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OLDER WORKERS SUMMIT

Summary Report

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A collaboration between the Office of the Seniors' Advocate, Older Workers NL,
the Leslie Harris Centre of Regional Policy and Development,
and the St. John's Board of Trade

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Older Workers Summit Summary Report

OVERVIEW:

NL's aging workforce and shrinking population can have a great impact on the labour market and the ability of businesses to find workers. Newfoundland and Labrador's demographics could be viewed as an opportunity, as more and more people are working well into their 60s and 70s. However, many older employees are reluctant to remain in the workforce because of policies related to pensions, health benefits and working conditions, as well as social pressures to "make room" for younger workers. In addition, some employers are hesitant to retain or hire older workers because of preconceived, negative notions. Yet, research demonstrates that many older workers are more productive, have low absenteeism and contribute to intergenerational collaboration.

On November 13, 2019, the Office of the Seniors' Advocate partnered with Memorial University's Harris Centre, Older Workers NL, and the St. John's Board of Trade to present a day-long workshop regarding older workers.

The summit brought together representatives from business, unions, government, post-secondary education institutions, seniors' groups, labour market researchers, and older workers themselves.

The session began with an overview of the issue as presented in a keynote by Dr. Suzanne Brake, Seniors' Advocate for Newfoundland and Labrador. Dr. Brake presented a summary of observations from a series of consultations conducted by her office over the last 18 months – including many issues related to older workers, and older people who wish to engage in the workforce.

Dr. Brake was followed by Dr. Lynn Gambin, an economics professor and researcher at Memorial University's Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Department of Economics. Dr. Gambin presented current statistics on the increasing numbers of older people in the workforce, and highlighted the fact that there has been a trend over the last number of years towards people staying in the workforce longer.

Stephen Moore, of MQO Research, a private market research firm, spoke about a research project they are currently undertaking with the St. John's Board of Trade regarding older workers. He pointed to an interest amongst retired individuals to reengage with the workforce in some way if appealing and appropriate job opportunities were available to them.

Following the presentations, a panel discussion was held with Dr. Brake, Older Workers NL representatives, Mike Kehoe and Jean Graham, and business owner, Kelly Mansell, of Rocket Bakery. The panel discussion covered challenges experienced by both Mr. Kehoe and Ms. Graham, as well as challenges faced by Ms. Mansell in her attempts to hire older workers. The

panel discussion was moderated by Bojan Furst, Manager of Knowledge Mobilization at the Harris Centre and host of the Centre's podcast, Rural Routes. Following the moderator's questions, attendees were also given a chance to contribute to the conversation and pose questions to the panel.

Issues raised during the panel discussion and morning presentations set the stage for the second half of the summit, which was aimed at discussing possible solutions to the issue. In this portion of the session, participants formed collaborative teams, identified key actions or projects they wished to move forward, and developed action plans to continue the momentum of the day after the sessions' conclusion.

The key issues and suggested solutions from both the morning presentations, as well as the discussion tables, are included below.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED:

Labour market shortage: The demographic situation of the province requires us to create age-friendly workplaces. NL does not have enough young people to fill labour gaps, as well as the gaps in volunteer positions in our communities. The sectors with the highest percentage of older workers includes *Other Services (except Public Services), Forestry, Fishing, Mining, Quarrying, Oil and Gas, and Retail Trade*. The sectors with the lowest percentage of older workers are *Professional, Scientific and Technical, and Educational Services*. There is more temporary work amongst older workers; this could be for a multitude of reasons.

Increased number of older workers: Statistics discussed identified a steadily increasing percentage of older people in the workforce, as well as an increasing number of older people who are unemployed but looking for work. According to market research presented, many people who are retired would accept an employment offer that was appealing and practical.

Cost of living and longer life-expectancy means many seniors need to work longer and later in life: The cost of living continues to rise and some seniors struggle to make ends meet on a fixed income; the need to work beyond the usual retirement age is a concern.

Some seniors want to continue to work, but feel social pressure to retire: Some seniors do not wish to retire for reasons other than financial constraints (social connection/contribution, active lifestyle, etc.), but do not feel welcome to stay in their workplace, and feel pressure to retire. In addition, some seniors are not able to avail of community services and programs for older people, as programming is often delivered during regular working hours, which makes those programs and services unavailable to older people who continue to work.

Lack of information for older people wanting to continue to work: There is a lack of information for older workers. Increased information would be helpful to determine what solutions are needed. Many older individuals are heavily reliant on health benefits – some people fear if they work past retirement they will not be eligible for government-sponsored

coverage and will also be unable to avail of employer benefits due to their age or the part-time nature of their work.

Lack of training opportunities for older workers: Older workers feel they receive less employer-delivered training, and this puts them at a disadvantage. As we move towards a more high-tech, knowledge-based economy, it is important for training opportunities to be available to older workers, so that they are not left behind in the labour market of the future. It is important that training opportunities be offered through multiple mediums, not simply online courses or tutorials.

Employers who wish to hire older workers struggle to find candidates: Employers who are interested in hiring older workers struggle to find and recruit candidates. There are ample programs and supports for hiring students, but few resources to help recruit and retain older workers.

Workplaces are not age-friendly: Some older workers feel forced out of their employment by social pressure to retire, employment policies that limit benefits for older workers, limited training and promotion opportunities, as well as physical barriers to full work participation. There is a need to understand what it means to be an age-friendly workplace, and what intergenerational impacts exist.

SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS AND ACTIONS IDENTIFIED:

Recruitment programs for older workers: Programs designed for student positions could be replicated for older workers. This would be especially relevant in rural areas where there are more seniors and less students. There is an opportunity to have integrated older worker and student programs to contribute to intergenerational learning opportunities. Other suggestions related to recruitment included improved employment services, such as peer-mentoring, community-based work experience programs, job-matching, and job-shadowing to help older workers gain new skills and open up opportunities for them to engage in the workforce, or continue to be engaged in the workforce.

Flexible working arrangements: Employers could provide flexible arrangements, such as job-sharing, part-time or remote-working options. This model could be piloted with willing organizations and promoted as a possible model for other groups to implement.

Age-friendly workplaces models and examples: Flexible employment policies, intergenerational collaboration, and physical accommodations can make a big difference to the retention and recruitment of older workers. Models of age-friendly workplaces could be promoted and acknowledged to encourage other groups to implement similar practices. Something as simple as a stool to be used for tasks that would otherwise have to be completed while standing can mean the difference between being able to participate in the workforce and feeling as though the workplace is no longer a place where they are welcome. These models

and best practices could be promoted with awards through business and industry associations, as well as through public awareness campaigns.

Public policy changes regarding discrimination: The issue of businesses discontinuing health and other insurance benefits at specific ages, regardless of health status, was raised as a specific public policy issue that should be addressed.

Better access to training opportunities: Training to upgrade skills could be increased for older workers both at the public level and employer level. In addition, training should be made available in a flexible manner (not just online), accessible and affordable. Training opportunities could also include experiential training, such as peer-mentoring, community-based work experience programs, and job-shadowing.

Employee and retiree information: More information is needed for employees and retirees to better understand how earning an income later in life impacts their pension and benefits. This information could be available through peer support networks, online portals, webinars, or in-person information sessions.

CONTINUED ACTION:

As part of the workshop, participants formed working groups based around five themes: Employee Supports, Employer Policy and Supports, Public Policy, Rural Workers, and Women Workers and Workers with Disabilities. The groups discussed key concerns, as well as opportunities for actions. The main deliverable for these group discussions was to identify opportunities for projects to help tackle the issues related to the specific theme. Groups then chose one specific opportunity to work towards – some of the groups continued to meet after the session to continue moving their opportunity forward. All opportunities that were identified are included in *Appendix A: What we heard – Opportunities for Action*.

In September 2019 the Office of the Seniors' Advocate released a report **Long May Your Big Jib Draw** which outlines the major issues seniors had brought to the attention of the Office. As well, this report details the Office's plans to ensure change.

One of the issues identified as a priority is seniors and labour force participation. Specifically, seniors' workforce concerns fall within three categories: continued attachment to the workforce, the stability of pensions, and access to benefits.

The Seniors' Advocate has committed to addressing labour market issues including the need for the development of more age friendly workplaces. In fact, the hosting of this summit was one of the actions outlined in the Seniors' Advocate's September report. The second work force commitment is to examine "age" within the context of the **Human Rights Act** and its impact on pension/retirement plans, and employee insurance plans.

Appendix A: What We Heard – Opportunities for Action

The following is a list of all the opportunities and recommendations that emerged through the discussions.

1. **Basic employment training:** Tailored to older workers on technology, resume writing and job search. This could also include job-matching, work-term or job-shadowing opportunities.
2. **Return to work (post-retirement) session:** Information related to financial impacts and assistance navigating the various scenarios.
3. **Peer support for older workers:** Focus on well-being and providing the opportunity to share information, network and mentor.
4. **Community groups education program:** Tool kit for community groups and municipalities; people offering learning opportunities.
5. **Round tables:** Discussions with older worker researchers; women in labour; 50+ group with a disability lens; get their perspective; bring people together with lived experience; discuss challenges.
6. **Public awareness campaign:** Presentations at schools, social media campaign, educating students about ageism.
7. **Education Campaign:** Fed by stakeholders, directed to policy makers on issues surrounding older workers; determine best practices.
8. **Submission forum:** Forum for generation of submissions to government for training in seniors.
9. **Identify gaps in data/knowledge and research opportunities:** Campaign to educate on policy gaps and needs for older workers; research idea to create evidence; adult literacy and training; stakeholder engagement and communication; discover governmental leadership role as employer; use connections to identify data gaps to create research needs.
10. **Communication tools:** Share knowledge; share success stories and job opportunities; connect people (employees and employers).
11. **Public event in rural area (networking opportunity):** Bringing together employers and employees aged 50+.
12. **Pilot event: talent mapping for senior workers:** Financial advising session; information finding sessions in rural NL; writing proposals for department of tourism to utilize seasonal senior workers; networking opportunity in rural areas; job matching for seniors in rural areas; publishing success stories newsletter; talent mapping session.
13. **Event/Workshop:** Using our skills and expertise and facilitation and public speaking skills and meeting spaces to hold event/workshop.

14. **Awareness Campaign:** Use knowledge and marketing skills to create an awareness campaign.
15. **Preparing Proposal for a Grant:** Using our contacts and our writing skills and expertise in order to create a proposal in order to successfully secure a grant.

Appendix B: Older Workers in the NL Labour Market Presentation

Older Workers in the NL Labour Market, Presentation by Dr. Lynn Gambin

https://www.mun.ca/harriscentre/Gambin_Older_Workers.pdf

OLDER WORKERS IN THE NL LABOUR MARKET

Dr Lynn Gambin
Department of Economics
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Older Workers Summit
13th November 2019

Appendix C: Working Better with Age

Working Better with Age: Presentation by MQO Research, Stephen Moore

https://www.mun.ca/harriscentre/MQO_Research_Presentation.pdf



Appendix D: Recorded Videoconference

Recorded videoconference of the Older Workers Summit November 13, 2019

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFRYbUCGEkI>

