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Chair: Mr. Robert Morrissey

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

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• (1730)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Committee members, I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 82 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skill and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee is meeting to study the Canada summer jobs wage subsidy program.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person and remotely using Zoom.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the participants. Several will be attending virtually, and all committee members are in the room. Please use the “raise hand” icon to get my attention, or raise your hand if you're in the room. You have the option of choosing to speak in the official language of your choice. If there is an interruption in interpretation services, please get my attention. We'll suspend while that is corrected. I would ask members and witnesses to speak clearly and slowly for the benefit of the interpreters. To committee members, please be careful of your microphones, your headsets around the mike, as well as cellphones, for the benefit and protection of the interpreters.

We were delayed starting, but we have two panels. One witness is not appearing in the second one, so it would be my intention, if the committee wishes, to do both panels and simply use a six-minute round in each panel. Everybody will get the same.

Mrs. Gray.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Can you clarify what you mean by that?

The Chair: We have one hour.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Only that, so we're not going past—

The Chair: It's the wish of the committee. We do have resources.

What is the wish of the committee?

Mr. Coteau.

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): Personally, I have a hard stop at 6:30 p.m.

The Chair: Madame Chabot.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): I agree with your suggestion. We have witnesses here with us, in person, and we want to hear from them.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Chabot.

We will have the ability to hear from all the witnesses. Each party in the committee will also have their six-minute questioning round if that's the consensus of the committee. It will push us beyond the 6:30 p.m. mark a bit as well.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Chair, is there a process you can put in place—and I've seen it done before—where after 6:30 p.m. we just restrict voting?

The Chair: That's the wish of the committee, if the committee resumes.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I need to leave at 6:30 p.m. I have something scheduled that I need to be at. I was hoping, as a courtesy, we would listen to the witnesses with the agreement that, after 6:30 p.m., we would suspend any possible voting.

The Chair: The committee can always choose, after 6:30 p.m., to operate under the rules of a reduced quorum if the committee wishes to go a bit further.

Mrs. Gray.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

If we have all of the witnesses except for one, and we're doing them in one hour, there's very little time to ask anyone questions. I don't think that's fair to anyone, both the members here at this table.... The reason why we're late is that the Speaker of the House made a lengthy statement today, so it was because of what was going on in the House. I don't think that's fair to these witnesses. We should be able to ask questions.

Why don't we schedule another meeting, so we can have the full hour with just this shorter group of witnesses. Even if we have all the witnesses at the same time, there's not as much time to ask them questions, which isn't fair to the members, or fair to the witnesses either.

• (1735)

The Chair: I agree, Mrs. Gray, but I've called the meeting to order.

We will begin with the first panel group that will be presenting their opening statements. There are only two, so that's 10 minutes. We will have a six-minute round, and the committee can then give me direction at that time.

Mr. Michael Coteau: For clarification...we'll go to what time? Have we decided that?

The Chair: We do have the resources to go to 7:30 at the latest.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Is it the will of the committee to do that?

I'd just like to know, as a courtesy, so that I can make some arrangements.

The Chair: All right, as chair, I'll make the decision.

We have the resources to go to 7:30, so we will proceed now with the opening round with the first panel. If members have to make some decisions, then we'll deal with them then.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Just for clarity... Again, are we going until 7:30?

The Chair: Do I hear any objections to going to 7:30?

Mr. Michael Coteau: I would make a motion, then, that we finish at 6:30 if no one is suggesting 7:30 except one member.

The Chair: Madame Chabot.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: I understand Mr. Coteau's motion, but we have provisions for replacing a committee member who needs to be absent. We can continue the meeting until 7:30 p.m. So if we start now, we can sit for the two hours, or nearly two hours, scheduled on the agenda. The names of the witnesses already appear on the notice of meeting, and we have some witnesses here in person.

It seems clear to me that, in the event a committee member from any party is absent, we can comply with the established provisions for replacing that member, and I would hope that's what will be done.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Chabot.

Yes, I will take direction from you that the meeting is under way now and that the meeting will conclude, unless somebody calls an earlier adjournment time, at 7:30.

We'll go to the regular scheduling and our first panel. We have, from Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada, Dr. Matthew Rempel, president. From Lullaboo Nursery and Childcare Center, we have Connie Leung, controller, who is not making a statement. We also have, from Statistics Canada, Vincent Dale, director general, labour market, education and socio-economic well-being; and André Bernard, assistant director, centre for labour market information. All the witnesses in the first panel will be appearing via video conference.

I will call on Dr. Matthew Rempel to make his opening statement for five minutes or less, please.

Dr. Matthew Rempel (President, Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

Hello. My name is Matt Rempel. I'm the president of CEWIL Canada. I am joining you from Oakville, Ontario, which is located on the treaty lands and territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit. We acknowledge and thank the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, the treaty holders, for being stewards of this traditional territory.

I am so honoured to be here today on behalf of Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning to discuss the Canada summer jobs wage subsidy program.

CEWIL is a national association. We're celebrating our 50th anniversary this year. We're dedicated to advancing work-integrated learning in Canada. Our comments and recommendations are presented to you from our experience as an organization with over 1,800 members that collectively facilitate hundreds of thousands of post-secondary work-integrated learning experiences per year.

Work-integrated learning is where a student completes work-based experiences as part of their educational program, such as co-ops, internships and placements. This ensures that Canada's youth have the skills our labour market and society need.

We would also like to share our appreciation of the government's commitment to funding youth programs, wage subsidies and work-integrated learning. Our country's ability to supply the skilled workforce of tomorrow is a necessity in the global race for talent and enables Canada to stay competitive in the innovative and emerging industries of tomorrow. That's why a balanced distribution of resources across these programs is vital for our youth, students and our economy. Inspiring employers and industry to simultaneously invest in youth creates a return on investment that is invaluable in achieving our collective goals.

In the review of the Canada summer jobs wage program, CEWIL would like to recommend a few opportunities for your consideration that may improve access to the quality work experiences needed to fully unpin the capacity of Canada's youth.

Recommendation one is to consider leveraging the Canada summer jobs wage subsidy program to support the government's work-integrated learning goals. There may be ways to improve the impact of the Canada summer jobs wage program on the government's other goal to expand access to work-integrated learning.

Whether it's a summer job or a formalized work-integrated learning experience, the program eligibility could be updated to achieve the goals of both. For example, student work-integrated learning may be full-time employment for a semester or more, which is longer than the typical funding in the summer jobs program, or even part time, such as two days a week, which is also ineligible. These restrictions impact employers' ability to select top talent and access this program.

Recommendation two is the potential for aligning funding confirmations with the timelines of the student job search. Often, post-secondary students specifically begin their job search process several months before the funding confirmations are provided to employers in April. This is especially true of students who are taking part in work-integrated learning. By announcing funding earlier, employers who rely on Canada summer jobs funding will be able to access more students and enable a better fit for their needs.

Recommendation three is to evolve the Canada summer jobs program to be offered year-round. The traditional post-secondary education model of studying in the fall and winter semesters and then working in the summer is changing. Academic institutions and programs have rotating intakes, which leave students available for employment all three semesters a year. The Canada summer jobs program could evolve to be available year-round. This would also support industry, which has a need for youth employment beyond the summer months. Employers are ready for this, as most already take on students three semesters a year through co-op and work-integrated learning placements.

Our last recommendation would be to ensure quality work and learning experiences for students. From our experience, we know that the quality of work experience truly matters, and at CEWIL, with over 50 years of history, we've developed a depth of expertise on how to structure high-value, high-quality and high-impact learning and work experiences for youth. Work experiences need clear learning and development objectives, and structured and quality supervision, and we need to remove barriers to access for equity-deserving groups.

CEWIL collaborates with thousands of private, public and not-for-profit employers, and we have significant experience and demonstrated success in supporting industry and employers to provide quality work experiences. We would welcome any opportunity to work with the government throughout the program review process to offer our expertise in ensuring high-value work experiences for our youth.

To the members of this committee, I would like to thank you for the invitation to share our thoughts. I appreciate your consideration of our comments, and I welcome any questions you may have.

• (1740)

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rempel.

We now have Mr. Dale, director general, Statistics Canada.

Mr. Dale, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Vincent Dale (Director General, Labour Market, Education and Socio-Economic Wellbeing Statistics, Statistics

Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members, for inviting us today to provide a brief overview of recent developments in Canada's labour market.

Labour market conditions in Canada remain tight by historical standards but have eased in recent months. Employment grew by approximately 30,000 per month on average between January and September of this year. That growth needs to be interpreted in the context of record-high population growth.

The employment rate—the proportion of the population aged 15 and older who are employed—was 62% in September. Little changed from one year earlier, but it's down 0.5 percentage points from the beginning of the year in January 2023. After reaching a near record low of 5% at the end of 2022, Canada's unemployment rate has increased slightly and now sits at 5.5%.

While recruitment remains a challenge for many businesses, the number of job vacancies in Canada has decreased by close to 30% since the summer of 2022. Positions requiring a high school diploma or less continue to represent the majority—just under 60% of total job vacancies.

I'll now turn to a discussion of labour market conditions more specifically for youth and students.

Each year, from May to August, the labour force survey collects labour market information on youth aged 15 to 24 who report that they were attending school full time in the spring and who intend to return to school full time in the fall. For the remainder of my remarks, I'll be referring to this group as “returning students”.

On average, from May to August 2023, just over half—53%—of returning students aged 15 to 24 were employed. The employment rate for this group was similar to the rate recorded before the pandemic, but it's down slightly from the recent peak recorded in the summer of 2022, when, for both youth and older workers alike, labour market conditions were particularly tight.

Small businesses are an important source of summer student employment. In the summer of 2023, over four in 10 returning students worked for a small business, compared with one in three employed persons overall. Although young returning students can work in a wide variety of industries—and do work in a wide variety of industries—about half of them work in either retail trade or accommodation and food services. This pattern has been consistent over time.

Proportionately, more young female returning students worked in health care and social assistance in 2023 than young men, while more young men than women worked in manufacturing. Over the summer of 2023, returning students earned \$17.84 per hour on average. This was up 4.3% from the same period a year earlier, which was comparable to the growth in average hourly wages for employees as a whole.

Despite a relatively tight labour market, there remains untapped labour supply across many segments of Canada's increasingly diverse population, including among students. For example, among returning students in the summer of 2023, those who were part of a racialized group were generally less likely to have a job. The employment rates for South Asian, Black and Chinese Canadian students were all lower than the average returning student population.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my opening statement. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

● (1745)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dale.

We will now begin the first round of questioning with Mrs. Gray for six minutes.

Mrs. Gray, you have the floor.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

My first questions are for the representatives from Statistics Canada.

How long have you been tracking youth employment statistics? How far back does it go so that you are able to compare?

Mr. Vincent Dale: I can tell you that we've been tracking it for at least a decade. I would have to go back and find out exactly when we started, but we have a relatively long time series.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Great. Thank you.

What statistics do you specifically keep track of with regard to the Canada summer jobs program?

Mr. Vincent Dale: For those students who do report being employed, we don't have any information, in fact, on whether or not that job was part of the Canada summer jobs program. We're not able to make that link directly through the labour force survey.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Okay. This is a study on Canada summer jobs, so it's interesting to hear that you don't track anything regarding that program. You don't track how many people might have been employed because of the program or who might continue being employed because of it. Absolutely nothing is being tracked from within the Canada summer jobs program.

Mr. Vincent Dale: I would make a couple of observations. First, the information that we do collect, including that labour force survey, provides valuable context for your study and for understanding student employment as a general issue, so it's very valuable as contextual information.

I didn't go into this in my opening statement, but at Statistics Canada we do have the capacity to integrate data from across different sources. If, for example, we wanted to engage in a more de-

tailed research study and look at the profile of those who participated in the Canada summer jobs program, that is something we could do, but we have not done that to this point.

● (1750)

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Actually, one of the questions I had was leading into what data might be crossed over with other programs. Based on what you just said, do you have any data at all on, for example, how many people might apply for various programs? We know the government has a number of different youth job programs. Do you collect any data on where students or youth might be applying? Someone might apply through several different streams or programs, and they might be accepted by one. Is that any kind of data that you would collect at all?

Mr. Vincent Dale: I could speak in general terms to how we would approach a research study of the type I described. Where we would want to look at the full file of applicants or people who had been employed in the program, we would typically do that in partnership with, for example, ESDC. They would provide us with information on applications and registrations.

We would then link that, for example, to census information or tax information and build up a portrait of those streams. As I said, we haven't done that to date and, to repeat, that's the type of thing we would generally do in partnership with a department like ESDC.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: What you're saying is that we don't really have any data at all at this point that could look at how successful the program might be, whether it's for re-employment or students staying on with organizations. It's just really interesting that the information isn't being captured.

One of the comments you made in your opening statement was about returning students, and I did want to ask you about this. I think the age group you gave was 15 to 24. I was wondering, when you look at returning students, who maybe wouldn't be within that age group, because we know that lots of returning students are mature students who are going back to school. When you're looking at students, are you only looking at this youth age, or are you also looking at having statistics on returning students who might be of different age groups?

Mr. Vincent Dale: For the group that I referred to as "returning students"—those who were students in the spring and intended to return in the fall—yes, that's only for 15- to 24-year-olds. That's a current limitation of the survey.

We do have additional information, for example, on those who are currently registered as students. We would have that for all age groups.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Would those be classified strictly as within that age group? Do you have a subclassification to see who's returning?

Mr. Vincent Dale: No. We can only do that subclassification for 15- to 24-year-olds and not for other age groups.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Okay.

I have one other quick question here. What information do you think would be useful to track regarding the Canada summer jobs program, if you were to start tracking some information?

Mr. Vincent Dale: Maybe I can clarify. I can speak to the data currently held by Statistics Canada, and I can say that we don't hold information related to the Canada summer jobs program.

In addition, I can say that it's not Statistics Canada's role to evaluate the effectiveness of programs. That's a question that would be appropriate for ESDC to answer.

The Chair: Mr. Van Bynen, go ahead have six minutes.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think this is a great opportunity for us to seek first-hand knowledge in terms of following up on our mandate to improve on the program or with respect to what the intent of this committee is.

This past summer I did visit with a number of organizations that were running programs with Canada summer jobs. In many cases the young adults who were delivering those programs were returning students. If I recall correctly from some of the statistics that we received in a previous presentation, in 2022 almost 50% of the students continued on with permanent employment following Canada summer jobs, but I think that's information we can get from the earlier testimony.

From my perspective I am more interested in the logistics and what happens on the ground in terms of how well we serve the employer applicants and the student applicants. I appreciate the many challenges that CSJ creates for applicant planning, budgeting and interviewing and then the onboarding of the students.

With respect to the timelines, what I heard back from my constituents was the frustration that employers had with respect to the deadlines and then onboarding of individuals. It was interesting to hear the same concern from Mr. Rempel.

Could you just explain in a little more detail what types of challenges you're facing in terms of the logistics of the program and in terms of the effectiveness of the program, and whether you have some recommendations on how we could improve the application process, the approval process and the timelines for the onboarding?

Then I'd like to come back to you with an additional question with respect to the flexibility that you would like to see inside the programs as well.

Mr. Rempel, I'll turn it over to you.

• (1755)

Dr. Matthew Rempel: Thank you very much for the question.

I think the point I would share, having seen the recruitment cycles of post-secondary students by employers, is that they are doing it earlier and earlier than history has shown us. If you're an employer and you require funding support in order to hire a youth or a student, you need to know as early as possible that you're eligible for the funding to be able to engage in a competitive recruitment process.

Many students are securing summer work, or their co-ops or their work-integrated learning, as early as January or February, and some employers are actually looking to push it further back to get ahead of their recruitment cycles. It's not to say that's the lived experience of every employer, but there are many that are recruiting that early.

If we wanted to make sure that the funding of the program enables the employers who are eligible for it to recruit and seek top talent in a competitive way, if they are informed earlier that they are eligible for the funding, that would be a big help.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: As well, on the flexibility you were talking about, you mentioned earlier that you'd like to see year-round eligibility and full-time and/or part-time eligibility.

Can you expand on that and give us some examples of how that might work better, both for the benefit of the program and for the benefit of the student?

Dr. Matthew Rempel: Certainly. Thank you for the question.

Some students in post-secondary learning these days really are experiencing something outside of the traditional format of having school in the fall and winter and then being off in the summer break to work. Many institutions have academic semesters that start in January and continue into the summer, and then students might have a break in the fall, or they might have their break semester in the winter.

Recognizing that our youth and the youth who employers are attracted to could very well be available three semesters a year, the recommendation would be to explore whether that meets the needs of employers in industry and, if so, the students are available and seeking work. Therefore, the program could be evolved to have a rolling intake of three semesters long—the time frame in which employers are looking for students and students are looking for jobs—which would meet the youth mandate better.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: If program administrators find out what the better cycle is or what the improved cycle is, how would they be able to establish it to get better informed on changing the administration?

Dr. Matthew Rempel: Thank you again for the question.

As I offered, I think there are many actors in the system of student recruitment that could offer some support and timelines, and how that would best benefit by meeting the government's goals as well as being responsive to both industry and students. I've offered on behalf of CEWIL Canada that we'd be more than willing to share what we have observed across all academic institutions in this country in the recruitment cycles that employers have with students. We'd be happy to work with the program staff within the government to determine what an intake in applications and timelines for informing employers of their eligibility would look like to best support the program's objectives.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Are there any recommendations you would make with respect to the administration of the program, the bureaucracy, in order to make it more efficient?

• (1800)

Dr. Matthew Rempel: I appreciate the question. I don't think I'm in a position to comment too much on that. Obviously, with all programs where funding is involved, there is some due diligence necessary, and forms. I think most employers and applicants are accepting of that circumstance.

For us, the recommendations that we think might make the most sense are exploring the full-year eligibility and exploring how we could inform employers earlier in the process that they're eligible so that they can continue to compete and hire top talent.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Bynen.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for being with us.

I'll go to Mr. Rempel first.

Mr. Rempel, I'm going to try to ask questions that are related to what you outlined, but I would also note that the focus of the study we are conducting is the Canada summer jobs wage subsidy program and that its purpose is to determine how changes can be made to that program. Questions have been raised about its funding and terms.

Unless I misunderstood you, you're suggesting that we could combine the work-integrated learning and skills program with the Canada summer jobs program. I'd like you to explain to me the benefits of combining those two programs, even though they're funded separately and, in some respects, have different objectives as well.

As you know, the federal learning and skills program doesn't apply in Quebec because we have our own learning and skills development agreements and programs.

Consequently, Canada summer jobs is the program that interests me. I'd like to know how we could improve its operation, flexibility and especially its funding. As we see it, increasing demands will be made on this program. We've seen it and can observe it in our riding offices. However, funding for it has remained stagnant, or has barely exceeded pre-pandemic levels, and that has caused prob-

lems. We know that funding has fallen to \$400 million, nearly one third of what it was in the budget that was introduced in the unique circumstances of the pandemic.

In addition, Canada summer jobs allows young, full-time students to hold full-time employment for a specified period of time because that suits them. For employers, as regards programs, there are a lot of day camps, for example. Many employers and community organizations have summer employment programs and need students in order to support their projects.

I'm trying to get a clearer understanding of what you're proposing. As I understand it, the idea would be to combine these programs. How would that benefit the Canada summer jobs program?

[*English*]

Dr. Matthew Rempel: Thank you very much for the question.

Just as a point of clarity, I don't think that CEWIL is proposing that we combine the programs. It's simply suggesting that there might be a way to adjust some of the eligibility requirements to thoughtfully harmonize meeting the objectives of government across two different programs. For example, with the Canada summer jobs grant program, I think the average funding is closer to eight weeks of employment, whereas a traditional co-op experience for a post-secondary student might be much longer than that. If we wanted to find ways and opportunities, like in that example, to achieve the goals of both programs, it may make sense to review the programs and the review process through that lens.

I do want to comment that these programs are designed for different audiences in some cases. Different employers are eligible under different programs.

I just admit that occasionally there's some overlap in that. If we wanted to be thoughtful in achieving two goals at the same time, we could review some of the eligibility of the existing program structures. The length of funding available might be a consideration. Another might be some work-integrated learning students who meet industry needs. It could be working in a part-time capacity, which again wouldn't be eligible with the current rules of the Canada summer jobs program.

I hope that helps clarify. Thank you for the question.

• (1805)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you very much.

As you know, we can first set objectives in conjunction with the Canada summer jobs program and then observe the results. As regards the eight-week employment period you're referring to, it has to be said that it's often the result of the projects that we see.

Non-profit organizations, small businesses and municipalities will generally seek employment periods longer than eight weeks. However, they're granted eight weeks for funding-related reasons. I tend to agree with you that eight weeks may not be long enough for a project designed to meet community and learning needs and to provide work experience.

That being said, as a result of funding issues, we're more likely to see a decrease in the number of working hours. One of your recommendations is that the eight-week period be extended. The program runs longer than eight weeks, but, as I understand it, only eight weeks are subsidized.

Another of your recommendations is that the calendar be adjusted to accommodate the situation of students enrolled in post-secondary education. We've already heard about this possibility. We know that high school calendars aren't the same as those of the colleges and universities. I think that offering the program earlier is a positive point, and that's a recommendation that we could get behind.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[English]

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm just going to ask some quick statistics questions of Mr. Dale and then I'll go to Mr. Rempel.

I note, Mr. Dale, that the Canada summer jobs program says on the Government of Canada website that the program "aims to provide flexible and holistic services to help all young Canadians develop the skills and gain paid work experience to successfully transition into the labour market."

It was concerning to hear you say that there are groups that are under-represented in the labour market that have a harder time entering.

Before I ask a little bit more about that, did I hear correctly that 60% of the open jobs do not require high school education?

Mr. Vincent Dale: Let me just check my notes.

There are 58.1% of job vacancies that require a high school diploma or less, as of the most recent data.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: It's a diploma or less.

I have another statistical question.

You mentioned about the earnings. In the last meeting on this, I was interested in the gender split on earnings. Can you share that? You had an overall number, but what's the gender split?

The Chair: Who was that directed to, Madam Zarrillo?

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Mr. Dale, you were on mute for all of that.

You'll have to go back to the gender split on earnings.

Mr. Vincent Dale: I don't have that on hand, but we would be happy to give that to the committee in writing.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Okay. Then just to go back to the other demographics, I would like to hear that for under-represented groups as well. If you have some information on it, that would be great.

I want to go then to Mr. Rempel, to talk about this objective of the summer jobs program for folks to have the skills and the ability to transition into the labour market.

What are some of the challenges that students share with you in dealing with moving from their summer jobs grant over to the labour force? Does it vary by gender or other demographics?

• (1810)

Dr. Matthew Rempel: I don't think I'd be in the position to answer what our membership is hearing from the students directly. The feedback and recommendations that I wanted to share are just from the members of the CEWIL community, primarily those who work in higher education institutions and how they've interacted and what they've experienced with their students and their employers who are interested in using the Canada summer jobs program.

My apologies for not being able to answer that directly.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: That's all right, Mr. Rempel.

They don't report back on the experiences of any of their students when they're coming forward to your organization. They're just looking more at what their needs are to meet their objectives. The employers are talking about their objectives and needs. Is that right?

Dr. Matthew Rempel: Yes...in some ways. I'll just explain how our membership would be involved with the recruitment process, which might involve employers leveraging the program.

Many colleges, polytechnics and universities across this country have job boards that are available to their students and have a close-knit relationship with employers and industry partners who are recruiting students from those academic institutions.

In the scenarios where employers are looking to access the wage subsidy through this program, they may very well also be recruiting through the academic institution. Similarly, students would be accessing their career services department to connect with employers who are actively seeking in the summertime, and the feedback that they receive would be through just the regular conversations that an institution has with their employer base who are using the services at the school.

In the context of work-integrated learning, one of the recommendations that we're offering is around quality work experiences. It's our belief in CEWIL that having structure around a work experience and having educational elements and facilitated learning that is in the spirit of the relationship between a higher education institution, the student and the employer, tends to yield the highest return on skills acquisition and growth and development through a student cohort. This is obviously what we work towards and champion at CEWIL.

It's not to say that summer jobs or part-time jobs that don't have that academic structure and support can't be meaningful. They absolutely can. We just know that, when there are supports, there's an educational environment and the post-secondary institution is involved, those are the ones where we can have thoughtfully structured, meaningful, high-quality work experiences for our learners and students, and for the employers as well.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: That's great.

I have just one quick question then. What data is captured on your end? Are there post-surveys for the partners you work with? What kind of information is available? Ultimately, the goal is to make sure these folks can transition into the labour market, so I'm just wondering how you measure that.

I'll take this opportunity to say that HealthCareCAN came to see me yesterday about stipends for research students, the amount of good work they do and how little they get paid, so I'm also interested to know if you hear anything about this correlation between employment and housing right now for students, because we know it's a very difficult time.

Dr. Matthew Rempel: I don't think that many members of the CEWIL community or post-secondary institutions are explicitly tracking which of their students are receiving summer jobs or the employers who are receiving the stipend. I'm not aware, personally, of any line of sight that would offer that insight. If it did exist, it would likely be more localized to individual academic institutions. It wouldn't be information that CEWIL would be collecting or asking for.

I'm afraid I can't answer that question for you directly, but thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Zarrillo.

Mr. Aitchison, you have five minutes.

Mr. Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll start, if I could, with Dr. Rempel.

You're in the hot seat, Dr. Rempel.

In 2023, for the Canada summer jobs, the top five national priorities for the program were to focus on youth with disabilities; Black and other racialized youth; indigenous youth; small business and not-for-profit organizations that self-report as having leadership from groups that are under-represented in the labour market; and small business and not-for-profit organizations in environmental sectors.

You may have heard, Dr. Rempel, that Canada is in the midst of a housing crisis right now. I'm wondering what you think about the idea of maybe changing the priorities—altering them, adjusting them, adding to it, maybe—to reflect national priorities and urgent national needs, such as housing or maybe even organizations that support addiction and mental health treatment, those kinds of things. Would you consider that?

• (1815)

Dr. Matthew Rempel: Thank you for the question. I'm in the hot seat indeed.

I think the space that we're most qualified to speak to is our line of business, which is supporting students in work-integrated learning. In the spirit of our mandate and sphere of opinion on government policy, we do appreciate and absolutely value all wage subsidy programs for youth and for work-integrated learning. I can say with confidence that our members are very appreciative. Employers require it, and it inspires them to continue to reinvest in our youth through these programs.

From that lens and that vantage point, I can share that we appreciate the programs, but I don't think CEWIL would be in a position to comment on the other elements of the question. Thank you.

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Okay. Let me try this, then. You're not wanting to comment or give an opinion on whether these should be considered priorities within the program. Do you think the summer jobs program could be adjusted or could be used as a tool to focus on...?

Let's take the labour shortage, for example, in the housing sector. The labour shortage is one of the big challenges we have in the housing sector. We just don't have enough electricians or carpenters. We don't have enough people in skilled labour and the skilled trades. That's not a secret to anybody, I think.

Do you think the Canada summer jobs program would need changing, or could be changed, to maybe try to help address those issues? You understand the system better than I do, I'm sure.

Dr. Matthew Rempel: Thank you for the question. I probably don't understand the system or how the program decisions are created any better than you do. I'm afraid I wouldn't feel in a position to be able to comment on that.

Our awareness, working with youth who are traditionally in co-op and working in great learning experiences, is that it is difficult and it is competitive. We do need employers and industry partners to continue participating and creating high-quality work experiences for our students. They rely on it. All programs that support that mandate and support student success are programs that we appreciate.

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Thanks for that.

I'd like to go to Mr. Dale and speak a little more about the skilled labour shortages.

I'll just share with you that CMHC released a report in October 2022 called "Labour Capacity Constraints and Supply Across Large Provinces in Canada". That report projected that Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia would need to double housing starts over the next decade to reach CMHC's 2030 affordability supply target, but that labour constraints would limit these provinces. In Ontario, it would be limited to about 36%, Quebec 41%, and 29% in B.C., under a best-case scenario.

I'm wondering if you can tell us what Statistics Canada is seeing in the labour market when it comes to increasing the skilled trades participation in Canada. Do you think the summer jobs program might be a way to assist there, if necessary?

Mr. Vincent Dale: Thank you for the question.

I can give you a sense of the range of data we have that responds to that question. I don't necessarily have the analysis or the results to present today. I can tell you that we have quite detailed information on job vacancies by industry and occupation. We can speak to vacancies in the construction sector and vacancies in the skilled trades. Similarly, we can tell you that we have detailed information on employment by skilled trades and detailed information on participation in apprenticeship programs.

We do have the elements that would respond to your question. It would require some integration of that data and some analysis to respond more fully to the particular policy questions you are asking.

Mr. Scott Aitchison: I'm running out of time. Just quickly, I'm wondering if you wouldn't mind sharing some of that data with the committee, if that's possible. I'm very interested in that.

Mr. Vincent Dale: Certainly.

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Aitchison.

Mr. Collins, you have five minutes.

Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Rempel, this is a wildly popular program, as I believe you could imagine. Well over 90% of the employers who responded commented that it was a very successful program and, of course, our youth responded as well through a voluntary survey. They responded with almost the same level of support, just under 90%. That's almost unheard of for those of us who have been elected officials for a while at any level of government. Getting a 90% score on any service or program that we offer is almost unheard of.

I missed my opportunity, Mr. Chair, to commend the staff who were here last week. We ran out of time, and I wanted to commend them for managing this program, because it is wildly successful.

My question would be around its popularity and the capacity to deliver more services. Of course, the program has doubled since 2015. Our government has doubled support for the program in terms of the number of placements, and it was increased even more so through the pandemic to provide employers, and, of course, obviously, as part of the youth employment strategy, our youth with opportunities through the pandemic to ensure that they gained employment during some very challenging times.

My question would be this. You have been in business for 50 years. I think you mentioned that at the start of your presentation. Could you give us a snapshot of the prepandemic scenario? During the pandemic, how did your organization shift gears to accommodate students and employers under very challenging circumstances, people working from home, and then how did you come out of the pandemic in terms of continuing this program and offering the placements through the employers and the industries you work with?

• (1820)

Dr. Matthew Rempel: To speak to some observations, at least in the world of work-integrated learning prepandemic, I think it's fair to say that co-ops, internships and work-integrated learning became very popular and were on a growth path across most post-secondary institutions, whether they be colleges, polytechnics or universities.

Many organizations, or at least many of the institutions, are looking for ways to balance the needs of students and learners with the identification of work experiences through our industry and employer partners. That's always a bit of a juggling act for post-secondary institutions. The demand from the student side is very high. There always needs to be enough employer opportunity for students to experience these incredible learning opportunities.

To answer your question about during the pandemic, obviously, with the economy and businesses unable to operate or have students in the workplace, we pivoted in a very similar way to many others. We advocated for employers to keep their co-op and WIL students as best they could and to leverage virtual work as a solution for that. We are thankful that many employers did respond and were able to, in some cases, salvage the education of students who would not have been able to graduate if they had been unable to have these working experiences, which were a part of their academic program. We're very thankful for that contribution.

Similarly, the funding through a range of federal programs, including the student work placement program as well as the Canada summer jobs program, is absolutely critical to inspiring our employers and industry partners to create enough opportunities to meet student needs across the spectrum of work-integrated learning.

Now that we have returned to a case of a bit more normal, I think we're going to continue to experience that supply-and-demand curve of students who need eligible, high-quality work experiences as part of their academic journey through post-secondary. Then there's also a cohort of students who may not be enrolled in post-secondary education who also require work experiences to enable them to develop the skills to pursue their career paths, even if it's not in the higher education direction.

It's our belief that wage subsidies in that environment do inspire employer participation, and that is required to support youth and our learners' needs.

Mr. Chad Collins: Thanks, Mr. Rempel.

You heard from Mr. Dale about some of the gaps that we still have in terms of accommodating and assisting equity-seeking groups. You did mention that at the tail end of your introduction.

Can you provide some information to the committee in terms of the progress you have made with employers and industries in terms of providing more support for those groups that are under-represented in the workforce based on the information that Mr. Dale has presented to us and information that we know is widely available beyond the StatsCan information?

Dr. Matthew Rempel: Thank you again for the question.

As a professional association, many of our members are the staff people and stakeholders who participate in student placements and student work experiences. As a community across Canada, we're all very invested in ensuring that all students have access to quality work experiences.

As a professional association, we have provided a fair amount of discourse and dialogue amongst our national conferences and around our professional development opportunities, ensuring that colleagues who are involved in the matchmaking of students with employers have access to training and advocacy materials to support their interactions with employers.

I think many of us know that there are the legal imperatives, but there are also the systemic barriers that might fall outside of the legal frameworks that equity-deserving groups may be experiencing when they're seeking work. In the CEWIL community, we do our best to make sure that we're advocating, to employers and industry, fair and equitable recruitment practices. We're equipping members of our community with the tools they need—

• (1825)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Rempel.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Rempel.

I think there's a real difference between the two programs, particularly as regards co-ops, as well as work-integrated learning for post-secondary students. Many Quebec universities have adopted this arrangement. It's an education program.

However, our goal for the Canada summer jobs program is to determine how we can improve it. It has to meet specific objectives, which aren't the objectives of a workplace co-op, an alternating work-study program or a skills development program.

I'm trying to get a clear understanding of what you're saying. I apologize to our witnesses from Statistics Canada, but, since there are no statistics on the Canada summer jobs program, I'm going to keep putting my questions to Mr. Rempel.

Mr. Rempel, do you think the Canada summer jobs program should be improved with regard to funding and job offers?

[*English*]

Dr. Matthew Rempel: Thank you again for the question.

The context I'm providing is from the lens of work-integrated learning. I think what happens is that employers who are recruiting summer students sometimes don't know whether a student is actually in a co-op for academic credit or is a student who's looking for a job between academic terms.

In that context, we offered some considerations for the program that might increase the eligibility to support some of those co-op students. In a general sense, we're firm believers in students' success. We're believers in students having quality work experiences, and additional funding to create additional wage subsidies that allow for that environment to take place is something that we would be supportive of—absolutely.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: The Canada summer jobs program should at least offer a minimum wage equal to that set by the provinces.

I'm trying to get a clearer understanding here. It seems to me there used to be something called the student employment program. Now we call it the Canada summer jobs program. It's aimed at youth 15 to 30 years of age who, we hope, are studying, and its purpose is to provide our youth with work experience that's likely to qualify them for employment but that's also important for their development.

How do you think this program, which differs from the work-integrated learning and skills program, could be more flexible?

You said you wanted the program to be offered every year. Do you think as possible? Would you please explain the benefits of this proposal?

[*English*]

The Chair: Could we have a short answer, please?

Dr. Matthew Rempel: Thank you for the question.

We know that students are in non-traditional academic cycles. Students may have breaks between academic semesters that may exist within the fall semester and may exist within the winter semester, and they need work during those breaks in their academic learning. It's similar to the historical model being summertime, when most post-secondary students would be looking for work, but they are available in the fall and winter and in greater numbers.

Similarly, this program, the wage subsidy, supports employer and industry access to youth talent and provides students with quality work experiences. As we know, industry and employers have projects and have work all year long, and it does seem that there might be an opportunity to consider extending the program across all three semesters. That would meet the needs of employers who have work in the fall and winter for students, and it would meet the needs of students who are on academic breaks in the fall and winter.

I hope that answers your question.

• (1830)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[*English*]

Thank you, Mr. Rempel.

I have Ms. Zarrillo to conclude the first round.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you so much.

My questions are going to be for Mr. Dale, but I wanted to recognize Mr. Rempel today. I really appreciate all the information you gave us today.

Mr. Dale, I firmly believe in the value of fact-based decision-making. You presented today the wider understanding of the labour market. Based on the data you see, on the insights you see and your office must talk about, what would you advise the government to focus on for Canada summer jobs grants in 2024, knowing the objective is to help young Canadians develop the skills and gain the paid work experience to successfully transition into the labour market?

Mr. Vincent Dale: I do appreciate the question. However, I would ask you to understand that it's not within my role at Statistics Canada to provide policy advice or policy evaluation. Unfortunately, I'm not able to answer the question.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I'll frame it in a different way, because "The Daily" comes out and "The Daily" often has insights rather than data. It actually looks at the data and data insights.

I guess I would ask the question in a different way. The data I see in front of me talks about declines in certain channels. We know there's a significant decline in workers in construction, but an increase in workers or job opportunities in health care and social assistance.

Is it important to invest in those job roles that are increasing, or is it important to fill the gap in those job roles that are decreasing? Is there a conversation about that within Statistics Canada?

Mr. Vincent Dale: I hope you'll understand I'm not avoiding the question. I can't speak to the wisdom of investments in one area or the other, but maybe I could answer your question this way.

One could certainly look at, as I did in my opening statement, the overall trends in the labour market. In the summer of 2022, the labour market was extremely tight with historically high unemployment rates and historically high job vacancies. Since then, that tightness has eased somewhat. Employment growth has been steady but not quite in proportion to population growth. Vacancies have fallen 30%. It's an indication that labour shortages have eased. As you suggested in your question, one could look at trends in employment or vacancies by industry.

The question was asked about the construction sector. One could use the data to address the question, "Would it be wise to increase investment in the construction sector?" That's a valid question, and one could use Statistics Canada data to inform decisions around that question.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Zarrillo and Mr. Dale.

I would like to thank the witnesses for appearing in the first round and providing testimony to the committee members.

With that, we'll suspend for a few minutes while we get ready for the second group of panellists.

Again, to those witnesses who appeared, thank you so much.

• (1830)

(Pause)

• (1835)

The Chair: Committee, we'll resume with the second group of witnesses.

In this timeline, we have in the room Michel Cantin, Club de Tennis Saint-Jérôme, and appearing by video conference, we have Kim Thomas from Neptune Natation Artistique.

Mr. Cantin, you have the floor for a five-minute opening statement if you choose to make an opening statement.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Cantin (President, Club de Tennis Saint-Jérôme): Good afternoon.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my opinion. I am the president of a local tennis club in Saint-Jérôme and the president of a regional association. I was disappointed when I learned that budget cuts had been made to the Canada summer jobs program. This is a program that is unanimously supported. Everyone acknowledges the importance of this program and its objectives for both youth, non-profit organizations and small businesses. We are a non-profit sports organization. Sport is very important for citizens' physical and mental health. There is also a community side to it. I would therefore like to make the committee aware of how important this program is.

The population of the regional county municipality, or RCM, of which Saint-Jérôme is a part, is 600,000 inhabitants. Just imagine the benefits that a program such as yours could afford in a region such as ours alone if we continued to promote it properly and recognized its true importance.

We represent a lot of volunteers, and they are good volunteers. Many of them are retirees who have held prominent positions and give a great deal of their time to their fellow citizens. This program also makes it possible to match youth who are embarking on careers with people who are established in the workplace. That's very important. Budgets are very important when it comes to promoting this kind of program, even in a community such as ours. In other words, you always have to be ready for the possibility that they have to be increased, especially if you think it's a good idea to promote the program and make it increasingly accessible.

Allow me to explain why I'm talking about the program's accessibility. Personally, I think it's difficult to apply to the program because the people who administer it are somewhat removed from the labour market. We have very good cooperation with all the employees who manage the Canada summer jobs program, but we often work online and that's difficult. When we contact them, someone may call back 48 hours later, and it's never the same person who responds. Once this part of the application process is improved, you'll receive increasing numbers of applications because the need is great. This is a program that no one will criticize. Everyone will be pleased with it. Consequently, you must be sure to make the necessary investments in it because we need it.

Our club had to hire coordinators to develop tennis in our region. Then we had to hire financial people and monitors. If we want to develop regionally, we'll have to ask the municipalities to build tennis infrastructure. So we have to establish a solid base. We'll be offering increasing numbers of good jobs. As someone said, it's very important to offer good jobs, and we've got them. I can also tell you from experience that this program has provided many young people in the labour force with their first job. We've hired students who worked for us for two or three years. Then they were hired back and went on to very good positions.

• (1840)

I would just like to make everyone aware of that. It's very important that the government continue this funding and consider increasing it regularly.

I'm very pleased to have met you.

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cantin.

We have Ms. Thomas for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kim Thomas (President, Neptune Natation Artistique): Good evening.

Thank you for welcoming me here this evening.

I am the president and treasurer of the Neptune Natation Artistique club, which is located in the Laurentians region.

The Canada summer jobs program has been a boon to us for many years. It has helped us run a day camp every year for two purposes: to employ students from the region and to enable parents to go to work. There is a critical need for day camps in the Laurentians region. The funding we receive helps us keep the costs of a specialized camp relatively low and enables parents to sign up their children. This helps us recruit new members and keep our club viable.

Thanks to this program, the female students we hire in summer, and rehire every year, become evening coaches during the school year. The program lets us offer them 35 hours of work a week. As someone said earlier, the length of the program is limited to eight weeks, and, if it could be extended, that would give us more resources.

As you know, small not-for-profit organizations, or NFPOs, such as ours were hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Lost or reduced funding can result in cancelled camps, and that's more or less what happened last year because only one position was recommended for our project. However, in artistic swimming, we can't have only one coach on the pool deck. When the children are in the water, we absolutely need two persons on the deck for safety reasons. Since costs therefore ran too high, too few swimmers registered. That affected our organization throughout the year because we use much of the money from camp registrations to offset turnover costs.

Our small artistic swimming club has 60 swimmers during the year. We make considerable use of this program to create visibility, enable parents to go to work and allow for some turnover during the year.

It's important to understand that altering a program such as this one, when there aren't necessarily any alternative solutions for small organizations such as ours, has a direct impact on their annual budgets.

• (1845)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Thomas.

[*English*]

We'll now begin with the first round of questioning with Ms. Ferreri for six minutes.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): *Merci*, Mr. Chair.

I apologize that my French is not yet there so that I'm confident enough to speak in it. I appreciate your being here and sharing your experiences. I hope you can both hear me with translation.

Is the translation working?

A voice: No.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: How about now? I'm going to speak now. Can you hear a translation in your ear?

[*Translation*]

Good evening and welcome.

[*English*]

Mr. Cantin and Madame Thomas, thank you.

I think what we just witnessed was a bit of what we see in my office as a member of Parliament. Sometimes there's a barrier in being able to access stuff if you don't know how to use it.

You referred to not being able to access the program. Applying for it...you were saying the website was a challenge for you.

Again, much like the technology you're experiencing at this very moment—and you're really making me realize how deeply I want to learn French—I would ask how you would like to see the program improved so that your very amazing volunteers, who might be seniors and who might not know the technology, know how to apply online or how to do that. That's a big barrier. How do we improve that?

What would you like to see?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Cantin: As you can see, it isn't easy for a man of my age—I'm 78 years old—to use technological resources.

Many community organizations also have trouble, particularly because the way to apply to the program is impersonal. For example, sometimes we have problems trying to sign up. One day when I was trying to write \$30.00 in French, I wrote it with a decimal point. It took me some time to understand that I had to use a comma. That's one example among many. When I need help dealing with a bug, I call the telephone service at the given number, but the waiting time is 48 hours. I'm sitting in front of my computer and don't want to wait 48 hours, so I hang up.

We should have someone who's responsible for a region such as the Laurentians, for example. I like to solve problems by meeting with people in person. I think we're losing some players.

Now that I've discovered the Canada summer jobs program as a funding source, I want to use it. I want to send a message to a lot of people that I know who live in the region. That'll result in more applications.

I would therefore like to bring the service that the program provides to us in the Laurentians. In other words, I'd like to have someone who is responsible in the region and who could answer our questions and provide information. When I speak to someone from the program and explain my problem, that person can tell me whether what I'm saying is right or not. If I ask someone to call me back, I don't know who I'm dealing with because it could be just anyone.

If the service is provided as it should be, it'll be a gem. A lot of people will be able to get jobs. A lot of organizations will also be able to benefit from the presence of these young people. As a result, both parties will benefit, but so will the community. Everyone will be happy. So we should move the application process closer to the labour market to facilitate things.

I get nervous when January comes around. I prepare my job descriptions and I know I'll have to apply to the program and that it will be a long process. So I'd like to have help available near my home. That would be one way of solving the application problem, for example.

There's another aspect that I especially want to discuss. You must never contemplate cutting budgets. You must always think about increasing them every year unless you stop promoting the program. If that's the case, budgets can be cut. If you continue promoting the program as it should be, it will be a winning ticket every time. That's the message I want to send.

• (1850)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you very much, Mr. Cantin.

[*English*]

I appreciate your answer. I think what you said is what we often hear: Customer service and having people show up to work in the office makes a very big difference.

Thank you very much. I'm sure I'm out of time.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ferreri and Mr. Cantin.

[*English*]

Ms. Murray, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Cantin, thank you for everything you said about the program and its value, as well as about the youth and organizations that benefit from it.

I have a few questions that I would like to ask you, and Ms. Thomas, because you are both beneficiaries of this program.

Is there a process for asking you whether the program has or hasn't worked and what could be improved? Is a survey conducted every year at the end of the program?

Mr. Michel Cantin: What could be improved? It's working very well.

• (1855)

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: No... Excuse me. I'll use the interpretation.

Has Service Canada surveyed you as an employer to get your feedback?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Cantin: Yes, they asked me for my opinion, and I gave it to them. I also gave Mr. Sugrue my opinion earlier. I'm happy to be here because this is so important. I think this is a very important study for everyone because this is a great program. I also benefited from a similar program, for careers at the time, that was managed by the department responsible for employment. I had a labour relations placement with the post office department and was subsequently offered a position. I worked in labour relations, and then staffing, for the post office department. So I know first-hand that this is a good program.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you very much.

So the government is trying to understand what's working well and what can be improved. That's good. The department is gathering those data, not Statistics Canada.

I have another question. My riding took advantage of this program for 15 years or so. Of course, the government doubled the number of program beneficiaries in 2015, but cuts may be made one day. That's what happens over time.

Is it better to have more employees working fewer weeks, or fewer employees working more weeks?

Mr. Michel Cantin: It should be both.

Hon. Joyce Murray: If you had to choose one of those options, which would it be?

Mr. Michel Cantin: Personally, I don't think I had enough weeks.

Hon. Joyce Murray: That's what I hear in my riding too. It's better to have more weeks, even if that means fewer employees.

I have another question.

Both of you work in the sports sector. Is it important to have students who are focusing on a career in your field, or can other students get a job with you and take advantage of that experience, for example, by learning how to start on time, work hard and solve problems?

Ms. Kim Thomas: In our case, we generally want female students in a bachelor of kinesiology program seeking a career in sports coaching. Artistic swimming, of course, is a very feminine sport. Consequently, many of our coaches are young women who are studying for a long-term career as coaches or kinesiologists. They therefore benefit directly from the program, but you also have to consider all the benefits that flow from working in a first student job. You have to understand that we have two types of employees in our club: bachelor-level students, but also assistants, young woman 15, 16 and 17 years of age who are working in their first jobs and thus acquiring experience.

It's important not to limit oneself to the idea that the job offered to a youth must absolutely be related to his or her future employment. The program should also be open to students who can acquire their first work experience.

Mr. Michel Cantin: The same is true in our case. We've had students who are now pharmacists. These were nevertheless good summer jobs for them because they helped them learn how to communicate, to go out and meet with the representatives of the municipalities and so on. They acquired all kinds of experience that served them well in their development.

Both components are important, of course. You mustn't focus solely on students who want a career in the field we propose. We prefer them, but others can definitely take advantage.

• (1900)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Thomas and Mr. Cantin.

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for six and a half minutes.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks very much to both of you, witnesses from the beautiful Laurentians region. Your testimony is relevant to the purpose of our study, which is simple: to review the funding of the Canada summer jobs program because it has undergone a major cut and to see how we can improve it. I don't think that any member of our committee doubts the value of this program. The task for us is to see how we can improve it.

Ms. Thomas, have you been using the Canada summer jobs program for many years?

Ms. Kim Thomas: I'm starting my sixth term on the club's board. Before taking up my position, I believe the club had used the program for two years. That means perhaps seven years in total. Including 2020, the year when the COVID-19 pandemic started and obviously no day camps were held, that means we've definitely been running the camps with the program's assistance for six years.

Ms. Louise Chabot: You also said in your testimony that you had requested two positions this year, but that you only got one.

Ms. Kim Thomas: I had requested three.

Ms. Louise Chabot: That put paid to funding for the youth day camp project, which benefits both the youth participating in the camps and their parents, as well as those who are thus able to acquire initial employment experience for their future.

Ms. Kim Thomas: That's correct. We actually applied for three positions because that's the number of positions we generally request. We got them the previous year, but we weren't even able to get two this year. Given our cost increases, we weren't able to employ three students this year.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Did the Canada summer jobs program officers ask you to report on that? Did you tell them you were concerned about the consequences that would have for your organization?

Ms. Kim Thomas: Yes. I completed the report at the end of the program and forwarded it to Canada summer jobs once we had decided not to hold the camp and cancelled the project.

Ms. Louise Chabot: More broadly speaking, what effect do you think that cancelling the day camp had on the parents or the community?

I understand that we're talking about an artistic swimming camp. However, we have to consider the statistics on drowning deaths recorded during the summer. Unfortunately, I think they were even higher in the day camps. As we all know, it's important for young people to learn how to swim.

If you had a recommendation to make for the next program, which will be coming out soon, what would it be?

Ms. Kim Thomas: The specific circumstances of the applicants must be taken into consideration.

In our case, receiving a subsidy for a single position may mean we have to cancel our day camp essentially because we absolutely need to have at least two employees for safety purposes.

All our coaches are also national-level lifeguards. That's a requirement of their employment with us. Even though a lifeguard is on the pool deck, we require that all our coaches also be lifeguards. Consequently, in our particular case, we absolutely must have at least two employees on site. Even if there are only 10 children to supervise, that would be too many for a single coach. The ratio would be too high. We therefore need two coaches for a group of 10 children.

• (1905)

Ms. Louise Chabot: I congratulate you for your commitment.

Ms. Kim Thomas: Thank you.

Ms. Louise Chabot: I understand that this isn't your first experience with the Canada summer jobs program.

As regards the application, what is?

Mr. Michel Cantin: I haven't been handling the application for that long.

Ms. Louise Chabot: I'm talking about the applications for jobs.

Mr. Michel Cantin: Yes. At first, other people handled the application. We were previously fortunate to have an experienced treasurer, and he was always the one who completed the application. That stopped at one point. I thought that made no sense, so we started over.

This year, there have definitely been some cuts, but at the same time we've been fortunate because, to our great surprise, the Ville de Saint-Jérôme renovated our 24 tennis courts. So there have been cuts, but there haven't been too many consequences as a result this year. It's next year that we are concerned about. We now have new courts ready to be used next year; so we would definitely like to have a coordinator, someone responsible for funding and maintenance workers responsible for the various facilities.

Ms. Louise Chabot: That's what I wanted to ask you. What would the consequences have been if you hadn't had that good fortune?

Mr. Michel Cantin: At some point, volunteers have to compensate for the lack of resources. So you have to find people who are prepared to get involved and to give a lot of their own time, which they may find exhausting. There are always volunteers who come back, but ever since we've had access to this program, the youth really help us and even teach us a lot of things. It's very important to continue that relationship.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chabot and Mr. Cantin.

[English]

Next, we have Ms. Zarrillo for six minutes.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to start with you, Ms. Thomas, because you talked about so many points in your presentation today.

I know this program has an objective of being a benefit to the employees. It has benefits for students. They are able to gain the skills they need to go out and work. As you said, there are so many other important benefits related to kids being out of school and having opportunities to learn a life skill around swimming, connect to their communities and help out parents who go to work. It is very often the woman who is looking after child care during the summer.

I see this study as being very gendered...this whole Canada summer jobs program. Work itself is gendered. Employment insurance was made based on gender. The labour stats are collected on gender, so this is very interesting to me. We saw in the data, the last time we met, that two-thirds of the jobs that go through the Canada summer jobs program go to women and girls. I take a bit of person-

al offence when we cut jobs that matter so much to women and girls.

My question is around that. You mentioned that you asked for three jobs and it went down to one. My question is this: How far in advance do you plan your programs, and did you have to spend any marketing money, or money, up front to prepare for those anticipated jobs?

[Translation]

Ms. Kim Thomas: We actually prepare for our camp every year. It's recurring, so we know that the camp will involve at least three employees. We add others if that proves necessary. We need the Canada summer jobs program so we can recruit at least two of our employees and start up the camp's activities. Apart from that it's the registrations that enable us to offer the camp. We have to plan it, and the planning is done throughout the year. We offer artistic swimming activities all year round. To ensure the camp is well planned, we plan it at the same time as we hold our regular activities.

We definitely need to do promotional work. In the Laurentians, we're fortunate to be cooperating with the Centres d'activités physiques Rivière-du-Nord, the CAPRDN. They usually do the advertising for our camps. So we're connected to them. They handle registrations through their website and then forward all amounts received with the registrations. As a result, we don't need to promote the camps.

However, we make extensive use of social media. We're part of a youthful community and we're a young team, so a lot of our advertising is done on social media and in the Laurentian cities that let us use their recreation publications.

• (1910)

[English]

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: That's wonderful. Thank you so much.

My next question is around making the program better. Part of this study is to find out where the gaps are and where we can potentially make this program better for the students, but I also see this as a wonderful ability to build community. I'm asking about what additional questions should be asked on the post-survey. I understand there is a mandatory one for employees and it's optional for the students who take on the roles.

What other questions do you think would be important so that the government has a good understanding of the success and gaps of this program?

[Translation]

Ms. Kim Thomas: As I previously said, you have to know the actual needs of the organization submitting the application and the specific requirements it must meet. In our case, for example, we have to make sure that our employees are national-level lifeguards. It's important to know that we have to pay for any upstream courses that may be necessary. If our coaches don't have the necessary training, we require that they get it before taking up their position, and we reimburse them for those costs after the fact.

So it's important to ask those kinds of questions regarding the necessary training on which the job depends. For us as an employer, it's important that funding cover the specific needs that we have to meet to ensure the connection among the various stages. We need the program so we can have two employees, and our employees must have acquired that specific training.

[English]

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: One of the other things I was interested in, when officials were here in the last meeting, was how much of an opportunity there is to educate young people about income tax and about filing their taxes and what kinds of entitlements they are potentially eligible for. Have you ever heard from your employees or the students who work with you that they'd like more information on that, or is that something totally outside this program?

[Translation]

Ms. Kim Thomas: To be really honest, I must say that we give them a lot of assistance in that area. We use a pay system and we show them where to access their pay statement. At the end of the year, I put all the documents they need to file their tax returns online, and I show them where to access their T4 slips or their Relevé 1, which they need in Quebec.

That support is provided to employees through the program itself, but it could help them. These youth have to learn how to manage this, even though tax withheld is refunded to them in full. They have to learn how to manage their official documents. They need to know where to find their pay statement and the other documents they need to file their tax returns.

Yes, that would be a very good thing to add to the program.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Zarrillo.

[English]

Ms. Falk, you have five minutes.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for their contributions to this study of the Canada summer jobs program and for being here today.

I think it's very important that government programs are accessible to those they are designed to serve, that they are fair and that the delivery of the program is also efficient. As employers and applicants with first-hand experience, I greatly appreciate your testimony here today.

Ms. Thomas, I'd like to start with you. I know we heard from Mr. Cantin on his experience with the application process, but I'm wondering, in your experience, because you did say you have applied

over several years for Canada summer jobs, if the application process has been simple and easy to follow.

• (1915)

[Translation]

Ms. Kim Thomas: In actual fact, I worked all year long with computer tools and an online application platform, so it isn't that much of a challenge for me. I have to admit that it isn't the easiest platform to use, so I can understand the trouble that Mr. Cantin encountered. It wasn't a nightmare for me to navigate, but I would say it's not an intuitive interface. Would there be some way to improve it and make it more intuitive for the user? I think so.

At the first step, when users connect, they're directed to a page where they have to find their business and click on it to bring up the form and the decision. I honestly have to say that the visual aspect is somewhat confusing and could be revised. Having said that, I haven't had any difficulty completing an application.

[English]

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Thank you.

Would you say that the process and the website used plain language, meaning easy-to-understand, simple and straightforward language?

[Translation]

Ms. Kim Thomas: Yes, it's quite easy to understand, but it could be improved by making it more intuitive, as it were.

Mr. Michel Cantin: The more you use it, the more you familiarize yourself with the site. It's well done, but there are some minor problems. For example, when I recently went onto the site, it asked me for a tracking code. I don't remember what that was about and I eventually lost my page. If you take too much time, you lose the page and have to start the process over. At times I've had to rewrite entire job descriptions and all kinds of other information that the bureaucracy requires be included. These are minor points that could be corrected.

It's obviously easier for Ms. Thomas, who's used to this kind of site. I have to say though that I'm gradually getting good with it too. So it's workable. It isn't the end of the world.

People always seem to complicate things. Why simplify when you can complicate them? That's often the message that seems to be sent. It's hard to simplify things, from what I can see, but they should be simple. We could skip a lot of it.

[English]

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Yes, I agree. I also agree, I think, that when things are simplified, it takes away a barrier to people accessing the program.

I also want to quickly ask both of you this. I know my office has heard a lot of complaints on timing. Sometimes the launch of the program doesn't give enough time to get the application in, or when you find out that you have been accepted for funds, sometimes the timing doesn't seem right for when kids are out of university and that type of thing.

I'll just start with Ms. Thomas first. Can tell me if you've had any problems with timing in that area? Then I'll follow up with Mr. Cantin, please, very quickly.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kim Thomas: Since the program never launches on a specific date, it's very hard to know what to expect. We're always on tenterhooks in early January, wondering whether the launch will be on January 15 or January 30, for example, because we have roughly a month to submit all our applications after the program launches.

After that, the time we spend waiting for a response is never the same. We can't be sure we'll get an answer on April 15, for example. Sometimes it comes in early April, other times at the end of April, and that affects how we reserve facilities. This may be true for Mr. Cantin as well. We have to commit to the cities and tell them when we'll need the pool. We have a deadline for cancelling those reservations. If we cancel too late, we're charged for it. Consequently, we don't know whether we'll need the pool until we've received a response to our application. If the answer comes too late and we're ultimately informed that funding has been granted for only one position, as was the case last year, we can't hold the camp and have to pay a penalty for cancelling.

So it's very hard not having fixed dates. The program's dates should be fixed. For example, you could require that the applications be received no later than January 15 and that responses be sent out by April 15 at the latest. That would make it much easier for the organizations to manage these applications and properly plan their activities.

• (1920)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Falk and Ms. Thomas.

[*English*]

We'll now go to Mr. Fragiskatos for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Cantin, thank you for your contribution today.

My question is very general, but I think it will be useful to the committee.

Do you have one or two key recommendations for the committee? You discussed a number of points, but do you have one or two key recommendations for us?

Mr. Michel Cantin: I think the most important recommendation is that you continue advertising the program and make it easier to apply to it. At the same time, there should be a major effort to make the program accessible and to attract as many people as possible. Where we live, that's a pool of 600,000 persons. It would be a good idea to adapt the application mechanism to the place in question. An effort has to be made to provide increasing numbers of jobs

through the program. This is in fact what will happen: increasing numbers of students will use this program. If it is simplified and a continuing effort is made to advertise it, organizations will submit applications, and it will be possible to get a great deal of work done. So I'd like you to work on that part of the program.

I think the rest of the program is very good. It's a good program. As we said, the important thing is to maintain the budgets. They should always be structured in such a way that there is a progression. Money is always the essential factor, but I'm sure that cuts can be made in many other areas and money invested in this program.

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Yes. There's also a video.

You had a lot to say about accessibility. Is that generally a technology-related problem? I'm thinking, for example, of the website and the fact that everything has to be done online.

Mr. Michel Cantin: I don't think so. In my case, for example, it took time for me to wake up and realize the program existed.

I was on the board of two organizations, one of which had applied for funding for one position, while the other had filed no applications. As a board member, I didn't immediately realize that. I wondered at one point why another organization had received support from the program but not mine. I asked one of the employees of my organization to file an application, to see what that might do. We ultimately received funding for one position. So I told my friend to file an application if he wanted his organization to get assistance as well. You have to understand that there are a lot of organizations.

I realize the development potential. The budgets of our organization, which is at the regional level, is \$9,000. That makes no sense. That's a small budget for a regional organization. I have a \$70,000 budget with the local club. The regional organization had been content to file applications for a number of years. When I joined it and saw that its budget was only \$9,000, I said I wanted someone to be made responsible for funding. I wanted the organization to have a bigger budget so it could develop the region. That's when I realized that our activities would be limited if budgets were cut. So I'd like the budget to be maintained.

To sum up, I recommend that the budgets be increased, that the program be more broadly advertised and that it be easier to file applications.

• (1925)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you once again, Mr. Cantin.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A question about funding was asked earlier. This is something that I've observed in my riding of Thérèse-De Blainville, in the Lower Laurentians. On the one hand, you have the number of positions that organizations request, and on the other hand, there's the number of weeks. Organizations generally request 10 or 12 weeks, as the program provides, unless I'm mistaken, but they are granted eight.

What are the ramifications of that? Considering your mission or your projects in general, are those eight weeks enough or is a larger number of weeks one of the improvements that should be made to the program?

That question is for both of you. I'll give you one minute each to answer it.

Mr. Michel Cantin: That's caused problems for me this year. It doesn't work if youth start working in May because our busy season is in July, August and September, and I don't want them to stop working during that period. So I thought I could work around the problem by having them work fewer hours per week, but over more weeks. So I offered them 24 hours a week. However, I was told later that I wasn't allowed to do that because the minimum was 30 hours a week. That's when I started doing what I mentioned earlier: I complicated the process. I had to come up with all kinds of schemes for it to work.

Ms. Louise Chabot: That's because you needed those employees until September.

Mr. Michel Cantin: Yes, that's right.

Ms. Louise Chabot: I see.

What about you, Ms. Thomas?

Ms. Kim Thomas: My answer would be somewhat the same.

Our needs start in May because we have to set up the program for the summer. We generally hire our students starting in May. They then work on a part-time basis, particularly on weekends. Starting in late June, when school is out, they can work full time until late August.

So our full-time weeks are in July and August. Before that, we need to have the option of having them work part time to prepare the program. However, somewhat as Mr. Cantin said, we're stuck with the program requirement of a minimum of 30 hours per week. However, you can't have students who haven't completed their school year work 30 hours a week. That doesn't work.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Is that a recommendation that could be made, that there should be more flexibility regarding hours worked?

Mr. Michel Cantin: Absolutely. You're absolutely right.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[English]

Ms. Zarrillo will end this round with two and a half minutes.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you.

I'm going to carry on with that theme because I heard from my community, too, that they'd like to be able to do a bit of training before they're fully in the role.

I will ask this question of Mr. Cantin and then Ms. Thomas. Did you have to pay for that training? Did they just come and volunteer, or is that something that needs to be incorporated into the eight weeks?

[Translation]

Ms. Kim Thomas: We do incorporate that in the weeks.

Mr. Michel Cantin: Canada summer jobs provides training at the outset. It's very good. It's done via Zoom, and it facilitates the work in our case.

I don't know if that's what you meant, Ms. Zarrillo.

[English]

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I'm just wondering if you needed to offer training.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Cantin: Yes. Being able to have training is definitely something else that would be very good to add to the program.

I tried to go to the Canada summer jobs office on Chomedey Boulevard, only to realize that it hadn't been there for a long time. Even though I was receiving documents from that address, the program office was now somewhere else. When I went there, I was told that I couldn't just show up like that and that I had to make an appointment.

So it isn't simple. It's definitely a very good idea to have training.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you.

[English]

Ms. Thomas, is that something you're doing? Are you doing training for your students before they start working?

• (1930)

[Translation]

Ms. Kim Thomas: Yes, we do it before they start working full time, but we pay them. We can't afford to start training on June 28 at the same time as the day camp. So we train the students before that, but we use the club's money to pay for the training.

[English]

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Zarrillo.

[Translation]

Thank you, Ms. Thomas and Mr. Cantin.

[English]

Thank you for your appearance here and, obviously, your passion and commitment to this program.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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