

A PATH OUT OF POVERTY

Helping BC Income Assistance Recipients Upgrade Their Education



By Shauna Butterwick
with Caroline White

FEBRUARY 2006



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A PATH OUT OF POVERTY: Helping BC Income Assistance Recipients Upgrade Their Education

By Shauna Butterwick
with Caroline White

February 2006

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Summary

It is well documented that low levels of education and literacy are key factors in maintaining poverty, and that welfare policies that support income assistance (IA) recipients to upgrade and acquire educational credentials for jobs that pay a living wage enable low-income individuals and their families to shift out of poverty. This report is concerned with a particular set of policies and practices formerly in place in British Columbia that supported access to post-secondary education and upgrade programs for income assistance recipients, particularly those facing multiple barriers to employment and education.

Between 1996 and 2002, income assistance recipients considered to have multiple barriers could continue to receive benefits while taking upgrading and English language courses at BC colleges and institutes. Targeted funds were also provided to both private and public post-secondary institutions to help set up services specifically for students on income assistance. In addition, tuition was eliminated for all Adult Basic Education (ABE) courses provided by BC's post-secondary institutions. (ABE refers to the programs that assist adult students who have not achieved their high school diploma.)

Based on interviews with staff who delivered these programs in colleges and institutes during the late 1990s, this report outlines 'best practices' for programs designed to help people with low incomes improve their educational credentials. It finds that effective programs comprehensively address issues in three key areas:

- Access (making sure people know about and are able to enter programs);
- Retention (ensuring they have the support to stay in education programs once started); and,
- Transition (helping people move on to further educational opportunities and/or employment on completion).

Best practices begin with the recognition that poverty exists and has profound effects on learning. The wellbeing and success of a student on campus depends on his or her wellbeing off campus. Other key components include:

- Identification of the multiple obstacles to accessing formal educational institutions that people with low incomes, particularly those who have experienced long-term and deep poverty, experience;
- Outreach activities and strong links with community and relevant government agencies that already serve potential students;
- Assessment of students' needs and capabilities;
- Assistance with the many financial costs of attending school (such as tuition, fees, books, housing, and child care); and
- Supports for academic success, including counselling, advocacy, networking, and partnerships with employers.

These policies and programs were very successful. They were cost-effective, innovative, and most importantly, they made a difference.

- In 2000/01, BC's public colleges and institutes received \$4.2 million in provincial funding for their programs for IA students. With this money they served approximately 20,000 people on income assistance. Thus, for a relatively small budget, a very large number of low-income students received educational opportunities they likely would not otherwise have had.
- Some colleges and institutes saw their number of IA students double; other colleges that had already been serving low-income communities saw less significant demographic changes.
- One college noted an 86 per cent job placement rate in the first three months of work search following program completion. This was a particularly impressive success rate given that the students in the program were longer-term IA recipients and were identified as facing multiple barriers to employment.
- Many college and institute staff interviewed for this study reported that the various programs and services for IA students helped to tip the balance between attending and not attending school.
- Graduates of these programs reported that one key element of their success was the recognition by employers of a credential from a public post-secondary institution. Graduating from a recognized post-secondary institution was a transformative event for many IA students who were able to leave social assistance and support themselves and their children. Single mothers in particular noted that they would not have been able to return to education without these programs.

Unfortunately, in 2002, the BC government:

- Ended the policy of tuition-free Adult Basic Education at colleges and institutes;
- Changed the rules so that people on income assistance could no longer attend post-secondary education (students, with the exception of those with recognized disabilities, were now required to leave IA and apply for student loans);
- Eliminated the targeted funding to colleges and institutes for IA students, effectively blocking the pathway to post-secondary education for many students with low incomes; and
- Eliminated the freeze on post-secondary tuition fees, resulting in a dramatic rise in tuition (average fees at BC colleges rose from \$1,301 in 2001/02 to \$2,240 in 2003/04, an increase of 72 per cent).

People already in the college- and institute-based programs for income assistance recipients were not exempted from these changes. Many students with only a few months left before completing their post-secondary programs were required to stop their education or lose income assistance benefits.

Since 2002, the emphasis for income assistance recipients has shifted to short-term job search and job placement programs, with funding linked to performance targets. These programs have proved to be costly, and largely ineffective for helping IA recipients with multiple barriers to employment. Indeed, post-2002 training and job placement programs have focused on people who have been receiving income assistance for only a short time and who have few barriers to employment, while longer-term recipients with more barriers to employment (the very people on whom the previous programs were focused) have been left with few training options.

This report concludes with four recommendations for supporting post-secondary access for low-income people, calling on the BC government to:

- Change welfare rules so that people receiving income assistance can participate in post-secondary education;
- Restore and increase designated funding to post-secondary institutions to support IA recipients (with the funding targeted so that it cannot be allocated elsewhere, as would be likely given the fiscal challenges facing colleges and institutes);
- Support colleges and institutes in providing programs and services that offer holistic support to students, based on 'best practices'; and
- Restore tuition-free Adult Basic Education in BC's public post-secondary institutions.

Introduction

This report is concerned with a particular set of policies and practices formerly in place in British Columbia that supported access to public¹ post-secondary education for income assistance (IA) recipients, particularly those with multiple barriers to employment and education.

Between 1996 and 2002, under the former welfare system, some IA recipients—those considered to have multiple barriers and to be unable to find jobs through independent efforts and job search programs—could continue to receive IA while taking Adult Basic Education (ABE), literacy, or English as a Second Language (ESL) programs (a suite of programs also known as “development programs”). The Ministry of Human Resources provided income assistance to these students, while the Ministry of Advanced Education² provided targeted funding to both private and public post-secondary institutions for programs and services designed specifically for IA students. The programs and services funded through these monies varied, but generally speaking, they included: community outreach, assessment, individualized program planning, advocacy and counselling, personal skills training, focused upgrading, academic support, work experience, and support with exit transitions and job placement.

These combined ministry initiatives met with considerable success, helping students with multiple barriers to upgrade their education, enter skills training programs, and find jobs outside low-wage job ghettos.

Then, in 2002, just when these programs were becoming well established, all funding was eliminated. A narrow and punitive approach to welfare was instituted by the newly elected government, which deemed these programs to be outside the mandate of post-secondary education. With only a few months left to complete their post-secondary programs, many IA recipients were required to stop their education or risk losing welfare. These short-sighted and oppressive welfare changes and funding cuts shocked those running the programs and many others who recognized that a key pathway out of poverty had been blocked.

The links between low education and poverty are well documented.

- Studies have illustrated how low levels of education and literacy are key factors in maintaining poverty. Statistics Canada found that “in 2000, individuals with no high school diploma, recent immigrants, unattached individuals, lone mothers and persons living alone accounted for fully 71 per cent of all full-time workers in low-paid jobs and in low income, but only 37 per cent of full-time workers.”³
- Welfare policies that restrict or deny access to post-secondary education and that move (or force) IA recipients off welfare into low-wage jobs, while reducing welfare expenditures, worsen poverty levels.⁴ The precarious economic situation of IA recipients who leave welfare for low-wage jobs has led to initiatives like Canada’s Self Sufficiency Project (SSP), which provided income supplements for up to three years. Under SSP, however, no training was provided, and a six-year follow-up of SSP clients found that most participants were unable to access work that paid a living wage.⁵

Research has also outlined the social and economic rewards of active and enabling welfare policy. Welfare policies that support IA recipients to upgrade and acquire educational credentials and skills-training for jobs that pay a living wage are, therefore, key to facilitating low-income individuals and their families to shift out of poverty.⁶

- Studies have also shown high drop-out rates for IA students who face multiple barriers, but with an integrated system of recruitment, assessment, and retention strategies, completion rates are greatly improved.⁷
- Training directed toward specific occupations is more likely to result in increased workforce participation and decreased reliance on income assistance.⁸
- There are health and social benefits beyond income. A New Zealand study cautioned that because most studies focus only on income or wages, they “considerably underestimate the total return for an additional year of education or an additional qualification.”⁹
- In a review of training programs for the excluded (women, immigrants, First Nations, youth and people with disabilities), CCPA-BC author Marjorie Cohen concluded that “good training programs are highly effective with regard to providing workers who are disadvantaged in the labour market with the tools they need to acquire more secure and well-paying jobs.”¹⁰

In this report we call for funding of educational programs that recognize the multiple barriers facing many income assistance recipients and welfare policy that realizes the critical role that further education plays in alleviating poverty. We argue that the current policy focus on “the quickest route to a job” does not offer IA recipients an adequate pathway out of poverty and insecurity.

Our findings are based on interviews with staff who delivered the former IA programs in colleges and institutes, and adds depth to our understanding of how these programs worked. The report maps the various initiatives put in place with the targeted provincial funding and provides a discussion of effective policy and practices, as described by these staff, who know a great deal about “what works and what doesn’t.” It is important to tap into that knowledge and learn from their experience. Given the rapid institutional and policy changes taking place in higher education and welfare systems, institutional knowledge (often not recorded in accountability reports) of effective and relevant programs is frequently lost and resources are wasted when new initiatives “re-invent the wheel.”

The study’s methodology is outlined in the next section, followed by a more detailed discussion of the context of welfare policy changes. The remainder of the discussion focuses on the kinds of programs and services provided by the targeted funding, what differences they made, what happened after the cuts, and what lessons can be learned from this review. The report concludes with recommendations for supporting post-secondary education access for low-income people.

Methodology

This study is primarily a qualitative inquiry grounded in the knowledge and understanding of those who ran programs that supported access to post-secondary education and upgrade programs for BC income assistance recipients from 1996 to 2002. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with college and institute staff, and with a few individuals working in government during this period. Relevant government and institution documents were also reviewed.¹¹ Data for this study was gathered between November 2003 and October 2004.

Introductory letters were sent to all of the 18 colleges and institutes that had received targeted funding. Staff who had been directly involved, who were knowledgeable about these programs and policies, and who were interested in the project were invited to participate.¹² We heard back from 14 colleges and undertook interviews with 29 people.¹³ In some instances, several staff from one institution volunteered to participate, and in other cases, only one individual from an institution came forward. Most of the interviews were conducted individually, but in the case of two institutions, group interviews were held. All staff interviewed had direct knowledge of the IA programs: they worked as counsellors, program coordinators, curriculum developers, and instructors. Most participants requested that their contributions to this study be anonymous. In response to this request, participants and their institutions are not identified in this report. Participants were sent a preliminary analysis of findings for feedback.

These participants were all employed at their respective institutions at the time of the interviews. When the targeted funding was made available, many were seconded from their regular college and institute jobs to work on these special programs and services for IA students. Once the funding was cut, they returned to their original positions or continued working in some capacity at their respective institutions. We were unable to obtain contact information for staff who had been laid off following the program cuts and were no longer working at their respective institutions.¹⁴

Five main questions directed our interviews:

1. How did the colleges and institutes utilize the targeted funding and what kinds of programs and services were developed?
2. How did these programs and services address the needs and circumstances of low income students?
3. What difference did these programs and services make to students on income assistance?
4. What was the impact on students and programs when the targeted funding was eliminated?
5. What lessons can be learned about the benefits of supporting students on income assistance to continue their education?

Policy Context

In Canada and elsewhere, funding cuts to public services, higher education and social welfare programs were a key aspect of social policy reform beginning in the early 1990s. Although welfare and education are a provincial responsibility, the federal government played a significant role by providing transfer payments to the provinces under what was then called the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) and Established Program Financing (EPF). Funding from the federal government for these programs began to decline in 1990;¹⁵ in the mid-1990s, CAP and EPF were replaced by the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST). Two key aspects of this federal policy change had significant outcomes for provinces: funds transferred to the provinces were greatly reduced and targets for specific programs or populations were removed.

In response to these changes at the federal level, British Columbia, like many other provinces, initiated significant reform of welfare policy, which led to new legislation in 1995 and 1996. At the time that the new legislation (called BC Benefits) was put into place by the NDP provincial government, about 10 per cent of the population was receiving IA. Under this new legislation, welfare benefit rates were reduced, as were allowable asset levels. The flat rate earnings exemption (which allowed IA recipients to earn and keep some income without deductions from their benefits) was temporarily eliminated, and the regulations changed in relation to accessing further education.

Under the previous welfare policy, employment and training programs for IA recipients had included private sector wage subsidies for on-the-job training programs (the Employment Opportunity Program); public sector on-the-job employment training programs in Community Tourism, Environmental Youth Corps and Forest Enhancement; classroom training in community colleges and institutes; and a job search

program (Job Action). In 1996, under the BC Benefits (Income Assistance) Act, access to college training was significantly restricted. The often-heard slogan that supported the policy reform was “give them a hand up rather than a hand-out.”

The reforms focused on getting as many IA recipients as possible into the workforce and limiting access to welfare for those considered “employable.” Those who were still able to access welfare, and who were categorized as “employable” fell under two main programs: Youth Works dealt with individuals aged 16 to 25 and Welfare to Work dealt with those over age 25.¹⁶ Under Youth Works, IA recipients were *required* to participate in job search and work preparation programs. Welfare to Work recipients had to first actively look for work and complete job search reports for seven months (Phase One: Independent Job Search), before accessing Phase Two: Assisted Job Search programs, which included short-term skills and job planning programs available for another two months. Those IA recipients still unemployed at the end of Phase Two were considered to have multiple barriers (such as low educational or literacy levels) and to be in need of additional supports to move into paid work. In Phase Three: Employability Skills, IA recipients had to work with training consultants (TCs)¹⁷ to identify needed skills and potential employment, and to develop Employability Agreements. IA recipients meeting the Phase Three criteria who had developed Employability Agreements with a TC were then referred to educational institutions and agencies for upgrading (such as ABE) and other supports. Those IA recipients who did not require upgrading or ESL, but who wanted to pursue further education or skills training, could not get income support while attending school: they had to find other funding such as student loans.

Thus, during the 1996–2002 period, while overall access to post-secondary institutions for IA recipients was restricted to those with multiple barriers, more supports and innovative programs were put into place for these students.

To provide programs and services for IA students (those in Phase Three), targeted funding was distributed to private trainers, community-based institutions, community skills centres, and school districts, as well as public post-secondary education institutions. Funding provided to public post-secondary institutions was known as the Public Post Secondary Education Envelope, often referred to as the “College Envelope.”¹⁸ The purpose of this funding was to enable the expansion of the role of the post-secondary system to serve the training and education needs of IA recipients.

Within the College Envelope, two pools of funds were made available: Institution Based Training (IBT) and Expanded Capacity (EC). According to government announcements, IBT funds were to be used to “increase student recruitment, retention and successful completion of basic education studies for students receiving BC Benefits.” These funds paid for extra staffing of counselling services and for special programs like bridging and transition programs that helped students to learn about institutional processes and supported them in becoming successful and active learners. EC funding covered the cost of new student spaces in expanded or new programs.¹⁹ Using these funds, a variety of services were developed and customized in each college to improve program completion rates and transition from welfare to work.²⁰ IBT funding also led to the development of stronger linkages between colleges and institutes and community agencies as well as provincial (Ministry of Human Resources) and federal (Human Resources Development Canada) staff.

The IBT funding recognized the particular circumstances many IA students faced:

Many BC Benefits clients have low levels of education, low self-esteem and have had negative experiences with formal education. As educational requirements for employment increase, it is critical that these learners, many who have experienced multiple barriers in accessing post-secondary education and training, be provided the supports and services necessary for transition into literacy, [ESL], Adult Basic Education (ABE), technical, vocational and academic programs. IA clients visit the IBT office up to

ten times unlike other students who may visit an advising office once or twice. Without individualized counselling, program planning support, exit transitioning services, etc. many of these learners would not be able to complete their program of study.²¹

IBT-funded services and programs included assessment, individualized program planning, advocacy and counselling, personal skills training, upgrading, academic support, work experiences, and job placement. The majority of students served by IBT-funded programs and services participated in upgrading (ABE) or English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. Adult Basic Education (ABE) refers to the programs that assist adult students who have not achieved their high school diploma. Both colleges and school districts offer ABE programs and students can choose which program (college or school district) best suits their needs. To access school district ABE programs, students must be 19 or older. To graduate with the BC Adult Graduation Diploma (also known as the “Adult Dogwood”), students complete 20 credits (compared with the 52 credits needed to graduate in regular high school programs). ABE programs in school districts are run out of schools, often in the evening. In BC, there are four levels of ABE: fundamental (up to and including Grade 8 level), intermediate (Grades 9 and 10), advanced (Grade 11), and provincial (Grade 12). In 1991, fundamental ABE was made tuition-free in the college system, and in 1998, tuition fees for all other levels of ABE were eliminated (school district ABE has been tuition-free since 1989 for non-graduates). ABE students could also receive support through the Adult Basic Education Student Assistance Plan, which covered the additional costs of going to school (including student fees, books, travel and childcare). It is important to note that ABE students are *not* eligible for student loans.

Once students completed their upgrading, they could also be supported as they made the transition to career programs²² or into university transfer programs. Of those IA students who, once they completed their upgrading, continued into skills training, most entered shorter-term career programs, some of which did not require high school completion. Students moving into these programs had to leave welfare and take out student loans and so the shorter programs were more attractive (as the amount of student debt these students had to carry would be limited). Given their longer duration and greater expense, few IA students entered university transfer programs.

Through the College Envelope, grants were provided to 18 colleges, university colleges and institutes, ranging from \$150,000 to \$265,000 per institution per year. The size of the college or institute determined the amount of funding made available. In 1996/97, 25 per cent of the overall training benefits funding went to the College Envelope (the remaining amount was made available to private and not-for-profit trainers). This portion increased to 33 per cent for 1997/98 and 1998/99. The College Envelope was reduced in 1999/00 and continued for one more year at 1999/2000 levels.

In 1996/97, the first year of IBT operation, 7,500 IA students were served. This rate doubled in 1997/98 to 13,000. By 1998/99, this had increased slightly to 13,895 IA students, and in 2000/01, the last year, an IBT Program Service Review estimated that the number had grown to about 20,000 IA students. Without access to annual reports, we estimate the total spent on IBT (based on the 2000/01 budget of \$4.155 million) to be about \$20 million over four years. Table 1 lists the distribution of IBT funds for 2000/01. Thus, for a relatively small budget, a very large number of low-income students were served.

IBT funds paid for extra staffing of counselling services and for special programs like bridging and transition programs that helped students to learn about institutional processes and supported them in becoming successful and active learners. EC funding covered the cost of new student spaces in expanded or new programs.

In addition to these targeted funds, colleges used other sources of funds to support IA students. For example, Skills for Employment grants were given to colleges to support program development for unemployed students including Employment Insurance and income assistance recipients. These grants supported upgrading programs in various areas such as computer skills, programs that responded to short-term labour market needs, and programs designed to support equity groups. These grants enabled some colleges to run several programs that served the needs of high-needs students. As previously noted, the ABE Student Assistance Plan was an existing source of funds established to support students who had left the secondary system without completion. It provided direct educational costs for students enrolled in academic upgrading, pre-vocational, ESL training, and adult special education. Training Assistance Benefits was another source of support created specifically to support Youth Works or Welfare to Work clients, and helped to cover other costs not eligible under the ABE Student Assistance Plan, such as bus passes, books and other expenses, beyond tuition, that related to participating in education. Eligibility for these benefits was based on Employability Agreements authorized by training consultants.

Table 1: Summary of Institutional-Based Training Funding 2000/01	
Institution	IBT grant
BCIT	\$225,000
Camosun College	\$245,000
Capilano College	\$225,000
College of New Caledonia	\$235,000
College of the Rockies	\$225,000
Douglas College	\$240,000
Kwantlen University College	\$240,000
Langara College	\$215,000
Malaspina University College	\$265,000
North Island College	\$240,000
Nicola Valley Institute of Technology	\$150,000
Northern Lights College	\$200,000
Northwest Community College	\$225,000
Okanagan University College	\$245,000
Selkirk College	\$235,000
University College of the Cariboo	\$240,000
University College of the Fraser Valley	\$240,000
Vancouver Community College	\$265,000
Total	\$4,155,000
Source: Ministry of Advanced Education Core Services Review	

2002: The Context Changes

On March 31, 2002, following a core review of services instituted by the newly-elected provincial government, IBT funding was eliminated. Gerry Armstrong, Deputy Minister of Advanced Education at the time of the core review, argued that IBT programs were duplicating services and were “more of a social service than a post-secondary endeavour” and were therefore outside the mandate of the ministry.

IBT funding duplicated services already available at the post-secondary education institutions ... funding for student counselling and support services continues to be provided in the block funding provided to post-secondary education institutions. Income assistance students attending post-secondary institutions will continue to have access to the same high quality support services available to all students.²³

Another important rule change came in 2002: income assistance recipients could no longer participate in post-secondary programs. Some recipients eligible for disability benefits could access post-secondary, but the government also undertook a major review of disability benefits programs, making it much harder for people with disabilities to qualify and for disabled students to maintain their student benefits. This closed the door for thousands of IA recipients to upgrade their educational credentials. Many students enrolled in IBT and EC funded programs at the time of the legislative changes were forced to withdraw from their programs or risk losing their welfare. Some of these were within a few months of completion.

While the IBT program was eliminated, the Expanded Capacity funding continued, although these dollars were now folded into the overall block funding each college received. Targets for specific programs (e.g. upgrade programs) and students (e.g. low income) were also removed. The Ministry of Advanced Education argued that under the new block funding arrangement, it was moving away from “prescriptive models” to an “accountability framework” in which institutions were to determine their own priorities under the mandate that students “receive quality education and educational opportunities relevant to their needs and the needs of the labour market.”

In the first year of block funding (2002/2003), there was nothing in the Ministry of Advanced Education Accountability Framework concerning ABE or other upgrading programs for low-income students with unique barriers to employment. This, coupled with the change in welfare policy that disallowed IA recipients from receiving support while participating in upgrading programs, had devastating impacts on ABE/upgrade programs, many of which were closed, and others greatly reduced. In response to declining enrolment and pressure from those concerned with the survival of these special programs, the Accountability Framework in 2003/04 included a new measure on access to upgrading programs. A letter from the Deputy Minister in March 2004 discussed targets and indicated that institutions would be evaluated in relation to how they were maintaining access to upgrading programs. The performance measure put in place, however, was based on the number of enrolments in 2003/04. By that time, enrolments had plummeted, so that the new baseline was set very low.

With new welfare regulations that no longer provided post-secondary educational support to IA recipients, and without targeted funds to support these programs, many colleges struggled to maintain the upgrading and support programs the IBT funding had previously financed. Some colleges moved away almost entirely from providing these programs, while others, in an effort to keep these programs going, reintroduced ABE tuition fees, much to the dismay of ABE advocates who had earlier fought to have these fees eliminated.

With this policy context in mind, what follows are the results of interviews with college and institute IBT staff about how they used the targeted funds, how they responded to the needs and circumstances of IA students, what happened to students and programs in 2002 when funding was cut and other policy reforms were introduced, and what recommendations they would make.

Many students were forced to withdraw or risk losing their welfare. Some were within a few months of completion.

Best Practices

In the remaining sections of the report, we draw extensively on the perspectives and voices (identified in italics) of staff we interviewed. As mentioned in the methodology section, in their terms for participation in this project, our participants asked that their specific contributions and their institutions remain anonymous. What is not included in our analysis, therefore, is information on the specific contexts of each institution and program, nor do we identify the specific positions occupied by the participants during the relevant period. While this information could be useful, we must honour the request for anonymity of our participating individuals and institutions. What is reported in the following sections are the ideas and themes that were repeatedly mentioned by study participants.

Staff spoke about the importance of having programs and services that reflected a sensitivity and awareness of how poverty impacts students' lives and their process of learning. This awareness and sensitivity grows from an understanding of the day-to-day struggles of living in poverty, and the energy, time and focus needed to acquire the basics of food, housing, childcare and security. In developed nations such as Canada, often considered the best place in the world to live, and in many communities and post-secondary institutions, the reality of poverty is hidden or unacknowledged. A middle-class bias pervades governments, agencies and post-secondary institutions as well as staff and faculty. Staff we spoke with were keenly aware of the difficulties and barriers encountered in integrating low-income students into institutional systems. *“Consistently the issue ... was how unapproachable the system was ... it was designed for convenience for the college, not students.”*

Staff also spoke about the difficulty of focusing on and targeting IA students while at the same time being careful not to contribute to further stigmatization of those living in poverty. *“Access is access is access, no matter who it is.”* As one staff member noted, *“We tried not to identify students as IBT [students] so they would not be treated differently, we tried to be respectful of students and did not want to centre them out.”* At another college staff reported that *“Our philosophy was to not have an IBT office; we incorporated IBT into counselling and reached more people, not just IA, but anyone in need... Everyone came through the same door.”* Others felt that *“Low-income students would be lost in the larger population if not, somehow, identified.”*

The Institution Based Training and Expanded Capacity funds were used in a variety of ways by each college and institute, depending on their local institutional arrangements and student needs. Existing programs and services were enhanced and new programs and services created to serve the needs of IA students. For some colleges and institutes, IBT and EC funding led to significant growth (e.g. from 250 to 600) in the numbers of IA students in the college. For other colleges that had already been serving low-income communities, the demographic changes were less significant. Some institutions brought resources and services together to offer ‘one-stop’ service. For the sake of this report, the programs and services developed for IA students have been organized into two main categories: access and retention. In relation to access, staff worked to create bridges and pathways so that IA students could more easily access their institutions. Once students gained entry, programs and services focused on creating spaces of support to enable IA students to experience success and to complete their programs.

Access

Outreach

All colleges and institutes, to some extent, engaged in various outreach activities in order to connect with their local community. The extent of these kinds of activities varied depending on the time and resources made available to staff, and the support of their administrators. For many individuals with low incomes, given their economic and social realities, it is difficult to even imagine including higher education in their futures. In addition to the financial barriers, many students with low incomes are wary of participating in further education if they have had previous negative educational experiences. Even for those who have an interest and make it to the college door, institutional and bureaucratic processes, rules and regulations are often confusing and overwhelming. Recognizing these barriers, colleges engaged in community outreach as an important strategy to provide information about college programs and services and to encourage potential students receiving income assistance to consider participating. Staff connected with a wide variety of community-based agencies such as multicultural organizations, school boards, welfare offices, transition houses, food banks, housing centres, emergency shelters, employers, and drop-in centres, making presentations and answering questions about college programs. Some colleges also created off-campus and storefront access centres.

Individualizing contacts with potential students made the colleges seem more welcoming; potential students now had the name and contact information of an individual, rather than dealing with a “faceless” institution and not knowing whom to approach or where to begin their inquiries. *“Having a relation with someone at the college provided a connection, an anchor, as college can be overwhelming.”*

Another aspect of outreach was the creation of information flyers encouraging students to think about returning to school. These materials were written in plain language and widely distributed to community agencies and put on institutions’ websites. Once students made their way to their local college, staff worked to create supportive environments and remove obstacles within institutions.

Community Development Approach

Building and maintaining community links took many forms. Some of the study participants spoke about the importance of having an awareness of local community issues and adopting a community development approach. A few of the staff maintained their community links and knowledge of local issues by serving on advisory boards of agencies and in other roles. Participants noted the significance of having this kind of community work acknowledged as part of their college jobs. *“The Dean was very supportive and staff were released from college tasks to maintain community contacts.”*

Liaising with training consultants, who were involved in creating training plans with IA recipients, was noted by many college and institute staff as essential.²⁴ Training consultants played a central role in ensuring that IA students continued to receive financial support while upgrading their education. Training consultants also played other roles, as noted by one college staff member: *“Training consultants would fax info about specific jobs and we could get that person into a program leading to employment.”*

Retention

Money Matters

Even when there was no tuition charged for such programs as ABE, other costs quickly added up, thus creating barriers for IA students. Knowing the very limited incomes of these students, fee waivers and registration fee deferrals were provided, using IBT, Training Assistance Benefits, and ABE Student Assistance Plan funds to cover application fees, registration deposits, library card fees, assessment fees, book purchases, and printing fees. Free phones were also made available.

Students' basic needs were also acknowledged. Some colleges created internal food banks, and provided clothing and school supplies. Emergency funding and bursaries were established. Finding additional child care funds was crucial for single mothers. Under the welfare system, IA recipients were deemed responsible for finding information and making choices, but information about other sources of funds was not easily accessible. Staff knowledge of other sources of support and links with other agencies and services was, therefore, essential.

Counselling and Advocacy

In addition to financial barriers, IA students faced other institutional challenges. Providing ongoing support was central to ensuring that students continued their studies. Most colleges and institutes used IBT funds to increase existing counselling and support services, while a few colleges created a separate IA or IBT office staffed with those who were knowledgeable of both institutional and welfare rules and regulations and who were sensitive to the issues facing students with low incomes.

A holistic approach and awareness of the complexity of systematic barriers were identified by study participants as key. Many of the staff who counseled IA students had an open-door policy, whereby students could drop in at any time without making an appointment. Such access was necessary given the rapidly changing circumstances of some students. Helping IA students address personal as well as academic issues was crucial. *“If personal counselling was not available we would have lost students.”* Personal counselling that addressed family struggles with intergenerational poverty needed to be built into the framework of the IBT program. *“Issues are generational, so we need support re family issues when stepping away from an old way of life.”*

Having the same staff consistently available for IA students was also important. Some colleges used IBT funds to “buy out” staff from other responsibilities in order to work exclusively with IA students. Individual, one-to-one support was a significant aspect in creating institutional spaces where students’ self-esteem and self-confidence could flourish: *“Students had a friend, a support person, someone with them throughout their time at college.”* Valuing and respecting IA students was also important; this approach was often a change from their earlier educational experiences.

Staff worked as advocates, making referrals, negotiating access to programs, directing students to other sources of aid. They were involved in trouble-shooting funding applications, connecting with financial aid workers, training consultants and other ministry workers, and informing students of their rights. Study participants also spoke about the class bias that exists in many institutions of higher education and how they had to challenge class discrimination. Building alliances with other staff and faculty was another aspect of their IBT work. Study participants also emphasized the need for *“seamless support”* so they could advocate for students both inside and outside the institution, helping students through the *“maze of bureaucracy.”*

Supporting Academic Success

In addition to individual and personal counselling services, colleges and institutes created group-oriented structures and programs under various labels such as “Career Explorations,” “Success Skills Seminars,” “Student Success Programs,” “Readiness Programs,” “Life Skills,” and “Breakfast Support Groups.” In these groups, students’ survival skills and knowledge of the system were valued. Programs sometimes emerged in a more grassroots fashion; for example, single mothers who were bringing their children to a college childcare centre organized themselves and identified topics of interest. In response, the college found appropriate resources to respond to matters such as parenting issues; these programs also provided bridges into certificate and diploma programs. Students learned from each other, and many programs recognized this and promoted peer education and support.

Continuous intake and self-paced learning processes were other key aspects of effective services. Educational and life planning, as well as assessment and testing, were provided. Materials and information kits were developed to enable students to negotiate their way through the bureaucracies. Staff worked to recognize and maximize the determination of many IA students, noting that mature students and single mothers were highly motivated. Home support programs were also established to assist IA students in contexts outside of the college.

Some colleges, using Expanded Capacity funds, were able to reserve seats in specific programs for their IA students, which required good working relationships with other units and administration. Tutors were made available to help students with course requirements. In some institutions, EC funds were used to add sections of existing programs, while in others, new programs were created. Given the costs and debt created by student loans, most entered certificate or diploma programs that were less than a year long. A few IA students entered university transfer programs. Because many students struggled to focus on their learning, and given their life circumstances, students were given a second opportunity if they failed a course. IBT staff kept track of where IA students were in their institutions, working collaboratively with faculty to encourage their “buy-in” to the program. Students’ successes were noted and celebrated.

Many of the staff who counseled IA students had an open-door policy, whereby students could drop in at any time without making an appointment. Helping IA students address personal as well as academic issues was crucial.

Buildings Links to Employment

Making links with employment opportunities was another dimension of effective services for IA students. Maintaining knowledge of labour market trends was noted as key. Employment officers were hired in some colleges to support IA students in resumé preparation, job search, and job placement. Employment oriented programs included job shadowing and assessment. Some colleges created other special programs, such as those assisting students with foreign credentials who faced barriers to working in their respective fields of practice: *“For immigrant students the service was one-to-one and that meant that we were able to take their hand through the [college/institute] process, which can be very intimidating; in other countries the concept of student financial assistance does not exist so we could explain/assist.”*

Making a Difference

Many college and institute staff reported that the various programs and services provided to Income Assistance students helped to tip the balance between attending and not attending school. Some students experienced the programs as a second chance: *“These programs make/made a huge difference to students’ lives, as they often mean the difference of whether or not adults have a second chance to improve their educational qualifications, their career opportunities, and consequently their economic status.”*

Many IA students were the first in their family to pursue post-secondary education. Many students would never have done so without the IBT and EC-funded programs, which made higher education a reasonable goal. Students moved from thinking that they did not belong, to developing confidence in their *right* and ability to learn. Program completion was one form of success, but students were also exposed to other possibilities, such as getting a job. Success at learning helped some students struggling with addictions to stop using drugs and alcohol. IBT programs also created new networks of support for students. *“It’s giving them the power to deal with other issues. It provided new connections in the community and also the nuts and bolts of academic skills.”*

Study participants argued that the cost of these programs was minor when considering the benefits. One college noted an 86 per cent job placement rate in the first three months of search following program completion. It is worth noting that this success rate is particularly impressive in that the IBT students had all been on IA for an extended period of time and thus likely faced numerous barriers to employment. In contrast, post-2002 training and job placement programs provided for IA recipients have focused on short-term IA recipients with few barriers to employment. IA students also developed other workplace skills, such as self awareness, decision-making, and interpersonal skills, and as a result developed a sense of accomplishment and confidence.

Student retention, completion, and success rates were exceptionally high ... I know many of the students—at all levels—in those programs found employment and eventually were able to get off income assistance. Except for a few students, students were very successful.

For students able to utilize the IBT program it was fantastic; we have a long list of students who moved from fundamental to advanced [levels of ABE].²⁵ For those without skills it gave them a sense of community and additional skills.

Colleges routinely gathered success stories and conducted surveys of their IA students. Some colleges shared these stories with us. Various aspects of these services appeared to be crucial for students' success including counselling and step-by-step support. For some students, learning assessment and disability support proved to be fundamental to their completion. For those who went on to career programs, IBT services helped with fee and book cost deferral for the period before student loans arrived. Without these deferrals, many students would not have continued and graduated. There were many stories of students

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obtaining full-time employment after many years on income assistance. Staff helped some students find work through their community and employer connections. Many other students acquired employment at practicum placements. Returning to school also sparked their aptitude and passion for learning. Students new to Canada for whom English was a second language were helped through ESL and upgrading programs. Others who came with credentials from their home countries were helped to acquire Canadian credentials and to find programs that recognized foreign credentials so they could find work in their profession. It was also not uncommon to have students receiving awards, and programs often reported that IA students were exemplary in their determination and commitment, acting as role models for other students.

Many of these success stories were about single mothers on income assistance who spoke of how their children were part of their motivation. Some of these stories were highlighted in a study of single mothers participating in an IBT funded program²⁶: *“Nothing makes me happier than going to school—except my daughter. If I get money for myself...if I get a job, it will help my children as well. I can meet their needs in everything...it's not just for myself to be independent.”*

In that study, many single mothers reported that they would not have been able to return to education without these programs. *“Even if I saved \$10 a month, it would have been another few years before I even got there.”* Having a central office for IA students was also noted as crucial. *“They always have information to give you, and if not, they direct you to where you need to go, what you need to do.”* These students also had high praise for the instructors in this program. *“They make themselves available to help you...they don't make you feel bad for coming and asking for help, they encourage it.”*

Another key element of success identified by graduates was the recognition by employers of a credential from a public post-secondary institution. Graduating from a recognized post-secondary institution was a transformative event for many students who were able to leave social assistance and support themselves and their children. As noted above, single mothers reported that becoming economically independent allowed them to feel they were positive role models for their children.

After the Cuts

After the 2001 election, the new Liberal government undertook a core review of all BC government services, and subsequently made drastic funding cuts to many public services.

Many of these cuts directly affected low-income students. Funding for post-secondary education was initially frozen at 2001/02 levels. The post-secondary education tuition freeze (which had been in place since 1996) was then lifted, which led many institutions to substantially raise tuition fees in order to generate additional monies. Expanded Capacity funds were rolled into the block funding provided to colleges, and money that had been targeted as grants for low-income students was rolled into the larger financial aid fund. Welfare rules were changed, such that even those individuals without a high school equivalent education and who faced multiple barriers to employment (except those categorized as “Persons with Disabilities”) could not upgrade their education and continue to receive income assistance. Social assistance recipients considered “employable,” even those categorized as having “Persistent Multiple Barriers,” were pushed to take any job, regardless of circumstance or educational level. Short-term Training for Jobs courses, which focused on job search, were the only training programs offered, and for many IA recipients, participation in these programs was mandatory. Once their youngest child turned three, single parents on income assistance were required to find work and could no longer attend post-secondary education.

College staff lamented these changes and the dominant message they gave to IA students: “*Improving your education and skill levels are no longer legitimate goals; you are no longer worthy of investment.*” The effect on student demographics and college programs was dramatic.

Demographic Changes

Since most IA recipients (except for those receiving Disability Benefits) were no longer eligible to participate in upgrading or ESL programs, the most obvious impact was a drastic decline in the number of low-income students. College staff described a bleak picture: without the targeted funds and income support, there were no services geared toward low-income students. The only remaining formal support available to some students facing financial difficulties was the ABE Student Assistance Plan; however, it covered only tuition costs, not application fees, assessment fees, books or childcare. Study participants were dismayed when those IA students who had not yet completed their studies were forced out and pushed into low wage jobs. *“We’ve had people drop out because they know they will be cut off.”*

Noticeably absent after the cuts were single mothers. *“There are fewer moms, now it’s pretty even in terms of genders; no more single moms.”* Another study participant pointed out that *“when childcare was withdrawn we noticed single moms dropped to half time and then entirely.”* Changes in the age and gender of students were also noted. *“In IBT years our students were in their late 20s/30s.”* Students were now much younger, many just coming out of high school. *“The impact is significant; older students are punctual, polite, hard working. Mature students are a good influence on high school students.”*

For colleges serving larger geographic areas, staff noted that fewer students who had to travel longer distances were accessing the college.

We serve smaller communities up to 60 km away and these people no longer come. There’s a direct correlation to IBT cuts; students used to get 100 km/month for gas [which was critical given that there were] no other alternative in terms of transportation. [There is] no community bus service; mostly service is once a week—it’s a very rural environment.

Study participants also commented that after the cuts there were fewer First Nations students, as well as fewer students with lower levels of education needing fundamental literacy and life skills. *“We lost lower level students; the higher level still have skills to access school in evening etc., whereas people with low life skills are not coming.”* Without the supports that were in place, those with lower educational levels accessing college programs were facing limited futures. *“People we’re seeing now are academically limited and therefore limited to move on.”*

In addition to the absence or diminishment of some groups of students, participants noted an increase in the number of students on Disability Benefits.²⁷ Staff hypothesized that the students with mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues are *“not really employable, but need to do something to satisfy the ministry.”* Students with mental health issues are part of the new demographic, but colleges have few supports to address their specific needs.

Another change that staff noted was that many more students accessing their programs are working full time while at school, and holding not one but multiple low-waged, part-time jobs. College staff observed how tired these students are and how they cannot devote the time and energy needed to succeed at school. *“These students are so busy with work and studies that they cannot even access the institutional support that is available.”* Many students facing these kinds of barriers were also dropping out before completing their programs. Staff also commented on the “Catch 22” facing those students who take only a minimum number of courses at a time, because they cannot manage a full-time course load. As a result, *“It takes much longer [to complete] this way and is more expensive.”*

To be eligible for student loans, students must be enrolled full time. However, student loans do not cover all their costs and tuition fees have increased dramatically. Some bursaries targeted for low-income students have been rolled into general student finances. Income-contingent repayment plans for student loans have been suggested by some governments (although not yet put in place), but this would mean that repayment periods would be extended for students with lower incomes, and they would end up paying more for their education as compound interest accumulated. Students who want a better life for themselves must now go into enormous debt. *“We should not force people into debt to get a better life.”*

Program Changes

Not only have these policy reforms altered student demographics, they have begun to transform the curricular face of post-secondary education in BC. Staff who participated in this study noted another outcome—a growing emphasis in some colleges on university transfer (UT) courses. This shift in emphasis threatens the future of upgrade programs. Literacy, ABE, and vocational programs are being replaced by more lucrative UT courses. *“It’s cheaper to run UT courses: 40 students versus 12 per class.”* Furthermore, students cannot apply for student loans unless they are taking UT courses or career/skill training programs, adding to the marginalization of ABE and similar programs. And, until recently, most colleges did not charge tuition for ABE programs.

Some ABE programs that formerly had long waiting lists began to run under capacity and study participants worried about their sustainability: *“The numbers are down because low-income/marginalized [students] can’t come to school. We no longer have waiting lists—we are now running at only 75 per cent of capacity, except for one campus which has a large ESL group.”*

Without these programs and services there is no longer any formal coordinated support, staff or service centres, leaving students on their own, with more *“falling through the cracks.”* As one student participant noted, *“With IBT we felt we had a connection/advocate for [low-income students]; now the contact is with whoever administers a program.”* Personal counsellors were a huge factor in the success of low-income students in these programs. After the cuts, personal counsellors were eliminated or significantly cut. As a result, *“success rates are down because students are not getting support.”* Support of low-income students is now largely random and dependent on the political interests/kindnesses of individual college staff and administrators.

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Without these bridging programs and services, many students who are not prepared for the demands of career and UT courses end up doing poorly: *“A student who really needs to get their Grade 10, but if on EI can only go into UT, but they are not ready for UT and therefore meet with failure—they’re set up because they’re hopeful.”*

Moreover, because colleges offer only the first two years of university courses, rural and northern students are required to relocate to larger urban centres to continue with their education, something many of them cannot afford to do. Students are faced with one of two choices: going to school, taking UT courses and then inevitably leaving their community, or eliminating post-secondary education as an option and staying in their community with limited opportunity for financial advancement.

Despite the severe cuts to funding, the staff we spoke to continue to be committed to low-income students, devising formal and informal means of support. Some colleges run Breakfast Clubs with support from local businesses. Some have greatly increased their grants and bursaries, with many college staff contributing to these funds. Staff have also organized regular book sales with proceeds earmarked for food vouchers. Colleges post information for students listing food banks and other resources. Some staff reported that *“It is not uncommon for instructors to give money from their purses.”* Some colleges continued to offer information sessions for social assistance recipients, but eventually *“the students stopped coming because the referrals were made through training consultants and the training consultants were cut.”* Frequently, staff look for ways to “get around,” “adjust,” or “accommodate” limitations in order to support students. Some staff reported that they were “reprimanded” for their efforts and “encouraged” to discontinue their specific support of low-income students because *“everyone should be treated the same.”*

In addition to the efforts made by college staff, several college administrations have also introduced mechanisms of support for low-income students. Increasing the availability of bursaries seems to be the

most common initiative: *“The college has tried to increase bursaries for people on low incomes since work study has been eliminated under student loans as well as grants under two years.”* Staff noted, however, that bursaries cannot offset the increased costs caused by dramatic increases in tuition. Some college administrators have also created emergency funds.

Conclusion

Lessons Learned

There is universal agreement among the college and institute staff with whom we spoke that the provincial government's focus on the "fastest route to a job" for IA recipients is unbalanced and short-sighted. Many observe that for those with low literacy, life or other skills, finding and keeping a job with a living wage is next to impossible. An emphasis on employment over education, they argue, is a short-term solution with short-term gains. College and institute staff predict an inevitable future crisis where people who required, but did not receive, additional support will be neither employed nor educated. The current policy mandating employment ensures that *"people who are poor remain poor."* There needs to be recognition of the costs incurred by *"NOT supporting people to be self-reliant/independent; the money saved on one side will be [paid] on the other in terms of self-destruction."*

Access to post-secondary education needs to be understood as a right and a benefit to society as a whole: *"We say education is a right for everyone, but we put up blocks preventing it. Yes, there's a cost to education, but there's an even higher cost to ignorance, i.e. the cost of NOT educating. There's an economic benefit of having people educated."*

Staff argue that it is in *"Canada's best interest to have an educated society"* and that *"every Canadian should have the right to meet their potential as 'good' Canadian citizens both educationally and socially."* Long-term solutions are needed. There needs to be a shift away from a one-sided focus on costs to a broad vision that recognizes the benefits provided by an educated population. Programs like IBT are of low cost relative to their high long-term benefits. Investing in such programs will, in the long-run, provide

greater returns. Funds need to be designated and targeted for these programs; otherwise, given the fiscal challenges facing colleges and institutes, they will be allocated elsewhere, as supporting low-income students is simply not seen as a priority. Policy that clearly articulates a commitment to ending poverty needs to be from the top down; a commitment from government regarding access to education for low-income students is needed.

College and institute staff lamented how the cuts and policy changes have distanced colleges and institutes from the needs of their communities; they want *“to put back the ‘community’ in community college.”* Increasing the availability of bridging programs is one way to make colleges more accessible. Such programs need to be integrated with both the community and the colleges, which requires outreach and coordination between colleges, and collaboration between ministries overseeing income assistance and ministries responsible for post-secondary education. The singular focus on employment as a goal needs to be broadened. Other matters, such as knowledge for democratic participation and global citizenship, must enter the government’s vision of post-secondary education. Programs, policies and services *“must be designed for the ‘whole’ person, including both academic and non-academic objectives [while] the social and economic benefits [of education] to the individuals and to society”* need to be stressed.

Supporting the “whole” person requires financial and personal support both inside and outside of post-secondary institutions. The college does not function within a vacuum and neither does the student; the notion of a “student life” as separate and distinct from “real life” leads to problems because student life and real life are inextricably linked. The well-being and success of a student on campus is dependent upon the student’s well-being and success off campus. *“After the student leaves campus, they still need support.”*

The staff who participated in this study underscored the necessity of concrete material support. Financial support is important, but so are other kinds of resources such as childcare, and computer and printing access. For students to learn, their health issues must also be addressed. The shift in orientation that positions students as consumers of education was regarded by college staff as problematic. *“The consumer agenda does not work for people [who are] multi-barriered and we helped people with many barriers.”*

Recommendations

The arguments presented in this study for continued support for IA students and against the short-sightedness of welfare reforms that deny access to education are echoed in other research. As noted in the introduction to this report, it is well documented that access to and successful completion of high school and post-secondary education is a key factor in achieving economic security and escaping from poverty. A CCPA research study by economist Robert Allen found that there is a huge societal payoff from education at all levels, with the largest payoffs for completion of high school²⁸—the very upgrade provided by ABE programs. Research has illustrated how those who have not completed high school are three times more likely to work in low paying jobs and are much less likely to experience upward mobility.²⁹ Investing in the further education of adults with low literacy levels not only brings substantial economic returns to individuals and their families, but also directly relates to the development of human capital and the well-being of developed nations.³⁰ In the long term, investing in the education of low-income individuals in upgrading and acquiring skills reduces government expenditures on income support, as well as on other kinds of programs that are needed to address the multiple health, social and economic consequences of poverty. Without jobs that pay a living wage, impoverished individuals cannot contribute through consumer and income taxes to the public treasury. Investing in the education of individuals with lower educational levels makes good economic sense as well as reducing other social costs.³¹

In its last year of operation (2000/01) almost 20,000 students were supported through IBT funding of only \$4.2 million. The returns on this investment were substantial, as many of these students were able to leave income assistance. Providing support for these students is not a handout. The costs are covered many times over by eliminating the need for income assistance and through the payment of taxes.

While this report has focused on the provision of services in public colleges and institutes, it must be noted that community-based training also provided services and programs to IA recipients. Access to both community-based and post-secondary institutional programs is needed, as well as a coordinated system that would allow IA students to move seamlessly between community-based programs and colleges and institutes.

This report concludes with four recommendations for supporting post-secondary access for income assistance recipients and other low-income British Columbians, calling on the provincial government to:

- Change welfare rules so that people receiving income assistance can participate in post-secondary education;
- Restore and increase designated funding to post-secondary institutions to support IA recipients (with the funding targeted so that it cannot be allocated elsewhere, as would be likely given the fiscal challenges facing colleges and institutes);
- Support colleges and institutes in providing programs and services that offer holistic support to students, based on 'best practices'; and
- Restore tuition-free Adult Basic Education in BC's public post-secondary institutions.

Endnotes

- ¹ Gathering data from other private and community-based agencies about their training for IA clients was beyond the scope of this study.
- ² In 1996, when this initiative was established, it was called the Ministry of Education, Skills and Training. Subsequently it went through several name changes; it is currently called the Ministry of Advanced Education, which is how we refer to it throughout this report.
- ³ Morissette and Picot, 2005, p. 4.
- ⁴ Karier, 1998.
- ⁵ Ford, Gyarmati, Foly and Tattrie, 2003.
- ⁶ Gittell, Schehl, and Fareri, 1990.
- ⁷ Beatty-Guenter, 1992.
- ⁸ Human Resource Development Canada, 1996.
- ⁹ Johnston, 2004, p. i.
- ¹⁰ Cohen, 2003, p. 11.
- ¹¹ There is no centralized collection of quantitative data about how each institution used this funding, although all were required to submit annual reports. Through individual requests and Freedom of Information processes, we were able to gather some information on budgets, numbers of students, and types of programs from a few institutions, but portions of this information were missing. Institution-specific data is not reported for two reasons: first, we did not receive reports from all institutions; and second, many participating institutions did not want this information shared.
- ¹² Because of confidentiality agreements that protect student data, we were unable to identify and interview students who had participated in the IA programs. A UBC doctoral dissertation that explored students' experiences in these programs provided us with some student perspectives (Thompson, D.M., 2002).
- ¹³ Our sample represented approximately 75 per cent of the 18 colleges and institutes that received this targeted funding.
- ¹⁴ While we have no specific data on the numbers of counselors or staff who lost their jobs with the policy changes, our study participants told us that the majority of college and institute staff who worked with the IA programs and services continued to work in their respective colleges and institutes.
- ¹⁵ According to the BC Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations, in 1990 federal funding accounted for 50 per cent of welfare funding, declining to 19.6 per cent in 1998.
- ¹⁶ Welfare to work programs were optional for those over 60 years of age.
- ¹⁷ Prior to this welfare reform, rehabilitation officers had worked with IA clients in relation to further training under the auspices of the Ministry of Human Resources. Under the new policy regime, TCs now worked under the ministry responsible for post-secondary education. TCs were located in community offices throughout the province. With this shift from the ministry responsible for

social welfare programs to the ministry responsible for post-secondary education, TCs had more direct links with educators and educational institutions.

- ¹⁸ The Skills Development Division, working under the auspices of the ministry responsible for post-secondary education, administered these funds.
- ¹⁹ To access EC funding, institutions had to submit specific EC proposals in which they provided a rationale for the request. Most of the EC funding went to support upgrading programs. The cost of the FTE varied depending on the program, with some programs costing less and others (e.g. specific skills training programs such as nursing) costing more.
- ²⁰ Colleges had to submit a proposal based on a Negotiating Framework, which listed a set of guiding principles that the Ministry and post-secondary institutions would follow: mutual respect, open communication, consistency, cost-effectiveness, accountability and timeliness.
- ²¹ BC Ministry of Advanced Education Core Review 2001/02, p. 2.
- ²² For example, Resident Care Attendant, Office Administration, or Child and Family Community Studies.
- ²³ Letter signed by Gerry Armstrong, Deputy Minister, BC Ministry of Advanced Education, May 21, 2002.
- ²⁴ Some staff noted some challenges in linking with training consultants because of the large number of TCs and the lack of continuity.
- ²⁵ As noted in the policy context section, “fundamental” refers to upgrading to a Grade 8 level while “advanced” refers to working toward Grade 11 levels.
- ²⁶ D.M. Thompson, 2002.
- ²⁷ After the changes to income assistance in 2002, only students on Disability Benefits could attend post-secondary education on a part-time basis.
- ²⁸ Allen, 1999.
- ²⁹ Janz, 2004.
- ³⁰ Coulombe, Tremblay, and Marchand, 2004.
- ³¹ Johnston, 2004.

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About the CCPA

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives is an independent, non-partisan research institute concerned with issues of social and economic justice. Founded in 1980, it is one of Canada's leading progressive voices in public policy debates.

The CCPA works to enrich democratic dialogue and ensure Canadians know there are workable solutions to the issues we face. The Centre offers analysis and policy ideas to the media, general public, social justice and labour organizations, academia and government. It produces studies, policy briefs, books, editorials and commentary, and other publications, including *The Monitor*, a monthly magazine. Most of these resources are available free at www.policyalternatives.ca.

Established in 1997, the CCPA's BC Office offers policy research and commentary on a wide range of provincial issues, such as: BC finances, taxation and spending; poverty and welfare policy; BC's resource economy; privatization and P3s; public education financing; health care; and more.

The CCPA is a registered non-profit charity and depends on the support of its more than 10,000 members across Canada.

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About the Economic Security Project

The Economic Security Project is a major research initiative of the CCPA's BC Office and Simon Fraser University, in partnership with 24 community organizations and four BC universities.

The project examines how recent provincial policy changes affect the economic well-being of vulnerable people in BC, such as those who rely on social assistance, low-wage earners, recent immigrants, youth and others. It also develops and promotes policy solutions that improve economic security.

The project is funded primarily by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) through its Community-University Research Alliance Program.

For more information, visit www.policyalternatives.ca/esp