

## Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Reality TV – Canada Jobs Grant Survivor Edition Provinces forced to choose who of Canada's most marginalized will be voted off the island**

(Dartmouth, NS) For most Canadians the right to education and an equal opportunity to gain employment is a given; sadly, for many the struggle to survive is constantly impacted by decisions over which they have no control.

"I don't want to be on income assistance," says Terry Wilson, Dartmouth Learning Network (DLN) program participant. Terry began his learning journey with DLN three years ago and has used the skills he has gained to achieve one of his many goals. Last fall Terry became President of the Halifax chapter of People First Nova Scotia, a self-advocacy group for people who have been labeled with intellectual disabilities. Terry has difficulty with short-term memory loss and while he learns how to cope with his challenges, his future plans include becoming President of People First Nova Scotia and ultimately People First of Canada. "My school (DLN) has helped me to be able to help others," he says.

"Terry's story is just one of hundreds of success stories the current Labour Market Agreement can be accredited for in our learning network," says Lesley Dunn, executive director of the Dartmouth Learning Network. "Literacy is a foundational skill needed to succeed in skills training employment, and for participation in all areas of life."

The Department of Employment and Social Development, the federal body responsible for the LMAs, has documented the effectiveness of current Labour Market Agreements. A department report found that 86% of LMA participants were employed after completing adult learning and job training programs (compared to 44% before entering), with average earnings increased by \$323 per week.

The innovative Labour Market Agreement designed to provide a lift up to Canada's most marginalized citizens is threatened with extinction. "There is no way to sugar-coat this," says Dana Atwell, DLN Board member. "Whether you withdraw \$75 million a year or all of it from the program the fact still remains provinces are being forced to choose who of their citizens will take priority over others."

Adult learning programs across the country commend efforts by the provinces and territories in standing up for quality literacy, skills and employment training programs for Canadians who need them most. Ontario Federation of Labour President Sid Ryan said, "Under the guise of addressing skills shortages, the Canada Job Grant will actually divert crucial funding for literacy training and skills upgrading."

"A job for every Canadian makes sense. Asking employers to become more engaged in the professional development of their employees makes sense. We agree with these concepts. What we are not in agreement with is that under the proposed program specialized support for those struggling to gain attachment to the labour market could potentially vanish," says Dunn. Recent statistics release by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) clearly indicates that Nova Scotia's working aged adults (16-65) are just meeting the OECD averages in literacy. They are below the OECD average in numeracy. Alarming, Nova Scotia youth 16-24 years of age are below Canadian and OECD averages in both literacy and numeracy.

By raising literacy levels to level 3 (high school), Canadian Literacy and Learning Network estimates 84,000 people would be able to get off social assistance, saving \$542 million a year and creating \$100 billion in increased annual earnings. Employees with higher literacy earn more over their lifetime, are more likely to be able to find fulltime work or receive further training.

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#### **ABOUT**

**DARTMOUTH LEARNING NETWORK** - Originally founded in 1985 by the former Premier of Nova Scotia Dr. John Savage, The Dartmouth Learning Network offers free literacy and essential skills programming in classroom/small group and one-on-one environments. Daytime and evening programs are held on site and at community partner locations throughout Dartmouth. We offer basic adult literacy programs, math upgrading, computer basics, and employment readiness program in addition to a General Education Development (GED) program.