, CAP recently decided not to continue funding the program for the upcoming fiscal year 2014-15. We can get into that a little bit later on, I guess, maybe during questioning.

AIP takes a comprehensive approach through recruiting aboriginal people and interns by working with businesses, mentoring, and job-shadowing with our senior consultants, and by their certification through the university programs, while working on live project delivery on our client sites, which provides the businesses the opportunity to observe the aboriginal interns as valued members of a project team.

Our program is highly effective in matching talented aboriginal youth with private sector needs and supporting each participant's professional development through a 52-week program life cycle. When leveraging entry-level positions such as customer call centres within private industry, our focus has been on career paths, with the ultimate goal of building aboriginal talent for industry.

In these two examples, our AIP approach focuses on integration and long-term retention. We understand that the current program's measure of success is either six months of continuous employment or a return to school. Industry's measure of success is three years of continuous employment.

The AIP's success rate has been continuous employment over three years after hire, in most cases with the same employer, and our interns have continued their education through evening courses at the university level—in other words, increasing their marketability. In other cases, our interns have found employment on their own merits with other firms in the private sector, which has led to higher incomes and greater management responsibility. They attribute their professional success to the AIP for opening doors and giving them their first management experience to prepare them to be successful in their chosen fields—in this case, HR and IT.

We understand that this is an unprecedented success. Our first interns who went through our AIP are now engaged and are being promoted into positions of influence in top-tier management levels in private industry. This in turn builds management's better understanding of aboriginal people and a better network for newly graduated aboriginals looking for their first employment within the private sector.

As noted in the government's response to the recent report, "Meeting the skills challenges of the future will require not only concerted action, but also innovative thinking, approaches, and partnerships." The AIP is a leading example of an innovative partnership.

Mr. Chairman, with the support of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, we propose to expand our AIP into a national pilot program of three years' duration, supporting 10 participants per year, with the aim of helping aboriginal youth develop the skills that today's employers need. We are confident that an expanded program can help advance the goals of the Government of Canada and the aboriginal peoples in building a skilled, flexible workforce.

● (0910)

In conclusion, I'd like to add that we have letters of support from the aboriginal organizations and from private sector for this innovative program.

I'm tabling four additional copies of our presentation about our company and who we are and the aboriginal internship program for your consideration. We're prepared to meet with your committee members in order to elaborate on our AIP and discuss other possible options of addressing the education and employment challenges of aboriginal people and what aboriginal people face.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for listening and I'm prepared to answer any questions.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move on to our first round of questioning. These are five-minute rounds.

Ms. Sims.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Thank you very much.

I want to thank you for the presentation.

Colleen, I hear that you had to face terrible weather to get here so an additional welcome to you as well.

This is a very important study. I think one common thread we're hearing from a number of presentations is that the best way to deliver this training is when it's localized and in the hands of first nations people—aboriginal, Inuit, and Métis—and that they have a lot of control over it. We've also heard that in having it community-based you also need to make sure that child care is available. We've heard that over and over again, because we want to make sure that women get integrated into the workforce as well.

We're looking at some specific recommendations for our final report so over to you first, David.

Are there specific recommendations you would like to see going forward? What would you see as best practice, the best way to carry out what is much needed in the area of improving employment skills and integration into the labour force for our aboriginal workforce?

Mr. David Acco: I think it's a two-pronged issue. One of the issues is the fact that the Government of Canada is asking businesses to have more participation and engagement with aboriginal peoples. Our experience has been that, yes, it's true that executive management has stepped up, and yes, it's true that human resources have stepped up, but when you come down to the operational level, this is where it's lacking. There are issues around how we can address this through sustainable procurement policies, especially when large government contracts are being handed out with the whole-of-government approach. HRSDC is aligning their objectives with aboriginal affairs and aboriginal affairs are aligning their objectives with PWGSC and that's a great place to start because then you can influence business into engaging with aboriginal peoples.

The other issue is the fact that there's no management layer in corporate Canada. By this I mean an operational management layer, not the vapour trails that we see right now with the appointment of aboriginal leadership to the boardrooms. It seems that the influence has always been down at the entry-level position skill level. At the management level, where the buying and hiring is being made, there's no aboriginal representation there. That's because a lot of aboriginal people decided to take careers in the public sector, at least on a professional level. That's what we were encouraged to do. That's the natural step that we took. I'm born out of the private sector. I'm one of the few aboriginal people that actually decided to take this path. The way I took that path, I didn't recognize my aboriginal heritage. Only when I started recognizing my aboriginal heritage did I start seeing issues of systemic racism within business units. That's one of the issues.

The other issue is the fact that when it comes down to the business unit, and rightfully so, their focus is on delivery—meeting their project objectives. When you're looking at an aboriginal person trying to transfer their career from public sector to private sector and you have businesses that don't recognize that experience, it becomes very hard to convince them the person has transferrable skills. This is where we've been working with private industry in trying to get them to recognize that a policy analyst is much like a business analyst. No matter how you slice it, those are transferable skills in project management.

Finally, the last thing I'd like to talk about is the fact that if we look at the demographic that are returning to school, it is aboriginal women that are returning back to school. A lot of them are going back for a second career. This is a second career for them or even a third career for them. Yes, child care support is a very big issue and they have to have that child care support and the educational support that's associated with it. I don't want to comment on how these programs should be delivered; I'm a businessman by trade.

Jerry, if you could add a few words on the way these programs work....

● (0915)

Mr. Jerry Peltier (Vice-President, Government and Indigenous Relations, AcoSYS Consulting Services Inc.): No, I think you cleared it up.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Thank you.

The Chair: Very quickly, you have 20 seconds.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Very quickly, what percentage of the people you've managed to move up the ladder, so to speak—and I hate to use that term, but it's the one that I think will describe it quickly—have been women?

The Chair: Be very brief and concise, please.

Mr. David Acco: Basically it's been all of them. Out of the 15, we're seeing the progression. We started to do this in 2009, and our first intern got a job as a business analyst in the IT group with RBC, and she's considered to be, I would say, just below a senior business analyst in IT. This is a person who comes from Thunder Bay and who worked for the national aboriginal organizations before she retooled her career to become a business analyst. I'd say three-quarters of the people who are in our program are women who are now in their third or fourth year of work experience and are entering, I would say, the director's positions today.

The Chair: Thank you.

We move on to Mr. Armstrong for five minutes.

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

I thank our witnesses for being here this morning especially, for some, on a difficult weather day.

David, your 15 interns who have gone through the program—are all of them female?

Mr. David Acco: As I said, three-quarters of that sample are female. As I said, those are the ones who are returning to school and are in the best position to take advantage of management positions. So the short answer is yes.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: My background is as an educator, and I have dealt with some very highly academically skilled first nations youth who actually excelled going through the school system. There seem to be barriers—and I'm sure you went through this yourself in your position—once they leave the public school system and go into a university, training, or business school environment. We've seen a lot of very highly skilled high-potential young first nation students struggle once they get there because they don't have the supports at the post-secondary level. Would you agree with that statement?

Mr. David Acco: I would agree with that statement. A lot of it seems to be that there's no support for aboriginal people who decide to go to university, especially if they come from remote communities. They basically are left to their own devices in terms of being able to pursue an education. To be absolutely honest with you, I don't blame them for leaving a program. However, there also has to be an outcome for aboriginal people who want to go into business, careers, and so on. So there has to be in the industry some amount of support as well. Cultural sensitivity is a good start. Also, the flip side of the coin is having industry cultural sensitivity on the part of the aboriginal person as well.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: We've seen some things recently. If the internship could actually start earlier, while they're still going to school, and the companies could actually go in and recruit at that level so that students would know there was going to be a job at the end of their training, would that be a support that could be put in place for students who are actually attending university and struggling, so they would know there's a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow?

Mr. David Acco: I'm glad you brought that up. Co-op programs are a very good tool, and I don't see enough aboriginal co-op programs right now within industry and within the aboriginal community, especially co-op programs focused on technology, digital economies, and so on. Where they have to get their training is in the urban centres, so there has to be some amount of support for them.

Also the flip side of it is the fact that businesses have to be ready to take on aboriginal co-op students. One of the things we have figured out is that there is a hypersensitivity to political correctness within businesses, so they shy away from engaging aboriginal people. Self-declaration is a good example.

● (0920)

Mr. Scott Armstrong: A lot of highly skilled highly motivated academically inclined first nations people do tend to go towards the public sector simply because they see room for themselves there, whereas they might not see it in the corporate sector. What specific recommendations do you have to allow the corporate sector to try to attract and recruit first nations youth?

Mr. David Acco: First, I think I should answer the question of why aboriginal people go into the public sector. It boils down to this: that's where your network is.

On the private sector side there are attempts to build a network with the Aboriginal Professional Association of Canada—APAC—and a few other ones. However, there should be more efforts in terms of building that network. Our aboriginal internship program is trying to address that by building network “angels”, as I look at them, that we can push into industry. Hopefully by then they'll hire three from their community, and so on and so forth. That's my hope, that the 15 will turn into 85, and 85 will turn into whatever the situation might be.

I think the AIP is going to start to really take effect in about 10 to 15 years as these individuals start moving up the food chain. I think we need to push more aboriginal people into those management levels in order to effect it. As I said, you have skills, you have the paper trails, and in between there's the gap. That's where there's the most influence.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cuzner, you have five minutes.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Let me start first by recognizing the fact that Mayor Savage doesn't have the streets open yet in Halifax-Dartmouth. I'd appreciate it if the parliamentary secretary would send him a transcript of this meeting today.

David, the internship stuff is really exciting and it's neat and I know it's going to be a challenge.

I want to go back to Colleen. If you want to read in your comments on the summer student program...because before you get into internships and what have you, a lot of the time in non-native communities that first job really has a big impact. It starts your resumé; it does so much. So if there are concerns around the summer students, if you want to read your comments into the record, I think that would be worthwhile.

I also want to commend you on the fact about the electronic data. That's really timely in light of the revelation that a lot of the government's data has been compiled through the Kijiji stats. Obviously it's tough to manage, but it skews the numbers. When you look at StatsCan and CFIB numbers and put those together, the government's numbers are even higher than those. I think that's a valid point.

If you could, help us out by identifying your concerns around the summer student jobs grants.

Ms. Colleen Wassegijig-Migwans: Through the pathways program, the RBAs, and the AHRDS, and even into year one of the ASETS, an allocation from the Canada summer jobs program was awarded to the ASETS of Ontario and Quebec. It did not occur with any other region. The goal as identified by HRSDC was to bring Ontario and Quebec in line with the rest of the country. The ASETAs affected would argue that the rest of the country should have been brought in line with Ontario and Quebec. Summer jobs were lost by first nations students. They are now obtaining them under the Canada summer jobs program at less than 10% of their former numbers. This conflicts with many of the government's statements on how Canada needs to invest in this population sector for the betterment of the Canadian economy.

So it's been difficult to try to get as many as we had previously. As we said, we had hoped that the government would be able to see bringing the rest of the country into the type of arrangement we had with this fund. It was Canada summer jobs. It was summer career placements. Back to 1993 the program was—

• (0925)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: When did that take place?

Ms. Colleen Wassegijig-Migwans: The program was discontinued in the first year of the ASETS. We were able to access it for 2011, but it has been discontinued since then. The money flowed through our ASETS and AHRDS agreements. I can't recall what it was under the pathways program, but we had access to those funds for our first nations' youth and some for off-reserve.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: You mentioned about the cuts to the sector councils. How has that manifested itself? How have you seen that lack of support or withdrawing of support impact...?

Ms. Colleen Wassegijig-Migwans: Especially within the trades and apprenticeship sectors, we have seen that the collaboration, the communication that is necessary before any partnership ensues has really been affected at their end. They are now all doing different things to continue. Some sector councils, especially the construction industry, are working with our organizations in Ontario at least, to be able to continue and lend industry support to those endeavours with the ASETAs.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: You made one comment about duplication. Could you expand on that? It was interfacing with the groups, I believe.

Ms. Colleen Wassegijig-Migwans: In particular with the SPF and the ASEP strategies.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: I have trouble keeping my acronyms straight.

Ms. Colleen Wassegijig-Migwans: Yes, sorry.

I can't remember what ASEP is. The SPF funds are also ending in March 2015. You can see, especially in the northern areas, that those SPF projects have actually become duplicates of the ASETS delivery. There are comments from the delivery agents in the northern areas that the SPF projects are doing essentially what the ASETA holders are doing.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Mayes for five minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

One thing the Government of Canada has been trying to do is facilitate connecting aboriginals with available jobs and identify the jobs. We heard some very positive things from companies such as Cameco from Saskatchewan, and about the good work that Gary Merasty has done previously. Rio Tinto was at our last meeting from British Columbia talking about the great opportunities that aboriginals have been given to get skills training through their company.

So there are many success stories, and that's what the Government of Canada's intent is, to make sure that we're training people for the jobs that are there. I don't know whether training people for government jobs.... We need government employees, and there's going to be a great need down the road, but there has to be a broader range of employees than just training people to be part of one or another level of government.

First, what initiatives have your groups undertaken to identify the employers, to attach the training to an actual job that is there?

Second, concerning community output, I was a mayor for nine years and I always knew that if something was community-driven, it was successful. You always have champions in a community to move forward. It's such an important thing for any government program, that the community be behind it.

I want to know what kind of output and connection you have with the communities you serve.

Let's start there. I'll ask all three of you.

Mr. Jerry Peltier: Mr. Chairman, can I answer Colin?

Concerning your first question, dealing with the companies that have appeared before you, there's no question that they're doing a good job. We certainly support them. Actually, we work with those companies, because, as Mr. Acco stated, we're part of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business—we're a board member. We sit at a round table with these corporate managers and talk about the challenges they have and we have, as corporate Canada trying to attract aboriginal people into the workforce.

Some of these people are there not because they want to be there, but because they are driven there because of court actions—the duty to consult. So they have no choice.

Concerning the other point, yes, we hear a lot of this from the private sector side. I don't want to put on my political hat, but I'll put on my private sector hat.

We see the commercials. We see the comments that the government has training dollars to help aboriginal people get into the job economy. But we can't seem to find those training dollars, and that's our challenge.

This is where the aboriginal internship program that Acosys has developed is falling into a vacuum. There seems to be no bureaucratic box through which this program can be addressed. This is why we're having such frustrations.

We hear all the good things. There's a saying that there are funds and training dollars out there. We don't want to take away those resources that the aboriginal organizations and aboriginal or first nation communities are entitled to. They are limited, as they are. We want to encourage the government to put more funding into those programs. It's been said so many times that they are just not enough, the way the young aboriginal population is increasing. You've heard those stats. We need more financial resources.

• (0930)

Mr. Colin Mayes: Can I just make a comment?

We had Roberta Jamieson here from Indspire. Our government added \$40 million for bursaries for aboriginal students for post-secondary education. So we have met some of the dollar needs to ensure that opportunities are available to aboriginal students.

When I was the chair of the Standing Committee of Aboriginal Affairs we did a study looking at post-secondary education for aboriginal students and we identified some of the issues involving aboriginals coming from remote villages and the challenges they face going to the larger centres and the cost of doing so. But we definitely have put some money forward to assist in post-secondary education for aboriginal students.

The Chair: We're over our time, Mr. Mayes. Five minutes goes quickly. If you choose to follow that up through another question, that's fine, but we've had more than five minutes there.

Now we go to Madame Groguhé for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): I have some questions, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, it's your turn. You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: I want to begin by thanking you all for being here.

My question is for Ms. Wassegijig-Migwans.

You developed a training and employability approach targeting members of your community. This approach is working well, as the number of companies in your community has gone from 5 to 67 since 1970.

According to your experience, is it better to adopt a training strategy tailored to each aboriginal community, with specific programs, or to use a more centralized approach, and why?

[*English*]

Ms. Colleen Wassegijig-Migwans: The history of our programming has changed. We had geographical delivery back in the days of the pathways program in the early nineties. That meant that we served all first nations, aboriginal people, and Inuit within a certain geographical area. When that changed to a politicized structure, our particular AHRDA served our first nation numbers regardless of residency.

This meant that there was a lot of local decision-making within the community development area, but we also had to take into consideration the needs of our first nation members who were living off reserve, generally in urban centres throughout the country. This has been difficult. It's very hard, of course, to provide some centralized programming for it, so it depends on their particular local labour market what will determine the types of supports they would receive from their home organization.

We have difficulty in working with the provincial jurisdictions concerning what is being supported in different Ontario cities, especially for our social assistance clients. The Ontario Works administration will approve training in a localized manner. For example, Sudbury will approve training for certain programs, while Sault Ste. Marie or North Bay might not approve those same training programs.

So it's a situation of scurrying about to find out who is—

• (0935)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: My apologies, Ms. Wassegijig-Migwans, but I have to interrupt you to ask for a clarification. You raised an important point that seems to indicate a lack of consistency among the strategies of different partners and stakeholders.

How could this situation be improved? What would you suggest?

[English]

Ms. Colleen Wassegijig-Migwans: Especially in light of the LMAs—labour market agreements—and the LMDAs that are also funded by ESDC for employment and training, there should have been recognition of the relationship of first nations with the federal government prior to the LMAs and LMDAs being implemented. The LMDAs and LMAs have targets for aboriginal people, but we don't know what those numbers or those targets are.

Let me correct that. We have targets, but the LMAs and LMDAs do not have targets. So it is very hard for us to determine what the numbers are of aboriginal people who are being funded under those two provincial strategies. Their seeking of first nation support for their ongoing LMDAs is very difficult for us, because we don't know what the priorities are under those programs. The only accountability we have is through the ASETAs, in terms of who is actually served out there in the urban centres by the provincial vehicle.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: My last question is for Mr. Acco.

You were talking about systemic discrimination. You mentioned a cultural approach that could eliminate certain discriminatory barriers. Have you thought about this and considered other options to prevent discrimination as much as possible? What would you suggest?

[English]

The Chair: Please keep your response very concise.

Mr. David Acco: That's a difficult chore for me, Mr. Chair, but I'll try.

Cultural sensitivity is probably the best way to remove racial discrimination, or at least systemic discrimination, and this is something that needs to be taken in earnest, and I believe, promoted by the government. I don't have to look far to notice that. For example, see the public comments that come out of the CBC after they deal with an aboriginal issue. I think that one of the recommendations is cultural sensitivity, and the other side of the coin, I believe, is the interns' point of view as well, to prepare them for some amount of cultural sensitivity to private industry. It cuts both ways.

I'll give you one concrete example of one particular situation that happened to one of my interns recently. Basically it was Halloween, and the first person that she is greeted by in a Halloween costume is Pocahontas. How is she supposed to take that? Of course she reacted very negatively and called me up and had a discussion with me about this. I had to put everything in context for her from this standpoint. I also had to put it in context for the company as well, so next year they're going to come out with a policy for Halloween costumes. Now this is something that looks trivial in non-aboriginal lives, but it's very serious in aboriginal people's eyes from that standpoint.

• (0940)

The Chair: Thank you. That's great.

We're going on to Mr. Maguire.

You have five minutes, Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for your presentations this morning as well.

I think one of the things that you outlined very well is your internship program, David. You know how it works quite well, but I'm just wondering what can be improved within the scope of the whole aboriginal employment program, just to let us know what the government can do to facilitate more opportunities in those areas.

Mr. David Acco: One of the things, as Jerry correctly pointed out, is that we need to have more aboriginal professionals inside in management level positions, especially on the operations side of it. When an aboriginal person decides to go into private industry as a professional, the first thing they're relegated to is aboriginal stuff. In other words, work directly with the aboriginal community, human resources as part of the operations management side of it, buyers, and so on and so forth. Being part of a management group, I've had the benefit of being there and being able to hire people, and so on and so forth. If you have an aboriginal person inside of those particular positions, then we'll be able to build a better network. That's one way.

But again it's a challenge with the business units. Where we've managed to do it is basically by taking profit. What we do is we take existing funding and we match them together, and that's the way we actually manage to bring in aboriginal people, by sharing the risk and staging aboriginal people's careers within our master supplier agreements or our contracts that we're delivering. So is industry demanding these aboriginal resources? The short answer is no. However, through the aboriginal internship program we're making it possible for, as you pointed out, that first job, because it is the first job that makes everything.

Thank you.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thanks.

I come from southwest Manitoba, and there is virtually no unemployment there. There are all kinds of opportunities for employment in those areas. We've put a lot of money as a government into apprenticeship training in a number of those areas. I would be hoping that you're able to access some of that as well as we move forward in those areas. But you've obviously expressed a considerable, extensive knowledge in regard to some of the programming, so what do you think is the most important aspect of recruiting and training aboriginals in some of these areas?

We have community colleges there as well. Of course first is to be trained at the elementary and high school level. But with the training that we have available across Canada in community colleges, I just wondered if you could elaborate on how we can best access those for some of the first nations people.

Mr. David Acco: The answer is that again it boils down to participation. What are the aboriginal people going into in their post-secondary education? It tends to be toward public sector careers, even though the market of available jobs is shrinking. I think the Government of Canada needs to engage aboriginal...and I think they're trying to. I think probably more aboriginal people have to start looking at these particular careers as being an option—careers in the digital economy, in technology, in engineering, in business, and so on and so forth.

Take Queen's University; in having a conversation with them, I think the aboriginal participation is less than 1%, or actually less than 0.5%, in terms of aboriginal people deciding to go into engineering. Yet you have industries screaming for these particular resources, especially to work on these localized natural resources projects. As Canada moves into being a natural resource-based economy as a way of building the nation's wealth, we need to focus in on that.

The other issue, I think, is getting urban aboriginal participation in the management level. You know, it's a crying shame that 60% of aboriginal people are living in the urban centres but we see such low participation in the management levels in corporations.

The flip side of it is getting the existing aboriginal people who are in corporate Canada to stand up and be counted. The government needs to do promotion around that. I believe there are probably more aboriginal people in corporate Canada, but they are not willing to be counted because they don't want to be identified. I think that's probably because of at least the perception of systemic racism in corporate Canada and within the management units they're working with.

So the Government of Canada could do efforts around that as well: stand up and be counted.

• (0945)

The Chair: Thank you.

That's your five minutes, Mr. Maguire. It goes fast.

That brings us to the end of this first hour of testimony.

I want to thank our witnesses for taking the time to be here.

We had a communiqué from the witnesses who were trying to get into Halifax that they got stuck in a snowbank. It's too bad we didn't have those folks as well.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: That mayor, I don't know....

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Yes, maybe the members from the east coast could take care of these problems in transportation there.

At any rate, thank you again for being here.

We'll take a short recess while we get our second panel in place.

• (0945)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (0950)

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee back to order for the second half of our testimony.

Welcome back. We'll continue with the second hour. This is meeting 17 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

For the next hour, we have three witnesses joining us from regions of western Canada. From British Columbia Aboriginal Mine Training Association, we have chief executive officer Ms. Laurie Sterritt and councillor Ms. Jeanette Jules from—I'm going to give this an attempt—Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc. I apologize. I told you

how long it took me to learn Haudenosaunee. I'm sure I butchered that.

Joining us by video conference from Edmonton, we have Ms. Charlene Bruno, executive director at the Six Independent Alberta First Nations Society, and finally, by way of video conference from Regina, Saskatchewan, we have Mr. Carlo Bizzarri, general manager at the Ignite Adult Learning Corporation, as well as Ms. Mona Hill, facilitator in apprentice support services.

Each organization will have 10 minutes to present. We'd like to keep it on time so that we can have the maximum time for questioning.

Our first presenters are here, and I believe Ms. Sterritt and Ms. Jules are going to split their time.

Please proceed.

Ms. Laurie Sterritt (Chief Executive Officer, Aboriginal Mentoring and Training Association): Thank you.

Good morning. My name is Laurie Sterritt. I'm the CEO of AMTA, the Aboriginal Mentoring and Training Association. We just recently changed our name. We were formerly known as the British Columbia Aboriginal Mine Training Association.

With me, as you've heard, is Jeanette Jules, who is a founding member of the AMTA board of directors and a councillor with the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc.

Thank you for inviting us here to speak with you about opportunities to increase aboriginal inclusion in Canada's workforce.

Four years ago, a group of people and partners from industry, government, education, and first nations started AMTA with the goal of connecting aboriginal people to jobs in B.C.'s exploration and mining industries. AMTA was initially funded with \$4.4 million under ASEP, along with financial and in-kind contributions from our founding partners. We also received a \$10-million commitment from Canada under the SPF program in August 2012. In total, Canada has pledged \$14.4 million for five years of AMTA programs and operations. In return, we offer a return on investment in the range of 165%.

With the support and input of our partners, we've created a business solution, and other resource sector industries are looking to adopt what we've created. What we have created is an education and training model developed by aboriginal people for aboriginal people. It challenges the assumptions about aboriginal workers and about how to prepare them for success and meaningful employment.

We've created a program that looks and operates very differently from what many people across all our stakeholder groups are used to seeing, a program built on the principles of flexibility, adaptability, and responsiveness while still maintaining a very structured approach. It's a program generating positive results that align with Canada's commitment to increase aboriginal education levels and workforce inclusion.

We do this by removing barriers one individual at a time to ensure that every AMTA candidate gets what they need to make life choices that may not have been open to them in the past. We do our best to get rid of the things that hold people back, and consistently we've seen our approach generate new possibilities for our candidates.

In AMTA's short history, we've registered almost 2,300 candidates in a variety of education, training, and development initiatives, and we have placed more than 730 aboriginal people into jobs.

In a recent PricewaterhouseCoopers study, which I have copies of—they are not translated into French, but if you want a copy of our study I have it with us—we discovered that our candidates earn on average almost 300% more than they did when they arrived at our doors. In aggregate, they are contributing more than \$100 million annually to Canada's GDP.

Our candidates have developed transferable job skills and are in demand because they are ready to work, qualified, trained, and certified to industry standards. They are finding employment close to home, achieving financial stability, and becoming leaders and role models within their own communities.

So what makes AMTA different? How is it that we've been able to achieve these results in such a short period of time?

From the start, everyone involved in AMTA has been willing to challenge their assumptions about education and training models, about aboriginal learners and workers, and about the makeup of their workforce. When we were able to challenge our beliefs and opinions, we were able to see that a new approach was not only possible but necessary.

We started by seeking out meaningful partnerships. Over the past four years, AMTA's industry partners have provided significant financial and in-kind support, and more than 200 companies have hired our candidates. In fact, AMTA has become a key part of the recruitment process for several companies, such as Acres construction, the Gibraltar mine, Graham construction, Ledcor, the New Afton Mine, and Sunridge Equipment, just to name a few.

Our industry partners don't only invest in AMTA to satisfy legal agreements or inclusion targets, though these are important benefits to many. Our industry partners come to AMTA because they are ready to challenge their assumptions about their hiring practices. They have specific hiring needs and they're ready to develop a local, loyal workforce. In short, we work alongside their operational teams to provide staffing solutions when needed and with workers that have the qualifications that are needed.

What else makes us different?

Our application process is unencumbered by the eligibility restrictions that many other training initiatives face, and we have a standardized intake process and assessment method.

• (0955)

For example, we work with all ages and all skill levels. Every AMTA candidate completes a test of workplace essential skills. In consultation with our industry partners, we've decided to focus on our candidates' reading, numeracy, and document-use levels. Through this assessment we find that about 70% of our candidates

need to enter our pathways to success program. In order to improve their essential skills, pathways to success also includes many confidence-building exercises like life skills, coaching, workplace orientation, and getting special licences and tickets that will help our candidates become more aware of the requirements of entering into long-term employment. From here, we work with our candidates to identify their particular skills and interests, and then develop customized training plans for each and every candidate. Jeanette is going to speak to this very shortly.

At the same time, we work with our partners to develop cohort training initiatives that suit the industry need. We then contract local educators and service providers to deliver training solutions. We've built programs like underground miner training, environmental monitoring, human resources management, etc.

AMTA staff are involved every step of the way to ensure that we're delivering the right solution for our candidates and partners. That's an important differentiator for AMTA. We manage the process very closely so that our candidates get everything they need to be successful.

Now I'll pass it over to Jeanette.

• (1000)

Ms. Jeanette Jules (Councillor, Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, Aboriginal Mentoring and Training Association): Thank you, Laurie.

My name is Jeanette Jules, and I'm a fourth-year councillor for the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, and I have been an AMTA board member since the organization's inception. I've spent 32 years working in first nations education in a variety of capacities, including as the manager of the HRDC programs within my nation. I have experienced first-hand what works and what doesn't work when it comes to training and development of first nation learners.

To continue where Laurie left off, another way AMTA is different, and the reason we are able to achieve what we have in a short time is our focus on the individual. What I've seen time and time again over my career is that aboriginal students are not successful because these programs that they are enrolled in are focused on the group, not the person. The standard approach within the education setting says everyone should be treated equally. The AMTA model challenges this very assumption, and delivers an innovative model for training and development: a candidate-focused solution.

In my opinion, the AMTA model is one that everyone should follow because we've proven that by tackling the issue one person at a time, one by one, we're helping aboriginal learners achieve their potential and make a contribution to their economic health, to their families and their communities, to the province, and to Canada. We have 730 examples of how it works, and another 1,500 in the works. At AMTA we have a model for education and training that is transferable and repeatable, yes, but it is successful because it is flexible and adaptable. We have a relationships and partnerships with more than 150 first nations in British Columbia, and there are 203.

In every instance, we take guidance and direction from the nation's leadership, who understand what is best and what their members' needs are. In this respect, we challenge the assumption that the issues and obstacles for one first nation or another target group, for that matter, are the same for the next target group, because each is different. We then work together to build and facilitate relationships and partnerships between AMTA communities and industry to ensure we're all working towards the same goal. It's not enough to have training and education clauses in IBAs. Those are words on a page. What is critical is the partnerships that we will make in order to ensure that these things happen. It is not easy, but it is possible.

Once the needs of our community and industry partners are clear, we can focus on preparing our candidates for the opportunities that exist. We do this by developing individualized education plans, one candidate at a time. Anyone on the AMTA team will tell you that the individualized learning plans are a must-have, not a nice-to-have. We offer flexible entry, clear pathways, and continuous coaching to ensure successful completion and ultimately consistent job placement.

The mentoring relationship doesn't stop when a candidate enters employment. There are genuine, heartfelt connections between the candidates and the AMTA coaches, who continue for as long as our candidates want them.

We must be doing something right because once our candidates are successful in landing a job the overall retention rate is more than 80%.

The Chair: Ms. Jules, does that wrap it up or is there more?

Ms. Laurie Sterritt: I'll just say a closing statement, if that's okay.

Thanks, Jeanette.

I wish we had a lot more time to talk about the results that we've been able to attain, but with this short moment in time we hope that we've shared with you a snapshot of the proven, credible solution that we've created.

We believe that we must attempt to understand who first nation learners are and what their specific and unique needs are, and to create a system that allows for first nations to feel as if they are important to Canada and that Canada wants them to succeed.

At AMTA we look at our role as doing what needs to be done to get our candidates to full-time employment and create an environment that promotes their continued success. We're delivering a system that aligns education and training with real workforce requirements, a system through which we train people for industry-defined job opportunities, a system that's put 730 people into full-

time employment generating more than \$23,000 each in revenues for government per year—that's more than \$16 million in aggregate per year—and a system where candidates earn almost 300% more than they did when they began their journey with AMTA.

We're slowly but surely removing long-standing barriers to employment that exist in many first nation communities, one barrier and one candidate at a time, through our collaborative partnerships with those who share our values and our commitment to empowering aboriginal people to create economic health for themselves, their families, and their communities.

• (1005)

The Chair: I think I'm going to have to end it there. We're way over time. I apologize for that.

Ms. Laurie Sterritt: Yes, for sure.

The Chair: If there are more points to be made perhaps they can come out in questioning.

Now we'll move on to our video conference witnesses. The first witness we'll hear from is from the Six Independent Alberta First Nations Society, Charlene Bruno, executive director.

Please proceed for 10 minutes.

Ms. Charlene Bruno (Executive Director, Six Independent Alberta First Nations Society): Thank you, Chair.

Hi, everyone. My name is Charlene Bruno. I am the executive director of the Six Independent Alberta First Nations.

We are one of the agreement holders in the Treaty 6 territory. There are three of us in total. In 2005 the Treaty 6 chiefs came together to form the Six Independent, which includes the communities of Samson, Louis Bull, Ermineskin, Montana, Paul band, and Saddle Lake. We have populations within our communities of over 25,500 people.

I'd like to thank the HUMA committee for the invitation to speak today. I'm very humbled and grateful to be speaking with you today, and for this opportunity to share some information that relates to ASETS. To put some perspective on what I'll be speaking on today, we'll look at this from a national, regional, and a nation level.

With respect to the national level, Canada's economic action plan ensures training reflects labour market needs. ASETS is best suited and equipped to align the skills of the unemployed with those required by employers. We have trained, qualified experts at our ASETS offices who are working directly with clients to determine needs, assessments, and training requirements, to address barriers to employment, to set clients up in individualized training programs, to match the needs of the demand-driven with industry, and to get clients trained and ready for employment. Building partnerships that benefit communities and nations falls within this category as well. Partnerships with industry ensure employment is available at the completion of training.

The other portion of Canada's economic action plan is training the workforce of tomorrow. The announcement mentioned:

...measures to support the training and employment of Canada's next generation by helping them get the skills and experience they need to get quality jobs, and... confirming significant new investments to support the implementation of a First Nations Control of First Nations Education Act, which will reform the on-reserve education system, in partnership with First Nations, to achieve better outcomes for First Nations students.

This is a step in the right direction toward building more self-confident individuals and youth within our areas. They will become a greater asset within our own communities, building self-assurance, contributing back to the community, and ultimately building a stronger educated nation within our own communities.

In this area, apprenticeship training was mentioned and at our nation's level, a lot of our nations are undertaking this initiative every year to get our first nation people through first, second year, all the way through Red Seal. First nations recognize the need for these skilled tradesmen within our own communities and how it benefits the employment gap within industry. So we provide entrepreneurship as well, on-reserve training once a year for those interested in this field, and in our own communities. It's resulted in building a stronger economic base on reserve and then expanding that by going off reserve. We have a lot of youth initiatives included within our annual operational plans. The youth initiatives are aimed at getting youth into jobs that interest them and that will allow them to acquire more experience for the jobs they'll be seeking in the future.

In terms of strengthening Canada's labour market, the first nation job fund, which is a new initiative on behalf of the government, targets 18- to 24-year-olds transitioning off income support by completing an assessment that will work for them, and getting them trained and into employment or returning to school. This initiative has high expectations, and some of our concerns at the community level is that it may be moving too fast for the individual, which then could result in poor results. We also have employment centres focused on getting first nation people into the workforce. They have a lot of opportunities available to them. All the job postings that are available to local job seekers are within websites, Facebook pages, and on Twitter.

One of the things that was mentioned that I would like to bring up is with respect to immigration and bringing in foreign workers to fill employment gaps. This opportunity should always be made available first to the first nations people and others within this country, prior to opening the door to external workers.

We also would like it noted that one in every two clients within our region is employed or is returning to school.

●(1010)

So when we look at the employment and social development logic model, which states that ASETS ultimately aims to increase the number of aboriginal people who are employed or integrated into the labour market, and we look at the way it works with the agreements within Canada, we look at the three pillars of accountability, demand-driven, and partnerships. The model itself works within each of our areas because each of the agreement holders works at all of the goals that are put out within the agreement.

We fulfill those requirements in numerous ways, one of them is that, as an agreement holder, we have solid partnerships within our own areas. One that should be noted is with the PTI Group. Saddle Lake Cree Nation has a written MOU with them, which in our opinion is a very good model for a partnership because there are several components that make the partnership work, such as a written MOU.

Within the PTI Group they have hired two liaison workers who work directly with the aboriginal clients and workers and with the business itself to ensure that the staff who are hired are comfortable working there, and that they have somebody to go to talk to. They also have internal policies that deal directly with the partnership. They have on-site training for their staff, for cultural awareness. They work directly with our satellite Cree nation to recruit first nations people in the surrounding areas so they've developed the customized recruitment process. They also have dedicated staff to recruit first nations people. That mandate came directly from the head office at the PTI Group.

Another best practice for us is the trans-Canada partnership within the Maskwacis area. It is a triad agreement with industry, the nation, and the province. They all play a part to make this very important literacy program within our community work. We've seen great success with this program in our communities and would like it to continue.

As agreement holders, we've had partnerships within Treaties No. 6, 7, and 8 in the province of Alberta. We've had forums to share best practices and ways to improve our existing processes. We've had a job fair in the Treaty No. 6 territory that saw over 1,200 people come through the doors over a two-day period in 2013.

Some of the main challenges we are facing have to do with funding. With the increasing population growth within our communities over the past 20 years, we've seen a fluctuation rate of over 30% growth, so the funding disparity has grown within our territories. Of course, the rising cost of tuition means that we can train fewer clients as a funding arrangement, as the funding allocations have gone unchanged since 1996.

One of the other challenges for us is the essential skills programming. There's no note in there for the cultural component, which in our area is a very important part of ensuring that our clients know who they are, know where they come from, and what makes them Cree people within our area. While there are many tribes, the majority of our people are Cree.

The other is persons with disabilities. Unfortunately, at our community levels, we don't receive enough funding for this specific area. We do not have adequately trained people to work directly with the people from our community who are persons with disabilities.

It would also be recommended that we should have additional capital funding for new child care centres. Many of our centres are very outdated and have not received renovations for decades now.

So as we look at the individual, overall the measures and programming that have been put into place ultimately benefit the individual client at the nation level and at the community level. The committee can rest assured that all of the work that's being done to bring each client to the level of employability within the first nation community is being done in the Treaty No. 6 territory. We know that the ASETS program is so vital to each of our first nation communities and contributes greatly to building a viable economic community within each of our first nation territories.

I'd like to thank you for your time. I really appreciate this opportunity.

•(1015)

The Chair: Thank you very much. Right on time.

Now on to our next witnesses, Mr. Bizzarri and Ms. Hill.

Mr. Carlo Bizzarri (Program Manager, Ignite Adult Learning Corporation): Mr. Chairman, members of the standing committee, thank you for giving Ignite the opportunity to share with you what Ignite does in Regina.

The Ignite corporation is a not-for-profit corporation. Our goal is to help young adults at risk become independent and self-supporting. We have been in existence since 1990. Our unique approach has to do with our business approach to social problems. What we want to do is to help these young adults move from dependency, poverty, and hopelessness to become self-supporting, independent, and contributing members of society.

Although our charter doesn't directly deal with first nations, we are extremely honoured to say that 90% of our clients are first nation. They come to Ignite of their own choice. They see value in what we have to deliver.

Ignite achieves its goals through training, healing, and employment. Like a business, we are open all year round. Each year we take 30 to 45 at-risk young adults from the ages of 19 to 30, and they're hired to work at Ignite. Their job is to learn—seven and a half hours a day, five days a week. Wages are deducted for lateness and absenteeism. Poor performance and chronic absenteeism are causes for dismissal from the program. We're finding that this approach prevents a lot of these young people from ending up in a situation of pain, such as jail or having to deal with the law. Our success rate is about 70% to 75% over the many years.

Let me tell you what the program includes. First of all, we have an academic component. We know that employers are not interested in somebody who doesn't have grade 12 or the equivalency. The second component has to do with computers. Computers are everywhere now. Anywhere you turn, you have to know about computers. The third component is business skills. They actually learn how to set up a company. They go through the whole process of raising capital, doing market research, coming up with a business proposal, producing a product, and marketing the product. It's an incredible program.

We also go through some financial literacy, communication components, and driver training. We have a superb mentorship program that is carried on by people in the business community. We also have a newer component to this program, which is health and wellness. This is based on the latest research by a psychiatrist, which basically says that most psychological problems can be tied to brain problems. We stress the importance of exercise and nutrition. We also help them get jobs and/or go on to further education.

What we do is not a band-aid solution. It's efficient, it saves the community a lot of money, and most importantly it helps these young people get some hope to be able to take charge of their lives and achieve goals. We see amazing things happening.

What happens to these young people after they finish the program? They become employees. They become small business owners. They are volunteers in the community. They become homeowners. They are consumers. They also pay taxes.

I don't want to take too much time going into all kinds of details, but basically that's what we do. It's actually quite simple. It's not complicated.

Thank you for giving me this time.

Mona, do you want to add something?

•(1020)

Ms. Mona Hill (Facilitator, Apprentice Support Services, Ignite Adult Learning Corporation): I'd like to once again thank you for inviting us to join you. We are much appreciative that you are interested in our program.

I'd like to refer back to a little earlier when Jeanette spoke about the "one person at a time" model. I'd like to say that we're in total agreement that this is the way to go, particularly with our client base. The young aboriginal adults who we serve and work with do respond to this type of support.

I am a support person at Ignite Adult Learning. By profession I'm a social worker and I have an open door policy. Each apprentice who works with us is able to come to visit me pretty well any time during the day, if they're not missing too much class time, in order to deal with specific issues that are barriers. There have been barriers in the past to them developing their education and being able to be employable.

Our nine-month program focuses definitely on components of reliability and employability. What we do is give them self-empowerment, including skills such as the health and wellness component of the program that Carlo mentioned. Another part of that is changing your thinking, changing through Pacific Institute thought patterns. Some of you may be well versed in the Pacific Institute's Lou Tice's teachings on being able to change our thinking patterns and move from the negative to the positive.

Another health and wellness component, which is an open book basically for our young people in the program who I work with, is on addictions education. Too many of them, unfortunately, have come from backgrounds where they have lived with this type of problem and the chaos addictions create in a young person's life. Oftentimes they have embraced it themselves, then tried to move forward and improve their lives.

This particular part of the program is extremely valuable for them, and all of those components of the whole make a difference in the end result of employer retention of the workers who graduate from our program. We actually have a community that supports us. There are investors who support us, who call us quite often to ask for employees, “Do you have someone because we love your employees”.

We have amazing support from our community here in Regina and from our investors. We have a wonderful relationship with our crown corporations, with Casino Regina, Conexus Arts Centre, Sun Life, SGI, and Yara Belle Plaine. They absolutely embrace what we're doing to help our young aboriginal people, as well as those who come to us who are not aboriginal, because it's open to anyone.

I think probably some of the barriers have already been addressed by our respondent from Edmonton, but I'd like to add also that there are definitely issues of lack of day care. There is terrible underfunding regarding living expenses. We are unable to give them minimum wage currently. The best we can do is a training allowance that actually amounts to \$5 an hour, so anyone joining our program is not going to be able to do that if they are single young adults, because they can't survive. Oftentimes that results in their living in untenable situations in another home.

We have a young man currently—and this is not unusual—who has been couch surfing for the last few months in the program, who never knows where he's going to stay, because he's trying to stay healthy. He's trying to move forward, away from his past and places and people who would pull him back. This is a commonality across the board over the years with our clients, and in that regard, besides what Carlo talk about, these are the other supports that we are trying to give them in order to help them become successful young adults.

That's about all I have say. We're open to any questions.

• (1025)

The Chair: Thank you, as well.

We will move on to our first round of questioning of five-minute rounds.

Monsieur Brahmi.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahmi (Saint-Jean, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Hill, I will come back to what you said regarding problems that are more related to social matters than to competency or education issues. You talked about addiction problems and people having insufficient money for shelter or food.

What programs could the government implement to resolve certain issues that are specific to aboriginals, more so than to the general population? Is there anything specific about first nations members in such difficult situations the programs could focus on? What do you recommend the government should implement for that at-risk population?

[*English*]

Mr. Carlo Bizzarri: Are you asking that question of me?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: The question is for you or Ms. Hill. She is the one who talked about homelessness and addiction issues.

[*English*]

Ms. Mona Hill: We seem to be having a problem with communication here. Can you give us a minute and we'll get someone to help us?

The Chair: Can I just ask, was there any translation there for you during the questioning?

Ms. Mona Hill: There was some translation.

Mr. Carlo Bizzarri: It was broken.

Ms. Mona Hill: Our communication is not working.

The Chair: Okay.

Maybe you could direct your question to another witness.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: In that case, I will put the question to Ms. Jules.

In your presentation, you said that the group approach was not working. Over the course of your career, you have noted that the strategy really had to be tailored to individuals, and not to a group.

Here is what I would like to understand. Let us take for example a segment of the population that has been unsuccessful at school and has had to return to the workforce. What specific obstacles do first nations members face that are not faced by the general population? In your opinion, how should programs be adapted or changed to take into account issues specific to first nations communities?

[*English*]

Ms. Jeanette Jules: It's having all of the agencies working together, not just the ASETS programs or any of the employment training programs. It's the social development departments within the communities, in the first nations community, and within the towns and cities. It's the education departments all working collaboratively together, because then you see that here's a person we need to bring in; they have no place to stay and they need extra funding. It's to ensure that everybody's working together, instead of having an agency say, “Well, we can't use and you can't use the funding for this, and you all can't work together, because you're breaching your contract, and if you're breaching your contract then we're going to cut your funding.” Because that's what people are being told.

A lot of the younger people—and it's the same with a lot of the older ones—have a difficult time getting through school. Then when they get through school, they find out that where they've graduated, they haven't graduated with the Dogwood Diploma, or whatever they call it across the province. They've graduated with a leaving school certificate, so then they need to bring their skill level up.

One of the things that we've done in Tk'emlúps is that we've worked with industry. We've worked with the AMTA program and our education program from the two communities, Tk'emlúps and Skeetchestn, to get a skills training program. But it's an education program to get them to a grade 12 level, because a lot of our people are not at a grade 12 level and that's what you need to get into a job or an education. They're at a grade 8 level.

•(1030)

The Chair: Okay, that's five minutes.

We're on to Mrs. McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Unlike the east coast, of course, we have witnesses here who had to leave flowers from the west coast to join us today.

But, anyway, I'm going to start with the B.C...I didn't realize the name had changed.

I actually want to probe...and I think it's a very important thing to probe, and I really need some frank conversation around it. I've been a supporter of the program when there have been challenges around funding models that aren't there already. We have had some witnesses who have suggested that there's duplication with the ASETS holders, and we've had some who have suggested it's complementary. We had another program here through SPF that was fishing up in the north, and it seemed to have some pretty significant positive results.

So can you talk about that whole overlap issue or complementary duplication? I think that's one of the challenges that we're going to deal with as a government.

Ms. Laurie Sterritt: That is a reality on the ground that our team faces every day because we are delivering services around the province of B.C. There are two issues. One is an administrative issue. For each program, whether it's an ASETS or another SPF or another provincially run program, the way that success is measured is not always complementary.

For instance, if we work with an organization and we each spend \$5,000 on a candidate, only one organization can measure the result. If that person gets employed, it might show up only on the other organization's results line, so it looks like we spent \$5,000 and it didn't go anywhere. I think that is being addressed on an administrative level in some places.

The other issue is more a human issue, and it is a willingness to be creative and find ways to work together. The way we do that is that in more than 50% of our partnerships around the province, we're successful in working with other ASETS holders or SPF holders. We try to find out what issues individuals are facing and what you can cover and what we can cover and whether we can split the results, if that is an issue.

If we have a cohort training program—say we run an environmental monitoring program and there are 15 students—we each invest in certain aspects of the program. We bring partners in to invest in the program and then we would say seven or eight results would show up on our books and their books when those candidates get employed.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Could you give me a specific example of a partnership you've had with an ASETA holder, what you've done, and what the other person has done, and then in the minute or two that we will, hopefully, have left, can you talk about your specific recommendations to government regarding how you see that we should move forward to really get the best outcomes for the expenditures that are put in?

•(1035)

Ms. Laurie Sterritt: The way I have seen this roll out is that a number of silos compete with each other. I would say that if we can—as Jeanette has recommended—work together and find a solution that works in a broader sense rather than on a community-by-community basis, then I think we might take the competition out of it. Frankly, we work with post-secondary educators who are also in competition to fill seats in their environment.

It's not as though it's going to go away, but if we were all able to sit down and plan things out with solely a view to the successful result for the student, I think it would benefit the bigger picture greatly.

I don't know if that answers your question.

The Chair: You have thirty seconds.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Just quickly, could you give an example of what the ASETS provider has done, when you've worked in a partnership, and what you've been able to bring to the table? That will probably take more than 30 seconds.

Ms. Laurie Sterritt: In some cases, the ASETS holder might fund the training allowance or the child care, and we would fund the tuition. We would provide the coaching. They might provide the essential skills upgrading. It totally depends on the situation. It totally depends on that other service provider and what they're willing and able to do.

Sometimes we're all multi-funded from provincial sources and federal sources and private sources, so we have to be creative in how we apply those funds. My message is always that we're stronger together and we're better off sharing our resources. If my \$10 and your \$10 equals \$25, we're all going to be a lot better off.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cuzner, you have five minutes.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank the presenters.

I have a comment first. The guys from Goldcorp the other day said, we're "miners and not educators." When they get somebody who comes to make an application, the key ingredient is what you folks are doing on the ground to prepare those workers so that they are successful. One of the unfortunate parts of the committee not being able to travel is that it would have been excellent to get on the ground and see what's taking place on the ground and why you guys are experiencing the success.

The other thing I wanted to comment on, Jeanette, is the comment you made that it's not being equal to everybody. That's important. I know even Nova Scotia Community College has gone to a self-directed approach to teaching where you're fair with people, but you're not the same. You're not just sort of teaching en masse. I think that's where we have success.

Laurie, you referenced something a couple of times. We saw some of the barriers and people have shared some of the barriers: financial, public school preparation, and that kind of stuff. But you had talked about fighting the assumptions. You made that comment three times in your presentation about the assumptions, and that would be I think an extrinsic assumption. Could you comment on that and how you've come about addressing it?

Ms. Hill, you talked about changing the thinking.

Are you guys linked up there?

Ms. Mona Hill: I believe we are.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: You talked about changing thinking. I would think that would be changing the thinking of the clients or the students, so that would be more of an intrinsic change or approach. Could you make some comments on that?

I know that was a big preamble, Mr. Chair.

But if you could, could you respond on the assumptions and the changing of the thinking?

Ms. Laurie Sterritt: Sure. If you don't mind I'll comment on the connection with industry as well, because it all goes together.

In our experience, if there is a willingness by the company to strip away some of the systems that they've used in the past and work with us to build a system that works not only for aboriginal applicants but other local applicants, we've been very successful in figuring out how we engage the local community, assess for the skills, and match it up with the jobs that are going to be available in the location. It doesn't matter what the background of the person is. Then we build a process that works.

On the assumptions side of things, I heard one of the other presenters earlier talk about racism and discrimination. I would take those strong words out of the equation and say really if you get to the human issue, it's that I assume something about you and you assume something about me. In a workplace that happens no matter what the person's background is. If I assume that first nations are not interested in natural resource development or extraction or mining, then I might not look to them as a natural workforce. If the first nations believe that's just a big, bad mining company that wants to come and strip away all of our natural resources, I might not look to them as a potential employer.

So when we have open conversations and we bring multiple stakeholders to the table we ask, what are your assumptions? Let's just get it out on the table. What do you think about having an aboriginal workforce? Would you be open to having a prayer or a drumming session at the beginning of your summer barbecue? If that is the case, then let's talk about that and let's make it happen. It's really about human issues and being able to strip away what we believe to be true.

I think in any work environment that approach can be helpful.

• (1040)

Ms. Mona Hill: I would probably respond with the component of the individual in the program that we provide. When I talk about changing thought patterns, what I'm talking about is changing the—we could use the word—"assumptions" of the young people in terms of their own sense of who they are, their sense of security, their sense of their ability to be responsible for themselves and perhaps for their children, if they have families, their lack of self-assurance. One of the things we provide—and that's on an ongoing, daily basis, not just in a classroom setting—is working with them to help change that thinking process from "I am not capable because I don't have a grade 12", or "Because I only came to the program with a grade 8 or grade 9 education I can't be successful".

I think it was very important that someone mentioned the fact that they may come to us and say I have a grade 12, but when we do skill evaluations, we discover they don't really have a grade 12 education —

The Chair: Ms. Hill...

Ms. Mona Hill: —and we don't need to go there right now because that would take forever.

The Chair: Thank you for that, Ms. Hill. I'm going to have to end this part of your testimony because we have limited time now for Mr. Butt's round of questioning.

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all three organizations for being here today.

I always consider myself a "glass half full" kind of guy, and I'm big on best practices. I like to hear from organizations on the unique best practices they're doing that other organizations can share.

Before I got elected here, I ran an apartment association in Toronto. We did a lot of training for apartment building superintendents, cleaners, and others. It was a very successful program, but the way it became a better program was that we actually learned from what other provinces and also other agencies were doing.

I know we only have a couple of minutes, Mr. Chair, so could each organization just take a minute and give me one example of something really unique they're doing within their organizations that could be shared with other organizations across the country as we deal with this whole issue on aboriginal workplace opportunities and training?

Ms. Laurie Sterritt: Thank you.

One of the approaches we take at AMTA is that everything has to fit into a process, and we have the process mapped out. I'm a bit of a geek, so we have it all completely mapped out on big pieces of paper. So when a new person joins our team, they know what the system is. There are so many human complexities that come with every individual who joins our program. We strip that away and make sure the process is maintained no matter how complex the individual situation gets. We can pull resources from all sorts of different places while still following the process.

That process map covers almost a whole wall-length of a room. We're happy to share it. In fact, we share it quite regularly. We've been helping some programs in Ontario to get started there as well. We're happy to share it.

• (1045)

The Chair: Ms. Bruno, could you please answer next?

Ms. Charlene Bruno: In some of the best practices for us that work in our area here in Alberta, we've worked very closely with the PTI Group in determining both what their employment gaps are and any up-and-coming opportunities that might expand their business. We are in discussions with them on an ongoing basis to make sure that we are well aware of what's going on with their particular industry.

We also adapt our training programs to meet the needs of that industry partner. We have well over 250 employees within all our six nations employed with them currently, which is a large workforce for the PTI Group, and for us as well. They're in a variety of positions,

from housekeeping to security to building their trailers, you name it. I think we have somebody in every position.

That only happens, though, with that discussion with the PTI Group and with them taking that initiative to say, "First nations people belong within our business, in our organization, and we're doing everything we can to work with our first nation communities in our surrounding areas."

The Chair: Mr. Bizzarri, would you like to wrap it up very quickly, please?

Mr. Carlo Bizzarri: First of all, as I said earlier, we are an employer, and when they come to us, they are employees. Their wage is tied to their productivity. It's not a passive wage. We give back accountability to them. They have to be able to make these decisions and not have their hand held all the time. Passive income creates dependency. Active income creates responsibility, and it allows people to dream and to become free, to manage. There is a relationship between action and consequences. It's very simple.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, colleagues, for allowing us to go a little bit over our time.

I want to take the last comment to thank the witnesses for coming in today on the video conference as well as in Ottawa. This has been excellent testimony today and an excellent session. Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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