



Fast

FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES – MANITOBA

there is an alternative.

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Social Enterprises Create Pride through Decent Work

Social enterprises fill an important gap in Manitoba's economy for those struggling to enter the workforce. The provincial government has seen the value of investing in social enterprises through funding training and procuring housing retrofit services. This in combination with financing from the Manitoba Hydro Pay As You Save (PAYS) program is producing great results. For instance, 194 people are employed in the six social enterprises involved in this study.

Over the past decade, a strong network of social enterprises has grown in Manitoba to help individuals develop the employment and life skills they need to enter and participate in the paid workforce. Social enterprises use a business model to promote positive social or cultural benefits including poverty reduction, fostering environmental sustainability, or other beneficial outcomes.

Social enterprises have emerged to create pathways into the workforce for those who face barriers such as lack of education, racism, histories of involvements with gangs or other involvement with the justice system, and lack of work experience. As one worker describes:

I was having a hard time finding employment because of my criminal history and whatnot. I just applied and got in and it was quite surprising to me to say the least. I spent so many years not being able to get employed, and then coming to a program like this and they accept you for who you are.

The unemployment rate amongst Aboriginal adults age 15 and over was 14.3 percent, more than six percentage points higher than the rest of the inner-city population (8.1 percent). The mainstream route from school to work — graduating high school at age 18, attending a post-secondary institution, and finding a good job — is fraught with roadblocks for young people who experience the intergenerational impacts of colonization. Without a high school education, it can be challenging to find any job, undoubtedly a decent job.

The reverse side of this challenge is that Manitoba has a tremendous underutilized pool of young workers who are a potential springboard for future growth. Manitoba also has a vibrant and growing social enterprise sector that could play an important role in bringing these workers into the workforce if it is given sufficient resources.

Manitoba Housing and Community Development allocated \$5 million in the 2015/16 capital and renovations budget to provide business opportunities to social enterprises. This procurement is needed to upgrade public housing and do needed energy retrofits. This creates a triple bottom line of this public spending resulting in a needed service of housing repair, job creation and electrical and water conservation.

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In order to understand the qualitative impacts on the workers in Manitoba's burgeoning social enterprise sector, we spoke to 51 workers in seven social enterprises that focus on job training and employment for people with barriers to employment in the home renovation and basic construction sector. We spoke with 26 percent of this portion of the social enterprise workforce.

Thank you to the participants in the study for sharing their perspectives and experiences. The themes emerging from the qualitative research depict that social enterprises provide trainees and employees with needed skills in a holistic fashion, from life skills, to budgeting, to accessing identification and driver's licensing, to workplace health and safety knowledge, to construction skills, and employment search skills. Recognizing the whole person in each employee or trainee, social enterprises use a holistic approach.

This is a program where they make a complete person you know. They get you to learn all this trade but life skills, management and all these skills that you need.

Participants spoke about the positive workplace culture and team environment created in social enterprises. Some participants who had worked in private businesses found the workplace culture different and challenging. When discussing their futures, a segment of participants wished for the opportunity to apprentice in the trade of their choosing.

The pride that comes from working hard and having a decent job, and the benefits that result from it shines through in this study. Participants told us they look forward to brighter futures for themselves and their families. These workers carry forward the virtuous cycle created by their involvement in social enterprise to their families and as leaders in the community.

Manitoba has a successful and growing social enterprise sector that has helped to integrate some of these workers. It is nonetheless still dependent on government

support. The support of Manitoba Housing and Community Development, other crown corporations, and government in providing contracts to keep these social enterprises vibrant is essential to meeting community economic development and sustainability goals.

Josh Brandon and Molly McCracken are the co-authors of Creating Pride Through Decent Work: Social Enterprises in Manitoba.

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