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REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS
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SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON

EDUCATION

Burnaby

Monday, June 5, 2006

Issue No. 8

JOHN NURANEY, MLA, CHAIR

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SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION

Burnaby
Monday, June 5, 2006

Chair: * John Nuraney (Burnaby-Willingdon L)

Deputy Chair: Gregor Robertson (Vancouver-Fairview NDP)

Members: Daniel Jarvis (North Vancouver-Seymour L)
* Richard T. Lee (Burnaby North L)
* Lorne Mayencourt (Vancouver-Burrard L)
* Mary Polak (Langley L)
* John Rustad (Prince George-Omineca L)
John Horgan (Malahat-Juan de Fuca NDP)
* Doug Routley (Cowichan-Ladysmith NDP)
* Diane Thorne (Coquitlam-Maillardville NDP)

**denotes member present*

Clerk: Kate Ryan-Lloyd

Committee Staff: Josie Schofield (Committee Research Analyst)

Witnesses: Shawn Bayes (Executive Director, Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver)
Sue Brigden (University College of the Fraser Valley)
Julia Dodge (University College of the Fraser Valley)
Vaughan Evans
Doreen George (Burnaby School District Parenting and Family Literacy Centres)
Laurie Gould (Vancouver Community College Faculty Association)
Souad Hage-Hassan (Burnaby School District Parenting and Family Literacy Centres)
Penelope Irons (Aboriginal Mother Centre Society)
Ted James (Douglas College)
Stephanie Jewell (Vancouver Community College Faculty Association)
Mardi Joyce (Douglas College)
Sean Kocsis (IIG All Nations Institute)
Ingrid Kolsteren (Vancouver Community College Faculty Association)
Nina Kozakiewicz (Vancouver Community College Faculty Association)
Lyn Lennig (Vancouver Community College Faculty Association)
Bob Logelin (Douglas College)
Wai Ng
Ben Qui (Burnaby School District Parenting and Family Literacy Centres)
Carol St. Jean (Douglas College)
Jim Sinclair (President, B.C. Federation of Labour)
Grace Tait (Aboriginal Mother Centre Society)

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MINUTES

SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION



Monday, June 5, 2006

10:00 a.m.

Waterford Room, Hilton Vancouver Metrotown
Burnaby

Present: John Nuraney, MLA (Chair); Richard T. Lee, MLA; Lorne Mayencourt, MLA; Mary Polak, MLA; Doug Routley, MLA; John Rustad, MLA; Diane Thorne, MLA

Unavoidably Absent: Gregor Robertson, MLA (Deputy Chair); John Horgan, MLA; Daniel Jarvis, MLA

1. The Chair called the Committee to order at 10:24 a.m.
2. Opening statement by the Chair, John Nuraney, MLA.
3. The following witnesses appeared before the Committee and answered questions:
 - 1) Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver Shawn Bayes
 - 2) Douglas College Ted James, Mardi Joyce, Bob Logelin, Carol St. Jean
 - 3) University College of the Fraser Valley Sue Brigden, Julia Dodge
 - 4) Vancouver Community College Faculty Association Nina Kozakiewicz,
Lyn Lennig
 - 5) Vancouver Community College Faculty Association Laurie Gould, Stephanie
Jewell, Ingrid Kolsteren
 - 6) Wai Ng
 - 7) Aboriginal Mother Centre Society Penelope Irons, Grace Tait
 - 8) Burnaby School District Parenting and Family Literacy Centres Doreen George, Souad
Hage-Hassan, Ben Qui
 - 9) BC Federation of Labour Jim Sinclair
 - 10) Vaughan Evans
 - 11) IIG - All Nations Institute Sean Kocsis
4. The Committee adjourned to the call of the Chair at 1:17 p.m.

John Nuraney, MLA
Chair

Kate Ryan-Lloyd
Clerk Assistant and
Committee Clerk

MONDAY, JUNE 5, 2006

The committee met at 10:24 a.m.

[J. Nuraney in the chair.]

J. Nuraney (Chair): Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. My name is John Nuraney, and I am the Chair of the Select Standing Committee on Education.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you all to the Education Committee's public hearing in Burnaby. It is a real pleasure for us to be in this fine city and in this absolutely great riding and to hear from you directly about the important topic of adult literacy.

For your information, today's meeting is a public meeting which will be recorded and transcribed by Hansard Services. A copy of the transcript along with the minutes of this meeting will be printed and will be made available on the committee's website at www.leg.bc.ca/cmt/education. In addition to the meeting transcript, a live audio webcast of this meeting is also produced and available on the committee's website to enable interested listeners to hear the proceedings as they occur. An archived copy of the audio broadcast will also be retained on the committee's website.

[1025]

Let me also, for the benefit of the presenters, read out the mandate that this committee has. The Select Standing Committee on Education was reissued the following terms of reference by the Legislative Assembly on February 20, 2006.

The mandate is that the committee be empowered to examine, inquire into and make recommendations with respect to finding effective strategies to address the specific challenge of adult literacy and in particular to conduct consultations to consider successful strategies from other jurisdictions on the promotion of adult literacy and specific strategies to improve literacy rates among aboriginal people, English-as-a-second-language adults, and seniors. The committee is required to report back to the Legislative Assembly not later than November 30, 2006.

Today we have a number of people working with us. Wendy Collisson and Marian van der Zon are here from Hansard Services to report what was said — so be careful what you say — during the hearing. Then Hansard produces a transcript of what people say, which is posted on the Internet as well.

We also have staff here from the office of the Clerk of Committees. Kate Ryan-Lloyd, who is sitting next to me, is our Committee Clerk. Our researcher, Josie Schofield, is at the information desk at the back.

I would now like to invite the members of the committee to introduce themselves, starting from my far right.

J. Rustad: My name is John Rustad. I'm the MLA for Prince George-Omineca.

D. Thorne: My name is Diane Thorne. I'm the MLA for Coquitlam-Maillardville.

M. Polak: I'm Mary Polak. I'm the MLA for Langley.

R. Lee: I'm Richard Lee, MLA for Burnaby North.

D. Routley: Doug Routley. I'm the MLA for Cowichan-Ladysmith.

L. Mayencourt: Good morning. I'm Lorne Mayencourt, representing Vancouver-Burrard.

J. Nuraney (Chair): As you will notice, it is a bipartisan committee. It is a committee that reports to the Legislature directly on what we hear and what our findings are. Our report will contain a set of recommendations that this committee will put forward to the Legislature for consideration and, hopefully, will eventually be passed on to the ministers responsible to make sure that what we are hearing is what the ministers are also listening to.

This is part of our task, and we look forward to listening to what you have to say. I would encourage the presenters to throw as much light as they can on the mandate of this committee to help us in our work.

Our first presenter is Shawn Bayes. She is with the Elizabeth Fry Society.

Welcome, Shawn. Thank you for coming.

Presentations

S. Bayes: The Elizabeth Fry Society — I'll start by talking briefly about that — is known for its work with....

J. Nuraney (Chair): Sorry. Before we start, just a quick little bit of caution. You have 20 minutes.

S. Bayes: Fifteen, I think.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Fifteen minutes, which includes five minutes of questions.

S. Bayes: The Elizabeth Fry Society is known for its work with women in prison. The issues I've come to talk you about today relate to the criminalization of people as they would overlap with the issues of literacy.

The Elizabeth Fry Society is located in New Westminster, and it operates a program in conjunction with the New Westminster school board, through which we support women to be able to get their GED or Dogwood certificates. Some of the problems I'm going to highlight would be from the experience we've had in running that program over the last five years.

As it would pertain to prisoners, there's a well-known link, as everybody knows. I'll skip all that information as it would pertain to the limited education of prisoners, their reduced likelihood of employability and increasing numbers who have cognitive disabilities and FAS.

Of the group that I work with, for women, 50 percent of the clients in Correctional Services Canada would have an education of less than a grade nine level.

[1030]

A significant majority of the clients that we work with in the community — and that's about 41 percent — would have an education of less than grade seven. When I say "clients in the community," I'm talking about women who would come through our shelter for homeless women and children, women who would come through our drug addiction residential supportive programs and women who come through an independent living program that we provide.

In terms of some of the issues as they would relate to the criminalization of people, the first thing I'd like to mention about female offenders is that two-thirds of them are mothers. When you consider those children, the first thing you have to recognize around prisoners is that there are intergenerational issues that would pertain there.

The numbers from the centre for incarcerated parents in California is that about 80 percent of prisoners would have an immediate family member who has been incarcerated. Correctional Service of Canada's statistics say they would come from.... Jeanne Ruest from the Department of Justice says that about 60 percent — 59.7 percent — of offenders come from families where a direct family member has been incarcerated previously.

The reason I mention that is because if we're going to address literacy as it would pertain to prisons and children, one of the things we need to consider is how, within the correctional system, we support the rights of children as they would come under legislation or international covenants that Canada has signed, such as the UN rights for children.

Parents don't have an opportunity to be able to interact with children in a normal way. Literacy issues, as I would identify them, would be things like: you can't bring into a prison any kind of written materials. So children don't even have the opportunity to read with parents, show them homework, do homework with them or any of those normative kinds of things.

The reason that would be important, from my perspective, is that Literacy B.C. identifies that children who come from literate families would already have several thousand hours of prereading activities with parents. We have structured the system so that systematically we're not providing parents an opportunity to engage with their children at that level.

The other thing I would say is that in terms of being able to work with prisoners and around the issues of literacy, we have not structured correctional programs to address that. The greater majority of people who enter our prisons serve less than 45 days in prison. Clearly, we cannot expect the correctional system to remediate literacy problems within less than 45 days.

Of the group that I represent, there are about 3,500 women incarcerated on any given day in Canada, but only about 500 of them are serving sentences of more

than 45 days. Literacy issues as they pertain to female offenders have to be addressed within the community. We need to then look at the kinds of proxy measures for where those people are going to be able to be supported in their literacy requirements.

In relation to that, in terms of even looking at where people are coming in contact with the criminal justice system, here in B.C. 32 percent of all poor families do not qualify for eligibility for legal aid even though their income is below that level. The reason is that their crime is taken to be not serious enough.

The support that's provided them is written legal information about how to represent themselves and negotiate through the criminal justice system. We can't be surprised, therefore, that poorer people suffer harsher sanctions within the criminal justice system, because not only are they not afforded a lawyer, but the means by which we communicate with them already reduces their ability to successfully navigate through that system.

In terms of welfare in B.C., because we've already identified that the population I work with would have drug addiction problems, homelessness and literacy issues, there are issues as they would pertain to the eligibility. I understand that's a provincial issue, but to be clear, the kind of thing that brings up for women is that when they attend our schooling program, we provide transportation to and from the school and child-minding because those are not funded activities to which they can come or have their child care provided for.

[1035]

We have also been working around the issue of what it is to feel yourself as a minority. In that, I speak of gender and not race. The issue from my perspective would be that many of the women I represent have historical victimization issues. Those women are not comfortable entering traditional environments and have issues around authority, around age, around role.

We provide our program within the Elizabeth Fry Society itself, and we provide a community resource centre through which women bring not just themselves but their children. There are three Internet computers through the government CAP program. They can attend up to 30 hours a week. We do homework with kids. We research school projects. King Tut's tomb was the one this weekend. But whatever it is, that's really about our work. Our work is supporting literacy in families at a really grass-roots level, and that's much of what is required.

If the issues that get between people and an education are being able to get from your home to school, when you're on social assistance living with less than \$8,700 a year, you're not going to get far. The same goes if you can't have childminding for your child, so we provide volunteers who do that.

Lastly is the two-of-five-year eligibility requirement. It doesn't provide enough time for anything above survival fluency in language in terms of mastery. As that would pertain to ESL issues, we're looking at more like three or four years for people to have a func-

tional level of literacy, or as it would pertain to people who are coming with deficits in their cognitive abilities. So I would reference that.

I would bring up the issue of housing. If we are to address this issue of literacy as it is generationally being passed through our criminal justice system with children, we have to recognize that for my population, they are single women, and they are living in great poverty. That means you move frequently, your children change schools often, and we are asking people to negotiate numerous times through the bureaucracy.

In terms of what programs have been successful, one of the most has been a casework approach based on what's called client-specific planning. That's been used extensively in the United States with women, and it's much like a wraparound approach that has been used with youth in this province and in Ontario. That approach would look to assist women to be able to negotiate bureaucracies, to be able to advocate for themselves and to be able to move through it with them.

Finally, there's a significant difference between the voluntary sector and government. Your programs are broad, and it's a wide-painting brush. The ability the voluntary sector has is to reach into populations and specifically work with and identify our groups. It's important to recognize that there are certain parts of the voluntary sector that would have significant investment in voluntary issues, and they have not traditionally been the places through which those access points have been made to reach clients. I would encourage you to think about that as it would apply to the work of the John Howard Society, the Elizabeth Fry Society or, in eastern Canada, St. Leonard's.

Thank you. I await your questions.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Thank you, Ms. Bayes. Questions.

M. Polak: Two quick ones. Hopefully, they're quick. You mentioned access points at the very end, and that was something on my mind initially. Very often we find provincial or federal governments perhaps not using the human assets that are out there with respect to NGOs. I'd like to maybe hear specifically one or two points as to how we might improve that.

Secondly, if you could talk a little bit more about the wraparound approach that you mentioned in terms of how we deal with youth.

S. Bayes: In terms of access points, I would say that both the John Howard and Elizabeth Fry societies do a lot of work in literacy. It's not well recognized, and it's entirely unresourced almost across Canada. That is, we raise money through our standing as charitable organizations to be able to do that work.

[1040]

In my own organization it's entirely unfunded and has been the entire time. We are the sole Elizabeth Fry Society within the Greater Vancouver area. There are some very small ones in northern B.C. That means we

subsidize the work we do by about \$200,000 a year, so most of my life is spent raising money to enable us to take what I would identify as a really pragmatic approach to addressing problems.

In terms of the wraparound approach, that would involve having people, very much as you might think of as a community development worker, who would work with clients to prepare a well-being plan, as we call it, which identifies what their needs are and works with them to negotiate getting into stabilized housing or training programs. You have somebody here from Douglas College who I'm sure can speak to the massive cuts that have occurred there in terms of educational programming such as ESL — but being able to assist clients to negotiate that.

People who have criminal records also tend to be people who have low thresholds of impulsivity, and so it's often very difficult for them to work through bureaucracies. Having someone go with you and attend with you and be there and address those issues can be very supportive and can ensure that our clients are successful. I think it needs to be done starting from within prisons.

The one thing prisons do is a very full and complete assessment of everybody who comes through their doors. They know who's literate; they know who's not literate. They have all of those early demographic pieces of information that would allow us to target people. What we need to then do is move with them into the community and see that they get the resources they need.

D. Routley: Thank you for the presentation. It's clear that so many of the problems our communities deal with are, in fact, outcomes that are representations of issues that people have or services that they haven't been able to access — be it educational services or health care services. It's clear that social determinants of health have a big impact on choices that people make and their ability to access housing.

You mentioned the increase in FAS issues and cognitive issues. We see that in the school districts as well, taking in more and more students with difficulties in learning. This is all at a time when — and pardon me, I'm an opposition critic so I'll be slightly political — we see this played out against a contrast of cutbacks in services to children, to women, to families.

It's clear to me that wealth equals health to a certain degree, but wealth also equals freedom. It equals literacy. It equals success so often.

You are an unfunded service. Government resources are either scarce or made scarce. To support the work that you do, what type of funding would you most require? Funding at an administrative level? Funding in program delivery? What is the biggest need you see that government could play a funding role in?

S. Bayes: I think the first thing is to secure the space — just being very pragmatic. That is, we have that resource centre. It's actually open not only for education; it takes the population-health approach. It has a com-

munity kitchen. It has a clothing bank. It has advocates who assist people with getting welfare, medical attention, different diagnoses — all of those things. So I would say that.

The second thing is, as it would pertain to the ability to provide what I see as those kinds of pieces that enable people to get where they have to be, we underwrite transportation and childminding, as I identified.

The other thing, though, that's quite significant is when you're talking about people with cognitive disabilities, we need to have them assessed. So we pay for assessments to be done by a clinical psychologist, where required, to enable a teacher to be successful.

J. Nuraney (Chair): I would encourage the members to just keep their question directly as a question, and no comments please. Next is Richard Lee, and this will be the last question.

R. Lee: Thank you for the presentation. You mentioned that three to four years of ESL additional training is probably appropriate for immigrants. But some immigrants have different backgrounds. Is that the average time requirement, or is that what you have learned from your experience — the time period which is appropriate?

[1045]

S. Bayes: For me, it's absolutely above two years. I think it's a minimum of three to four years to provide for functional literacy. There are estimates that say it's up to five. The kinds of clients we're working with are women who are often being involved in packing drugs and in sex enslavement issues. For me the issues for them around literacy are quite significant because they're people who may also.... I think if you come as a professional person with an intact understanding of grammar and structure, your ability to learn a language is significantly better than if you don't have that internal framework to apply to being able to learn a language. So when we're working with people who may not have that, it's particularly difficult. Certainly, significant periods of time are required.

[Interruption.]

J. Nuraney (Chair): Thank you, Ms. Bayes. This is not a signal for you to wrap up.

K. Ryan-Lloyd (Clerk Assistant and Committee Clerk): It is a fire alarm, but they're going to make an announcement. They're just going to confirm if we have to vacate.

J. Nuraney (Chair): So just hang in there for the announcement.

A Voice: The alarm stopped.

J. Nuraney (Chair): It was a false alarm.

Our next presenters are the people from Douglas College. They are Ted James, the dean of student de-

velopment; Carol St. Jean, coordinator of ESL programs; Bob Logelin, coordinator of adult special education; and Mardi Joyce is a literacy instructor.

Excuse me for all the interruptions.

T. James: No problem. Good morning.

Today we'd like to tell you about the work that we do and to give you some examples of the contribution to literacy education that Douglas College provides and to talk about some of the challenges that we and our learners face.

My position is responsible for administering a wide variety of college access programs such as adult upgrading, college preparation, programs for students who have English as a second language and training programs for people on income assistance, including those which we provide for adults who have disabilities or barriers to employment. My position is one where I know firsthand every day how important it is for the college system to provide many routes of access for learners.

I also know how equally important it is for us to ensure that those students are successful in reaching their goals, in achieving their potential. Colleges assist ordinary British Columbians to access post-secondary education, but colleges also support them to actually be successful as learners. Without that support, they wouldn't maximize the return that the province expects to receive by investing in their education.

This topic is important to you as hon. members of the Legislative Assembly, as custodians of the provincial economy, because one key way in which B.C. can maximize the return on its investment in education is to ensure that the consumers of education have their needs satisfied. That will only come through learners being successful in their studies. Access has to mean more than an open door. It must lead to a successful path.

[1050]

We urge you to consider literacy not simply as a project, something to be highlighted for a moment and then completed, but rather to consider literacy as a field where the ongoing needs of undereducated adults are continually served by professionals with specific expertise and training. Colleges such as ours are well positioned to do this, using the capital and infrastructure dollars which the public has already paid for.

As you know, literacy is becoming much more important to our economy. In the '90s employment opportunities for those with less than high school graduation declined sharply by 40 percent. The share of employment openings that will require some post-secondary education is expected to rise by more than 70 percent by the year 2008.

In the interest of time, I'm not going to go through a whole range of other statistics that have also been provided in the package for you. But the challenge is not just simply numbers. It's also the ever-increasing range of the diversity of learners' needs. We're glad that your mandate includes such a wide, broad definition of literacy, because this includes those members of society

who need you to be able to provide them with services to assist them in improving their English, as well as other minority groups such as people with first nations ancestry and those students who have disabilities.

Colleges such as ours are well placed to serve this variety of needs. We can provide highly trained professionals who address these issues and serve learners holistically. We can also help learners access other training opportunities and career programs to help them become more self-sufficient and lead more sustainable lives with access to higher-paying employment. This allows their literacy training to ladder into a better future for them, for us and for our economy.

A good example of the literacy programming we provide is the ICARE tutor programming. ICARE stands for individualized community adult reading education program. It's aimed at being able to help adults in the community who want to improve their basic reading, writing and numeracy skills but who are unable, for a variety of reasons, to attend formal classes at the college. The program matches learners with volunteer tutors in the community who undergo a formal program beforehand to train them in the best practices of being a literacy tutor. The learners receive tutoring free of charge and receive tutoring services once per week at a time and place convenient for both the learner and the tutor.

Over the past 27 years of offering this award-winning program, we have served over a thousand undereducated adults to develop their literacy skills and become more functional members of society. The success of learners accessing and re-accessing such programs of high quality literacy education, perhaps even the success of the Premier's literacy legacy, will rely upon the public community colleges continuing to provide leadership in this area. Our learners do not deserve less than this.

My colleagues are going to provide some more details about some of the programs that we offer and some of the issues that we face.

M. Joyce: When I meet with adult literacy students to individually assess their goals and skills, many say: "This is the first time I have told anyone I have trouble with reading and writing." I'm no longer surprised by this, because I realize literacy is an issue that carries deep shame with it — an issue that people hide as long as they can. But I am surprised no one asks them whether they can read or write. Usually their employer does not know, their doctor does not know, and their child's teacher does not know.

What is even more distressing is that if they are on social assistance, their social worker has stopped asking about literacy. If they are brave enough to say they have problems reading and writing, the information is not considered important. Literacy is no longer recognized as a barrier for employment by the ministry of social services.

All clients are sent to private organizations for help with job searches rather than educational upgrading. Adults who have difficulty reading and writing are expected to research careers, conduct job searches and

document their findings. If they do find a job requiring reading and writing above their skill level, they must try to bluff their way through. If they lose the job, they are cut off social assistance and must start the process over again.

[1055]

At the college we have literacy classes, which students can attend while they're doing job searches, and individual literacy tutoring, which can help them fill out forms and learn the reading and writing necessary for a particular job. But people on social assistance are no longer referred to literacy programs or given financial support to attend. This policy is destroying access to public programs.

If students on social assistance manage to find our programs without help, they struggle to find the money to come. Our tuition is free for literacy classes and our books are free, but students are often one bus ticket away from not making it to class.

We have raised money to help them with bus tickets, school supplies, child care and food. Much of the money comes from our own donations. Trying to provide these supports distracts from our real work: teaching reading and writing.

Our students who have jobs often work at minimum wage and also need support. They have the additional pressure of not enough time. There are no educational leaves or student loans for literacy. All their education must be squeezed into evenings and weekends. If they are parents, it means time away from their children. As they move into higher-level upgrading courses, the tuition fees become a new obstacle.

Excellent literacy programs have been developed in British Columbia. But without government policy changes and the restoration of supports for students, these programs will die and the strides we have made in providing adults with a second chance for education will be lost.

C. St. Jean: In the interest of time, I'm not going to describe to you our services for students in our English-for-academic-purposes program, which is the ESL program at Douglas College. Just to add to the words of the speaker from the Elizabeth Fry Society, academic fluency takes from five to eight years to develop after you have the social-survival fluency.

What I would like to address are barriers for immigrant students. Provincial funding for support services for immigrants at the college has been compromised with the closing of the B.C. Benefits office, which was funded by a provincial initiative to support institutional-based training. This provided a personal first approach to the college for immigrants referred by their social service workers. The counsellors helped the applicants arrange for funding for tuition, day care, books and living expenses.

There needs to be for the ESL literacy students a central, one-stop shop where the applicants can get the information they need from someone with time to spend to answer questions. This was a service that existed and was available through B.C. Benefits.

The label ESL, itself, is another barrier. Immigrant students graduating from high schools and their parents resist the demand to take ESL courses. They would prefer to take their chances in an open-enrolment university transfer program or try to take adult basic education courses. However, adult basic education instructors are often reluctant to have ESL students in their classes. They feel they may not have the skills to help the ESL learner, and they worry that the anglophone students' needs, which are often very different, will not be met. These ESL students need a bridge program to help them address the reading-writing deficit that they still have when they finish high school.

Rising tuition has created another barrier for students. ABE courses cost less than ESL or are tuition-free, dependent on the student's situation. ESL learners will often try to bypass ESL in order to benefit from this tuition situation in the ABE program. However, ABE is not always the best solution for their language learning needs, and they may take time away in the classroom from the instruction the L1 student needs. Also, the adult basic education student assistance program — ABESAP funding — is insufficient, and the costs of textbooks are no longer covered. You're probably aware that an average textbook costs between \$45 and \$80 now.

[1100]

We see the need for the following new initiatives: (1) a bridge program for recent high school graduates with insufficient reading and language skills to be successful in university transfer courses, and (2) a bridge program for immigrant students who have fluent oral skills but do not have the skills required for success in UT or career programs. These students do not fit into the English-for-academic-purposes program because of their high level of oral fluency; nor do they fit into the ABE classroom because of their second-language needs in their reading and writing.

We also see a need for the growth of ELSA levels four and five to upgrade older immigrant learners to help them gain access to the English-for-academic-purposes program and additional financial aid to help immigrants pay tuition costs which are not eligible for student loans. Immigrants enter language training when they perceive a need to, and they interrupt their learning to handle family and employment needs.

Language learning is not a seamless process. For example, a woman may spend five years at home raising her children and then decide to go to language classes to improve her English. A health care professional may come to Canada, work as a nanny and then require additional upgrading to meet accreditation standards in a professional body. A man employed in a company may reach a barrier to promotion if he doesn't have the required reading and writing skills needed for a new position. Consequently, literacy education for immigrants is an interrupted continuum, not something which can be simply front-end-loaded in their settlement period. Colleges play an important role in being there when immigrants need to change direction and improve their language proficiency.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Thank you.

Bob, if you would just highlight the important points, as we are a bit short of time. Thanks.

B. Logelin: Actually, I had a story that I was going to tell about a student of ours and his difficulties in coming to B.C. and gaining employment. I work with students with disabilities, and to separate literacy and disability from the variety of other issues that this population deals with is very difficult. I wanted to make that point.

In B.C. there are 460,000 people aged 16 to 64 with disabilities, of whom 52 percent are unemployed. One has to wonder why business and government are overlooking the need to further educate and train this population in light of the discussions promoting the recruitment of workers from other third-world countries in many cases.

It's ironic that people with disabilities find themselves facing a bleak future in terms of education and employment. Over the past several years best estimates have students with disabilities comprising less than 5 percent of post-secondary populations, whereas people with disabilities comprise 17 percent of the provincial population as a whole. The two issues that are outstanding for this population are: firstly, some current changes in government policy have, in effect, denied access for people with disabilities to post-secondary education; and secondly, as was also spoken to briefly, resources for this particular population to attend post-secondary education are lacking as well.

Literacy and employment are two of the primary issues facing this population. Unfortunately, through some recent changes in a long history of undervaluing this population, we're really not making much progress.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Thank you, Bob. We certainly will read the presentation that you have submitted to us. That will give us a little more light into what you are trying to tell us.

Questions.

M. Polak: To any one of you, if there was one most significant policy change that government could make to advance literacy with respect to the marginalized populations that you speak of, what would it be? What would be your wish?

T. James: How desirous to be able to provide ways in which people can afford to come.

M. Polak: Yeah. So it would be resourcing, in particular.

T. James: As Mardi mentioned, it's not simply a question of resources that we have control over. In many cases we try to keep our tuition as low as possible.

M. Polak: It's more the practical: transportation, childminding — those kinds of things.

T. James: It's more the practical, yeah.

M. Joyce: Well, and also referrals. I mean, unless people are allowed to come.... The system is there. You've got to let them come.

B. Logelin: And MEIA policy — the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance policy that currently is, intentionally or unintentionally, preventing people on income assistance or people with disabilities from coming to post-secondary environments.

M. Polak: Thank you.

[1105]

L. Mayencourt: Bob, what is that policy about?

B. Logelin: I'm not sure where it fits, but there is a policy that says that people on income assistance cannot go to post-secondary education.

M. Joyce: Or literacy.

T. James: The literacy, as Mardi mentioned, is not viewed as a way out of poverty.

M. Joyce: And it's not seen as something that enhances your employment opportunities anymore. I've walked through it with a student. He had virtually.... He was a non-reader and -writer. He was told that there was employment for non-readers and -writers right now as construction labourers.

I argued that he couldn't even read the danger signs in a worksite, but he was still sent to an organization to help him do job search. He couldn't attend their workshops or be provided with any of their assistance, aside from the fact that they gave him a resumé to take out with him that he couldn't read himself but that they had prepared for him.

I came to be an advocate. They refused to talk to me, so I went back to talk to his worker. He didn't really have a worker, because they rotate so often that there's no case management being done with people on social assistance.

What I was eventually told was that if he failed to find a job through them, then I could come and be an advocate again and say: he can't read and write, and so maybe you should address this, because it seems to be an issue. It's going to be a safety issue on the job, if he does get a job, or it may cause him to lose his job.

B. Logelin: One of the points is that people don't get jobs. They wind up volunteering in business for a year or 18 months — two years in some cases — at no salary, at places like Home Depot and White Spot. It's often a sad picture for them.

R. Lee: Some of the immigrant students sometimes actually move in quite a high level in their country, but when they come here, they are probably 16 or 17 years old, so it's very difficult for them to catch up and then

go to a college. Do you have any suggestion on how to help them?

T. James: Yes. There are a number of opportunities for being able to help foreign-trained professionals and....

R. Lee: Not professionals. Sorry. Not professionals but high school students.

T. James: I'm sorry. I thought you mentioned that they had been highly trained in their previous country.

R. Lee: Well, they're in grade 10 probably in their countries.

T. James: We provide an important route of access for them to be able to access further training and further education because we have a variety of career programs. In cases where they need to develop their workplace English, our programming will provide for that.

R. Lee: I think my question is how to help them speed up their learning of English in the school system so that they can graduate from high school.

C. St. Jean: I think it takes a family endeavour, and it also takes some realism on the part of the parents. Language learning is a hard slog, and it takes time. The youngsters very quickly develop streetwise English. But their English, to be able to cope with dense academic text, to write in a rhetoric that may be different from their first culture and to deal with different student-teacher expectations, takes time.

It also takes the parents to recognize that the student-teacher interactions, expectations, may be different from the education they had in their first language.

D. Thorne: Mardi, I'm sorry. I missed your position at the college when you started to speak. What do you do there?

M. Joyce: I do the educational support to the ICARE program. I'm also an instructor.

D. Thorne: Okay. I know the ICARE program, actually. My friend has volunteered there for a long time.

Two things that I am particularly wondering. It sounds like there are significant challenges to the ABE program because of the current situation with ESL overall. Is that a fact? Are you having problems in ABE because of this — because students are in the wrong class? Is it significant?

M. Joyce: Somewhat. Certainly, we do assessments. We try to place people where they should be. But we certainly, I think all over the lower mainland, have an issue of flooding of people that don't quite fit. They're not really ESL anymore, but they're not really ABE.

D. Thorne: So it's almost like you need a bridging program in between those two. It's a very significant need.

M. Joyce: We're certainly trying to do that between ESL and the ABE program.

[1110]

D. Thorne: Right. But it's not a recognized program at this point in time. It's just kind of ad hoc.

M. Joyce: No. It's a reality of what's happening in the classroom.

D. Thorne: The other thing I was wondering about was: you've all mentioned advocacy quite a bit; is there a program of any kind so that you have advocates to help people, generally? Do you have a volunteer program or a group of advocates?

T. James: In general, no. Carol was mentioning the B.C. Benefits program, which was funded to be able to provide that kind of initial storefront operation. That's something which was very beneficial for being able to help people who were not necessarily used to finding educational opportunities for themselves and being able to understand how to access them and prepare themselves.

D. Thorne: Yes, because that would be, other than... I'm sure, in cases, a non-immigrant population, as well, would benefit from something.

T. James: Exactly, and that's part of what she was mentioning — the desire to have that kind of one-stop approach.

D. Thorne: I see.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Thank you very much for coming.

T. James: Thank you very much for listening to us.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Our next presenters are from the University College of the Fraser Valley. We have Sue Brigden and Julia Dodge.

J. Dodge: I wanted to thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My experience as an adult literacy practitioner is that we tend to be a rather reticent bunch and do not often get a chance to toot our own horns and talk about the programs we're engaged in, so I thank you for listening to what we have to say.

My work at the UCFV region is as regional literacy coordinator for the upper and eastern Fraser Valley region. My colleague Sue Brigden is the current department head in the college and career prep department at UCFV.

I wanted to briefly share with you a few of what we consider exemplary adult literacy programs that are

currently underway at UCFV, ones that we think model principles of good community collaborations and access and best practice. I'd also like to share with you our understanding of adult literacy development and how it's related to community development in a complex range of intersecting scenarios. It cannot be considered as confined to reading, writing and traditional schooling. I'd also like to point out our perceptions of the current context in which services are delivered in B.C. these days and make some recommendations for improving access and delivery of programs.

Historically, when the United Nations in 1990 declared the International Literacy Year, Fraser Valley College — as we were known then — declared: "The development of community coalitions is an essential element in the process of combatting literacy problems. The college's role, then, should include the development of community partnerships." So our predecessors at UCFV have worked intentionally and directly for years with community stakeholders specifically to formulate programs and initiatives through developed community partnerships.

We produced not-for-profit, community-based societies comprised of representatives from UCFV, school districts, regional libraries, health authorities, community services and numerous community-based service agencies and organizations. This attitude of collaboration is ongoing, and joint planning and partnership have produced many award-winning adult and family literacy programs that are diverse in nature. They serve a range of participants' needs and skills.

My actual position at UCFV is a good example of a community partnership that works very well. I am one of, I believe, ten regional literacy coordinators in the province at the moment. We're known as RLCs, if you've heard of us before. It is a partnership between Literacy B.C. and, most recently, Literacy Now, the Ministry of Advanced Education and local colleges and university colleges. The UCFV model, started in 1990, of placing people out in communities to develop these strategic partnerships and coalitions was the basis on which the RLC program was developed in '94.

[1115]

Our mandate, then, is to work essentially as conduits in our regions to help make these links between institutions and agencies and organizations — those that are involved with literacy, those that have not traditionally been involved with literacy — and to help break down barriers and improve community's awareness about the issues. As is the case in many adult literacy programs and projects in this province, it is not fully funded, though, so regional coordinators are, at maximum, working half-time.

There's one program in our region we're particularly proud of that I wanted to talk to you about. It's called Central Gateway for Families, and it's in the city of Chilliwack. It's a family learning centre that's run in an inner-city community school. The project comprises a prenatal nutrition program, a parenting education program for families in crisis, a summer reading and

recreation program, various parent and child programs and English language services for adult immigrants.

Most importantly, at the hub of this range of services that all happen out of this one community school is what we call a four-component family literacy program. Those four components comprise a UCFV adult learning centre on site at the school, a parent education program, a literacy-based preschool and infant-toddler program and a facilitated parent-child learning program. I think this is a great example of where many different community agencies and institutions come together to collaboratively plan and deliver an integrated range of services.

Typically, literacy is seen as funded in these silos that this type of an approach helps to break down, because we do have the pre-literacy, age-zero-to-six silo; the K-to-12 system; and adult literacy. By bringing them all together, we're able to share resources, bring families together, meet them in the community where they're living and working, but at the same time acknowledge that the three learner groups need specifically trained practitioners and programs. It isn't one-size-fits-all.

However, I think it's important to point out that there is no core funding structure in place in this province to enable sustained delivery of programs such as this. So the projects exist really through unstable, piecemeal funding, usually having to be cobbled together from numerous funders, mostly on a year-to-year basis. It does result in a fair amount of insecurity on the part of participants as well as practitioners and the community partners, but it also becomes very costly and time-consuming when it comes time to measure outcomes and success and to be accountable for the moneys that we're securing to run the programs, because we end up having to report to numerous external taskmasters.

If we are allowed to make recommendations to the committee, I would like to see a cross-ministerial government directorate that integrates and builds upon these natural partnerships that we see out in community. We could have one commonly understood set of best practices and evaluation criteria, which would avoid the overlaps and duplications of outcome measurements that we see in the programs at the moment.

Another program we're very proud of at UCFV is a literacy tutor certificate program, a paraprofessional certificate, which people who are interested in becoming teaching assistants can take, who are thinking of perhaps going on in the field of being a literacy practitioner. What I'm particularly proud of is that we offer the first introductory course tuition-free. In lieu of paying tuition, we ask people to then volunteer as tutors, either in our fundamental-level classrooms or out in community in family literacy programs or in our adult literacy classrooms.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Ms. Dodge, I don't want to interrupt you, but in two minutes could you quickly wrap up and highlight some of the points? Thanks.

J. Dodge: Okay. I won't touch very much on the stuff that Elizabeth Fry brought up, but Fraser Valley is home to a large number of correctional facilities. So what we see are adults who are living in the Fraser Valley, possibly because a spouse or family member was incarcerated in the Fraser Valley and they choose to live there upon release. That comes with a specific set of social issues that are perhaps not always best dealt with in a family literacy program or in a community-based setting. They really do need a targeted, mature adult-focused program.

[1120]

I think that adult literacy practitioners who are situated in college systems are really well-placed to help adults regardless of the geographical location of where we meet them. We know how adults learn. Whether they have learning disabilities or cognitive disabilities or English as a second language, we know how to teach adults, and where we go to teach them isn't the problem.

If somebody has had a bad experience with their schooling, returning to schooling may simply bring them back to feeling an aversion towards learning, so we're more about getting out there and looking at ways that we can develop programs that work for adults on the ground in the community where they are.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Ms. Brigden, did you want to say anything?

S. Brigden: Yes. As an instructor and head of the department, I've met many adults who cannot read, write, add or subtract well enough to read instructions on medicine bottles or reports from children's teachers, manage family finances or get a job. They come to our department because they want to learn so they can take care of themselves and their family.

You have been asked to find out about successful strategies that promote adult literacy, so I will summarize what I believe makes the adult literacy program at UCFV successful. First, the instructors and tutors working with our low-literacy students are trained to work with adults. Just as the instructional methods used to teach kindergarten students differ from those used to teach secondary students, the methods used to teach low-literacy adults differ from those used to teach children. The people who work with our students know how to work with adults.

Second, adults with lower literacy skills are not marginalized at UCFV nor at other post-secondary institutions that offer this programming. They're included in our classrooms and our department activities. For example, our classes are organized so students working with literacy tutors also participate in classroom discussions and other assigned activities. One of our classes, "Thrifty Chefs," helps students work on their literacy skills by planning and preparing nutritious meals. Not only does this enrich their learning experience, it enriches the experience of their fellow students.

Outside of class time students attend activities organized by our department, like the breakfast club,

which is a speaker series held before morning classes. As UCFV students, they are free to attend events organized for the broader UCFV community. By attending these activities, they meet others who have struggled to strengthen their literacy and numeracy skills and who have moved on into the adult Dogwood program or other post-secondary programs that we offer at UCFV.

Finally, we provide an adult learning environment. As a post-secondary institution, UCFV focuses on adult learners rather than children. The facilities are designed for adults; the activities are geared to adults; and support staff, such as educational advisers and counsellors, are trained to work with adults.

I have found that adults prefer to learn with other adults and that adults who have failed to thrive in the K-to-12 system are hesitant to return to it. I have a great respect for the adults in our classes because it takes courage to ask for help to learn the basic skills most people learn in elementary school.

To be successful, an adult literacy program must respect its students. I believe that a program that employs personnel trained to work with adults in an inclusive, adult-oriented environment that respects its students' challenges and strengths is one that will be successful.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Thank you very much. I'll just allow two quick questions.

L. Mayencourt: Thank you very much for your presentation. You've made a very interesting recommendation, and that is with respect to the cross-ministerial government directorate — basically coming up with best practices and evaluation criteria and a way of the overlap being mitigated.

What would that process look like? Obviously, you'd have to get some people together to develop what the criteria would be. Who needs to be involved in developing those best practices? If we were starting today, how long do you think it would take?

I mean, you guys have obviously developed best practices for your population. How much more complex is it than that?

[1125]

J. Dodge: I think in many instances it's already happening on the ground level, because resources are short. I think there are lessons to be learned by looking at communities that do have experience of working together.

In this province right now, through support from Ministry of Advanced Ed, there is a project called From the Ground Up where practitioners in the field are developing sets of criteria that answer those exact questions.

I would think that what we'd want to do is look at what they develop, what they bring forward as recommendations, and share it amongst other agencies and institutions that are working in these integrated services programs to see if it also speaks to them. I

think a lot of us are measuring the same beans for this funder, because it's a zero-to-six funder, and for this one because it's adult literacy. I think a lot of that good work is out there. We need a year or so to look at everybody else's work to see where we intercept.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Thank you, Ms. Dodge and Ms. Brigden, for taking the time and coming before us.

The next presenter is from the Vancouver Community College Faculty Association, from the ESL program. It's Lyn Lennig and Nina. Are you both going to make a joint presentation?

L. Lennig: Yes.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Just to warn you that you have ten minutes to do what you need to do.

L. Lennig: We wish to thank the Select Standing Committee on Education for this opportunity to speak on the challenges of providing English language education to ESL adults. In addition to this oral presentation, the Vancouver Community College Faculty Association will be submitting a fuller written report to the committee.

My name is Lyn Lennig, and my colleague is Nina Kozakiewicz. We are here today as representatives of the Vancouver Community College Faculty Association. As you may know, VCC is a key provider of English language education to adult immigrants in the lower mainland. Our association represents, among others, the ESL faculty at VCC, who are professional educators widely recognized for their expertise in English language education for non-native speakers of English.

To assist the committee in their search for effective strategies to address literacy challenges in B.C., our submission will focus on how access to English language education is a literacy issue for English-as-a-second-language adults. We will outline some challenges and some strategies and actions that we think might address some of these challenges.

If the committee focuses on literacy challenges only for those who have less than eight years of education in a first language, it would exclude a large number of ESL immigrants from this discussion. Government statistics show that B.C. receives over 35,000 immigrants each year. About 64 percent are between the ages of 20 and 59. A Ministry of Advanced Education study, the 2003 ESL student outcomes survey, shows that statistically 60 percent of this group have 12 years of education or more in their country of origin.

Although this group is literate in their first language, without continuous access to comprehensive English language education, they suffer the same consequences as those who do not meet the traditional definition of literacy. They are unable to participate fully in the social and cultural and economic life of their communities. Skills and talents are not utilized, and opportunities for their families are missed or delayed. They are at an increased risk of living in poverty.

Without adequate language and literacy skills in English, ESL adult immigrants are unable to enter the workforce as skilled workers or professionals, start bridging and mentoring programs designed for the internationally educated adult immigrants to jump-start their professional careers in Canada, enter technical education programs, pursue academic upgrading programs or develop the social and cultural knowledge essential for promotion and effectiveness at the workplace.

If an English-speaking Canadian is unable to engage his society in these ways, for all intents and purposes they would have a literacy problem. For most of the immigrants we deal with, their skills and abilities exist, and the spoken and written forms of the English language remain to be dealt with.

[1130]

Challenges and some suggestions for remedies to meet these challenges. First, currently three ministries — Advanced Education, Ministry of Economic Development and MCAWS — fund English language education. Each ministry has its own mandate and expertise, but often a lack of coordination creates a lack of cohesion and impedes overall planning for this group. A comprehensive provincial strategy for adult English language education would allow for more effective planning and help create a more accessible, rational system of English language education for ESL adults.

B.C.'s system of providing English language education through a mixed delivery approach of ELSA and then through varied college programming has created a good mix of educational approaches and has encouraged innovation and responsiveness. However, there is a need for better coordination with the funders.

The second one is funding challenges for students. The funding challenge for an ESL adult student is daunting. The government's adult basic education student assistance program allows for many ESL adults to attend English language education programs. However, many of our students are the working poor. They are ineligible for this funding because the threshold levels for eligibility are set too low.

Students will register for a term, then leave for a period of terms until they have worked and saved enough money for another term of study. Frequently this cycle of intermittent study is repeated several times. The outcome for this interrupted course of studies is a significant delay in students acquiring the literacy levels required for further study or employment.

One possible remedy would be to establish a system of educational planning for individual students based on their career plans and possibilities, with attached financial assistance that would sustain the individual's educational plans. An example of one province that does that is Manitoba. It has established a system of individual career and education counselling that's attached to financial assistance to make that a fact.

Developing literacy in new language requires not only financial support but time. A study from the University of Alberta shows that at the intermediate level of language learning, students need nine months of

full-time language study to increase proficiency by one level. I'm using as a reference point here the Canadian language benchmarks, which is the national standard of language assessment.

To meet the language requirements for workplace entry, levels eight and nine are essential. Bridging programs that aim to connect internationally educated professionals, technicians and skilled tradespersons to the workplace require CLB levels of seven and eight. For many ESL adult students, that will require several years of financial support before they have the language and literacy skills to be fully productive in the workplace.

We would encourage the government to increase the overall amount of ABESAP funding and the amount available for individual students, and to recognize that acquiring literacy in a new language takes time.

Our third point refers to the challenges because of gaps in delivery. Access to all levels of English language education should be available throughout the province. Maintaining the presence of English language education in the public post-secondary system is an essential and effective way to hasten the entry of new arrivals into the social and economic life of the community. Gaps in the delivery of English language education waste productive years of internationally educated workers.

At present new immigrants to B.C. can access free English language education at the Canadian language benchmarks levels one to four, which provide beginning language skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing. The next level of English language education, the intermediate level, five to eight, is a pivotal level in language learning. Without access to this level of language education, entry into further career training, bridging programs or academic study is stymied.

Recently the B.C. Skills Connect program initiated a new program to help skilled immigrants find jobs. This innovative program will help internationally educated professionals move into professional workplaces. This type of programming, however, will require language proficiencies in the seven-to-eight range.

[1135]

A provincial plan to provide access to the intermediate levels of English language education needs to be adopted. Providing a comprehensive and seamless system for the funding and delivery of English language education from beginning through intermediate to advanced levels is essential to maintaining B.C.'s attractiveness to internationally educated immigrants and utilizing the talents and skills of those who have already selected B.C. as their new home.

The fourth challenge for the government is to provide a one-stop learning system. The publicly funded post-secondary education system has a responsibility to students in the developmental areas of ABE and ESL adults to provide them with access to ongoing, quality educational programming. Colleges are unique in that they can provide English language education from beginning through intermediate to advanced levels of

English. Students can then transition to further applied training or content coursework, be it health sciences, technology or university transfer courses required for professional certification or upgrading.

Publicly funded colleges can and should provide educational counselling and advising and student support services such as libraries and learning centres, which are key to student success. Utilizing the expertise and resources of the local publicly funded community college should be a priority for funders. A provincial strategy to create a real and/or a virtual information clearinghouse that would provide information on access to English language education delivery throughout B.C., available professional bridging or transitional programming, support services and financial support information should be available and should be a priority for the government.

College program funding and tuition. At the institutional level there should be an increase in designated funding for the developmental programs so that demand can be met and delivery stabilized so that students can expect ongoing programming. While the government does require developmental FTEs of the colleges, and our particular college is doing so to meet the current requirements, these quotas were set several years ago after there had been major cuts. There has been a loss from the levels of five years ago. Where five years ago there were 3,500 FTEs expected from the college, now something less than 2,500 are being provided.

This group of students also needs protection from rising tuition fees. As developmental students they do not yet have the core literacy or English language proficiencies demanded in the applied, technical and professional workplace. Often unemployed or underemployed, they, like the ABE student, need discounted, if not free, tuition in order to access education and language.

My last point is to do with immigrant youth in this one sector of the adult ESL profile that has not received adequate attention from the system. Often referred to as late arrivals, these young adult immigrants arrived in Canada as high school students. Some have not had the time to develop the reading and writing literacy skills necessary to compete for jobs or meet the prerequisite for college programs.

These youth are in danger of being marginalized. They fit neither the traditional ABE nor ESL student profile, and the system is struggling to find appropriate, effective and efficient literacy training for them. A provincial strategy is needed, and cooperation between the public secondary school system and the post-secondary school system is needed to plan and devise appropriate responses to this need.

In conclusion, we wish to thank the select committee for this opportunity to speak to them on the challenges our students face to acquire adequate language and literacy skills. We would encourage the government to consult with English language educators and with students. From our perspective we would recommend that there be more coordination at the fun-

ders' level, increased financial support and tuition relief for students, a recognition that language learning requires time as well as adequate institutional support, a plan of action to meet the literacy needs of the late-arrival group and a commitment to provide access to a comprehensive English language education for ESL adult students throughout B.C.

Thank you for your attention.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Thank you, Lyn. Thank you, Nina, for taking the time to come and make your presentations.

Lorne, a very quick question.

L. Mayencourt: You mentioned the Manitoba program for individualized.... What kinds of dollars are attached to that program per student? Do you know?

L. Lennig: No, I don't have that exact information, but we understand that each student receives career and educational advising when they arrive in the program, through the ELSA initially, and that program and that planning follows them through to their completion of the educational plan. It could be up to two or three years.

L. Mayencourt: It'll be in the Advanced Education Ministry or....

[1140]

L. Lennig: We can make sure you get that information in our written report.

L. Mayencourt: That would be terrific. If you could e-mail that to us, that would be great.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Last question. Richard.

R. Lee: You mentioned a reduction of numbers for the students of 3,000 or 4,000 to 2,500. Is that because of the job market? You know, sometimes they need to go to the program in order to catch up. Are there any statistics on the real situation?

N. Kozakiewicz: Was the question about why the numbers were reduced, or...?

R. Lee: Yes. Are those students taking jobs and then coming back to the school?

N. Kozakiewicz: No, they're not. Vancouver Community College is the largest provider of adult ESL programming in the colleges and in the lower mainland. Our students come from across the lower mainland, but because VCC was so highly based in teaching developmental education, it caused financial problems for the college. So the college has moved to becoming more of a comprehensive community college, offering first-year university courses and expanding in other areas. In order to do that, they had to cut

developmental programs, so the cuts were made in the ESL area several years ago.

R. Lee: But I think some students are also moving to universities. I heard that some of the colleges aren't getting as many students because they're going to university.

N. Kozakiewicz: There was a time two or three years ago when tuition was raised and we were getting fewer students, but right now we are turning away students. At the level that Lyn was talking about, where there is a problem in serving them, they are post-ELSA, which is 100-percent funded, and pre-Canadian-language-benchmarks-7-to-10, where there are starting to be more programs for professional immigrants. I have, for example, about 580 students this term in my department alone — and that's only one of six departments — who are in that middle group of intermediate students. The large majority of them, probably 80 percent, have finished high school. Probably 60 percent of them have some post-secondary education — many, many of them graduate degrees.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Thank you, Nina, for taking the time and coming before us.

Our next group is also from the Vancouver Community College Faculty Association, on adult literacy. We have before us Stephanie Jewell, Laurie Gould and Ingrid Kolsteren. Please do proceed.

I. Kolsteren: Thank you for this opportunity. I'm Ingrid Kolsteren, and I'm representing the Vancouver Community College Faculty Association — that's the union that represents the instructors — and I'm also a literacy instructor. This is Laurie Gould, a literacy instructor and the department head of basic education, and Stephanie Jewell, the dean of arts and sciences and also previously an adult basic education instructor. It's a little bit unusual to have three from these different groups together doing a joint presentation, but we are here together because our union, our faculty and our administration have a deep commitment to adult literacy. We wanted to take this opportunity to bring that message to you in a joint kind of way.

By literacy we mean reading, writing and numeracy from the basic level of learning to read, to upgrading in general, to grade 12 completion. This is also referred to as adult basic education or ABE.

VCC teaches more literacy students than anyone else in B.C., possibly more than anyone else in Canada. We've been doing this for over 40 years. We offer the full range of literacy, from beginning reading and writing to grade 12 completion. Currently we have the equivalent of over 900 full-time students engaged in some form of literacy. That translates to over 2,500 students — students that are involved in our community, students with family, students with friends.

Going to school for these students is very, very hard. It takes a tremendous amount of courage for them to return to school. They often have had negative

experiences in the past, and they face many, many barriers. We need strategies to dismantle those barriers, to increase their access to literacy education and to support them so they can be successful.

We have three main points that we want to touch upon. One is that they need an adult learning environment. Two, we want to make some comments about funding, and we want to make some comments about how government ministries need to work together.

[1145]

We believe that adult literacy belongs in the post-secondary education system and that community colleges are the best place to offer that kind of education, especially in the lower mainland. We offer adult curriculum. We offer student services, support services, libraries, counsellors, etc. We offer the ability to move into other college programs and make a smooth transition. We are able to deliver programs in the community. Colleges offer stability, not just projects.

One of the key points in terms of talking about access for literacy is financial barriers. We need to remove all financial barriers for literacy, both on the individual level and at the institutional level. This means all literacy programs need to be free for everybody.

We need targeted funding so colleges can offer adequate adult basic education programs, and we need increased funding. We need funding that's sufficient and sustained to provide the flexibility needed to have realistic time lines for our students. It takes time to learn literacy skills. We need separate targeted funding for aboriginal students, and we need to increase the ABESAP funding, which is the funding for basic education and...

What's it stand for? I can't remember now.

S. Jewell: Adult basic education.

I. Kolsteren: Thank you.

...to provide the additional funding that's needed for books, supplies, transportation, child care.

In order for these kinds of strategies to be realized, the government ministries need to work together. Literacy needs to be seen as part of a process. Our students have education needs within the context of having social needs. They have multibarriers.

This means that the different government ministries, their policies and practices, need to work together to not just enable students to go to school but support them going to school. Literacy needs to be seen as a realistic and authentic part of an employment program. Income assistance recipients need to be encouraged and supported instead of sent to low-paying jobs. Parents need to be able to remain on social assistance and take literacy programs and not placed in job programs simply because their youngest child reaches the age of three. The Ministry of Education needs to acknowledge and support the work of post-secondary institutions in providing adult literacy.

These are some effective strategies that are needed to improve literacy. We believe that literacy is a basic right of people to learn. Our students need to have these skills in order to be fully engaged and participate

in society, and our society needs these folks to be fully engaged.

I'm going to pass it over to Laurie to give more practical comments.

L. Gould: Thanks, Ingrid.

I'd like to talk about how the effective big-picture strategies that Ingrid has outlined apply to the literacy students that I've been teaching at Vancouver Community College for the last 32 years. Basic education is the department at VCC that provides classes to adults who are working on their reading, writing and math from beginning level skills up to about the grade-nine level. In order to come to our department, students must speak fluently.

In April we had our last registration. We registered over 200 students who wanted to work on reading, writing and math below the grade-eight level and about 125 math students. That is usually our lowest registration of the year. We have larger numbers that come in, in September.

Our students include young people, seniors, single moms and some single dads. They include aboriginal students, the unemployed, the working poor. They include people born in Canada and people that have come here many years ago and have learned to speak but need work on their reading and writing. They all have one desire in common, and that's to improve their education.

In the last years these students with the lowest levels of literacy have been finding it increasingly difficult to access upgrading programs, mainly due to changes in government policies. To help our students continue to access education and come to school, we've done a lot of tightrope walking and changing things around. We've offered more part-time, continuous intake classes. We've made them available in the morning, the afternoon, the evening and at a number of outreach sites.

Our department is large and flexible enough to be able to do these things, but it's not the ideal. It's my experience that most adult students are best served in small scheduled classes where they have the time and opportunity to focus on their learning and get the help they require.

[1150]

In a small full-time class, the group becomes a learning community and a support for one another. That's the ideal. But over the last few years I've watched the number of students that are to complete our fundamental-level program and move on to other programs decline, as more and more students are forced to move out of full-time classes and into part-time classes.

It's no surprise that adult literacy students make less progress when they try and fit school into stressful lives that often include short-term low-paying jobs, shift work, crummy living conditions, serious family problems and other challenges that you and I seldom have to face.

I'm sure other presenters — and I've heard some of them today — have told you about the relationship between low literacy skills and poverty, poor health,

crime, addiction and disabilities. If we truly want to help people overcome these issues, which are either one of the causes or one of the results of their low literacy skills, we need to make sure that when they make the courageous decision to come back to school, they meet with success. Success for adult literacy students requires a number of systems to be put in place.

First of all, as you've heard, adult literacy students need the financial support to enable them to attend school on more than just a short-term, part-time basis. Without the time to concentrate on their studies, they'll never make enough progress to improve their lives.

Secondly, adults must have the opportunity to learn in a place where they feel comfortable, a place in their community that has ongoing stable funding. For many adults that place is a community college, but for others an alternative is needed. For example, in addition to the classes that we offer at our Broadway campus, King Edward campus, we offer classes in the downtown east side at First United Church, and we have been since the early '80s.

Also, about that time the Mount Pleasant disabilities connection people came to us and asked us to set up a program in their community centre, and we did. That program now is more accessed by single moms who require the day care there, and we're hoping to use it as an intermediate point for first nations students who are not quite ready to step into the big institution but might be more comfortable in a community centre.

Over the years we've offered classes in many of the libraries around the lower mainland. As they've become demographically more needed by ESL students, we've had our department — Lyn and the group — take those over, but we still run one in the downtown library.

J. Nuraney (Chair): I don't mean to interrupt, Laurie, but a minute to wrap up, please.

L. Gould: Okay. We've been able to initiate and run a number of innovative programs like these because we have a solid community college-based program and trained, experienced instructors. And I want to underline what other people have said about the importance of having trained instructors.

When I came to VCC in 1974, I soon realized that I needed to learn how to more effectively teach adults to read. I taught English in the high school system in Australia and Alberta, but I wasn't trained to teach adults how to read. I went back to school, and I learned how.

I also learned the other things that are important about teaching adults, one of the things being adult-oriented materials. If you look at the materials that most adult literacy instructors in this province use, you'll find they were created by instructors — many of them instructors at the college. At our college we've published, produced and distributed a number of these.

In addition to financial support, stable programs, well-trained instructors and appropriate materials, to be successful adult literacy students need a range of

support services. They need counsellors to help with issues like addiction, abuse, mental health, disabilities and educational career planning. They need learning centres and libraries with the relevant materials and professionals that know how to work with adult students, and they need access to other adult programs. Every day I walk a student down the hall to the GED program, upstairs to the ESL program or downstairs to the automotive technician.

I think my dean, Stephanie, is going to tell you a little bit more about the importance of having adult literacy in a college setting.

S. Jewell: Thank you, Laurie. Thank you, Ingrid. Thank you to the committee, and thank you very much to our faculty association for sharing this spot.

We've come here as a united group because it's absolutely critical to understand that the college is committed through our faculty association, through our instructors and through our administration to provide adult literacy. I am responsible for the area in the college that provides adult literacy, as Laurie said, from the beginning all the way to first-year university, including adult special education.

One of the key things about college is that when the public hears the word "college," many of them assume that you're sending 17-to-20-year-olds off to do the first and second year of university transfer. We do a little bit of that, but we provide 40 percent of our training in adult literacy and English as a second language.

[1155]

It's absolutely crucial that the public and the province understand that these 22 colleges around the province provide unique and specific training for adults in an adult setting, as Laurie said, with materials developed for adults. You can't say enough about that.

In the current ABE outcomes study, fundamental learners were asked as a group, "Why did you come to school," or: "Why did you leave school?" Each time, they said: "Personal reasons." They didn't say: "I can't read and write." They didn't say: "I don't have the money to continue." They didn't say any of those things because in many cases a lack of literacy is something that people hide.

Jacques Lemaire, the hockey coach, is the perfect example of that. The psychic energy that it takes to exist in a society that is now information-based and not to have the skill set to be able to be successful or to pass that down to your children is a huge loss of human capital.

The government knows this. That's why literacy is one of its great goals. As Ted James from Douglas said, we have an absolutely incredible system in this province to deliver this service to our learners in an adult setting which provides for it.

I was an adult educator as well, and people used to ask me, when they heard of the college: "What do you teach there?" I'd say: "Well, people who don't have their high school diploma." What they have is an absolutely burning need to get ahead, and the only way they can get it is to achieve literacy or to call their instructor, which is me, at three in the morning and leave

a message on my voice mail to say: "Could you delay the test for 30 minutes, because I'm closing 7-Eleven tonight?" That's what it means to teach adults and to be able to provide that service to them.

As Laurie and Ingrid have both said, there are many obstacles. The people we deal with are the most vulnerable, the most fragile and in many ways the most valuable people in our society, because they are the people we're going to need to put to work to be able to be successful in this province.

I'd like to thank the committee, and I'd like to thank my colleagues for letting me appear with them.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Thank you.

D. Routley: Throughout the presentations to this committee in other locations, as well, we've heard reference to the fact that literacy is best absorbed and the skills are retained when there is a purpose, when people have hope, when they have a reason. You've referred to people having personal reasons, both as a target and as a description also — avoiding the shame that's associated with illiteracy.

We've also heard words like "maximizing return" and that there are great public benefits to investment in literacy programs. We've also heard, from Ingrid Kolsteren, the words "realistic and authentic piece of a job requirement." I think that's really important too. Those are important pedagogical goals perhaps.

For us as a political body, we've also heard constant reference to funding shortfalls not just in providing programs but in the support students need to be able to access them — transportation, housing, all of those issues. So in order not to make words just words — words like "great goals," words like "new relationship...." In order to make them more than just words, the funding that has been absent or the shortfalls inside and outside the college.... What do you see as the most significant barrier in accessing programs in terms of government funding?

L. Gould: I'll speak to my particular group, which is the students with literacy levels below grade eight. The single largest impact on their ability to come to school in the last five years has been changes in the Ministry of Human Resources funding and the ability for students who are on social assistance to access upgrading classes. It has affected them hugely. There are other things that have affected the ability to access day care, but fundamentally it's that the students can no longer be funded to come to school.

D. Routley: I find it very impressive, Mr. Chair, that people refer to funding and not to themselves as the barrier and are encouraging us to consider funding beyond their own scope. I find that to be encouraging, and I congratulate them.

[1200]

M. Polak: A quick question about the structure of funding.

Ingrid, you mentioned desiring forms of targeted funding in different areas. At the same time, one of the themes that recurs throughout presentations is the need to break down the ministry silos and have some better cross-ministry participation. Can you reconcile those two for me? In my past experience with school districts, targeting tended to militate against the cross-ministry kind of functioning.

I. Kolsteren: We have targeted funding now. We have targeted funding for about 2,500 FTE spots, and we're happy to have those. We used to have more, and when we had a higher level of targeted funding, we at VCC were able to provide more literacy training and more ESL training. We need to have some protected funding.

To have protected or targeted funding at the college doesn't necessarily mean bringing a silo. The thing is that literacy is part of a process. It doesn't exist on its own. Our students have literacy needs, and they have other needs. The institutions need to be funded, but so do other aspects of it. They need to be able to afford to go to school. They need to be able to have transportation. They need to be able to buy books and supplies. They need to have child care. It's all of them.

M. Polak: So it's the security of the funding as opposed to attaching it to...?

I. Kolsteren: Absolutely.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Thank you very much for coming before the committee.

We now have Wai Ng. We are running a little bit behind. You have ten minutes, and please allow some time for questioning.

W. Ng: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

The international adult literacy survey defines literacy as the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities at home, at work and in the community to achieve one's goals and to develop one's knowledge and potential. Conducted in the year 2003, the international adult literacy and life skills survey measured literacy in four domains: prose literacy, document literacy, numeracy and problem-solving. Seven industrialized countries, including Canada, participated in the survey; 23,000 Canadians aged 16 to 65 across Canada were tested on their literacy skills.

The survey divided literacy skills into five levels. Persons at level one have great difficulty reading. They are aware that they have a problem. Persons at level two can read, but not well. They can deal with simple and clearly laid-out material. Persons at level three are at a basic skills level. They can cope with the demands of everyday life. Persons at level four and five have strong literacy and information-processing skills.

The 2003 survey shows that 46 percent of Canadian adults aged 16 and above have low literacy skills, 20 percent are at level one, 26 percent are at level two, 33 percent are at level three, and 20 percent are at levels four and five.

Many Canadians, however, do not realize that they have low literacy skills. One reason is that their jobs do not require them to use literacy. Many employers do not require a high school diploma.

A country's labour productivity and gross domestic product — GDP per capita — are tied to the literacy of its people. One's well-being is associated with one's literacy skills. People with strong literacy skills are healthier and happier. When people better their literacy skills, they increase their self-esteem and self-confidence. They learn important skills for life.

They're able to find more fulfilling jobs. They're able to assess health information and act upon it, change their lifestyles and take control of their lives. They're able to help their children with their school work. They're able to help others less capable. All in all, they make positive impacts on their own lives and on others.

Compared with the Canadian average, B.C.'s adult literacy rates have improved over the past decade, but we could do better. In fact, it is a goal of the present B.C. government to make B.C. the most literate jurisdiction in North America.

[1205]

I am here as a concerned citizen to present my views on enhancing adult literacy. Let me first cite some reasons why some adult learners do not enrol in adult literacy programs and what we can do about it. Students who do not feel confident making the call are less likely to enrol. I suggest hiring staff who speak the learner's language. Some adult learners are not aware of what literacy programs are available in their communities. I suggest placing advertisements in local newspapers, radio and television. Some adult learners may find it embarrassing to register in an adult literacy program. I suggest an automated phone-in registration system, so that the learner can punch in the information needed instead of having to speak with an individual.

Some adult learners find the program content inappropriate. For learners who want to learn skills that help him or her cope with the demands of daily life, I suggest a literacy program that teaches skills so that the learner can perform functional tasks such as taking phone messages, reading street signs, billboards and transit information, writing a grocery shopping list and calculating the cost of groceries, understanding household bills and writing cheques, understanding instructions on a medicine bottle, reading information and filling out forms, and depositing a paycheque using the automated teller machine.

Some adult learners need transportation and child care. I suggest the government provide funding support for free transportation, child care and other support services. Adult learners learn better when their basic needs have been taken care of.

Some adult learners are concerned that they may not be able to work at their own pace. I suggest a learner be given the choice of one-on-one tutoring or computer-assisted tutoring. Some adult learners say that they do not have enough time. I suggest weekend

adult literacy programs to accommodate those learners. Some adult learners find class locations and class times inconvenient. I suggest public libraries and churches deliver adult literacy programs.

In Toronto the public libraries offer free one-on-one tutoring in basic reading, writing and math for English-speaking adults 16 years or older. We could do the same here in Greater Vancouver. We should also offer this free tutoring for ESL students as well. At St. Andrews Church in Maple Ridge there is a weekly ESL class for women immigrants. I would like to see more adult literacy programs being delivered in churches.

When we prevent adult literacy problems, we enhance adult literacy. We need to make changes to the current school system. We need to demand that elementary schools teach basic grammar and spelling and that students should not be allowed to use calculators for arithmetic.

We need to encourage family literacy. We need to have high expectations for our children. Most important of all, we need the federal government, the provincial government and Canadian companies to invest in Canada. We need jobs that require high literacy skills so that college and university graduates can put the skills to good use so that our best and brightest people can stay in Canada.

It should be noted, however, that when people fail to understand certain written material, it does not necessarily mean that they have low literacy skills. It could be that the material is poorly written, a jumble of words that make sense only to the person who wrote it. I believe manuals should be written in simple English so that the reader would not misunderstand what is being written.

To make adult literacy programs work, we need adult literacy programs in public libraries and churches. We need plenty of voluntary literacy tutors. We need to encourage students, professionals, educated seniors and other community members to become voluntary literacy tutors. We need to provide free bus tickets for the learners. We need volunteers to provide free transportation for some learners. We need volunteers to help with child care while the parents are taking literacy classes. We need understanding employers who will allow their employees to enrol in adult literacy programs. We need substantial funding and support from the government for the various adult literacy programs and for the adult learners.

[1210]

While some learners may drop out of literacy programs, thus making them expensive, some do return to complete them. For every learner who completes the adult literacy program, there is benefit to society as a whole. It is found that in areas where literacy rates are high, violence and incidence of disease are low.

Improving adult literacy is certainly a great challenge and a daunting task for the government and those involved. The time to act is now. We cannot afford to wait.

J. Nurany (Chair): Thank you, Ms. Ng.

Our next presenters are Penelope Irons and Grace Tait from Aboriginal Mother Centre Society.

P. Irons: Hello. You can call me Penny.

In 2003 the Aboriginal Mother Centre Society entered into a contribution agreement with the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services. The purpose of this agreement was to support the enhancement of educational programs and services offered through the Aboriginal Mother Centre Society.

During the month of March the learning centre project team conducted extensive community consultations. The project was a great success, and the findings demonstrate strong support from aboriginal women in the community at large for the development of a community-based learning centre to be situated within the Aboriginal Mother Centre.

The Aboriginal Mother Centre is based on the successes of mother centres in other countries such as Germany, Switzerland and the United States. Mother centres have re-created neighbourhood structures and services to support themselves through self-help efforts, training and micro-enterprises. Mother centres are meeting places where young parents and their families come together to build their confidence, skills and capacity to look after themselves and their children and to become economically self-sufficient through employment and entrepreneurship.

The philosophy of the Aboriginal Mother Centre supports the creation of healthy communities for urban aboriginal families in the Greater Vancouver regional district. It is evident that many issues are interrelated and many topics need to be included around the discussions of education for aboriginal communities. Predominant issues include historical effects of colonization, traditional ways of teaching, gender relations, cultural discrimination, poverty or economic status, healing from abuses and drug and alcohol dependencies.

Since the original inception of the Aboriginal Mother Centre in Vancouver, the concept of a woman-only learning centre was identified as a priority. Moreover, the movement to develop a learning centre was derived from an identified need to address local control of educational initiatives by aboriginal communities and for aboriginal communities.

A research report entitled *Homeless Aboriginal Women in Vancouver* done by the Indian Homemakers Association of B.C. and the Aboriginal Mother Centre pilot project in 2001 identified the need to develop entrepreneurship and pre-employment training programs for aboriginal women in the Greater Vancouver regional district. In order to help aboriginal women in our community, we need to create stepping stones that lead to skills development, entrepreneurship and self-sustainability. The Aboriginal Mother Centre would be a suitable environment in which to create a learning centre for this purpose.

[1215]

The costs of developing and running a distance learning centre need to be weighed with the short- and

long-term social benefits. One social benefit would include a reduction in women and children being dependent on welfare and thus reducing government spending in that area. A second social benefit includes overall health improvement of families, decreasing the strain on the public health care system.

Aboriginal women will participate in the wage economy, create businesses and actively contribute to the development of their communities, thus reducing violence against women, oppression of women and poverty of aboriginal families.

In response to community needs, the Aboriginal Mother Centre initiated discussions with the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services to conduct an extensive community needs assessment and consultation process to identify the community, the educational needs, the support services required and the educational programming and services that community members desired.

The Aboriginal Mother Centre initiated this research for the reason that aboriginal women need to have access to quality, culturally appropriate and relevant education if they are to increase the health, well-being and self-sufficiency of themselves and their families. Moreover, the historical circumstances of colonization, particularly residential schools, have resulted in the devastation of aboriginal people, mostly aboriginal women.

Aboriginal women face a double oppression. They are oppressed by general society, and they are further oppressed within their own communities. Most importantly, the Aboriginal Mother Centre exists to provide a safe place where aboriginal women and their families move from poverty and isolation to self-sufficiency while creating healthy, culturally connected neighbourhoods and communities.

Consequently, aboriginal people in city populations had among the highest poverty rates of all the groups examined in a report released in April 2000 by the Canadian Council on Social Development. In Vancouver the rate was 66.1 percent. Aboriginal people living in Canadian cities were more than twice as likely to live in poverty as non-aboriginal people.

Currently 40 percent of children in Vancouver live below the poverty rate. Children living in poverty are often confronted with poor nutrition, ill health, dental problems, lack of clothing, frequent changes of residence and little access to transportation.

The Aboriginal Mother Centre believes that a learning centre supports the goals of the Aboriginal Mother Centre to build the capacity of the community. In our context, capacity-building is the movement of social action that has a direct impact on the health, well-being and self-sufficiency of aboriginal women in their communities. The Aboriginal Mother Centre is building capacity, through the development of the learning centre, by providing aboriginal women the opportunity to access skills-based programs, personal and cultural development programs and post-secondary education that focuses on stimulating community development education.

The research questions. The Aboriginal Mother Centre wanted to investigate if aboriginal women would access a women-only learning centre that is culturally based in a safe environment and an inclusive curriculum that is relevant to their lives. Additionally, what educational programs are considered a priority, and what support services should be offered through the learning centre?

J. Nuraney (Chair): Sorry, Penny. One minute to wrap up.

P. Irons: Okay.

J. Nuraney (Chair): We will read your submission when you submit it.

P. Irons: I'm going to go over to the conclusion, then, and the recommendations.

There were 100 surveys complete with seven focus groups. The community that was consulted through this process was aboriginal women that lived in or frequented East Vancouver. For this reason, surveys were completed in the east side at the Aboriginal Mother Centre, Anderson Lodge and the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre. All focus groups were held at the Aboriginal Mother Centre, with the exception of the one that was held at Anderson Lodge, a residential treatment centre.

[1220]

The recommendations on the findings of the community consultation process were that a community learning centre be created, offering a combination of on-line and face-to-face educational programs and services; that there is a setting just for aboriginal women; that the community learning centre be culturally appropriate in its design of curriculum, physical space and program development; that aboriginal women have a place where they can feel supported and safe. They need a place where they can be free to support each other in times of need, a place where they feel comfortable to relax, not to worry about discrimination, and with trusting, friendly staff.

In response to the community needs and opinions, flexibility will be undertaken in terms of developing educational programs and services for young men, fathers and men who are a part of aboriginal families.

These bridging programs be made available: grade 12 diploma, health and wellness, life skills, parenting skills. Skills development programs be made available: aboriginal history, aboriginal languages, medicine wheel and cultural teachings, business management, community development, tourism. College and post-secondary programs be made available: native studies, social work and early child development.

A series of workshops be offered to promote holistic community development, covering focus group ideas around the political, social and cultural economic components of our community. Learning centre human resources include aboriginal instructors and staff. A computer lab be available, including instruction. Sup-

port services be made available, such as day care, transportation, student counselling and support groups, meals, food bank, financial bursaries, tutors and academic support.

In conclusion, aboriginal women have very distinct needs that must be met in order for them to be able to advance in their education. The historical impacts of abuses and the poverty that aboriginal people have lived through create long-term consequences that need to be effectively addressed when setting up programs that lead women into self-sustainability.

Moreover, aboriginal moms living in urban settings, where they may be isolated from their home communities and their families, tend to live in isolation or get immersed in unhealthy lifestyles, which include addictions and abusive relationships.

The Aboriginal Mother Centre is a place that is like a home away from home, where people can come in and support each other towards increased confidence, training opportunities and education, and that leads to self-sustainability.

G. Tait: Can I just add one thing? This is my only job.

We are currently participating in the Ministry of Children and Family Development consultations with the new deputy minister, Lesley du Toit, and the assistant ADM, Deb Foxcroft. I encourage the Education Committee to really look at the steps they're taking, because one of the main things we have to deal with, which is a reality in our communities, is racism. I think you would benefit a lot from connecting with that group to look at what they're trying to work on with the aboriginal community.

D. Routley: In participating in this committee, we've examined a lot of different aspects of literacy. Of course, the immediate assumption is that we're examining literacy and numeracy — words, reading and writing — but we've also discussed things like political literacy and cultural literacy. You've referred to, particularly in the case of aboriginal women, the need to have a literacy of their rights and the obligation of the community to them.

What sort of steps do you take in your programs to encourage women to be literate of their political rights?

P. Irons: Oh, wow. I don't even know how to answer that.

Grace?

G. Tait: I think that through the actions of coming to groups like this and bringing in experts, politicians, potential politicians, the leadership of our aboriginal organizations, to come to our centres, to hold meetings, to be there and to have question-and-answer periods with them — that has really been the thing we've been with most successful with. As we get feedback from those women who have attended those sessions.... They come back, and some of them are spurred on to attend other meetings in the community or join com-

mittees. We've had women join the city of Vancouver's committees on different issues, as a starting point. They also become very much involved in furthering their education in their schools.

[1225]

J. Rustad: Thank you for your presentation. I was curious. In terms of the Aboriginal Mother Centre Society, how many various centres or locations do you have in the lower mainland and around the province? Where does the current funding come from for those? The reason why is that I'm trying to just get a scale of the network you've created in terms of the overall picture.

P. Irons: Currently we have only one Aboriginal Mother Centre in British Columbia. We actually were incorporated only in 2002. I get a lot of enquiries about starting mother centres. I think that a mother centre would work and be ideal on every reserve in British Columbia.

We also, with the work that we do, have a social enterprise that's very successful. Currently we have 43 women who were on social assistance and on disability. There are many of them that are illiterate or, you would say, borderline illiterate that are working for us.

The first step to even working within the social enterprise, I think, is a first step into actually furthering their education. We find that even in our moms program, women that come in and volunteer, by building their self-esteem, go on to further their education. We have one mom — I could give lots of examples — that didn't have a degree and went into post-secondary and is now in third year at Simon Fraser University. There are other examples of just having some....

I think at the Mother Centre it's like a home away from home. It's very nurturing. It's a very caring environment, and I think having that environment actually will assist women in taking that next step into education.

J. Rustad: I'm just wondering. Are you working in conjunction with the native friendship centre and the network they have in the province?

P. Irons: We do. We have partnerships with Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Vancouver and also the B.C. Association of Friendship Centres. We network often with them.

G. Tait: Just to answer your question about finances. Our major funding comes from the federal government. We have one small grant that we're working on through the province for sexually exploited youth and women.

P. Irons: We also have a day care. We're working on a day care centre, and we have a couple of other proposals in to the province.

J. Nuraney (Chair): A quick, short question from Richard.

R. Lee: You mentioned about the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre already — also the Native Education Centre, which you haven't mentioned. But they are providing education opportunities.

P. Irons: Yes. We actually did a trial run of the learning centre. We partnered with the Institute of Indigenous Government. But there really wasn't enough, I guess, support — like contributions. We only had a small grant to run it. IIG offered their services in kind, which was really great that they could do that.

I think that was two years ago, right after this report was done, and we weren't able to get continued funding. It was only a small-term grant that we got from one of the ARDAs to do the learning centre.

R. Lee: The friendship centre provides certain services. I believe maybe there's some overlapping between your service and....

P. Irons: No, no. There's absolutely no.... The Mother Centre doesn't overlap with any of the aboriginal groups. We actually enhance each other and work together in the aboriginal community.

R. Lee: Thank you for that clarification.

J. Nuraney (Chair): I would just add that I've had the opportunity to visit the centre and have seen what Penny and Grace and the gang do there, and I really commend the work they have been doing.

Our next presenters are the Burnaby school district parenting and family literacy centres. They are being represented by Doreen George, Souad Hage-Hassan and Ben Qui.

[1230]

D. George: I would just like to introduce Souad Hage-Hassan and her son. Souad comes to the Maywood parenting and family literacy centre as a parent with a son. On this side I have Ben Qui, and he is a grandfather who attends the Second Street parenting and family literacy centre with his granddaughter. They're here today to just help me a little bit to explain about the centre.

S. Hage-Hassan: We'll start first with the characteristics of the parenting and family literacy centre: a welcoming place for families; staffed by trained parent facilitators; within walking distance; no cost; drop-in; open five mornings a week.

Philosophy of the centre. Parents, grandparents, caregivers are the child's first educators. Children develop within their culture. Families have a powerful influence on the child's literacy learning in the early years. Parent and caregiver involvement promotes a child's chance of academic success. Parent and caregiver support indirectly raises the self-esteem of the child as well as the other. Parents and caregivers learn from and support one another. Parents and caregivers

learn alongside their children. Parents and caregivers learn and extend the child's learning through language. Parents and caregivers benefit from information on community resources.

What parents and caregivers learn. Most of the parents say they learned how to be their kids' teacher at home following the example from the centre. Most of them said they learn to play games and new activities such as making bubbles or new techniques of playing such as using flour to draw. That's how my son learned his alphabet at home on a tray.

I just want to share one mother's story who comes to the centre. She has been in Canada for five years, and she has four kids. I didn't know her before. I just saw her around the school, and she had the most depressing look in her eyes. It made you wonder why she looked this way. This year she started coming to the centre. She's illiterate. She doesn't speak any English, and even in her language she doesn't know how to read. She said that she spent those five years sitting on the sofa. She only dropped her daughter at the school and went back home with four kids.

By coming to the centre, she got connected to other things like the community kitchen and preschool for her kids. I mean, you can see the light in her eyes. She smiles now. She made friends. She always asks us about different words — what does it mean in English? — and we try to help her to a parent who knows. She made friends. I know I look at the centre as helping me to be my child's teacher at home. But for this mom, just coming to the centre, sitting down, she has a smile. It's amazing.

I'll give Ben an opportunity to say....

[1235]

B. Qui: Okay. I'd like to add a few words on what parents and caregivers learn at the centre. In my idea, they are learning three things.

First of all, the philosophy of the parenting and family literacy centre. That's the five points. First, parents are a child's first educator. Second, children develop within their culture. Third, families have a powerful influence on their child's literacy learning in the early years. Fourth, parent involvement promotes a child's chance of academic success. Fifth, parents and the caregivers support indirectly raises the self-esteem of the child as well as the adult.

I think it's the first important factor: to raise a child having the ideas of the philosophy of the centre. Second, to some extent it seems that the parents and the caregivers, to be trained as early childhood educators in the centre.... We learn from each other; we learn how to educate, to raise up, toddlers — a child. Third, the parents are learning English, learning Canadian culture. They affirm and support one another.

A friend of mine brought her niece to the centre. She was from Algeria, North Africa, so she has a French background. Whenever she takes her child to the centre, she's learning basic English. She read some notes in a special book. I asked her why. She goes: "I am learning English."

We are soaked in the Canadian culture and environment. As for me, I have stayed in Canada for several years, but I am just familiar with special, very narrow fields. I taught at McMaster University and the U of T, Toronto university, but I can only communicate with people in very narrow mechanical engineering.

Sometimes I can't understand what they say. "The centre will be closed on Friday." I don't know why. They told us it's pro-D. I don't know what pro-D is. Professional development for teachers. I don't know what that is. Oh, I know. I just know vacation at the university or a sabbatical at the university, but I don't know what pro-D is. So I am learning Canadian culture.

Anyhow, I think it is very helpful to build up, to form, to create a harmonious community. Thanks.

S. Hage-Hassan: Just quickly, what the children learn in the centre: they learn social interaction, language and cognitive skills. For most of them it's a little preparation for kindergarten. They learn how to stand in line, how to share, and most of the parents say their kids learn about Canadian table manners because each culture is different.

D. George: Currently there are seven centres in Burnaby, and they are spread throughout Burnaby. They were based on the EDI results, the early development indicators, from Clyde Hertzman's work at UBC. Trends in Burnaby: approximately 47 percent of Burnaby residents are immigrants, so we're dealing with a large number of newcomers to Canada and a large number of refugees, the convention refugees, that are settling in east Burnaby. As a previous presenter said, almost a quarter of our families are living below the poverty line. Again, that's very prevalent in the immigrant population and in the refugee population.

[1240]

Research was done last year by Janey Talbot. One of her findings was that at the centre at that time there were 24 different cultural heritages self-reported by the participants and 24 different languages spoken in the centres. At that time we only had four centres.

Again at that time 68 percent of the children attended with a mother or father, and almost a quarter came with the grandparents — so a large percentage of grandparents attending. As Souad has talked about, the education level goes from no educational experience at all — no attendance at any school in any country — to people like Ben here, who have a very high level of education.

I think a key point to note is that all are accepted, all are treated the same no matter where you come from, what language you speak, what age you are or what education level you have. I think that speaks a little bit to the literacy that you, I believe, talked to Doug, when you talked about political literacy. The people in our centre are understanding and working together. They're understanding where we come from across this world. Emotional literacy is part of it, as well as the other basic literacies that we talk about —

and, of course, cultural literacy, which Ben has talked to so eloquently.

In terms of attendance at the centres, in February of this year we had over 1,733 adults attend the centres. There are seven centres in existence right now. The total number of children per month — again, that was February — was 2,293. The statistics have gone up by the month until we are now, in some centres, really very, very high.

Of course, the importance of literacy can't be overstated. Again, in our research last year, 90 percent of the participants involved said that they participated in literacy activities daily; 85 percent viewed literacy activities as very important; 2 percent considered them important; and 12 percent were neutral.

I'm not going to read what participants said. I've just included a few, but I think that, "At home I felt lonely and isolated," represented many of the responses from participants. "We all learned so much." I think, again, that was reflected by many of the responses from participants.

We see the parenting and family literacy centres as centres that reduce the barriers to learning. We've talked about the no cost, and we've talked about it being in the local elementary school within walking distance. We've talked about daily drop-in. It's open nine to 12 — convenient times. I did allude to the cultural acceptance and that participants feel socially equal and valued.

This is a transitional program. It's not a formal adult literacy program of any sort, but as with children, adults will learn only when there are relationships and a community has been developed. I think these centres are places where the parents and the grandparents have told us that this happens. They feel comfortable and safe to try new things. They become involved in their child's school readiness. They learn alongside their children through the conversations, the songs, the stories.

What we have is really a multi-layered program. We're meeting the needs of the newcomer families, meeting the needs of families with children zero to six and meeting the needs of school readiness and the emerging literacy and ESL needs of adults.

We have pieced together funding for the past year and a half, and we really are in need of some sustainable core funding. We feel that what we do in the centres is probably the mandate of many ministries, and our hope is that perhaps it can be an interministerial approach to supporting in some way the continuing work of these centres.

Thank you for your time.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Thank you, Doreen, Souad, Ben.

Questions?

D. Thorne: We toured your centre at Second Street this morning. It was a wonderful tour. It's obviously a program that is working very, very well and achieving probably even more than you'd hoped in the begin-

ning. It's certainly a way for people to learn with their children. I mean, it is multi-layered. It's wonderful.

Are you modelled after any other centre, or is this a unique program in Burnaby? Do you know if there are other centres like this around?

[1245]

D. George: As far as I know, there are no other centres exactly the same or similar to this in Burnaby. This was modelled after Mary Gordon centres in Toronto. We had heard about them a number of years ago, and two or three of us were particularly interested in what they might look like and how they could meet the needs of this particular community in Burnaby. That was how they originated. We researched it and brought that into Burnaby. It does have a Burnaby focus, because Burnaby is a unique community. So that's where they came from.

I think that there are a great number of really very good family resource or family support programs on the go. What we do that's slightly different is that we're daily; we are five days a week. What we've realized from talking to the many families who were new to our community was that once or twice a week for two hours doesn't give you that sense of belonging.

The other thing that I think makes us unique is that we are based in schools, intentionally. The idea is that the children and the parents are part of our school. Even though they're not school-aged, they are part of our school, and it's a seamless transition into the school system.

D. Routley: Thank you for the presentation and the tour this morning. It was a really great representation of universality in our school system — that everyone is welcome and that there is a universal sense of culture being blended there.

Mr. Qui was very eloquent in speaking about being soaked in Canadian culture in a place where there are actually people from so many different cultures. That is, in fact, what we are. I felt very good about that.

You talk about the need for core funding. Is your funding currently all coming from the school district?

D. George: No, it's not. Actually, on the second-to-last page of your package, I think, I put in a budget. That's next year's. This year our funding has come from Vancouver Foundation, from United Way, from Ministry of Children and Family Development and from about eight or nine other smaller granting organizations. That's how we've pieced together this year. Last year was a different set of grants and this next year.... You know, we just continue making application and hoping.

D. Routley: Thank you.

J. Rustad: I just have two quick questions, one around the financing side. I notice in the costs here that what you haven't included is the school district's use of the facility in terms of the rooms and those sorts of things. Those costs aren't included. I'm assuming,

obviously, the school district would be in support of the program.

Just as a comment: you probably should include some of those costs to show what the overall cost is of presenting the program for other districts that may want to consider it.

D. George: Yes.

J. Rustad: The other comment. In and around my riding, in Prince George, we have a family resource centre that we've just got set up. It's been very successful. We have some good programs with first nations that bring the families in. A lot of those programs are.... A centre point is around food, around the community kitchen and sharing a meal, around bringing them in and then extending those programs out.

I notice that you've got a component of that in this program as well. I'm curious as to the levels of participation around when there's food available, when there is a sharing of a meal or providing a breakfast or a meal for those who need it. Do you find that it actually increases the amount of participation in and around, say, from other times when that isn't part of a particular program?

D. George: Okay, to be truthful, the food involved in this program.... There is food available for breakfast should children and families need it, and there is a nutritious snack that's prepared by the parents and the caregivers in the centres and served by them. We do not provide a lunch, and we have not provided a full breakfast.

In the location that I work in, we have a community kitchen, a pregnancy outreach program and many other programs that kind of feed in and out of the Parenting and Family Literacy Centre. But that's quite specific to the location that Souad and I are from.

J. Rustad: Okay. Thank you.

R. Lee: In Burnaby we also have quite a few community schools. Do you see any potential of, say, integrating this program with the community schools?

D. George: I'm sorry. Do I see potential to integrate this program into the community school program?

R. Lee: Yeah.

D. George: In what sense, Richard? I'm not clear on your question.

R. Lee: Say, after school in some of the schools, they open up the facility for programs. For this program, you can use their facilities and they would also provide the custodian.

[1250]

D. George: It is currently in existence in four schools that are not community schools. Those schools,

like the community schools, see the value in having the parents and the preschoolers in their location. So they are providing the space and the custodial coverage to meet this need.

R. Lee: And also the Community LINK program in the school districts.

D. George: Yes, it is.

R. Lee: So there would be....

D. George: I don't think I could comment as to whether the funding could come from that. That's not my mandate.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Thank you, Doreen, Souad, Ben. Thank you for taking the time and coming before this committee.

Our next presenter is the B.C. Federation of Labour. It's being represented by Jim Sinclair.

J. Sinclair: Thank you very much. I'll be brief — unusual, I suppose. It's lunchtime, I know.

J. Nuraney (Chair): That will be much appreciated.

J. Sinclair: Let me just ask you a simple question. Can anybody name a good-paying job with a future that doesn't require reading and writing? Can anybody come up with a job that you'd send your son or daughter to do that doesn't require reading and writing or comprehension of the language that you work in? My answer is no.

The labour movement spent years and years trying to get good wages, and if you don't have those basic skills, then those jobs aren't available for you. That's the first reason why we need a literate population. It's really that simple.

The second reason is probably more profound, though, because it isn't just an economic question. It's a human rights question. The fact is that if you can't participate in your society, then you can't be a citizen and you can't know your rights. So it's a human right to be able to participate. It's part of being a whole human being.

If you can't participate in your society, which I don't think any of you would argue.... If you can't read or write, it makes it extremely difficult to participate in your society and act out and take on your full role in it. Then you can't participate. You can't have your full rights. This is a fundamental issue for us, and it has to be given a much higher priority, I think, than it has been given.

The third thing I would say is that if you want a job in this society, all the studies show that you need post-K-to-12 education for about 93 percent of the jobs that are available now. So we're not just talking about literacy as an end in itself. It is a very important end in itself, but it's also a means to get the rest of your education in order to get a job that pays bills and raises fami-

lies and buys houses — perhaps, anyway, in the lower mainland.

The bottom line is that you can't open these doors without those skills. That's why the federation has been on literacy for many years. We've had programs. Many of our members do not have literacy. It's one of the revelations you learn. As somebody who grew up learning it naturally as it came across and being fortunate enough to learn it.... Many of your co-workers can't read or write at the levels that would require them to participate.

It's not just a sort of small group of people over here. It's a major group of people. The number's at 40 or 45 percent. You've heard it all today. It's a major problem we have to try to come to terms with here. How important is that? Well, we all saw the figures. If you don't have those skills, then you don't have an opportunity to really participate fully.

Another economic argument, of course.... C.D. Howe — that's a good left-wing organization — says that a 1-percent increase in literacy skills would boost productivity by 2.5 percent and lead to a 1.5-percent permanent increase in GDP — \$18 billion a year. So there are a lot of economic arguments and other arguments for this.

Here's the problem. The problem I see is that in the last period of time we actually haven't done as well as we should on this. I assume that's why you're here. I assume that you're here to hear from everybody, so we're going to change what we've done because we're not happy with what we've done.

One of the things that comes to mind is that we haven't had the kind of support that we need for adult-based education in the post-secondary institutions. If you believe me — and I quoted a TD Bank study, if you don't; you need more than a K-to-12 education to get a decent job in this society these days — then we've been doing the wrong thing, actually, for success. We've been putting up barriers for people getting a post-secondary education or getting an apprenticeship or getting all those things which have as a prerequisite a grasp of literacy and numeracy.

We've been going in the wrong direction. Our tuition fees have gone up dramatically. Our access to education has gone down. We've fired people taking care of our apprenticeship programs. We've done a number of things that I think have set back our possibilities.

[1255]

That goes back to the root issue: are we going to be a high-wage, high-skill society, or are we going to be a low-wage, cheap-labour society? I think we're still fighting over which we're going to be here, by the way. I think it's part of the challenge of today, to sort that through, and part of your mandate, hopefully, to get us in the right direction here.

I'd like to make a few recommendations, because I know we don't have a lot of time. We need to change the way we approach this somewhat. Adult basic education should be free. The labour movement has always said that tuition should be free — period. We realized some time ago that K-to-12 was necessary to

have a viable economy and have citizens, so we made K-to-12 free. We just haven't caught up to the real world, which is that in other countries that have viable economies, it's free all the way through. They've figured out that somebody with post-secondary education or apprenticeship is far more valuable to their society, far more useful to competing in the world economy, if you're competing with cheap labour around the world. So we need to do that.

Adult basic education students are a good start. We either pay now or pay later, so let's pay now. You have to get your chequebooks out. I would hope your committee would make a whopping big recommendation for funding for literacy training.

Listen. There is no shortcut for this. You can't get out of this responsibility, and it costs money. The people you've heard today — and I was here for an hour — have got a great education. They're the people who get up every morning and go try to fix this. We need to pay for that. Obviously, every one of them is telling you that we're not paying enough to get the job done. If we're going to get the job done, we're going to have to pay a lot more money. I'm not telling you how much. You've heard all your experts, and you've heard people talk about it, but I'm sure it's millions of dollars, and it has to be secure funding.

We all agree with everybody's statements today. It's not just about learning to read and write and languages; it's about the support system to get you from a vulnerable situation in society to one where you're not. That means that counselling, support services, the stuff that gets you there, the community-based programs — that all has to be done. So you have to continue to expand the support services for those people.

Allow those on income assistance to go back to school. I've got to say that I couldn't believe it when I read it was illegal to go to school and be on welfare. I couldn't believe where we got a benefit out of that. I'm sorry. Somebody can maybe explain that to me. If you're stuck on welfare, which is, you know, not a great place to be for anybody, for those of you who have been there or know something about it.... If you actually have the gumption to pick it up and go to school, where do we lose on that equation as a society? I don't get it.

You have to recommend that it no longer be a crime to go to school on welfare, that it actually be encouraged. You could also recommend — before people are forced off welfare, if they haven't found a job — that you move it to the age of eight from the age of three. I don't know about you, but raising five-year-olds is a full-time job. Raising eight-year-olds may be a full-time job, but if you're going to move it back, at least to the age of eight would make a huge difference for us for this.

The post-secondary institutions. Obviously, it's a really important part. They used to have community storefront programs that had to be shut down under funding cutbacks. Some of that slack has been picked up by some of the people you've heard of today, who are doing it very well. But you know, it's not a one-

size-fits-all situation. We have to put resources in. It does cost money to pay people fairly to do this work and to put it back into the community. I think that's really, really important.

I'm hoping — I think we all hope — that what this committee will do will be to give us a big problem. Give us a challenge that we have to meet. If we don't meet this challenge, then we're actually writing the script for hundreds of thousands of people that they're not going to be the kind of people we need them to be to have a sane, safe society.

There was some discussion that people aren't going to university because they've got all these great jobs, that adult basic education has gone down not because we've raised the tuition and taken the support services away but because people have jobs and don't feel a need to get this education. Well, I go back to my first question to end, which is: is what we're really saying here that we have all these jobs that don't pay very good money, and people are taking those jobs rather than getting an education and getting a good job? I don't think that's right — okay? I think that's wrong, and I think the reason that people aren't using the services is because they're not available in a way they can use them. I think most people do want to participate, and we have to open those doors again.

I want to thank you for taking this task on, and I want to encourage you to take all of this advice. Take it there, and let's change what we're doing for the better. There really is a lot of opportunity here and a lot of hope, actually — a lot of hope for us that we can collectively make that transition we're in right now.

M. Polak: There is a lot of hope. I'm always encouraged when we find a topic where I can feel comfortable agreeing with Jim Sinclair.

[1300]

J. Sinclair: We'll see your report first, though.

M. Polak: Yeah, yeah. Well, how to get there is sometimes different than where we want to go — right?

I guess what I want to tap into is that we heard some really interesting presentations in the Victoria portion from experts all over, one of which really caught my imagination. It was the role of labour organizations, in particular in Europe, in promoting workplace literacy and some really innovative approaches to that. You mentioned that it's certainly an area that B.C. Fed advocates with respect to.

I wondered if you could provide any information with respect to either initiatives that are ongoing right now with employers or things that you'd like to see happen.

J. Sinclair: There are a number of programs, both in the health care sector and the public education sector, for literacy training that go on. They're joint projects with the employers in those areas. There was a major project in the pulp and paper sector, in the wood sec-

tor: Forest Renewal funding. Again, the funding disappeared, so the program stopped.

We have a literacy committee at the federation that does sit down with post-secondary institutions and support the work that they do and figure out how to integrate it. It's tough to get people to declare that they can't read and write. You really have to be conscious of doing that. Lots of times when people have jobs, they don't see the need to learn it, if they have that job. So you have to go in there and make it a personal contact.

We do have those committees. We do have a standing committee. I think there are hugely more areas that we can be involved in. Like the other people at this table, it's a resource question. We had a few other things, as a labour movement, to do the last few years. Maybe we could spend some more time on this in the future, because the payoffs are enormous. There's no question. This is a fundamental investment that societies either make or don't make. It's for everybody. Everybody wins.

D. Routley: You referred to making post-secondary education free. That would be one of the steps that you would recommend, as well as moving the age requirement for parents on income assistance from three up to eight before they're required to go out to work in order to help people, again, access those programs.

A couple of years ago there was a UN study that ranked Canada second in the world in education generally. Norway was first. The U.S., I believe, was 32nd. In Norway post-secondary education is free, and there's no standardized testing in the K-to-12 system. In the U.S. they have a high cost of post-secondary education and a high reliance on standardized testing. We've heard time and time again about the economic benefits of increased literacy. You referred to increases in gross domestic product far outweighing the investment that might be made.

Where do you think the labour movement could play a role in helping government achieve those goals that you talked about: zero tuition fees, implementation of training on the job — that sort of thing? What specific roles do you see labour playing?

J. Sinclair: I think that in those societies where they've actually come to terms with a bit of a transition in the global economy — developed countries — you'll find that there's been a much greater dialogue between government, business and labour over how to do that. It's not just Norway. You look at Ireland; you look at Scandinavian countries. All of those countries actually had to sit down and say: "Okay, what's it look like ten years from now? What kind of economy do we have? What's the role of education in that economy?"

The Irish miracle was based not as much on entering the European Economic Community as it was based on a massive reinvestment in their education system, starting with kindergarten and moving right through to try and increase that education and making it free post-K-to-12. I think we have a huge role to play in that, because working-class people understand that

if their kids don't get that education, those job opportunities aren't there any more. We need a \$5,000 course at a community college to get a job in a production line in a pulp mill, if you can find one.

It's a different world, and I just think a far harder one, so we could play a major role. It's our imperative. If we don't have education, that's how we as ordinary people realize our dreams for our kids. We're having a harder and harder time realizing those dreams, because we can't afford them any more. That's got implications far beyond the individual, to the whole society.

D. Thorne: Just quickly, Jim. Thank you. Lots of good points.

A couple of our presenters before mentioned people with low literacy skills getting jobs like construction jobs and jobs like that. Have you found that that's an issue with safety? My son is working in construction, and he has mentioned to me that he's working with several people who have trouble reading. I see that as a really dangerous thing for him and for all of the workers on that site.

[1305]

J. Sinclair: There's no doubt that in order to participate effectively on most job sites, you need to read and write. If you want to know what's happening, you've got to articulate what's going on and understand the orders you're being given, and to relate to your co-workers, you need to know how to read and write. If you want to do it at levels that are sufficient to stay safe, then you really do. Lots of people are handed booklets. An example of that is the gasoline station workers that get handed a booklet on how to deal with a robbery in one language. "Here it is. Read this when you get a chance." I mean, the point is: if you can't do that, you can't be safe, and you endanger other people.

Having said that, I don't think we should then say you have to speak English and do all that in order to do certain jobs. You've got to work at this and work at the language and integration. It's not going to change overnight.

D. Thorne: Are we doing that, do you think? Or do we need to really start doing a lot more in that direction?

J. Sinclair: No, we're not doing that. We need to do a lot more in that direction. People need to know their rights.

D. Thorne: Yeah. This is something we haven't really discussed.

J. Sinclair: We're going in the opposite direction. We're actually introducing a system right now where we're bringing in guest workers to work in British Columbia but denying them any of the rights of citizenship or nation-building, and we're asking them to participate in languages.... They can't speak English. They actually have no rights at all right now, and no

way of having those rights except that if you do the wrong thing, you get sent back home.

That's the opposite to building a nation. That's exploiting another nation. I think we really have to come to terms with: what does this nation look like in the next period of time, and how do we do it? The United States is a great example. The state of California has a huge problem around immigrant labour but also a huge problem about priorities. They spend more now on prisons than they do on post-secondary education — total. I mean, they've made a different decision about how they're going to deal with their crisis of inequality, access to jobs, access to wealth. It's not a pretty picture down there.

We don't want to go there. That's not the model, I think, that British Columbians or Canadians believe in. I think we have a chance to change that. I think you do, actually, have a chance to play a major role.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Thank you, Mr. Sinclair, for taking the time and coming in for us.

J. Sinclair: Oh, you're welcome. Thank you. I'm looking forward to your report.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Thank you.

We now have an opportunity, as you know.... The presenters have done what they needed to do, and we now have an open mike. I believe the first guest who would like to come before us is Vaughan Evans.

If you would, please.

V. Evans: How many minutes should I restrict myself to?

J. Nuraney (Chair): Five minutes.

V. Evans: Okay.

I'll introduce myself. I'm 57. I was born in Vancouver, and I've witnessed so many changes that took place in the '60s and '70s, because I'm of the hippie generation. I think the problem that we have about illiteracy — why we got ourselves into this mess — can be summarized as follows.

First of all, our language is a cross between our British heritage and the powerful force of the Americans. British and Americans pronounce words differently, spell words differently, and they have different meanings for words. I took business training. When I read American textbooks, sometimes I used words that my bankers didn't know. Canadian bankers, for example, use the words "data centre" in the same context that Americans use "clearinghouse." Therefore, people who teach English to new Canadians are wondering whether we should use the British or American standards.

The whole issue of political correctness is a stumbling block to teaching English because we still read old poems, stories and songs that would use words like "fireman" and "policeman." Also, our language is difficult as it is. We have so many words for the same....

One word has more than one meaning. We have so many synonyms. This is a hard enough language for our own people.

I think part of the problem is that how we act as adults towards our children is obstructing teaching us how to communicate well. I had a problem with my mother once. She said: "Why do businesses use big words like the word 'remittance'?" Now, I should have told her that in any body of knowledge, having a vocabulary is a tool to convey precise information. Like in business training and communication with people, words beginning with "re" — like remittance, recourse, redress, rescind, repudiate, restore — are used because the word "re" means "back" or "again."

[1310]

Having a vocabulary and having specific meanings of words are tools to convey precise information. As an example, the words "fruit" and "berry" have special meanings in botany. The botanists use the words "sugar," "salt" and "flower" in different contexts, because all bodies of knowledge have their....

When I was growing up, our parents were veterans. They treated us as if it were still a wartime economy, saying: "Never volunteer information. Children should be seen and not heard. Talk is cheap." We boys....

J. Nuraney (Chair): One minute, Mr. Evans. Thank you.

V. Evans: Okay. Well, I think the trouble is that in order to help maintain literacy, we should ask ourselves: what are we doing? Will we obstruct other people in learning communication and good fighting habits?

If I were raising a boy, I would tell him that part of fighting one's own battles is to give accurate, complete information to people that you go to for recourse — your lawyer, your policeman, your therapist, your counsellor. Unless you could give accurate information, the lawyer couldn't help you. His advice could be dangerous. People are dangerous to themselves if they can't give accurate information to people who are supposed to give them recourse or redress.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Thank you, Mr. Evans.

Our next speaker is Sean Kocsis. He's from the IIG.

S. Kocsis: Thank you all very much. I know it has been a long morning. I'll make this very brief.

It had actually been my intention just to listen and learn along with you, as well, so I really appreciate that Lorne and Josie both asked if I would be willing to participate, especially in this last time slot. So thanks very much.

I don't believe that there's any clear-cut answer to the issue of adult literacy, especially as it relates to aboriginal people, but I do have four observations and a number of recommendations that I'd like to share with you.

The first observation is that much of our success at the IIG All Nations was based on a philosophical shift

at the planning level. Rather than behaving as a service provider, we put ourselves in the position of an individual seeking upgrade. This led, then, to the second point, to the question: why would I want to upgrade? In general, the answer is some combination of motive and opportunity or incentive and ease of access.

The other presenters talked a lot about their suggestions. I won't add to them, because they were all very good, I thought. But we did learn some lessons at the IIG All Nations with respect to incentive — institutionally as opposed to individually.

The third point I'd like to make, the third observation — and this is something that you may have come across — is that for many aboriginal people, there's a great deal of mistrust towards the government, and there's a fair amount of cynicism that service providers are simply using us as a vehicle to obtain funding.

This leads to my last point, which are some recommendations that I put forward to you. I think that if the province wants to promote or help promote aboriginal literacy institutionally, it can do so perhaps by doing some of the following.

(1) Create a level playing field. You hear this everywhere you go — that the government's role is to create a level playing field and not necessarily to involve itself in issues. In this respect, I'd say that the province could create a universal set of rules and expectations and apply them fairly across the board.

(2) Don't tell our organizations how to do things. Certainly, I think it's fair to say that the government has a role in saying what is expected — not necessarily how to do it, but what the expectation is.

(3) I think the province has a right to demand apoliticalness from the organizations that it funds — that is, there should be a separation of politics from service delivery. Service deliverers should be delivering a product, not necessarily emeshing politics into that message.

(4) Again, I believe that the province has a role in setting standards and holding organizations accountable to those standards.

(5) The province has a role in determining realistic goals, clearly stated, with an expectation that those goals are to be achieved.

Finally, I think there should be some kind of insistence upon viability, sustainability and economies of scale.

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There must be a public benefit for what's being funded, with solid evidence to support that expenditure and the achievement of the goals, if they've been achieved.

My last point — I mentioned that I had four observations; I did sort of put it out of order — was that I do believe native institutions are treated differently than other institutions. If some or all of these recommendations are followed, I think we'll then see that level playing field. We'll then see institutions treated similarly across the board, with similar expectations and a sense of accountability.

Anyway, I know that you have had a very long day, so I really do appreciate these few minutes appearing in front of you. Thank you.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Thank you. Before I conclude, Sean, if I may make a request.... As you know, one of the mandates of this committee is to address some of the problems of the first nations. With your being involved so heavily in that segment of our society, if I may make a suggestion: give this matter a little more thought and, with the group of people that you are working with, if you can put forward some kind of a presentation to us in a formal or an informal manner, or submit to us electronically or in writing some of the suggestions, it could be helpful to this committee. I would really appreciate that.

S. Kocsis: Well, thank you very much. We'll do that.

J. Nuraney (Chair): Thank you, Sean. This concludes our hearing at Burnaby. We shall reconvene in Surrey at 3:30.

The committee adjourned at 1:17 p.m.

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