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Mercredi 5 mars 2014

**Select Committee on
Developmental Services**

Developmental services strategy

**Comité spécial sur les
services aux personnes ayant
une déficience intellectuelle**

Stratégie de services
aux personnes ayant
une déficience intellectuelle

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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON
DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES**

**COMITÉ SPÉCIAL SUR LES
SERVICES AUX PERSONNES AYANT
UNE DÉFICIENCE INTELLECTUELLE**

Wednesday 5 March 2014

Mercredi 5 mars 2014

The committee met at 1616 in committee room 1.

DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES STRATEGY

The Chair (Mrs. Laura Albanese): Good afternoon. The Select Committee on Developmental Services is now in session. I hope everyone saw that we presented the interim report this afternoon in the House.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: You did a fine job, Chair.

The Chair (Mrs. Laura Albanese): Thank you I appreciate it.

We have received a number of documents, and I guess we'll go over these afterwards.

MR. MARK WAFER

The Chair (Mrs. Laura Albanese): In the meantime, we do have a presenter that is here with us this afternoon: Mr. Mark Wafer. Good afternoon. How are you?

Mr. Mark Wafer: Oh, my goodness. [*Inaudible*] and I'm over there talking to everybody else.

The Chair (Mrs. Laura Albanese): Sure. Well, welcome to our committee. You will have up to 10 minutes for your presentation. Then that will be followed by 30 minutes of questioning, if the committee members wish to do so. It will be divided in 10 minutes for each party. You may begin anytime.

Mr. Mark Wafer: Okay. Well, thank you very much for having me here. First of all, I'm a Tim Hortons franchisee with seven stores in Scarborough. In the last almost 20 years I've hired almost 100 people with disabilities, and about 35% or almost 40% of those have been intellectual disabilities.

My expertise is in opening doors at the corporate and business level by explaining the many, many business benefits to being an inclusive employer. By using a business model and peer-to-peer discussions, I've had tremendous success in doing so. More than 1,000 people have found work through the discussions that I've had through one of our programs, which is known as Rotary at Work, but also from discussions with chambers of commerce and a number of other initiatives. When we discuss inclusive employment from a business-case model, we will open doors. That has been my expertise up to now.

The most important aspect of a person's life really is the fact that they have a job—a job that is meaningful and that is competitively paid. It's what we want for ourselves. It's what we dream of when we're growing up. It's what we expect for our children as well.

In Ontario today we have a 70% unemployment rate for people who have a disability. HRSDC says 50%, but if you take a look at the number of people who have dropped off the grid and people who have given up out of sheer frustration, we're looking at about 70%. With 1.9 million people in the province who have a disability, 70% of those is a huge number that's costing us, in ODSP support payments alone, about \$4 billion, and that's growing by 8% per year.

For every 100 people we take off of ODSP and put into the workplace in meaningful and competitively paid jobs and for those that we're taking off of benefits, and creating taxpayers, we're saving the economy about \$1 million.

There are many reasons why companies are not hiring them. There is a series of myths and misperceptions that they're buying into. There's a fear, a tremendous amount of fear, that the employee will be less productive, less safe, will take more time off, and be a human rights issue at the end of the day. None of that is true. They are all myths and misperceptions. The reality is that hiring people with disabilities in meaningful and competitively paid positions is good for business.

My employee turnover rate in my seven stores is 40% per year. The average for the industry and the average for Tim Hortons, McDonald's and the rest of the QSR in the Toronto region is 94.5%. For me to replace one person—the person who served you your coffee this morning—it's \$4,000. By the time we look into advertising, uniforms, training, procurement, interviewing and so on, it's about \$4,000. So if my turnover rate is 40% and my friend down the street is doing just as good a job as I am at 94%, the bottom line is I'm making more money—on the bottom line. That's really important.

The discussions that we have with our children today—when parents have a child who has a disability, we tend to look after them. We tend to smother them with love, and we let them know that as they grow up they're going to be looked after. But the siblings and the children who don't have a disability, we tell them to dream about what they want to be when they grow up.

Even if it's a dragon slayer or an astronaut, it doesn't matter; at least they have dreams. But the child who has a disability, we tell them they're going to be looked after. We have to change that mindset. Stakeholder groups and social service agencies are complicit in that mindset as well.

We don't even talk about the workplace until they're 17, 18, 19 years old, and it's too late. We need to have those discussions much earlier—12 years old. If the person with a disability has older siblings, we need to start even earlier, because the siblings are going to be talking about going to work. Mom and dad go to work, so there's an expectation that everybody who grows up goes to work. It should be the same for someone who has a disability. We have to change that mindset right from the get-go.

We need to have our agencies, we need to have our stakeholder groups, and we need to have families talking to a child so that when they grow up and they are ready, the expectation is that they will be in the workforce. If it doesn't work out, we'll deal with that when the time comes.

Last year, I was working on a federal task force, and I met with about 75 Canadian corporations. We talked to CEOs and heads of many large companies. They told us that they wanted to hire people with disabilities and they wanted to be inclusive, but they didn't know how, so we still have to make that connection with corporate Canada. That's not just for skilled labour. Corporate Canada also does, and can, hire people who have developmental disabilities.

I think my time is up in terms of speaking. I could pass that on to questions now.

The Chair (Mrs. Laura Albanese): Sure. Thank you. The question time will be starting. Each party will have 10 minutes to address the questions, and we will start with the Conservative Party. Ms. Jones?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Thank you, Mr. Wafer. I'm really very pleased that you're able to come to the committee, because one of the things that we think is so important, in terms of recommendations going forward, is how do we incorporate that availability for jobs?

You started to talk about, before you timed out, the challenges when you spoke to corporate executives, corporate Canada. Can you expand on what you were hearing and what you were recommending from your experience?

Mr. Mark Wafer: Yes. The issue with corporate Canada—if you look at the number of people who are participating in the workforce today who have a disability, only 7% of those actually work for corporations; 93% work for small to medium-sized businesses. There are many reasons for that, but the most obvious reason is that Canadian corporations tend to buy into the myths and misperceptions a lot more than a small business will. A small business can make decisions very quickly, whereas if it's RBC or BMO or someone like that, it's like trying to turn the Titanic around every time we want to make a change.

But the CEOs get it. They don't always get it for the right reason, but they know that it's on their watch. An executive might get it; certainly, we need talent from the top. But in corporations, we have what we call the "permafrost," which are the middle managers, which make up 40,000 to 50,000 to 60,000 employees. They're the real issue. If you take the head of HR in a corporation, for example, the CEO will say to that head of HR, "Hire the best and the brightest, and don't let me down," and a week later, somebody comes in in a wheelchair who just happens to be the best person for that job, but the head of HR will be reminded of that conversation she had last week with the CEO. So it's going to be the toughest nut to crack: corporate Canada. That's why the focus right now with all of the agencies and stakeholder groups is with small to medium-sized businesses, because they know they can make a lot more success with that.

My phone doesn't stop ringing all day with stakeholder groups and families of people with disabilities looking for work for their child. Now, obviously, I'm more well-known in this than most, but it's constant. That doesn't happen in corporate Canada.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: You made no reference to any kind of incentive. Obviously, you're not getting incentives in your own business to do the hiring. Do you have a comment on whether there's a role for that, there's a value in that?

Mr. Mark Wafer: Yes, absolutely. I don't believe in incentives of any kind. The incentive, to me, is getting a great employee. My employees who have a disability, without question, are my best employees. I have a gentleman who has been with me 11 years who has two disabilities, one of them being schizophrenia. He is the only employee I have had in 20 years who has won the overall employee of the year twice. That's the value I have in my employee.

Businesses invest in an employee, just as you would invest in a piece of equipment for your business. You expect a return on that. When we have new employees, we send them for training, we send them to school; we send them to Tim Hortons University, for example. We expect a return on that. We're investing in our people.

If we take a subsidy—a wage subsidy, or whatever you want to call it—we're not investing in our person. Wage subsidies actually work against us. Now, there is a place for a wage subsidy, but it should be used only as a very, very last resort and only in a very small number of situations.

The business benefits of being an inclusive employer speak for themselves, so businesses don't need that additional \$200, \$300 or \$400 per week. It's not going to make any difference. But what will make a difference is, if an employer is taking a wage subsidy, they will look at that employee differently. Managers will look at that employee differently: "Let's not send them for training, because when the subsidy ends, we might be getting rid of them anyway."

The success rate of subsidies is extremely poor. I've hired nearly 100 people; I've never taken a wage subsidy. I don't see the point in it.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Thank you. I'll let my colleagues ask.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Thank you very much, Mark, for taking the time to be here. I think it's really important, what you have to say, because this is one of the biggest issues that we're facing: how to get people into employment so that they can also create those kinds of social networks that are so important to everyone.

Has that been your experience, that once you have someone with a disability that comes into your employment—can you tell us a little bit about how they relate to the other employees and what that does to their life in general?

Mr. Mark Wafer: Well, the first thing is that human beings tend to be hard-wired. I'm no different to anybody else. When I see a new employee who has a disability, I tend to do sort of a litmus test. I know exactly what that employee's capabilities are. I've hired almost 100 people with disabilities, and I'm happy to say that I was wrong nearly 100 times. The capacity of a person who has a disability, the capability, is always far greater than what we really think it is. So they bring something of huge value to the business.

For that reason, other employees tend to raise the bar, when they see that productivity levels have gone up, for example, because the people who have a disability, their productivity level is higher. By the way, that has happened very often. Safety ratings have increased in my business. So when we start to see people with disabilities setting the standard—for example, for uniform wear, I have one employee whose uniform is military crisp every time he comes to work, but the rest of them look like bums. He set the standard for uniform wear, and everybody else raises the bar.

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Being an inclusive employer has a profound effect on the rest of your employees. Forty-three of my employees today have a disability, but 210 of them don't, and so it has a profound effect on them.

I actually have people who contact me and say, "Are you the Tim Hortons franchisee who hires people with disabilities?" I say, "Yes, I am." They say, "Well, okay. I'd like to apply." I say, "Oh, you have a disability," and they say, "No, I don't." So it's quite profound. People want to be involved in an inclusive environment.

What it does is, it changes the culture of your workplace by being inclusive once you've built capacity with people with disabilities. Employees like it, and customers like it. In 20 years in business, I have never had a customer make a negative remark about any of the people we have working who have a disability.

My expectations of people with disabilities are exactly the same as everybody else in the business. They have a boss, they have a job to do, and I expect it to be done.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Thank you.

The Chair (Mrs. Laura Albanese): You have about a minute.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Okay. Well, I'll make it quick, then. What recommendation would you make to us about what we should say about the whole employability situation as part of our recommendations in this report?

Mr. Mark Wafer: I think there are two. One, I think government has to have an overall policy on disabilities in terms of work, because there's a lot of different messages that I hear from different facets of government and stakeholder groups and quasi-governmental agencies, such as social service agencies, across the province. I think there has to be an overall strategy. Of course, that's not my expertise, but I think that has to happen.

If we look at the fact that we've got wage subsidies now for people who don't have disabilities, where does that put people who have a disability? It's very hard for me to speak to a CEO and say, "You know what? There's some terrific business benefits to being an inclusive employer," and they say, "Well, why would I do that if I can get somebody else, and I could get paid for it, and they don't have a disability?" So that is actually working against us right now.

One of the most important things that we can do, and this is in the federal government—we have the Opportunities Fund, which in 2015 will be increased by another 33%. That type of funding, that type of money, can be used very well for employer engagement programs. Employer engagement is going to be one of the most important ways that we're going to educate the private sector.

Government can't solve this problem. We've tried for 50 years. Government can't solve this problem. Stakeholders can't solve this problem. Social service agencies can't solve this problem. Only the private sector can solve this problem because what we're trying to do is get people with disabilities into the private sector. Unless the private sector steps up and says, "We're going to do this," we're going to fail. We can shovel all kinds of money at the problem. We're going to have the same conversation 20 years from now if we don't have the private sector buy into this.

When I speak to a CEO as a business owner or I speak to a business group, there is never a time when I don't have some success where at least one person comes up to me and says, "I had no idea about this. Now that I'm aware of it, this makes total sense." So we're going to make change that way. We're not going to make change by creating more red tape, creating more legislation and policies and so forth.

AODA, for example is great piece of legislation, but when it comes to the integrated standard, part of which is employment, that's not going to move the needle. That brings much-needed awareness to the issue. That means that people with disabilities will get interviewed, but it's not going to move the needle in terms of how many people will find work until such time as we educate the private sector and show them the business benefits of being an inclusive employer.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Thank you.

The Chair (Mrs. Laura Albanese): Ms. DiNovo.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you very much for coming before us. I'm going to pick up where Ms. Elliott left off, really. When you think about and look at employer engagement programs, the kinds of things that you're suggesting that we should be encouraging, what would that look like? What can the government of Ontario do to bring about employer engagement programs? What would they look like?

Mr. Mark Wafer: Well, the government can certainly provide the funding for such events.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: What would that funding go to? Where would it go?

Mr. Mark Wafer: Well, I'll give you an example. There's an agency in Ontario called the Ontario Disability Employment Network. It's just a small agency. I'm working with them to put together an employment engagement event for October of this year, and we're hoping to have 350 to 400 of Ontario's top companies there. We're talking about the big corporations and the small corporations as well.

We ran into a roadblock. We approached Service Canada and we ran into a major roadblock in trying to get seed money for this. ODEN is very small, but punches well above its weight. What we want to do is get 400 businesses into one room and talk to them about the business benefits, talk to them about how we can solve the looming labour shortage for them, how we can be a consultant to them for their business to make their business better. But we ran into a roadblock with Service Canada because they cannot provide us the seed money to do this. We needed \$50,000 just to advertise this properly in the Globe and Mail and in Canadian Business magazine and so on. We pushed it back. This is the type of thing that the government of Ontario can certainly be helping us with.

Three months ago, I was a keynote speaker at the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers AGM in Toronto—660 of Canada's grocery heads across Canada in one room. I spoke for 45 minutes. Afterwards, I had a lineup that was an hour and 45 minutes long of grocery store owners saying, "I think you've just helped me solve my labour issue." Many of those were from Alberta and BC, where we're already seeing significant labour issues. So businesses really get it and they get it when the message is delivered from another business owner.

I see the government's role there in making sure that the funding is in place for those. The money is already there; we just need to spend it more wisely. We've got the federal-provincial transfer money, which is \$220-million-plus right now. Some of that money should be used for employee engagement. That's the way forward.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: In some instances, depending on the disability that the person has, there's actually some kind of hard capital needed to change the workplace a little bit to accommodate people; let's put it that way. For example, we have a wonderful volunteer in our office; she's blind. There are many things she can help do and

there are many things she cannot help do because we don't have the wherewithal to translate all the paper we deal with into Braille etc. Would you see a role for some of this money to go towards corporations to do that? Again, we're looking for solutions here of how we can help more employers do the kind of employment you do.

Mr. Mark Wafer: Absolutely. Accommodations are an issue for some people. But if you look at the statistics, 65% of people with a disability, when they go into the workforce, do not need an accommodation at all; 35% need an accommodation which is going to have an average cost of \$500 or less, and that includes extra training. So if it's a person who has a developmental challenge, there will be extra training, training will take longer, that's included in that \$500. The number of people with a disability getting into the workforce who need a long-term accommodation, ongoing or expensive, is only 4%. So it's a very small number of people who are actually getting into the workforce.

The Opportunities Fund right now has provisions—and this is the federal Opportunities Fund—for helping businesses pay for some of those accommodation costs, but only a very small fraction of it. The vast amount of that fund is used for wage subsidies. In my opinion, that's a waste of money, because it's not sustainable. We're not building for the future. Where the provincial government can certainly step in is to provide funding for those accommodations.

Many corporations today, when it comes to accommodations, have created central accommodation programs. Deloitte, for example, has 57 offices across Canada. Deloitte has one central accommodation pool, so if Deloitte in Toronto, for example, hires people who might require a sit-stand desk, which is a \$12,000 piece of equipment, the Toronto location is not penalized in its profit and loss statement because the money comes from a centralized location. Businesses are already looking at that; businesses are already finding solutions to the accommodations. Absolutely, government can help with that.

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Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Okay, thank you. My colleague has questions, too.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you so much, first of all, for the work that you do, and the enrichment that I'm sure it brings to many lives. Having meaningful work, we've heard, is so important to so many young people and people with disabilities, so good job.

I was looking through this. I believe you brought this report. This panel—I haven't had a lot of chance—completely speaks to, or was made up of, businesses that are already doing this?

Mr. Mark Wafer: Are you talking about the people who created the panel?

Miss Monique Taylor: That's right.

Mr. Mark Wafer: Of the four members of the panel, three are in business and one is a stakeholder.

Miss Monique Taylor: Right. But major banks, law firms on Bay Street, are they moving forward with this? Are they getting involved?

Mr. Mark Wafer: The companies that are listed in there are the companies that we consulted with. We consulted with 75 companies and we had 212 online submissions from companies. The results that you see in there are the results of our consultation with those companies.

Miss Monique Taylor: Okay.

Mr. Mark Wafer: They're in alphabetical order, not in order of how well they do in terms of hiring people with disabilities. I can tell you that every one of them sucks; they're awful. Corporations are really pathetic at hiring people with disabilities.

Miss Monique Taylor: Doing this research, do you find that it brought awareness to the situation and do you think it would make any changes?

Mr. Mark Wafer: Say again.

Miss Monique Taylor: Do you think the work that you did here, speaking to these corporations that were failing, has made a difference to make them think differently at all?

Mr. Mark Wafer: A huge difference—huge.

Miss Monique Taylor: It has? That's good.

Mr. Mark Wafer: Once you bring your awareness to a business, once you talk about it and you talk about the business benefits—because I didn't just consult with them. I gave them a 40-minute pep talk as well about what happens in my business and why they should be doing it, too. Quite a few of those companies that are in there, the people who I met with, we've actually become friends, because they use me as a consultant now to see how they can bring people with disabilities on board.

Miss Monique Taylor: That's really great. I know I was speaking with somebody in my community who had a part-time job somewhere and then that job was cancelled because of insurance costs. Have you had any of those issues where the insurance rates are higher because you have people with disabilities?

Mr. Mark Wafer: I can assure you that's false. It's absolutely false. If that was said, it's not true. Insurance cannot be increased because you hire people with disabilities. Insurance can only increase in a business because you have a poor safety record.

I've hired 100 people with disabilities in the last 20 years. I have never had a WSIB claim for any of the people I have with a disability—not one. I know exactly what the rest of them cost me. By looking at this from a safety point of view, you're at least as safe, but most likely, you have a safer workforce.

First of all, insurance companies can't discriminate, but they will never increase your insurance premiums because you've hired people with disabilities. That's a falsehood. It is, actually, a fear. It's one of the fears that I hear from CEOs, that their insurance costs will go up. It's not true at all.

Miss Monique Taylor: Great. Thank you so much.

Mr. Mark Wafer: Thank you.

The Chair (Mrs. Laura Albanese): Thank you. Ms. Hunter?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Mr. Wafer, thank you so much for joining us today and for the work that you do with people with disabilities in your franchises—and really, the examples that you're providing for other employers—because that's the way to build confidence amongst businesses, for them to see another businessman that is using this as a method of attracting great employees and showing them that they can do it as well.

I'm wondering, from your experience and from talking to other businesses, if there are specific types of businesses or types of companies that are well suited for employing people with disabilities; specifically, those with intellectual disabilities.

Mr. Mark Wafer: There is no sector and there is no business which will be better suited to hiring a person with a disability or a person who has an intellectual disability.

What we find, though, is that social service agencies tend to go for the low-hanging fruit, which would be my sector, the quick-service restaurant sector, because that's the easiest one: people with intellectual disabilities cleaning the dining room, doing the dishes at McDonald's and taking the garbage out, or looking after a parking lot. This is because agencies always tend to go for what's going to be easiest, and I think the last time I looked at the statistics, 68% of people with an intellectual disability who are in the workforce were working in the retail sector. That's not because the retail sector is better suited for them; it's simply because that's where they've been focused.

People with intellectual disabilities can work anywhere. Obviously, there's going to be a limit to what they can do, but each one is going to be limited based on their own capacity. If you don't give them a chance, you never know.

Like I said earlier, when we talk about corporate Canada, corporate Canada can hire people with intellectual disabilities; they just don't do it. There is no one sector which is better than the other.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: In terms of better engaging employers and companies, demonstrating to them that there is an opportunity to engage this group of talented individuals, what would be some concrete things that, from your perspective, we could do to get them more involved?

Mr. Mark Wafer: In terms of engaging business?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Yes.

Mr. Mark Wafer: Well, the first one is, education is key. So education and awareness is going to be key. But if you go further than that, we're facing a looming labour shortage; no question about it. Last year, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business did a survey of its members and asked them, what is their number one business constraint today? Some 38% said skilled labour was the number one business constraint. Okay, we get that. We see what's happening out west. But 13% said that their number one business constraint today was a shortage of unskilled labour. If that's the case—and this

is 10 to 12 to 15 years before we're expecting that huge labour shortage to hit—this is a way to solve that issue with businesses. You've got 350,000 businesses in Canada that have hired at least one person in the last year. They are going to start to feel the crunch. People in Canada who have a disability are the answer to that issue.

Last year, the Prime Minister—he said this three times; the Prime Minister has said this three times—said that we're going to be a million workers short by between 2020 and 2025. It's going to affect our GDP by 1% to 1.5%.

At the same time, we have 800,000 Canadians today job-ready who are unemployed and have a disability, and 340,000 of them have a post-secondary education. We have that huge disconnect. So when we talk to businesses, those are the things that we talk about. It's not just about the obvious business benefits of hiring somebody with a disability. It's also about solving a huge issue with a labour shortage you're going to have very shortly.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Is there anything from an educational perspective that we can do better in transitioning into work? You mentioned that 300,000 of them have post-secondary, so what could we do to better—

Mr. Mark Wafer: Well, that's a whole other question, really. It's a very good question, Mitzie. We do have a very large population of students coming out of school—43,000 in post-secondary education in Ontario alone, going up 15% per year. This coming September, it's expected to go up 17%. We're one of the leaders in the world at getting people with disabilities through post-secondary education. The problem is when they graduate. Schools do a very good job—secondary schools and the universities do a very good job of accommodating students with disabilities.

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I spent a little bit of time at Algonquin College, and I was astounded at the number of students walking the halls and in wheelchairs: blind, deaf, all types of disabilities. It was really great to see. But what happens to those people when they graduate? We're not really doing very much in terms of readying them for the real world.

One of the things that we know for sure is that the greatest barometer of whether a person with a disability gets a job when they graduate is whether they had a job before they graduated. We're not looking at that; we're not working on that. Children who have disabilities don't have paper routes. They don't work at McDonald's or Tim Hortons. They don't have those jobs that increase their soft skills and their confidence so that they have something on their applications, they have something on their resumé when they graduate from university. The resumé are blank. Government can certainly help in that area, ensuring that teenagers in high school who have disabilities have an equal opportunity—because it's not a level playing field—of getting jobs during the summer.

Certainly, if we talk about wage subsidies of any kind, as loath as I am to accept those, wage subsidies probably would fit into the summer jobs program for children who

have disabilities. We really need to have them come out of university with something on their resumé and some understanding of what the soft skills are going to be, the expectation.

I met a gentleman just two years ago, so 2011, who had been called to the bar in 2004. He never worked. For seven years, he never worked. I helped him get into Deloitte as a lawyer, as corporate counsel. The chief corporate counsel said to me afterward, "He is a fantastic lawyer—fantastic. But his social skills and soft skills are so poor. We really need to work on that." He said, "If the universities had just done a better job, we would have been better off." He was a quick study, so today he is an awesome asset to Deloitte. But it is an issue, and in some cases, that person may have lost his job if he didn't have a more understanding boss.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Right. So we can't shift that on to employers. We have to support them all the way through.

Mr. Mark Wafer: Yes.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you.

The Chair (Mrs. Laura Albanese): One minute left.

Ms. Soo Wong: One minute—quickly.

Thank you so much for your presentation today, Mr. Wafer. I noticed in your report, on page 24, the topic of partnering with educational institutions. I just heard you talking about increasing the soft skills so that the young person can be successful. Can you elaborate a little bit more? Currently, what more should the institution, both high school and post-secondary, do to support the young person when it comes to the issue of soft skills?

Mr. Mark Wafer: Well, the focus right now is on readying them to have the skills to actually do the job. Take a look at community college, for example. The last six months of community college quite often are in the workplace. It's a co-op program, and then you graduate, and quite often you end up working in the place where you did your co-op. I remember 30 years ago, I did that. But that's not happening for people who have disabilities. They're not having opportunities to be in co-op programs.

One of my stores has a co-op student every year, and the difference in that person's confidence and capabilities over that year of them working in my store is just enormous. I'm talking about somebody with a profound intellectual disability. When they graduate, they're ready for the workplace.

There are many, many areas where we can work on soft skills. But the only way that you can really improve on social skills, understanding how to communicate with other people your age or communicate with the opposite sex, for example, is by actually doing it. When we take those opportunities away from people with disabilities, they regress.

I'll give you the example of myself. I have a hearing problem; I'm deaf. When I was a student in school, I was excluded from a lot of things, and it was foolishness. I was capable of doing all of the things I was excluded from, but it was because people thought better. They thought, "Oh, well, Mark will get hurt if he plays

soccer.” It was very foolish. That mindset is still there today.

So it’s not just getting them through the curriculum and getting them ready for the workforce; it’s making sure that they take part in all of the other things as well.

One of the first people I found work for when I started this one program was a man with cerebral palsy who was an advertising student. He graduated from Durham College in advertising. I got him a job in a car dealership, and he was doing some good work. Then I went by to see how he was doing, how it was going, and I noticed he was eating a sandwich at his desk while everybody else was on the second floor having their lunch. I said, “This is not right,” because he’s missing out on all of that social interaction. That’s how soft skills are developed: not by doing your work, and not by being great at your job, but by being where everybody else is. Coming through school, you’ve got to do the same thing.

Ms. Soo Wong: Thank you very, very much for your presentation. I think you have provided some very concrete and realistic recommendations and suggestions for the committee. I want to say thank you for your leadership and your vision, because you have mentored thousands of others out there, so we really appreciate it.

Mr. Mark Wafer: Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mrs. Laura Albanese): I too would like to thank you for your presentation to the committee this afternoon. It has been a very valuable learning experience listening to all that you have done. Congratulations.

Mr. Mark Wafer: Thank you very much for having me.

The Chair (Mrs. Laura Albanese): That concludes that part of the meeting this afternoon. Does the committee wish to go in camera to begin discussing, perhaps,

some of the report writing? Or is there other business that we want to conduct before that?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I just have a brief comment that there was a whole CBC The National segment on Mark and speaking to some of his employees that aired last week. I think we’re trying to send the link around to everybody to take a look at it, just to see from the perspective of his employees how things are going. So, if you’re interested, we’ll make sure that you—

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Trevor Day): Ms. Elliott sent it to us prior to this. I apologize; it didn’t get out to the committee members, but it should have. It is a very good piece. It does sort of capture the basis of the presentation, so we’ll have that out immediately.

The Chair (Mrs. Laura Albanese): That’s much appreciated. Any further comments before we go in camera?

So just a couple of minutes requested by the Clerk—

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Chair?

The Chair (Mrs. Laura Albanese): Yes, Ms. DiNovo.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I had given Trevor the group Keys to Inclusion. I think I raised this last time. This is not a group that necessarily wants to present, but it is a group that would like to play for us, perform for us, at some point. I’m just wondering if there’s going to be an opportunity in this entire process where we can get back to them and ask them to come and perform.

The Chair (Mrs. Laura Albanese): Well, it’s something that we can discuss as a committee.

The Clerk will need a couple of minutes to get set up, and then we’ll get back to the table.

The committee continued in closed session at 1658.

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