

# Selling the Canada Jobs Strategy

Job-training for people who have been kept out of the labour force doesn't seem like a lucrative field. And yet in the last five years, the federal government has given more and more money to private training institutes and businesses to train women, visible minorities, disabled people, youth and welfare recipients, as part of the Canada job strategy. With no means of monitoring the kind of training people get, and only approximate measures of performance it's not surprising that the people who are in the program and the people who deliver it are less than impressed.

By Chris Lawson

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OTTAWA - There's a number anyone can call if they want to find information from any one of the Federal government's 500-odd listings in the blue pages of the capitol's phone directory.

For journalists trying to track down information on a story it's a last resort. I dialed it about half way through my quest to get official comment on the Canada Jobs Strategy - a five year old program aimed at attacking structural unemployment of women, native people, people on welfare, disabled people and youth.

Under the Strategy's auspices, \$200 million was spent in 1988-89 to find jobs for some 60,000 social assistance recipients, mostly for job-training programs offered by community colleges, and private training schools.

It started innocently enough, calling the number listed as "Canada Jobs Strategy" under the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission (CEIC) listings. And while it's not considered normal to find all the information you need - or even someone who can tell you anything - with just three or four phone calls, after about seven or eight I figure I had to start from square one.

I had been given four different numbers - all, I was assured, were for the office responsible for implementing CJS programs - by different functionaries within the CEIC. The people on the other end of the line were trying to be helpful, they just seemed a bit confused.

"Oh God, you want to know that?" said one official, with the Ottawa CJS office. "Let me see if I can dig up the pre-packed answer." I had asked what - in

broad terms - the goal of the CJS was.

Five more phone calls and I was at the Special Employment Unit of CEIC. Convinced general questions weren't the way to go, I asked about where money for CJS job-training projects was being spent.

"That's not my division," was the response.

"Who might be able to tell me about that?"

"God, there's so many divisions, it's hard to keep it straight yourself," was the answer. "I'm not sure where they fit in."

CEIC figures show at least 250,000 people went through Canada Jobs Strategy training programs between Jan. 1986 and Nov. 1988. Employment and Immigration officials are quick to point to their internal evaluations which show about a 59 per cent 'success' rate of project participants who, three months after taking a CJS-sponsored training course, are either at work or in further training.

But the real picture is less than rosy. The National Anti-Poverty Organization estimates that of the two million "employable" social assistance recipients in Canada, only about five per cent (or 60,000) received some kind of training from a CJS project in 1988-89.

## DISILLUSIONED

The CEIC figure is based on responses from participants who return a questionnaire. And CEIC officials got back about 44,000 fewer questionnaires than they sent out between 1986 and 1988.

"Whatever happened to them?" asks Bob Dale of the National Union of Provincial Government Employees (NUPGE). The union has been researching the effectiveness of the CJS.

Dale said it's likely the people who don't respond to the surveys wouldn't rate as 'successes' and were probably too disillusioned to respond.

Nor is the 'success' shared equally amongst all participants in Canada Job Strategy projects. The projects target women, natives, disabled people, youth and social assistance recipients. With roughly 29 per cent of program participants unemployed three months after their training program, women, youth and visible minority 'target groups' are the most successful. For natives, the figure is 45 per cent, for disabled

people, 37 per cent, for social assistance recipients, about 40 per cent.

The program's shortcomings go much further than its research methods, according to one Senate committee report.

The 1987 report by the Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology said the CJS had "no quality control methods, no set of objectives or criteria with respect to what kind of training should be given," in addition to a lack of an adequate means of tracking people who go through the programs.

A 1988 internal audit of the CJS programs also revealed some major problems.

"The generalized effect of the shortcomings identified during the audit is a lack of assurance that training resources are being effectively spent to help those most in need," the audit read.

One area of concern for CJS's auditors was the way commission officials decide where to send trainees for their courses.

Most training money is used 'purchase' training courses either directly in community colleges, or indirectly, through a private broker, in a private training school.

But, the audit reports, "no formal documents are used by CEIC for the planning of indirect purchases within CJS."

"The effect of the absence of a formal planning document for indirect purchase is that (the commission) is unable to ensure itself that planned expenditures are being directed to those segments of the labour market that require them."

## RANDOM TRAINING

In the absence of a plan, the decision on what kind of training to give people is almost random, Dale said.

"The CJS' focus is on damage control," he said. "It's 'get them trained in something, never mind what will be useful down the road, never mind what trying to find some skills that they can use elsewhere.'"

Employment and Immigration officials also have no means of evaluating the quality of education trainees in private schools get.

"We've heard about too many cases of fly-by-night 'institutes' which take the money and run," Dale said.

Association of Community Colleges of Canada executive Ed Luterbach was also critical of the Job Strategy's use of private

training.

"Students end up without useful credentials, because there are no uniform standards of evaluation," Luterbach said.

As well, CJS training projects often rely on on-the-job training, which may not provide participants with transferable skills.

"It doesn't make sense for firms in competition with each other to invest in on-the-job training," Dale said. "Because while they're competing for market shares, they're also competing for scarce skilled labour. Why would they train them only to watch them leave?"

Dale said American companies spend twice as much on training as their Canadian counterparts.

But still, CJS had 3073 training 'projects' involving private companies and schools in 1989. Dale said many of these projects involved "subsidizing a firm to employ someone."

"It's great for the firm, but what does the worker get? Nothing."

Luterbach said CJS's apparent success was due to a "churning effect."

"You get people into a job from a training program - often at someone's expense - and they work at that job until they are bumped out by someone else."

The person put out of the job waits until they are again eligible for a training program, and the cycle starts again. "There's no upward integration."

## BROKEN BY DEFINITION

While Federal job training programs have always partially relied on private-sector training, one of the Canada Job Strategy's articulated purposes is to farm more of its training projects out to private companies.

"They have no proof that employers invest in training, and no

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