

Reflection on the *Pathways* Project

Every kid is different. They no more take the same route to getting a good job, than they listen to the same music. For some it's hip-hop; for others it's rap or rock. Some kids will drop out of high school to work; others will take time off between high school and post-secondary education; and still others may go into a vocational program in high school and sail smoothly into a good, steady lifelong profession.

The goal of CPRN's *Pathways* project is to find ways to help young people with diverse interests and learning styles get from school to sustained employment with decent pay, good working conditions and career potential.

The *Pathways* project began in 2006. Since then, four studies have been released. The first looked at career development services, the second examined the pathways taken by Alberta youth over seven years as they made their way from school to work, the third gave an overview and assessment of high school pathways initiatives in four provinces, and the most recent provided case studies of five examples of career pathways initiatives in Canadian high schools.

Three more papers are underway: a mapping by Statistics Canada of the outcomes associated with different pathways, a similar study focused on Quebec and an examination of career pathways initiatives in Quebec.

With such a body of work already completed and underway, CPRN felt it a good time to reflect on the *Pathways* project, in other words to consider the results, hear feedback on work in progress and listen to advice on future parts of the project.



Participants in the *Pathways* roundtable, May 2007.

In May, Ron Saunders, CPRN Director, Work and Learning, hosted a day-long roundtable sponsored by the Work and Learning Knowledge Center of the Canadian Council on Learning. Participants came from across the country and from a variety of perspectives: governments, business, labour groups, Aboriginal organizations, school boards and universities. Many of the researchers involved in the projects attended, as did three young Canadians who are experiencing, first-hand, the issues under discussion.

Research Highlights

The participants heard a summary of the papers already published as well as the preliminary findings of the studies in progress. Here is a brief look at some of the results:

- Post-secondary education (PSE) provides, on average, clear benefits in terms of employment rates and earnings. However, in Canada and the United States, one-third of employed 25-to-29-year-olds with a PSE diploma or degree have a low-skill job – the highest ratio among OECD countries.
- University attendance is more likely among young people who:
 - are female,
 - have a university-educated parent,
 - have parents with high aspirations for the educational attainment of their children,
 - work some hours in high school, but fewer than 20 hours/week.
- Career planning services for youth are scarce outside of a school setting. Those offered in schools are primarily career information and support with immediate education and training decisions rather than career planning and preparation.
- A study of high school-based career pathways programs in BC, Alberta, Ontario, and Newfoundland and Labrador finds that all four provinces are paying more attention to such programs, which often involve partnerships among high schools, colleges, and employers. However, to date, these initiatives involve only a small proportion of the high school population.

Continued on page 2



- Governments could play a much more active role in ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of vocational education and training.

Participants at the roundtable confirmed many of the results and added their own ideas about the implications of these findings and about where CPRN might take new *Pathways* research. Here are some of their thoughts:

- High schools should offer a richer array of courses, including “hybrid” courses that cut across traditional disciplinary boundaries, and more co-op courses.
- Attitudes are important. We need a marketing campaign and a culture shift around valuing different learning pathways.
- Many employers overestimate what skills and education are needed for entry-level jobs.
- The fact that women still earn much less than men, though they have a greater level of educational attainment, suggests that attention still needs to be paid to issues of gender in the labour market.
- A greater effort is needed to reach out to disadvantaged groups such as Aboriginals, recent immigrants, and disabled persons.
- Education standards differ across the country, impeding the mobility of our youth.
- It is important to have effective bridging mechanisms to allow students to move between different learning streams.
- Schools boards, colleges and universities need to work together so that students’ learning is recognized as they move through different institutions.



The three papers still underway in the CPRN *Pathways* project will be released in the fall of 2007. Future plans include a study on the demand side of the youth labour market and a synthesis of all of the research. If funding permits, we will also include a dialogue with students, parents and educators about their attitudes towards different pathways.

For more information on the *Pathways* project, please contact Ron Saunders, Director, Work and Learning, at rsaunders@cprn.org.

CPRN is a national not-for-profit research institute whose mission is to create knowledge and lead public dialogue and debate on social and economic issues important to the well-being of Canadians, in order to help build a more just, prosperous and caring society.

CPRN Board Welcomes New Members

CPRN’s Board of Directors is pleased to announce the addition of three new members at its May meeting in Toronto. The new additions are:



Robert C. Thompson
Government of
Newfoundland
and Labrador



Arn van Iersel
Former Comptroller
General,
British Columbia



Léo W. Houle
BCE Inc. and
Bell Canada

Update: Youth Civic and Democratic Participation

There is no doubt – we want more young Canadians to be active in the political arena, not just sitting on the sidelines. That might mean forming or joining public interest or advocacy groups, or political parties, or getting rid of voting. In fact, the young people who participated in CPRN’s *National Dialogue and Summit* in 2005 told us they felt disconnected and unprepared to take part in these processes.

As a partial response, CPRN created a research series on *Youth Civic and Political Participation* that is designed to examine the barriers, challenges and opportunities for this participation, and offer policy recommendations to chart a new course to support our young people.

Six research papers are now being written as part of this series. They are:

1. *Indifferent or Just Different? The Political and Civic Engagement of Young People in Canada*. Brenda O’Neill, University of Calgary.
2. *Challenges and Opportunities of Engaging Young People in Political Parties*. Bill Cross, Carleton University, and Lisa Young, University of Calgary.
3. *The State and Potential of Civic Learning in Canada*. Joel Westheimer, Sharon Cook, and Kristina Llewellyn, University of Ottawa.
4. *The Meaning of Political Participation for Indigenous Youth*. Taiaiake Alfred, University of Victoria; Brock Pitawanakwat, First Nations University of Canada (Regina Campus); and Jackie Price, Nunavut Sivuniksavut Program (Ottawa).
5. “*What Do You Mean I Can’t Have a Say?*” – *Young Canadians and Their Government*. André Turcotte, Carleton University.

6. *Youth, Volunteerism and Engagement: Assessing the Research and Youth Policy in Quebec*. André Thibault, Julie Fortier, Patrice Albertus, Laboratoire en Loisir et Vie Communautaire (LLVC), Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, in collaboration with Pierre-Luc Gravel, Table de concertation des Forums Jeunesse régionaux du Québec.

The researchers preparing these papers shared some of their findings with a group of 50 roundtable participants in early May. Here are some highlights of their discussion:

- Many of our political institutions and traditions discourage engagement of young people, and even more so for indigenous and ethno-cultural groups. They need to be open to change in order to attract young people.
- We need to better understand the relationship between volunteering, civic and political participation as it affects how young people engage. Does one lead to another or are they seen as alternatives?
- There are big differences between young people who are members of advocacy groups and those who are members of political parties.
- Family continues to play a very important role in political socialization of young people. Most young people who join a political party are asked to by a family member.
- It is not clear that many political parties are ready to live with the consequences of increased youth participation.

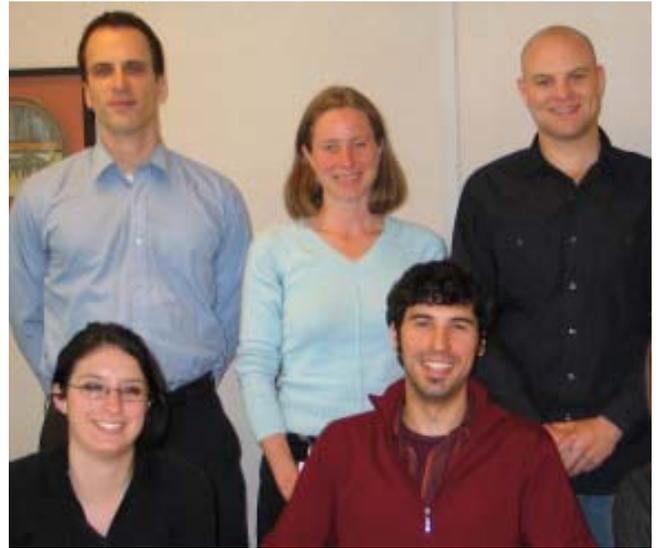
CPRN will publish the six research papers, followed by a synthesis report, starting this September. If you would like more information on the *Youth Civic and Political Participation* project, please contact: Mary Pat MacKinnon at mmackinnon@cprn.org; or Judy Watling at jwatling@cprn.org.

Pushing Affordable Housing Back on the Public Agenda

Canada has rarely paid much attention to affordable housing. Most policies, including economic incentives, have been directed towards home owners and high-end market renters, which make up the largest sector of the housing market. Policies for the rest of Canadians living in subsidized (5%) or low-end market housing (15%), are largely determined by the government of the day.

With that latter group in mind, CPRN, with funding from Ontario's Social Housing Services Corporation (SHSC), York University and Infrastructure Canada (INFC), has hired five interns to conduct research on housing. It is expected this new research will be useful to both housing providers and government officials.

Housing can be seen as key to Canadians' health and well-being, and the availability of affordable housing helps promote the economic and social sustainability of our cities and communities. Policies promoting housing affordability become pressing in light of recent statistics, such as: a single parent needs to earn three times the



Back row: Joël Thibert, Leonore Evans, Jeff May
Front row: Sally Turner, Michel Molgat Sereacki

minimum wage to afford a two- or three-bedroom apartment in Toronto, Ottawa, or Vancouver.¹ It is apparent then that housing policy is interrelated with employment and labour markets. Research also shows us that housing quality is a central determinant of health. Since housing affects so many elements of Canadians' lives, the research that the interns are doing this summer will contribute greatly to understanding more about the central role played by housing and also provide a picture of some of the challenges Canadian municipalities are facing in providing affordable housing.

The interns were given freedom to come up with their own research proposals under the broad theme of "sustainability of social housing." Four research papers funded by SHSC are: *Sustaining Ontario's Affordable Housing by Supporting Non-Profit Organizations* (Sally Turner); *Social Lives in Social Housing* (Jeff May); *Inclusion and Social Mixing in Canadian Cities* (Joël Thibert); and *Fostering Horizontal Policy Models for Housing in Canada* (Michel Molgat Sereacki). The fifth research program, funded by INFC, is entitled *Examining the Social Elements of Public Infrastructure: Impacts on Competitiveness and Implications for Governance* (Leonore Evans).

There will be 12 interns in total this year, all of them focusing on housing research. CPRN has proved to be a stimulating forum for furthering our ideas and providing guidance in the research process.

Leonore Evans, CPRN Intern

¹ Pomeroy, Steve. 2007. *Minimum Housing Wage: Housing Continues to Move Out of Reach for Minimum Wage Workers*. Canadian Housing Renewal Association: Ottawa.



Losing Our Ability to Hear the Big Ideas

Remember the old philosopher's conundrum "When a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?" You could ask that question of Canada's policy community. Our capacity for policy research is at an all-time low, and we not only stand to lose valuable knowledge, we stand to lose the ability to even understand policy options in a meaningful way. Could we hear the big ideas if they were being voiced? Who is listening?

Policy research is a curious thing. It is the process of finding better ways to do the right thing for people through improved policies and programs. It is practised within government policy shops and external organizations such as universities or think tanks like CPRN. The best policy research is based on sound evidence gathered through rigorous research, taking into consideration social, economic, cultural and environmental concerns. To create policy options that grab – and that go somewhere beyond the bookshelf – takes training and experience in an applied setting.

Public policy schools in Canada do teach students the policy-making process. However, no single school in our country graduates policy-ready researchers. Policy researchers need to be nurtured and supported while they gain skills and experience in an applied setting. Just as you want the surgeon operating on your knee to have some previous surgical experience – you want highly experienced policy researchers producing the policy options to guide decision-makers. Our social, economic, cultural and environmental issues are too important to leave the design of policy options to unskilled workers.

What has happened to policy capacity in our country? For years, most provincial governments have been systematically stripping out their policy shops in cost-cutting exercises. These difficult choices were made because direct services to people were also on the chopping block and it was easier to cut a policy shop than to cut school lunch programs or services to persons with disabilities. Recently the federal government's own cost-cutting measures removed or downsized the policy research capacity in a number of federal departments and external organizations (including CPRN). Provinces that relied on the federal government to do the heavy lifting in building the policy backgrounders are now doubly whacked because they long ago lost capacity to produce their own analyses.

Does anyone care? Well yes they do. Across Canada now, there are signs that provinces in particular are feeling the pinch. They are responding by trying to create policy networks, policy centres or to restore capacity to their in-house policy shops.

Newfoundland and Labrador have played a leadership role. Under the auspices of the Clerk of

the Premier's Secretariat, the province has created the Newfoundland and Labrador Policy Networks, bringing together policy researchers from across all levels of government, university, voluntary and private sectors. The NL Policy Research Conference held in March was an important first step in building a policy community for that province and creating essential links with a national policy community.

Other provinces are acting too: BC has just opened the Pacific Centre for Social Innovation; Alberta is reviewing its policy research capacity; and in Ontario, the Ministry of Community and Social Services is reviewing its array of programs – and in the process has stimulated the policy community to work together to find better solutions.

Universities are onto this trend too. For example, the University of Toronto has opened the School of Public Policy and Governance and will welcome the inaugural class in the fall of 2007. At Queen's University, the School of Policy Studies continues to produce excellent graduates as do the Schools of Public Administration across the country. These fine graduates are not the complete answer to the lack of policy capacity in our country.

What more should be done? Vigilantly guarding what is left of the policy community is a first step. But rebuilding and strengthening it is essential. One excellent solution was the Summer Institute for Social Policy Analysis, which ran from 1999-2001. Funded by the federal government, Alberta, Ontario and BC, it trained over 70 government analysts from across Canada. It folded for lack of leadership and money.

Other solutions? Interchanges where government policy analysts temporarily move into an external organization are a good idea as they build capacity and links outside government. Sabbaticals, where university professors are encouraged to take their knowledge and use it in an applied policy setting, are another way to build capacity.

Ensuring that Canada maintains its receptor capacity for policy research must be a priority. If Canada is to move ahead and transform our society to match the challenges posed, we must preserve, protect and promote policy research in Canada. Otherwise we will not even hear a big idea if it comes along, much less create the big ideas needed to keep Canada a just, prosperous and caring country.



Sharon Manson Singer, Ph.D.
President