



the **fACTivist**

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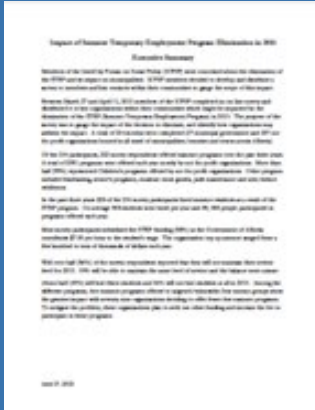
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Additional Resource



Edmonton Social Planning Council & Inter-City Forum on Social Policy. (2013). *Impact of Summer Temporary Employment Program (STEP) elimination in 2013*. Retrieved from <http://www.edmontonsocialplanning.ca/content/view/full/1307/279/>

The Government of Alberta suspended the Summer Temporary Employment Program (STEP) as part of Budget 2013. In response, the Inter-City Forum on Social Policy (ICFSP) administered a survey created with the assistance of the Edmonton Social Planning Council to gauge the impact that the elimination of STEP would have on organizations in municipalities across Alberta. This document provides an executive summary, an analysis of the survey results, and a copy of the questionnaire that was completed by participating organizations.

Foreword: The Cost of Education

By Susan Morrissey, Executive Director, Edmonton Social Planning Council



Education is a fundamental part of any healthy society. Regardless of whether it is early learning, primary schooling, or higher education, the gains in knowledge, skill development, and basic social interaction are things that have the potential to shape our children into good citizens. The recent decision by the Alberta Government to make financial cuts to education funding and the Summer Temporary Employment Program struck a chord with our staff and, in turn, helped to make the decision to focus this issue on The Cost of Education.

What you will see in this edition of the *fACTivist* are articles that explain the impact of cuts to education, but also the great

benefits that arise when a population has the ability to learn. We know for sure that education translates into asset building and can help to move someone out of poverty.

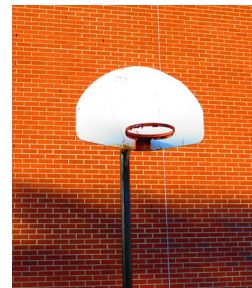
When I was on vacation last fall, I had the opportunity to go to Costa Rica, where healthcare and education are provided to all citizens free of charge. Although I was only there for a very short time, what impressed me most was the positive, vibrant feeling that permeated the local people who I chatted with. Education allows individuals to make good choices in their lives, raise their families, and contribute to the economy, all of which are necessary for a healthy, just and inclusive community.

Out of STEP

By Susan Morrissey, Executive Director
Edmonton Social Planning Council

On March 7th, the Alberta Government announced the elimination of the Summer Temporary Employment Program (STEP). The next day, the Edmonton Social Planning Council issued a media release that called the decision very short-sighted. STEP was a cost effective way for the province to make sure that thousands of Alberta's post-secondary students received meaningful job experience in their field of study. In addition, many non-profit organizations hired students through STEP to work directly with low-income families and children out of school, to do fundraising, to provide senior's programs, to operate museum tours and do park maintenance, and to work at arts and culture exhibitions.

The Inter-City Forum on Social Policy (ICFSP) is an intergovernmental committee which acts as a vehicle for information-sharing, networking, and advocacy for and among Alberta's cities and other major urban areas.



In partnership with the ICFSP, ESPC worked on the development of a survey to gather input on the potential impact of the decision to eliminate STEP.

The survey results data has been analyzed and a report is now available (see sidebar) that shows the impact of this decision not only on post-secondary students wishing to gain work experience, but also on individuals who would normally participate in programs that were created using the Summer Temporary Employment Program.

Teacher Burnout in Alberta

A Look at the Challenges Faced by Elementary School Educators

By Leah Read, Volunteer Writer

An exceptional teacher: most of us have had one at some time in our lives. Someone who cared enough to encourage an interest or talent, who went out of their way to lend support, someone who showed us a new way of thinking. It is these exceptional early educators who play a profound role in our lives, helping to shape who we become, and it is these same educators who are leaving the teaching profession in alarmingly high rates. What is happening to our teachers?

How bad is the problem?

A recent report states that not only do teachers experience higher levels of burnout than other workers, but that 12% - 20% of teachers in Quebec experience symptoms of burnout at least once per week (Fernet, Guay, Senecal, & Austin, 2012). A survey of teachers in Saskatchewan shows that just over half of the sample would pursue a different career if they were presented with a viable option (Martin, Dolmage, & Sharpe, 2012). In Alberta, the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development (CRTED) (2012) found that 40% of new teachers leave the profession within the first five years.

The high attrition rates become more unsettling when we hear that the “best and brightest” are the ones who are leaving more rapidly (CRTED, 2012, p. 13). Ronald Martin gives an explanation for this during an interview with Robert Smol: “Burnout is more common in the young, highly motivated, energetic, hard-working teacher ... The people who burn out are the people who pour everything into it without balance” (2009). It is the exceptional teachers, the ones more likely to go above and beyond for their students, who are feeling the highest levels of stress and burnout.

The high rate of teacher burnout increases the cost of providing education while decreasing its quality. In the USA, the cost

of replacing teachers who burn out has been estimated at \$2 billion (USD) per year (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005). The need to constantly replace teachers who are leaving also creates a non-cohesive environment in schools, lessening their efficiency and ability to promote student achievement (CRTED, 2012).

Why is this happening?

Alberta teachers are given ever increasing levels of responsibility. They are not only accountable for their students’ education, but must also act in a multitude of other capacities. Regarding the similar situation in Saskatchewan, one teacher was quoted:

The worst thing is just being thrown into a class with nearly 40 students which consists of ones with physical or mental disabilities, behaviour issues, social or family problems, and without the skills or motivation to do the work. Then being expected to teach the subject while adjusting it to fit everyone’s needs and learning ability while being their parent, counsellor, social worker, negotiator, and teacher. (Martin et al., 2012, p. 27)

The fact that teachers are required to fill so many roles and uphold “value-based concepts” creates what Ted Stouffer calls an “emotional burden...In addition to the ABCs, teachers are responsible for healthy snacks, appropriate relationships, racial and religious tolerance” (2010, p. 54). This burden of responsibility weighs heavily on teachers who are driven to meet the needs of their students. A recent study of Alberta teachers shows that 98% of teachers find it impossible to complete everything required during the work day and resort to taking work home with them on a regular basis (Duxbury, 2013). The same study reveals that Alberta teachers work, on average, 10 hours more than the other professionals



Additional Resource

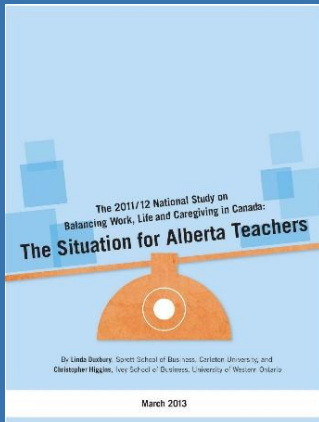


Fisher, M. H. (2011). Factors influencing stress, burnout, and retention of secondary teachers. *Current Issues in Education* 14, 1. Retrieved from <http://cie.asu.edu/ojs/index.php/cieatasu/article/view/658>

This study examines the stress, burnout, satisfaction, and preventive coping skills of nearly 400 secondary teachers to determine variables contributing to these factors. [Taken from report]



Additional Resource



Duxbury, L., & Higgins, C. (2013). The 2011/12 national study on balancing work, life and caregiving in Canada: The situation for Alberta teachers. Retrieved from <http://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Research/COOR-94%20National%20Study%20on%20Balancing%20Work%20-Duxbury.pdf>

The purpose of this study was to identify the issues Alberta teachers face as they attempt to balance their professional and family lives, the impact that work-family imbalance has on teachers and school boards, and to help the ATA identify ways to address this imbalance.

surveyed. The news that proposed funding increases to Alberta school boards have been cancelled means that teachers will be pushed harder and given fewer resources to back their efforts (Sands, 2013). Carol Henderson, President of the Alberta Teachers Association, says of the inadequate funding, “we will have 11,000 new students squeezed into classrooms with \$14.5 million less in funding” (Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2013).

It’s not just the huge workload, though. Teachers are feeling ever more frustrated with their lack of input into the development of school policies. Their interactions with students, parents, and administrators “are often based on policies that they had no part in creating” (Stouffer, 2010, p. 53). In Saskatchewan, teachers describe their biggest stressors as challenges involving parents who are either abusive or fail to uphold reasonable consequences for their children’s behaviour, administrators who initiate drastic changes in responsibilities without the teacher’s input, and students who are disruptive or abusive (Martin et al, 2012). This inability to enforce classroom rules combined with the lack of input in higher level planning and decision making leaves teachers with increasing responsibility and decreasing power.

What can be done?

Teachers must be given more input into decisions involving their teaching assignments in order to feel trusted and “rewarded instead of trodden upon” (Stouffer, 2010, p. 54). This alone is not adequate, however, as teachers require more support from administrators and from their colleagues. Stouffer (2010) suggests that supervision duties be lessened to encourage collegial relationships, foster collaboration, and allow teachers to support each other. When Alberta teachers were asked what the best professional conditions for teaching would be, several themes came up including professional autonomy allowing teachers to find creative and engaging ways of delivering lessons, positive collegial relationships, more comfortable multiuse facilities, and better access to

resources (Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2012).

These suggestions cannot be implemented, however, if school boards continue to struggle under crippling budgetary constraints. Without an increase in provincial funding, we will continue to see high rates of burnout among early childhood educators.

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Budget+funding+squeeze+schools+dismays/8064990/story.html

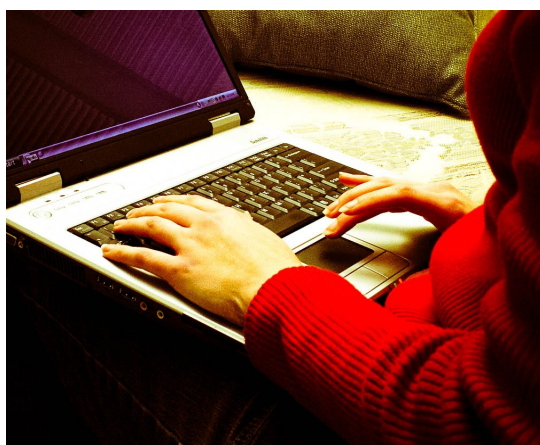
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If you or your organization needs a hand finding information about local social issues or related topics, feel free to contact our Resource Coordinator, Stephen MacDonald, by phone at 780.423.2031 ext. 354 or by email at stephenm@edmontonsocialplanning.ca.

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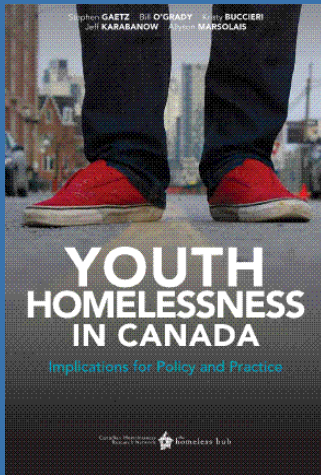
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Education and Poverty: A Call to Action

By Dan Scratch, Volunteer Writer

Additional Resource



Liljedahl, S., Rae, J., Aubry, T., Klodawsky, F. (2013). Resilient outcome: Academic engagement by youth with histories of homelessness. In Gaetz, S., O'Grady, B., Buccieri, K., Karabanow, J., & Marsolais, A. *Youth Homelessness in Canada: Implications for Policy and Practice*. (P. 269-286). Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

Using an ecological perspective, [the authors of this chapter] examined academic resilience among youth who have experienced homelessness. [Taken from book]

Picture yourself as a 17-year-old living in inner-city Edmonton. Due to family instability, you find yourself sleeping on the streets, in a shelter, or maybe in the river valley, if the weather is nice enough. You find it difficult to negotiate street life as you have constant insecurity around food and having a safe place to go. Since you are homeless, you find public places to spend your time, such as the library, parks, and the mall. However, since you don't have many clothes, your appearance can be deemed "unsightly" and you are constantly harassed by security and police officers for loitering. Despite the challenges that you face on a day to day basis, you are a survivor of your environment and believe that getting an education is your key to improving your situation.

Unfortunately, as you start to attend school, you realize how difficult of a challenge this will be. You show up to class every morning on time but, since you do not have a safe place to go to at night, you have only slept a few hours and are extremely tired. On top of this, you have not eaten since the day before. The stress of sleeping in shelters and being alone and hungry has made it nearly impossible for you to concentrate on school. You keep falling asleep in class and this upsets your teacher. You are told that you are unmotivated to complete your school work and are becoming a "challenge" in the classroom. You are trying to improve your life and make a positive change, but with all your effort, it just seems that more and more barriers are being placed in your way. How can you break this cycle?

A picture like this illustrates reality for students who live in poverty, and how they negotiate the education system. Not all students who are in poverty live on the streets, but it is important to highlight the social conditions listed above to understand how they can impact a student's ability to learn. In Alberta, 73,000 children are living in poverty, with 34,000 of that number under the age of six (Briggs & Lee, 2012, p. 8). When you include the entire population,

and depending on the statistical indicator used, the number of Albertans living in poverty is between 300,000-388,145 (Statistics Canada as cited in Briggs & Lee, 2012, p. 8). With these staggering numbers, it is often the popular sentiment to look at education as the great equalizer to lift people out of poverty. We must realize that, while we place much emphasis on the ability of education to reduce and eliminate poverty, we may overlook the effects that poverty has on a student's ability to receive an education.

According to a Statistics Canada study about educational performance differences between poor and affluent families, children from disadvantaged families were less ready to learn than those from affluent ones (as Cited in Canadian Teachers Federation, 2009, p. 2). Students from disadvantaged backgrounds who suffer poor living conditions, unstable family life, street violence, and other social insecurities are less prepared to excel when they come to school. On top of this, many students living in poverty often learn different behavioural norms than that of the middle or upper class. This can leave students from poverty feeling excluded from the more privileged groups, which can produce a feeling of alienation from educational institutions as they can be seen as places that reproduce the social norms of the dominant groups in society (Sharma, 2012, p. 80).

When the conditions of poverty impede a student's ability to learn, it can hamper their chances of completing high school. Without a high school education and the opportunity to attend post-secondary education, students will be at an even higher risk of remaining in poverty (Kolkman, Ahorro, & Moore-Kilgannon, 2012, p. 11). We must realize that many students in poverty do not see the value in attaining high school credits when they have more pressing issues to worry about, such as food and shelter. This creates a daunting challenge for teachers to demonstrate to students that the ticket to their long-term sustainable prosperity is

through educational attainment.

It is imperative that teachers who work with disadvantaged students, and all students for that matter, build a sense of solidarity and equality with their students to create a new and meaningful experience at school. As Freire states (1970) "No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption" (p.54). Teachers can accomplish this by engaging with democratic teaching techniques within the classroom, and by embracing their communities. George Wood's study on democratic education is a fine example of this, demonstrating what happens when teachers enable students to be a part of the decision-making process and provide input on issues of assessment, learning strategies, and classroom rules (Wood, 1990, p. 36). If we empower students who face societal oppression with a strong voice inside the classroom, allowing them to explore their barriers and feel in control of their learning, we can create a meaningful connection for those students to understand the viability of an education to improve their lives and community.

The struggle to end poverty must take place both inside and outside the classroom. It is crucial that the general public, and those in positions of power, understand the impact that poverty has on the educational attainment of many students. Educators and citizens must reframe how poverty is perceived within the dominant culture of Alberta. If we understand it as a moral injustice and a terrible outcome of our socio-economic system, that should compel us to act. For teachers, this means engaging with their work in a very political way to fight for justice on behalf of their students. Educational theorist Henry Giroux (1991) argues that this work is "morally courageous, as it does not require educators to step back from society in the manner of the 'objective' teacher, but to distance themselves instead from those power relations that subjugate, oppress, and diminish other human beings" (p. 53).

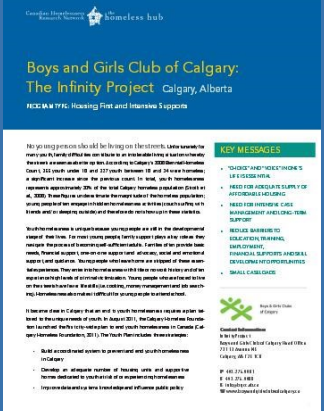
With this spirit, teachers can engage with community members to ensure that we no longer turn a blind eye to the social abandonment and political neglect that allows the suffering of those in poverty to take place. If this is accomplished, educators and citizens can create the just and equitable world that will eliminate barriers to student success in the classroom.

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Additional Resource

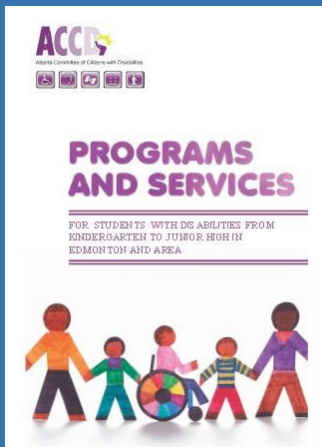


Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press. (2013). Boys and Girls Club of Calgary: The Infinity Project. Retrieved from <http://www.homelesshub.ca/ResourceFiles/BGCC.pdf>

This report is a case study of Boys and Girls Club of Calgary's *Infinity Project*. This initiative "provides youth (aged 16 to 24) with a permanent home in the community of their choice and the supports they need to maintain it and become self-sufficient." [Taken from report]



Additional Resource



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The purpose of the Programs and Services for Students with Disabilities from Kindergarten to Junior High in Edmonton and Area project was to educate school boards and decision makers about gaps in services and programs that exist for students with disabilities in Edmonton and area. [Taken from report]

Does the 2013 Budget Support Alberta's Vision of Inclusive Education?

By Nicole Sobus, Volunteer Writer

The Current State of Education in Alberta

Over the last couple of months, the focus on Alberta Education has been squarely on the changes made by the 2013 Alberta Budget. What many people are not aware of are the major changes that have been occurring within the education system since 2008. Over these last 5 years, Alberta Education has been on track to completely revamp its system (Alberta Education, 2013a). What began as an endeavor to overhaul inclusive education for students with special needs grew into a system wide change called "Action on Inclusion" (Alberta Education, 2013a). Now, all students, not just those with special needs, will be part of an inclusive school system.

As part of the "Action on Inclusion" initiative, a "curriculum redesign" has been developed and is set to be approved next year and implemented in the 2014/2015 school year. The redesign will include changing from print to digital curriculum, along with major shifts in the development, delivery, and evaluation of student learning (Alberta Education, 2013d).

Locally, Edmonton Public School District No. 7 has made many improvements in inclusive education for persons with special needs, including the addition of "The Pyramid of Intervention" (Edmonton Public Schools, 2013, May, p. 12). The foundation of this pyramid consists of "universal" strategies, such as school-wide screening practices to identify students who need more support, followed by "targeted" strategies, including instructional adaptation and accommodations (p. 12). At the top of the pyramid are "specialized" strategies such as formal assessment and intervention by Inclusive Learning Professionals (p.12).

In addition to these accomplishments, Alberta Education has also maintained the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement, or AISI, which has been running since 1999. AISI, a project-based research approach, has contributed to a variety of important



Photo by Laubenstein Ron, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

changes currently being implemented in the education system (Alberta Education, 2013b). For instance, one research project conducted through the AISI initiative focused on "Differentiated Learning," which is the concept that students possess different talents and learning styles, and that educational instruction needs to be tailored to individual students so these differences can be nurtured (McQuarrie, McRae & Stack-Cutler, 2008). While there are still many things that Alberta Education is working on improving, it would appear that education in Alberta is doing relatively well, and heading in the right direction. That is until we consider the 2013 education budget.

Education for Today...and Tomorrow?

Unfortunately, the money that was well used by Alberta Education over the past few years has been significantly reduced due to an unexpected drop in oil revenues. In an attempt to maintain the quality of its current level of programming, Alberta Education has responded the only way that it can, by making significant compromises. The Minister of Education, Jeff Johnson, notes, "many school boards will see fewer operating dollars this year" (Government of Alberta, 2013, March). Fewer operating dollars leads to job cuts for teachers and administration and, therefore, teachers are being asked to do more with less. It is great that they are not cutting core funding, but they are not raising it either. The \$6.1 billion budget for K-12 education will just cover

base operating costs and increased enrollment (Government of Alberta, 2013, March).

Additionally, the research and project development program, AISI, has been suspended until further notice. Though Alberta Education has promised to replace it with a new program that is more in line with their vision, they have not provided a timeline (Alberta Education, 2013c). As the AISI program has been instrumental in the development of Alberta Education's inclusive vision, it is unpleasant to imagine how this elimination will impact the "Action on Inclusion" initiative and, ultimately, the students.

Even the 2% funding increase given to inclusive education does not deliver solace for those in the Edmonton Public School system who are paying close attention. After reviewing the minutes from Board Meeting #19 of Edmonton Public School District No.07 (2013, April), Dovercourt School Council Member Susan Ketteringham points out that "when you read the fine print in Appendix II, a 2% increase to inclusive education still translates to less money per student in both the "mid" and "small" sample schools and not much of an increase for the "large" sample schools." Essentially, the funds that are intended to support our most vulnerable students will be of little benefit. Regrettably, a 2% increase is simply not enough.

An Inclusive Solution?

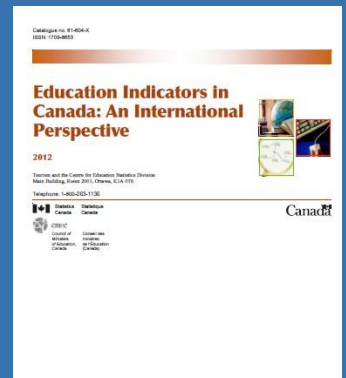
One possible initiative that the District No.07 School Board is considering is a Special School Tax Levy (Government of Alberta, 2013, April). A short term solution, the School Tax Levy could allow schools to scrape by this year and next, if the plebiscite on this issue passes. In this turbulent time, it is comforting to hear Alberta Education point out that they are "investing every dollar where it will be most effective for student success" (Alberta Education, 2013c). The unfortunate thing is that there is no way of knowing if that will be enough to keep Alberta Education on track to realizing its vision of an inclusive education system.

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Additional Resource



Canadian Education Statistics Council. (2012) Education indicators in Canada: An international perspective. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-604-x/81-604-x2012001-eng.htm>

Education Indicators in Canada: An International Perspective was developed to expand upon Canada's participation in IES [Indicators of Educational Systems] and to broaden the Canadian statistical picture by providing comparable statistics for Canada's provincial/territorial systems of education. [Taken from report]



Join us for our next Lunch and Learn

“Exploring the Early Cultural and Economic Adaptation Process of Newcomers in Michener Park, Edmonton, Alberta “

DATE: September 11, 2013



The ESPC's Social Justice Intern, HM Ashraf Ali, will discuss the findings and potential policy outcomes from his research project on understanding the social, cultural and economic constraints faced by immigrants in the Michener Park area in Edmonton.

Lunch and Learns are always held at 12pm in the Audio-Visual Room of Stanley Milner Library in Edmonton.

Pushed to the Wall

Provincial Post-Secondary Education Investment Across Canada

By Stephen MacDonald, Resource Coordinator, Edmonton Social Planning Council



Over the last three months, Alison Redford's government has become unpopular amongst Albertans. A Leger Marketing poll

commissioned by the Calgary Herald found that 50% of Albertans disapproved of the premier's performance during her first year after being elected. A major source of Albertans' frustration with the premier is unfulfilled campaign promises, which included a balanced budget and additional investments in healthcare and education. The declining value of Alberta bitumen in global markets over the past year scuttled those plans. This significant reduction in oil revenues created a \$6 billion reduction in government revenue, forcing the Government of Alberta to implement a series of deep budget cuts to improve the province's fiscal situation (White, 2013). In the 2013 budget, post-secondary education institutions in Alberta were dealt a major blow, receiving \$100 million (or 3.6%) less than what the province gave to them last year (Bradshaw, 2013).

Alberta is not alone in its cuts to funding for post-secondary education. It appears that other provincial governments are also facing deficits and, as a result, have reduced their spending on post-secondary education. This puts higher learning institutions in a difficult position as they attempt to deliver quality education services with less revenue at their disposal. Below is a breakdown of financial support that provincial governments in Canada allocated to their universities and colleges this fiscal year.

Newfoundland and Labrador: Tuition Freeze Maintained

A \$563.8 million deficit has forced the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to make significant cuts to public spending

in their latest budget. This included the elimination of 1,200 positions in the province's public sector (Bailey, 2013). Despite this, the provincial government demonstrated their commitment to post-secondary education, maintaining the province's long-standing freeze on tuition at Memorial University of Newfoundland and the College of the North Atlantic (CNA). The budget also contained financial support for students in the form of "\$19 million for the continuation of up-front needs-based grants and interest-free student loans and \$3 million for continued debt-reduction grants" (Newfoundland and Labrador, 2013). However, the province also cut CNA's funding by \$15 million, resulting in the elimination of over 100 positions and their high-school equivalency program, Adult Basic Education, which had 872 students as of March 2013 (CBC News, 2013a).

Nova Scotia: Another Reduction in Post-Secondary Education Spending

The Government of Nova Scotia continues to find cost savings as it attempts to reduce its deficit, which grew by \$66 million to \$277 million at the end of 2012-13 (Taber, 2013). In its latest budget, the provincial government implemented a \$10 million cut to operating grants for post-secondary education institutions, which is a 3% reduction in spending from last year (Willick, 2013). This is the third consecutive year of cuts to post-secondary institution operating grants, which were previously agreed upon by the province and post-secondary education administrators in the province (CAUT, 2013a).

This year, the government will boost financial assistance to Nova Scotia university students by \$4.6 million, increasing the total amount of aid to \$45 million (CAUT, 2013a). Also, the government estimated that it will contribute \$6 million to the province's Graduate Retention Rebate, a tax credit program for Nova Scotia-born students who choose to live in the province after graduating (Willick, 2013). Canadian

Federation of Students representative Nicholas Stark argues that the increase in student assistance does not outweigh the 3% increase in tuition that will result from the government's cuts to post-secondary education in the province (CAUT, 2013a).

Prince Edward Island: Funding Freeze or Indirect Funding Reduction?

The 2013-14 Government of PEI budget revealed that the province is running a \$58.9 million deficit. The province failed to reduce their deficit in 2012-13, which was supposed to be the first year of their three-year deficit reduction plan, and so the provincial government has decided to re-start its three-year plan to balance their budget. As a result, there were few increases in funding for provincial government departments and programs (Yarr, 2013). In the 2013-14 budget, the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) was given the same amount of funding it received last year (CAUT, 2013b). However, the government's new 14% harmonized sales tax will reduce the size of UPEI's budget, increasing their electricity and heating bills. UPEI estimates that the province's new HST could drain \$400,000 out of their operating budget every year (CBC, 2013b). In addition to the fact that the university is required to operate with a balanced budget, university departments asked for an additional \$9 million this year. As a result, UPEI was forced to eliminate 35 positions and raise its tuition by "\$21 per course or \$210 per course load" (Ross, 2013). The new HST will also impact Holland College, costing them \$375,000 a year (CBC, 2013b). This year, tuition will increase by 4% at UPEI (CBC, 2013c) and an average of 2% at Holland College (Holland College, 2013).

New Brunswick: Real or Pretend Tuition Cap?

Funding from the Government of New Brunswick to universities and colleges will remain the same as last year (Lett, 2013). Premier Alward's government has also promised New Brunswick post-secondary students that a tuition increase in the province this year will not exceed \$150. However, St. Thomas University in Fredericton have said that they will increase

tuition by \$434 next year because of the province's decision to freeze their operating grant and the institution's need for additional revenue to deliver quality education. The province has not said if it will penalize St. Thomas University if they increase their students' tuition (CBC, 2013d). New Brunswick is the second-most expensive province in the country in which to attend university (CAUT, 2013c).

Quebec: Universities Get Squeezed by Frozen Tuition Fees While Investment in Post-Secondary Institutions Is Reduced

In November, the Government of Quebec projected that the provincial government's deficit would reach \$1.6 billion by March 2013 (Seguin, 2013). As they attempt to eliminate their deficit by 2014, the Quebec government has reduced funding to the province's universities by \$124 million, while also cancelling a plan to increase tuition fees this year. As a result, universities have been forced to make difficult decisions to ensure that they balance their books. On April 2, McGill University implemented a hiring freeze and will attempt to reduce the number of staff lay-offs by implementing wage freezes and relying on attrition (Wilton, 2013).

In May, the provincial government announced that they would provide an additional \$160 per year in student aid for 120,000 Quebec university students, helping them cover their living expenses. The revenue will come from a reduction to income tax credits on paid tuition (Dougherty and Seidman, 2013).

Ontario: Modest Increase in Post-Secondary Funding

In the 2013-14 provincial budget, the Liberal government carried through on their promise to increase the operating budgets of Ontario's universities and colleges by a modest 1.9%, helping them cover the cost of growing enrollment. The province also agreed to keep tuition increases capped at 3% over the next four years, which does not meet the previous demands of students who were hoping for a freeze on tuition, or universities that were hoping the province would continue to increase tuition by 5%



Additional Resource



Canadian Federation of Students. (2012). Student debt in Canada: Education shouldn't be debt sentence. Retrieved from <http://www.cfs-fcee.ca/html/english/research/factsheets/Factsheet-2012-Student%20debt-En-8x11-Bleed.pdf>

This fact sheet looks at the state of student loans in Canada and the impact they have on the well-being of Canadian post-secondary education students.



Additional Resource



Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada. (2013). Tuition fees by university. Retrieved from <http://www.aucc.ca/canadian-universities/facts-and-stats/tuition-fees-by-university/>

This page contains the cost of tuition for Canadian and International students enrolled in arts and humanities programs at universities across the country.

(Bradshaw, 2013). The budget also set aside “\$20 million to universities and colleges for entrepreneurial programs [that they offer], such as Ryerson’s Digital Media Zone and the University of Toronto’s Impact Centre” (Flavelle, 2013). The budget also announced that over the next three years, the Government of Ontario will invest \$800 million in infrastructure at Ontario's post-secondary institutions (Ontario, 2013).

Manitoba: Promised Five Percent Increase In Funding Reduced

The Government of Manitoba gave universities a 2.5% increase in funding instead of the 5% increase promised as part of the province’s three-year plan to increase post-secondary education funding by 5% per year (Beaudette, 2013). Before the budget was released, the University of Winnipeg was already short \$1 million for this fiscal year. Now the university has to look for ways to address this unanticipated drop in funding (CAUT, 2013d). The province's decision not to follow through on its funding promise for Manitoba's universities is likely a response to the province's growing deficit, which grew by \$107 million to \$576 million last year (Lett, 2013).

Saskatchewan: Significant Increase in Post-Secondary Education Funding

The Government of Saskatchewan’s budget for 2013-14 provided the Ministry of Advanced Education with \$787.7 million, which is an increase of 8.8% from the previous year. The budget also contained \$117.4 million in direct supports for students, which includes scholarships, student aid, and refundable and non-refundable tax credits for the province’s Graduate Retention Program, a program that returns a maximum of “\$20,000 in tuition costs” to Saskatchewan students who choose to stay in the province after graduating (Saskatchewan, 2013). The budget also provides “a \$14.3 million increase in base operating funds with a 3.1% increase for technical institutes and an average 2.1% increase for universities, federated and affiliated colleges, and regional colleges” (Saskatchewan, 2013). However, some were disappointed with the

size of operating grants for universities in the province. University of Regina Faculty Association president Gary Tompkins believes that the operating grant to his university falls short of what the institution needs (CAUT, 2013d).

British Columbia: Post-Secondary Education Funding Slashed by \$46 Million Over Next Three Years

The Government of British Columbia's latest budget will reduce spending to post-secondary institutions in the province by \$46 million over the next three years. Universities in the province have been asking for additional student spaces at their institutions so they can train British Columbians and address the severe skills shortage in the province (Kines, 2013). The province’s budget does contain \$46 million in routine capital funding, which includes funding for “maintaining and upgrading campus facilities” (British Columbia, 2013). Robert Clift, executive director of the Confederation of University Faculty Associations of B.C., argues that the university infrastructure funding announced in the budget is a one-time investment that will not create the new student spaces that BC’s post-secondary institutions need to address the province’s skill shortage. He feels that the ongoing cuts to post-secondary education combined with increased costs will have a negative impact on the province’s students and the economy (Kines, 2013).

In their Budget 2013 analysis report, the Canadian Federation of Students-British Columbia said that the B.C. provincial budget will not stop tuition from rising in the province, driving students even further into debt. The report mentions that the cost of a post-secondary education has increased every year for the past 10 consecutive years (Canadian Federation of Students-British Columbia, 2013).

Conclusion

There is no doubt that provincial governments have to keep their finances in order. However, post-secondary education institutions in this country contribute to innovation that drives our economy and play a crucial role in training Canadians for

the workforce. If Canada's universities and colleges are not properly funded, they will be expected to deliver the same services with less, while also struggling to budget and plan ahead for the future. More deep cuts to post-secondary education in this country will also lead to increased university tuition fees, making a post-secondary education less affordable for Canadians and increasing their debt levels.

More discussion is needed in this country about ensuring that we provide adequate funding to our post-secondary education institutions. If we continue to leave our universities and colleges without the funding they need, our country as a whole will suffer over the long term.

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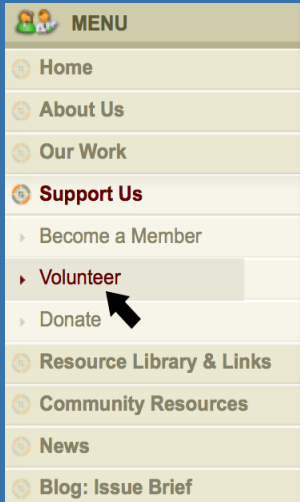
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- help in the community
- serve on the board
- plan events / fundraise

For more information, visit edmontonsocialplanning.ca and fill out our volunteer application form (under the **Support Us** menu).



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Students Stand Up

By Darlene Paranaque, Volunteer Writer

Education cut backs are a global issue. Students from countries around the globe, including Canada, the USA, the UK, Australia and more, are reacting through social media and protests (International Student Movement, 2012). On March 7, 2013, Alberta's Progressive Conservative government released the 2013 provincial budget, which included a \$147 million funding cut to post-secondary institution base operating grants compared to the 2012-13 budget (Alberta Government, 2013). Instead of the 2% increase that was promised by Premier Redford and anticipated by educational institutions, funding has been cut by over 7% in some cases (Wingrove & Bradshaw, 2013). Many share frustration about Premier Redford's broken promises, with at least one observer commenting that, "Alison Redford will say one thing during an election campaign then do another once elected" (Clark, 2013).

These funding cuts pose many concerns, ranging from effects on educational quality and class sizes, threatened academic independence, job cuts (including teaching assistants and front line services), salary cuts, and loss of diversity in programming (Pratt, 2013) (Wingrove & Bradshaw, 2013).

Students, professors and staff took immediate action with protests throughout March and April 2013. These protests have had large support. In Calgary, over 700 students marched to Redford's office on April 10, 2013, asking for the government to reinstate the \$147 million that were cut (Franklin, 2013). As Calgary protestors marched, they carried colourful signs with slogans saying "We are Alberta's Future" and "Advanced Education is not an Enterprise," while chanting, "No ifs, no buts, no education cuts." Meanwhile in Edmonton, hundreds of protestors from the University of Alberta, Grant MacEwan University, Athabasca University, and students who bussed 430 kilometers from the University of Lethbridge, marched from the Alberta Legislature, along main streets of Edmonton's south side, and across the

river valley, to show their anger and dissatisfaction with this recently released budget (MacDonald, 2013).

Organizations including the "Student Empowerment Committee" and the "Coalition for Action on Post Secondary Education" (CAPSE) were immediately formed as action and advocacy groups against the cuts. The "Student Empowerment Committee" is a grassroots movement that began at Mount Royal University (Franklin, 2013). It is a "response to the uncertainties and difficulties posed to Alberta's students by the 2013 budget cuts to post-secondary education; this group has been formed to facilitate collaboration and coordination of Alberta's students in response to this issue" (The Student Empowerment Committee, 2013). CAPSE was also a movement created in response to the post-secondary education cuts. The coalition "believes that post-secondary education is a public good that requires strong, stable government investment. [They] maintain that cutting funding to postsecondary education not only undermines the strength and integrity of our universities, colleges, technical institutes, and certificate-granting institutions, but also threatens the future of the entire province" (CAPSE, 2013). Both groups organized protests throughout March and April, while keeping students informed and encouraging involvement in the collective action against these "devastating" cuts (CAPSE, 2013) (The Student Empowerment Committee, 2013).

On March 28, 2013 about 200 students attended a lunchtime Town Hall meeting at the University of Alberta, in which the Student's Union presented on the provincial budget, post secondary participation throughout Alberta, student debt, and the state of Alberta's post-secondary education system as a result of the cuts. Attendees were encouraged to share their concerns with the crowd. Among the concerns expressed were administrative costs and mandatory retirement for professors.



Additional Resource



Stolle, D., Harell, A., Pedersen, E. F., & Dufour, P. (2013). Maple spring up close: The role of self-interest and socio-economic resources for youth protest. Retrieved from <http://www.cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2013/Stolle.pdf>

This research report focuses on the differences between Quebec university and CEGEP students who either supported or were against against the proposed tuition increase that led to last year's student strike in the province. This project is one of the first to examine the Maple Spring protests.



Additional Resource

MOBILIZATIONS, PROTESTS & ENGAGEMENTS

*Canadian Perspectives
on Social Movements*

edited by
MARIE HAMMOND-CALLAGHAN
& MATTHEW HAYDAY



Hammond-Callaghan, M. & Hayday, M. (2008). *Mobilizations, protests and engagements: Canadian perspectives on social movements*. Black Point, NS: Fernwood Publishing.

This book focuses on various questions and factors facing social movements in Canada.

(Yakulic, 2013). MLAs from all political parties attended except for the Wildrose Party (Kusmu, 2013).

Mayor Mandel also spoke against the budget cuts, stating that Premier Redford is "showing poor leadership and threatening the well-being of his City which has several post secondary institutions, including the University of Alberta" (Wingrove & Bradshaw, 2013).

The University of Alberta will begin addressing these cuts in two phases, the first being quick cuts to promote administrative efficiencies, and the second being strategic and long-term cuts. The second phase will include large stakeholder involvement, and there will be much political pressure to include students in the governance process as well (Kusmu, 2013). The president of the University of Alberta, Indira Samarasekera, advised students and faculty that the cuts are a "very serious threat to our quality" (The Canadian Press, 2013). Staff reductions have increased from 1.5% to 3%; senior administrators are taking five-day voluntary leaves, which is equivalent to about a 2% cut in wage; and Advanced Education Minister Thomas Lukaszuk sent a letter to all post-secondary boards requesting three years' worth of salary freezes (The Canadian Press, 2013).

Following this large outcry, Redford announced that the Province will support a one-year tuition freeze for the upcoming academic year, a savings of roughly \$16 million for academic institutions (Dunn, 2013). Although students are happy to see the freeze, Petros Kusmu, Vice President (External) and incoming Students' Union President, stated that they will likely be getting less education for the same price. He noted that students remain "cautiously optimistic" as there are many loopholes providing the ability to increase fees in the future (Kusmu, 2013). Lethbridge College is also happy to hear students will not be struggling this year; however, they realise that the future is still uncertain. They have large concerns that there will be a "compounded effect" in later years (Dunn, 2013).

Evidently, government funding is an important resource for colleges and universities to better serve the student body and to retain a competitive advantage in providing leading and quality programs that "produce" our leaders of tomorrow. Large funding cut decisions, such as the recent one made after minimal consultation with institutions, create consequences that not only affect our students, but those who work for the institutions – those who have themselves and their families to support. This funding cut punishes struggling students who have a desire to learn and who we, as a society, rely on for a secure future. Support for education funding protests is important to help the government realise the larger impacts that their decisions have on our society, and our future.

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The Price of Getting Ahead The Case of Growing Costs and Debt for Canadian Students

By Manuel Francisco Escoto, Volunteer Writer

In July 2012, the Bank of Montreal conducted a survey of 1,018 university students to look at the burden of student loans and debt for the average Canadian student. The poll resulted with the following information: 58% expected to graduate with close to \$20,000 in debt, while another 21% expected to graduate with close to \$40,000 in debt. Significantly, more students (27%) are worried about paying for school than they are about finding a job after graduation (20%) or attaining good grades (20%) (CBC News, 2012).

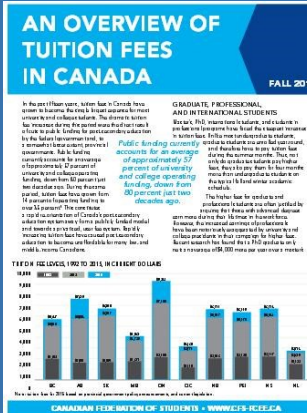
The reality is that in the last twenty years, an enormous shift has occurred in the way post-secondary education costs are divided between public and private money. This transfer has witnessed government cutbacks that have made tuition expenditures rise for academic institutions and, thus, a larger financial obligation has

been placed on students. Correspondingly, debt obligations have skyrocketed.

For example, between 1989 and 2009, average tuition fees as a percentage of total revenues for universities and colleges more than doubled, rising from 10% to 21%, while funding from government fell from 72% to 55% (Luong, 2010). Average tuition fees increased four-fold between 1990 and 2010, rising from \$1,271 to \$5,139. Not surprisingly, student debt has dramatically increased during this time span. The Canadian Federation of students reports that student loans disbursement are increasing by approximately \$350 million a year and, as of September 2010, approximately \$15 billion was owed to the Government of Canada (Canadian Federation of Students, 2012). Equally as taxing is the fact that this figure does not include the provincial student debt, student



Additional Resource



Canadian Federation of Students. (2012). An overview of tuition fees in Canada. Retrieved from <http://www.cfs-fcee.ca/html/english/research/factsheets/201211-Factsheet-Funding-en.pdf>

This document explores the history of federal funding for post-secondary institutions in Canada.



Additional Resource



Hugh Mackenzie. (2013). *Learning and Earning: The impact of taxation in the higher education debates*. Retrieved from <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/learning-and-earning>

This study finds that public funding for postsecondary education is repaid many times over by graduates in the form of higher personal income taxes paid on the income they earn. In addition, it demonstrates that the claim that subsidized tuition is an unfair, regressive income transfer from lower-income families to middle- and upper-income families is simply not true. [Taken from publisher's website]

lines of credit, or credit cards which also burden students.

As the cost of education increases, there is a growing realization that, for some, student loans may be the best way to fund education. As a result, potential students, students, and graduates are more likely to experience a number of outcomes.

The first is debt aversion. Callender (2004) conducted research into debt aversion in regard to higher education and concluded that prospective students look at the costs and benefits of going to school, and that debt aversion is a strong indicator of individuals both not attaining a post-secondary education and dropping out once enrolled. A study conducted by McElroy (2005), titled "Student Aid and University Persistence: Does Debt Matter?" concluded that as student debt increased from less than \$1000 to \$10,000 per year, program completion rates for those with only loans (and no grants) plummeted from 59% to 8%.

Also exacerbating the debt crisis is that, in accordance with Canadian law, each province has autonomy over its education system. As a result, a momentous factor in increased costs has to do with provincial deregulation wherein each university or college in a certain province decides what they can charge for more costly programs. Using Ontario as an example, between the years 1995-2002, tuition fees increased by 132% for the faculty of medicine, 168% for students in dentistry, and 61% for students in law (Frenette, 2008).

Second, increased debt may affect a student's health. Many students work part- or full-time to reduce their borrowing and, as a result, academic commitments are more likely to become more difficult to fulfill. Research from the United Kingdom on student debt and mental health found that students with a high degree of financial worry showed greater levels of tension, anxiety, and difficulty sleeping (Cooke, Barkham, Audin, Bradley & Davy, 2004).

Third, because student loan repayment begins a mere six months after graduation, graduates are pressured to make employment choices based on need.

According to the Canadian Federation of Students (2012), financial obligation "reduces the ability of new graduates to: start a family; work in public service careers; invest in other assets; build career-related volunteer experience; or take lower paying work in their field to get a "foot in the door".

Finally, there is a small population that has not been able to repay their loans. Since 1998, graduates have been subject to a law prohibiting bankruptcy on student loans for many years after graduation. Because of this law, when graduates default on their payments, they have been penalized and are faced with the same type of penalty as those convicted of fraud. Verma (2013) argues that because most students have little or no experience with debt, many 18- to 25-year-olds make significant fiscal life choices that burden them with poor credit histories even before they start off their careers.

The rising cost of post-secondary education is a public issue and one that must be immediately addressed by those working in the public sector. Access to higher education is practically a necessity—not only for the well-being of an individual, but for the broader good of one's community. Those who have post-secondary educations obtain considerable economic benefits through lower levels of unemployment and higher earnings over the course of their lives. Estimates indicate that graduates with an undergraduate university degree earn annual salaries approximately 55% more than those with only high school educations (Alberta Advanced Education, 2005). According to the Alberta Ministry of Education, university graduates experience:

... an increase in their quality of life, evident through such indicators as better health outcomes, life expectancy, and job satisfaction. Individuals with higher educational levels also have a greater appreciation for the importance of advanced education and have a greater likelihood of engaging in further studies, career-related training, and personal interest

learning. (Alberta Advanced Education, 2005)

Personal growth in individuals also leads to positive developments in the community, evidenced by things such as “a healthier population, reduced crime rates, and less reliance on publicly funded income supports” (Alberta Advanced Education, 2005). Studies have also shown that an educated population demonstrates “higher levels of civic engagement and volunteerism that builds critical social capital and improves social cohesion. Higher educational attainment also enhances our capacity for innovation, productivity, and transition [sic] to a knowledge-based economy” (Alberta Advanced Education, 2005).

On a national level, access to higher education is also crucial for Canada’s continued competitiveness in the global economy. A large part of this is having an educated population to ensure that the Canadian workforce has the skills, flexibility, and innovation needed to compete in the global market.

Barriers for higher education must be removed, and one of those barriers is cost. Research into advanced education has shown that parental education and income are the most crucial factors in determining whether children will seek higher learning. Thus, parents who were exposed to higher education and benefited from university are more likely to advance their understanding of the benefits and opportunities to their children. On the other hand, individuals who come from a disadvantaged socioeconomic upbringing and who have not been familiarized with a culture that values advanced education are less likely to seek post-secondary education for themselves. Indeed, it is a cyclical pattern, and one that must be broken. Knowing this, a fundamental question must be asked: If more Canadians decided to drop out or not attend university due to costs, how will this affect the next generation of Canadians?

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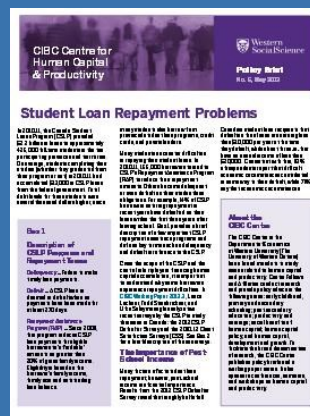
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Additional Resource



CIBC Centre for Human Capital and Productivity.

(2013). Student loan repayment problems. Retrieved online from <http://economics.uwo.ca/centres/cibc/policybriefs/policybrief6.pdf>

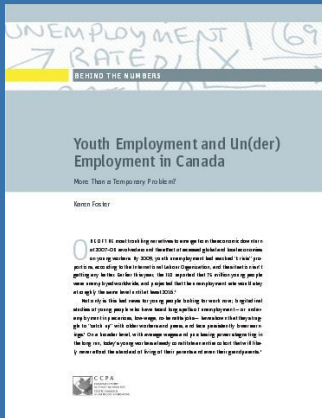
This brief discusses the CIBC Centre for Human Capital and Productivity's recently published research on Canadians who are defaulting on their student loans.



Youth Underemployment

By Natty Klimo, Volunteer Writer

Additional Resource



Foster, K. (2013). Youth employment and un(der) employment in Canada—more than a temporary problem?. Retrieved from <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/youth-employment-and-under-employment-canada>

This report looks at trends in youth employment and finds that one of the most troubling narratives to emerge from the economic downturn of 2007–08 revolved around the effect of recessed global and local economies on young workers. [Taken from publisher's website]

Economic and social shifts that have occurred over-time have greatly impacted youth employment opportunities in the labour market. Youth employment opportunities in countries coined as post-industrial diminished during 1970 to 1980, as manufacturing industries' well-paying jobs gave way to less well-paid employment in the service industry (Cote & Allahar, 2006). Youth and young adults were left in a disadvantaged position, and up until this day it is not uncommon for them to have low paying part-time or contract jobs with no room for advancement (Cote & Allahar, 2006). As a result, more young people pursued a university education in the hopes that post-secondary credentials would increase their future job prospects (Cote & Allahar, 2006).

In the past individuals could progress towards a good career without having educational credentials, and in many cases the skills required for these jobs remained unchanged despite the emergence of credentials (Cote & Allahar, 2006). However, in the present day labour market if individuals do not possess the credentials achieved through higher education, their employment prospects become limited (Cote & Allahar, 2006). This phenomenon has given way to the credentialism paradox, which refers to highly educated individuals who do not use the skills they acquired through their education in their jobs, but would have their employability threatened without these credentials (Cote & Allahar, 2006).

As more universities and colleges were built in the 1960s university enrollment increased, and has led to many graduates being exposed to a labour market that does not require the skills that they have acquired through formal education (Cote & Allahar, 2006). Young Canadians are encouraged to pursue higher education because of the economic benefits, but this may have the opposite effect by affecting their well-being (Cote & Allahar, 2006). As the number of young adults entering the work force with higher credentials

increases, more competition will exist among them for low paying jobs, placing many who do not possess a higher education at a disadvantage, and potentially discouraging high school students who feel that they could not achieve equivalent levels of education from continuing with their education (Cote & Allahar, 2006).

Various reasons as to how underemployment comes to be have been put forth. It is believed that underemployment emerges due to a lack of experience by those who are over-qualified, thus causing them to take jobs that do not match their skills in order to gain the experience they need to advance to higher level positions (Crompton, 2002). Young adults are also trying to find their place in the labour market, and this may involve taking on employment with various employers, and potentially taking jobs that are different than they expected, but over time they become more adept at finding a job that makes them feel less over-qualified (Crompton, 2002). In addition, young graduates may focus on achieving goals important to them at that point in time, which may include challenge, opportunities for growth, and responsibility (Crompton, 2002). However, these expectations may change later in life, when other issues relating to quality of life become more important, potentially changing their opinions about their employment (Crompton, 2002).

Many theories have been developed in an attempt to explain why underemployment arises. Human Capital theory states that underemployment is a temporary state that results from an imbalance between an organization's technological resources and the skills of its personnel (Quintini, 2011). Employees are paid based on their level of productivity, which is determined by their education and previous job training (Quintini, 2011). Matching theory suggest that potential employees search for job opportunities and employers look for the best suited workers, but discrepancies may exist between the skills possessed by the

employee and the skills required for the job, leading to temporary employment until a better suited job is found (Kucel, 2011). Job Mobility theory argues that individuals are underemployed because they lack awareness of their productivity, but gain experience that eventually leads to better positions (Kucel, 2011).

The Job Competition theory states that qualifications serve to determine organizational costs, and that more qualified candidates are favoured over those that are less qualified because they require less training (Quintini, 2011). Therefore, it is important for individuals to continue acquiring higher education in order to be considered as potential job candidates in the labour market, although it does not guarantee a job that will utilize all of their skills (Quintini, 2011). The Assignment Theory incorporates elements from Human Capital and the Job Competition models, and argues that although education makes individuals productive, this productivity is also determined by how complex the job being undertaken is (Quintini, 2011). An underemployed employee cannot achieve his or her full level of productivity because not all of his or her skills are utilized, whereas someone who is under-qualified is more productive than they would be in a job that matched their skills (Quintini, 2011). However, this employee may eventually become less productive due to his or her limited skills, thus making productivity more achievable when employees have a job that is compatible with their skills (Quintini, 2011). This theory offers the most probable explanation for underemployment, given that employees may choose either underemployment or over-qualification in order to obtain a job that better utilizes their skills (Kucel, 2011).

To alleviate underemployment and related issues, the educational system must help students from a very early age to acquire skills necessary for the work force (Quintini, 2011). This is important as many graduates may possess a higher education, but may not have the necessary skills for the labour market (Quintini, 2011). Nevertheless, organizations should also be encouraged to

adjust their resources to include individuals that are highly trained (Quintini, 2011). In addition, policies developed need to be implemented with help from many different sources that contribute to the structure of the labour force, such as government, employers and workers (Quintini, 2011). The development of skills and the demand for those skills are not mutually exclusive, and both are affected by changing trends in demographics and globalization (Quintini, 2011).

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Additional Resource

The Incidence and Persistence of Youth Underemployment:
The Canadian Context
Layton Reynolds
April 26, 2012

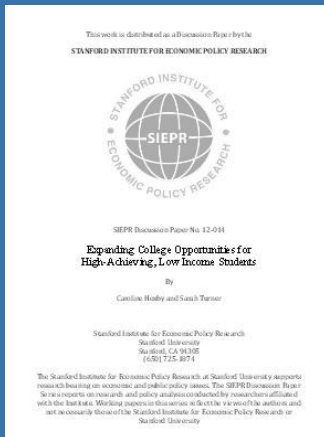
Prof Karen Myers
Course: The Social Context of Policy Making
School of Public Policy and Governance
University of Toronto
Research Question

Reynolds, L. (2012). The incidence and persistence of youth underemployment: The Canadian context. Retrieved from <http://portal.publicpolicy.utoronto.ca/en/sr/StudentProfiles/LaytonReynolds/Documents/The%20Incidence%20and%20Persistence%20of%20Youth%20Underemployment%20-%20The%20Canadian%20Context.pdf>

The purpose of this paper is to begin a serious debate over the prevalence and consequences of youth underemployment in Canada. [Taken from report]



Additional Resource



Hoxby, C. & Turner, S. (2013). Expanding college opportunities for high-achieving, low income students. Retrieved from <http://siepr.stanford.edu/publicationsprofile/2555>

In this study, the authors focus on high-achieving low-income students and the ECO Comprehensive Intervention, which causes these students to “apply and be admitted to more colleges, especially those with high graduation rates and generous instructional resources.” [Taken from report]

The Impact of Budget Cuts on Low-Income Learners

By Diane Strickland, Volunteer Writer

To the displeasure of many Albertans, the recent provincial budget felt like the fiscal pain of the 1990s. In an effort for the province to live within its financial means and remain fiscally sound, the Redford government made significant cuts and reductions to services and programs. However, while the government claims to have Albertans’ best interests in mind, the 2013/2014 budget cuts affect an area that is vital to the successful future of Alberta’s families and communities, which is education. To give an example, the recently announced budget implemented an overall reduction of 7% to the operational funds to post-secondary institutions in the province (Council of Alberta University Student, 2013, para.1).

Significant cuts, such as the reduction of funds to post-secondary education, prompted a public outcry as well as garnered significant media coverage. While this budgetary maneuver drew considerable attention from the public, other significant budget cuts to educational services received little media attention. Specifically, low-income learners will be extensively impacted by cuts to programs and services, and yet this issue received little media attention. Putting aside the reasons for why the media choose not to devote more attention to low-income learners, this article will focus on the impact of the short-sightedness of the budgetary cuts to programs and services affecting this demographic.

The 2013/2014 budget cuts are significant as they limit opportunities for low-income learners. The Alberta government slashed several fundamental programs and services that greatly impact this demographic. Specifically, the Edmonton Social Planning Council (ESPC) (2013) reports that “funding for employment and skills training programs are being cut significantly in the coming year. Career Development Services are being cut 18.2%, Basic Skills and Academic Upgrading by 30.9%, and Training for Work

by 16.4%”. Additionally, other key areas that benefit low-income learners are being impacted, as the EPSC (2013) reports that the Alberta “government is reducing the budget for Expected to Work (ETW) clients by \$32.5 million, or 16%. Income Support for Learners is being reduced by \$13.1 million or 18.2%”. The budget cuts to the ETW program and Income Supports for low-income learners may be quite disadvantageous, as they limit opportunities for career improvement. Additional consequences of these funding cuts are impediments on low-income learners’ progression from a vulnerable state of fiscal insecurity to finding fiscally meaningful work.

While funding cuts to programs and services such as the ETW and Income Supports for Learners are detrimental, these cuts are additionally compounded by the daily financial and logistical barriers low-income learners face. For instance, balancing a limited income with childcare, working, and educational endeavors may hinder low-income learners’ opportunities to successfully participate in adult education (BC Teachers’ Federation, 2013). The financial and logistical barriers that low-income learners face make it imperative for official government programming to be available that provides affordable opportunities to learn new skills or receive academic upgrading. However, program cuts to academic upgrading or job and skills development training leave low-income learners with little choice. They often have to make the difficult decision to not



Photo by City of Edmonton via photos.edmonton.ca

continue with their educational pursuits due to their financial constraints. Macdonald and Shaker (2012) report that "the links between income and pursuing an education are evident; nearly 30% of 18–24 year olds indicated that they did not pursue further education and training for financial reasons"(p. 6).

Simply put, low-income learners do not have the financial means to pursue educational advancements, and many options such as a college or university education are too expensive. Currently, the cost of post-secondary education in Alberta is one of the highest in Canada, and as such is too great for many low-income learners to afford (Macdonald and Shaker, 2012, p.32). Additionally, for families living in poverty, the future outlook of affordable education does not appear to be improving as the cost of post-secondary education continues to rise and remain out of reach for low-income learners (Macdonald and Shaker, 2012, p.32). Therefore, with the significant barriers that low-income learners face and the high cost of education in Alberta, having access to academic upgrading and job and skills training through government programs is critical, since it provides an initial step as a way out of poverty.

Advocating for low-income learners to have access to educational services is imperative. In a study that Lee and Vinokur (2007) carried out involving female welfare-to-work clients, they suggest there are benefits to interventions such as "improved policies and programs that promote work" (p. 309). As well, Lee and Vinokur (2007) argue that, "[i]ncreasing the minimum wage and more job training and educational programs are needed so that working a full-time, minimum wage job pushes poor families out of poverty" (p. 309). However, it would appear that the 2013/2014 budgets in Alberta may be doing just the opposite. Unfortunately, the budget cuts to the ETW and Income Supports for adult learner program may deny several low-income Albertan families opportunities for career or fiscal improvements.

With many areas of the 2013/2014

provincial budget receiving the public's attention, let us not forget to advocate for those with little political clout, such as low-income learners. Low-income learners were significantly impacted by other types of educational cuts to academic upgrading and skills development. On the most basic level, education offers fundamental opportunities to alleviate poverty for many Albertans. Therefore, it is important to offer services and programs that assist low-income learners and provide a means to access educational services and possible fiscal advancements. It is a shame that the provincial budget's short-sightedness overlooks the potential of providing programming and services that will work with low-income learners' needs and empower them to better their futures.

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Additional Resource

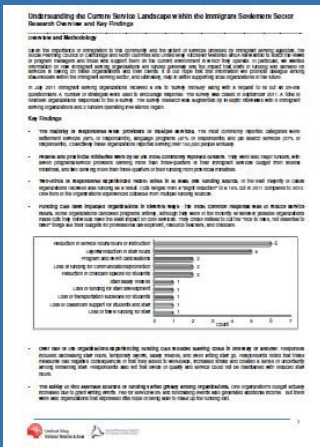


Macdonald D., & Shaker, E. (2012). *Eduflation and the high cost of learning*. Retrieved from <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/eduflation-and-high-cost-learning>

This study looks at trends in tuition and compulsory fees in Canada since 1990, projects fees for each province for the next four years, and examines the impact on affordability for median- and low-income families using a Cost of Learning Index. [Taken from publisher's website]



Additional Resource



Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries & United Way Kitchener and Waterloo. (2011). Understanding the current service landscape within the immigrant settlement sector: Research overview and key findings. Retrieved from http://www.immigrationwaterlooregion.ca/files/news/Current_Service_Landscape_Summary.pdf

This documents focuses on the key findings of a survey designed to learn more about how immigrant-serving organizations are funded, funding instability and how that impacts their organizations, and how immigrant-serving organizations can best serve the immigrant community in the Waterloo region.

Growing In-Migration, Shrinking Services

By John Kolkman, Research Coordinator, Edmonton Social Planning Council



Due to a strong economy, a growing proportion of immigrants and refugees (newcomers) arriving in Canada as permanent residents are deciding to live in Alberta. Ten years

ago, one in sixteen newcomers to Canada settled in Alberta. Today, one in seven newcomers is settling in our province (Citizenship and Immigration Canada). The number of permanent residents settling in Alberta has grown from 15,839 in the year 2003 to 35,764 in the year 2012, more than doubling.

And this tells only half the story. The number of people entering Alberta as temporary foreign workers is growing even faster than the number of permanent residents. There has been almost a four-fold increase in the number of temporary foreign workers, from 9,191 in 2003 to 35,615 in 2012. Chart 1 below shows the total entries of newcomers between 2003 and 2012.

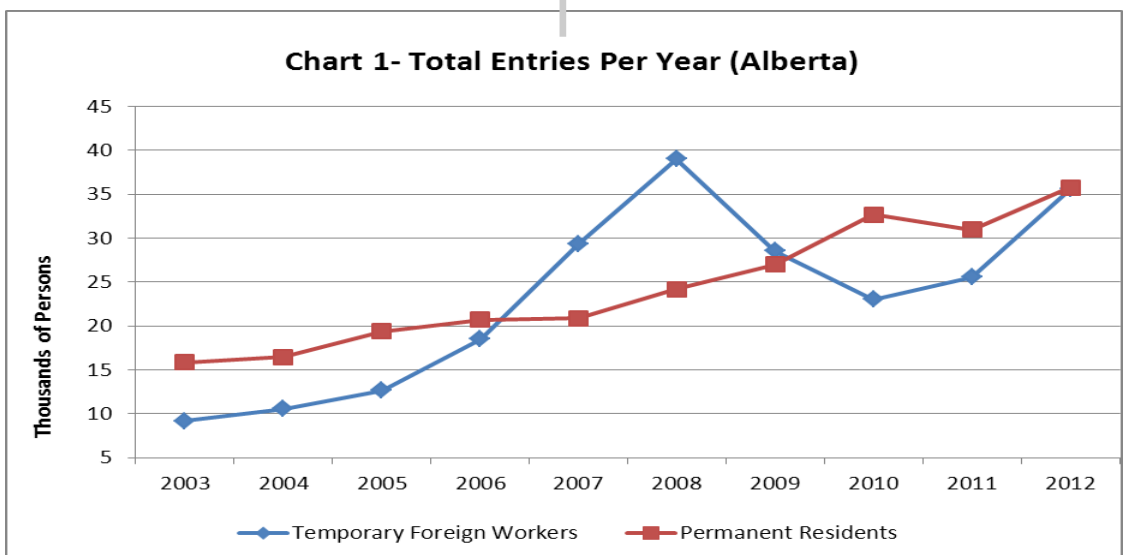
Immigrant Services Funding Not Keeping Pace

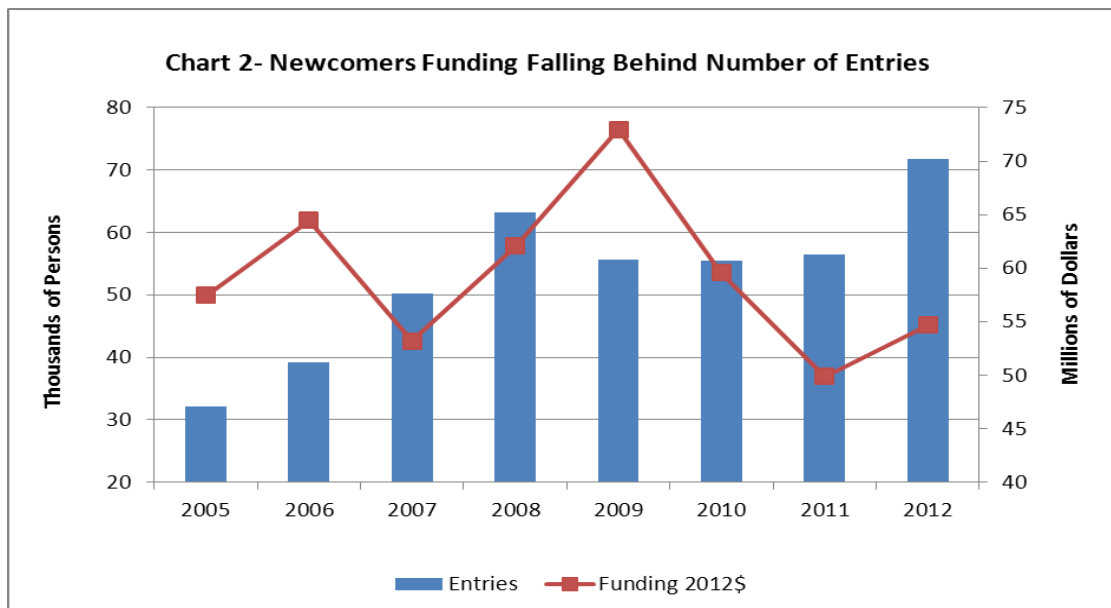
Provincial funding for newcomer services has not even come close to keeping pace

with the increased numbers of permanent residents and temporary foreign workers arriving in Alberta. Chart 2 on the next page compares the funding in constant 2012 dollars for English as a Second Language, settlement, employment, and other newcomer services, to the number of permanent residents and temporary foreign workers entering Alberta between the years 2005 and 2012. These services include Settlement and Immigration, Foreign Qualification Recognition, the Nominee Program, English as a Second Language, employment bridging programs, living allowances for immigrant learners, as well as policy support for the above programs. These services, a number of which include an educational component, play a vital role in enabling newcomers to obtain employment and integrate more fully into Canadian society. The amounts shown on Chart 2 also include federal transfers for provincially delivered services.

During a period of time when the number of newcomers entering Alberta more than doubled from 32,083 in 2005 to 71,739 in 2012, funding for services – when adjusted for inflation - actually went down. Apart from trending downward, newcomer services funding is also volatile, with significant ups and downs depending on the budgetary position and priorities of the province (Government of Alberta).

Chart 1- Total Entries Per Year (Alberta)





Most immigrants with permanent residency are highly educated, with a higher percentage having post-secondary degrees than those born in Canada. For example, according to 2006 Census data, immigrants arriving in Alberta between 2001 and 2006 were twice as likely to have university degrees as non-immigrants living in Alberta. Over time, immigrants earn higher salaries and experience lower unemployment compared to non-immigrants in Alberta (Statistics Canada).

TFWs Are Major Component of Alberta Workforce in Low Skill Jobs

The situation of temporary foreign workers is somewhat different. In order to be approved to come to Alberta, there is a requirement that TFWs have accepted a job offer here. Their ability to remain in Canada is dependent upon them retaining their employment.

Until ten years ago, most temporary foreign workers were either highly skilled professionals or trades people. The main exceptions were seasonal farm workers and live-in caregivers (nannies), for which special programs existed.

In 2002, the federal government and several provinces, including Alberta, opened up the TFW program to allow foreign workers to fill positions requiring lower levels of skills or training. In recent years, about 60 per cent of TFWs are filling either low skill or semi-skilled positions. Fully 40 per cent of TFWs in Alberta work in jobs as kitchen helpers,

food counter attendants, cooks, and light duty cleaners in an occupational category called 'Accommodation and Food Services' (HRSDC, LMO Statistics).

The above types of unskilled jobs increasingly being filled with temporary foreign workers tend to have little job security as well as low pay. These workers are also vulnerable to economic exploitation since their legal right to stay in Canada is subject to them staying in a job.

If a temporary foreign worker loses their job due to lay-off or intolerable working conditions, they have a fixed period of time to find new employment or they will be required to leave the country. Many TFWs in low skill jobs arrive in Alberta with the expectation that they will be allowed to move here permanently (Woo-Paw, p.8). Regardless, should they experience job loss or other life challenges, TFWs seek help from agencies serving immigrants and refugees. Currently, only one Edmonton agency offers these services (Catholic Social Services, 2013).

Changes Needed to Ensure Integration Success

In order to successfully integrate newcomers into Albertan society, services such as English language training, foreign credential testing and recognition, and Canadian work experience and bridging programs are vital. These services represent an excellent upfront investment that achieves rewards for generations to



Additional Resource



Lodermeier, V. J. (2012). A chance for a better life: Development of the immigrant workforce in smaller communities and rural Alberta. Retrieved from <http://www.bowvalleycollege.ca/Documents/Regional%20Stewardship/Final%20Report.pdf>

This research project engaged immigrants, employers, and service providers to assess rural immigrants' needs for workforce development services, including language learning, education, and career training. It fills a gap in information regarding immigrant workforce development in smaller urban centres and rural communities in southern Alberta. [Taken from report]



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come.

In addition to adequately funding newcomer services, policy changes are also required. One change is to provide the temporary foreign workers already here and who want to stay with a gateway to permanent residency. A related change is to restore the temporary foreign worker program to its original intent. The purpose of this program is to allow highly skilled foreign professional and trades people from other countries to work in Canada temporarily. The program should not be a source of cheap labour for fast food attendants and motel cleaners. These service industries must begin paying wages and benefits sufficient to attract Canadian workers, including youth, Aboriginal people, and recent immigrants.

Update: Just prior to final publication and after the writing of the above article, some welcome news: The Government of Alberta announced on June 20, 2013 that some temporary foreign workers in this province will be allowed to apply for permanent residency. However, the tens of thousands of TFWs in low skills jobs like food counter attendants, kitchen helpers, cleaners, and security guards do not appear to be eligible. Find more information at <http://www.albertacanada.com/immigration/campaigns/ainp-awe.aspx>

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Original background photo by Antoine Tavenaux

Staff Member Profile: Stephanie Haar



Well, she's back! Stephanie Haar, our Executive Assistant, has returned to the Edmonton Social Planning Council after a two year absence.

During that time she was living as an expat Canadian in Singapore, enjoying the multiculturalism and varied environment of Southeast Asia. Here, Stephanie shares a bit of her story:

"My time in Singapore was an amazing experience. I was immersed in a mix of cultures that are so different from our own here in North America. I frequented the many ethnic communities throughout Singapore—Chinatown (70% of Singaporeans are ethnic Chinese) and Little India, to name a couple—and enjoyed learning about Colonial British history, as well as the colourful history of Singapore and the entire Southeast Asia region. I was able to travel to places that I would never have visited otherwise (Australia, Malaysia, China, Japan, and Indonesia).

The weather, however, was a bit overwhelming. I found out that I am a true Canadian, in that I never got used to the extreme humidity, having no seasons (it is always summer, or as the locals say it is the rainy season or the "rainy'er" season), it

getting dark and light at the same time everyday (7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.), etc. Singapore is only 100 km from the equator so it is very jungle-like there.

Other than the weather, the people (over 8 million on an island that is 43 km by 29 km) of Singapore are warm and friendly. They love to shop and eat out and the food is amazing. It is said that if you spit (if you could – spitting is against the law there) you would hit either a mall or a restaurant, which is very true. It is extremely safe there. They have absolutely no violent crime and it is very safe to walk in any area at any time of the day or night.

Singapore is truly a world class city/country. It is cosmopolitan and historic at the same time. It moves forward and respects its history and has managed to find a wonderful balance between the two. Its people are happy and prosperous, as well as spiritual and enlightened. Learning from the past but keeping up with today's pressures seems to be the way Singapore and Singaporeans function on a daily basis.

I would encourage anyone who has the opportunity to visit Singapore to go as it was definitely the experience of a lifetime. I am glad I went, but I am also very pleased to be back home here in Canada, and especially back at the Edmonton Social Planning Council."

Board Member Profile: Sumeet Shinde



Sumeet is a graduate of the University of Alberta Faculty of Business, with a specialization in Management Information Systems & Operations. After graduating, he moved to

Calgary where he gained 8 years of experience in management roles in a variety of fields, including telecommunications, oil & gas, and health care. Sumeet was looking for a career opportunity that would allow him to be a positive influence within his community and, subsequently, he joined

Pharmacare Specialty Pharmacy in 2010. He is thrilled with the opportunity this career path has provided, allowing him to be part of a passionate and innovative group who are trying to make positive changes for patient health outcomes. He has a long history of volunteering with community sports, healthcare, and in other community-based organizations. He is currently a member of Rotary and the ESPC board. Sumeet is excited to be working with the ESPC, its board and its staff, to see how we all can make Edmonton a more just and inclusive community.



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About the Edmonton Social Planning Council

The ESPC is an independent, non-profit, charitable organization. Our focus is social research – particularly in the areas of low income and poverty.

We are dedicated to encouraging the adoption of equitable social policy, supporting the work of other organizations who are striving to improve the lives of Edmontonians, and educating the public regarding the social issues that impact them on a daily basis.

Our Vision

A healthy, just and inclusive community.

Our Mission

The Edmonton Social Planning Council provides leadership to the community and its organizations in addressing social issues and effecting changes to social policy.

As a Member

- support our efforts to remain on the forefront in dealing with social issues
- make it possible for us to distribute our materials freely and widely to all
- receive our newsletters, fact sheets, and other publications
- be eligible to vote at ESPC AGMs and have a say in the direction of the organization
- be eligible to serve on the board of directors
- advertise your non-profit events in the *fACTivist*

Visit edmontonsocialplanning.ca > **Support Us** > **Become a Member** for more information.



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NAME ★

ORGANIZATION

POSITION:

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