

Making the Case for an Aboriginal Labour Market Intermediary: A Community Based Solution to Improve Labour Market Outcomes for Aboriginal People in Manitoba

SHAUNA MACKINNON *

I. ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN THE CANADIAN CONTEXT

Aboriginal¹ people in Canada continue to measure poorly on several social and economic indicators when compared with non-Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people are over-represented among those who are poor, unemployed, precariously employed and measure comparatively poorly on many health indicators (Fernandez, Mackinnon, and Silver 2010). Aboriginal people are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system, child welfare system, are more likely to live in poor housing and Aboriginal youth are more likely to leave school at an early age. These poor social and economic conditions and outcomes have nothing to do with indigeneity but rather a long history of structural forces that can be traced back to the arrival of European colonizers who brought with them a worldview that prioritized economic expansion and the generation of wealth at all costs. As described by Indigenous scholar

* Shauna MacKinnon is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Urban and Inner City Studies at the University of Winnipeg, Department of Urban and Inner City Studies and Co-Investigator of the Manitoba Research Alliance (MRA) – Partnering for Change – Solutions to Aboriginal and Inner-City Poverty. Partnering for Change is a 7-year research project funded by a SSHRC Partnership Grant. She leads and conducts research in the Education, Training and Capacity Building research stream of the MRA.

¹ For the purposes of this paper “Aboriginal” includes First Nations (status and non-status), Metis and Inuit people who self-identify as Aboriginal.

Taiiaki Alfred, they “came to discover, with no collective ethos” but rather “a strong belief in individuality and the pursuit of individual material gain” (Alfred 2009:10-11).

Colonialism continues to have serious, long lasting and very damaging economic, social and cultural consequences. Generations of Aboriginal people have been traumatized by efforts to strip them of their identity and culture. In many cases, this has led to a complex form of poverty that is far more serious than simply a shortage of income.

On many reserves today and in many urban centres Aboriginal people experience a form of poverty that is complex, involving many interconnected layers of systemic exclusion and intrusion. The lack of adequate housing for example has been linked with poor education outcomes, which in turn has an impact on future earnings (Cunningham, and MacDonald 2012). Children involved in the child welfare system are at greater risk of poor social and economic outcomes (Brownell et al. 2010), the length of time in foster care and number of placements has been associated with poor education outcomes (Mitic, and Rimer 2002) and it has been shown that the longer people live in poverty, the less likely they are to escape it (Lang 2007).

Aboriginal people generally have lower education levels, lower income levels and weaker attachment to the labour market. The 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) shown in Table 1 shows the disparity in income between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada and more specifically in Manitoba.

Table 1: Median Income: Canada and Manitoba

Age 15 and over	Total Income Canada	Employment income Canada	Total Income Manitoba	Employment Income Manitoba
Aboriginal Identity	\$20,701	\$24,481	\$17,690	\$24,456
Total Population	\$29,870	\$31,603	\$29,029	\$30,371

Source: (Statistics Canada 2011a)

While these statistics demonstrate the serious disparity, it should be noted that the high global non-response rate of the National Housing

Survey is likely to understate the relative disadvantage of Aboriginal people.

Government and business sectors are increasingly taking notice of the statistics highlighting the poor social and economic outcomes of Aboriginal people. This is in part because the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal workers has become widely recognized as critical to Canada's economic future. In May 2013 Manitoba business leaders attending an event hosted by the Business Council of Manitoba identified the challenges facing Aboriginal people in Manitoba as a top priority. The business community is taking notice in part because it knows that the Aboriginal population is growing far more quickly than the non-Aboriginal population and it is understood that Aboriginal people will be a significant source of labour in Manitoba's future. A total of 16.7% of the Manitoba population and 11% of Winnipeg's population identified as Aboriginal in 2011 (Statistics Canada 2011b). This is an increase from 15% in Manitoba in 2006 and from 10% in Winnipeg. According to the NHS, the metropolitan area (CMA) of Winnipeg has the highest number of Aboriginal people of all CMAs in Canada and this population is expected to grow further and quickly. Statistics Canada estimates by 2031, between 18 and 21% of Manitoba's population will identify as Aboriginal.

Aboriginal people in Manitoba are also generally much younger than the non-Aboriginal population. In 2011, Aboriginal children aged 14 and under represented 28.7% of the total Aboriginal population in Winnipeg and 18.1% of all children in Winnipeg (Statistics Canada 2011b). By comparison, non-Aboriginal children aged 14 and under accounted for 16% of the non-Aboriginal population. The median age of the Aboriginal population is 21 years, almost half that of the non-Aboriginal population of 39 years. Statistics Canada (2011b) estimates that the number of Aboriginal adults in Manitoba between ages 20 and 29 will increase by over 40% by 2017 compared with a 9% growth rate among the same age cohort in the general population.

The increasing number of Aboriginal people in Winnipeg is in part the result of migration from First Nation communities as individuals and their families relocate to Manitoba's largest city in search of better opportunities. Unemployment in Manitoba First Nations is extremely high and poverty is rampant — 62% of First Nation children in Manitoba live in poverty (MacDonald, and Wilson 2013).

Of all CMAs, Winnipeg has the highest population of First Nation people living off reserve. Many of these families settle in Winnipeg's inner city and north end communities. The Aboriginal population in the

inner city is markedly higher than in Winnipeg generally. Census 2006 showed 21% of the inner-city population identify as Aboriginal. In some inner-city neighbourhoods more than 50% of residents are Aboriginal. Within these neighbourhoods Aboriginal people are also among the poorest and most marginalized. For example, 65% of inner-city Aboriginal households had incomes below Canada’s Low Income Cut Off measure (LICO) in 2005 (Statistics Canada 2006a).

II. LABOUR MARKET PARTICIPATION

It is often said that the best way out of poverty is employment. Poverty alleviation is of course far more complicated than this, especially in the contemporary political economy where the labour market is increasingly segmented and polarized (MacKinnon n.d). Nonetheless an emphasis on paid work has become increasingly central to federal and provincial social policy since the 1990s, and improving labour market access to Aboriginal people is an important means toward improved social and economic outcomes.

While the Aboriginal population in Manitoba grows, Table 2 shows that Aboriginal participation in the labour market continues to lag far behind that of the non-Aboriginal population.

Table 2: Labour Market Participation in Manitoba

	Employment Rate 25-64 years	Unemployment Rate 25-64 years	Participation Rate 25-64 years	Employment Rate 15-24 years	Unemployment Rate 15-24 years	Participation Rate 15-24 years
Aboriginal Identity	61.3%	11.4%	69.3%	33.1%	23.2%	43.1%
Non-Aboriginal	80%	3.9%	83.3%	60.5%	11.5%	68.3%

Source: (Statistics Canada 2011a)

As these statistics show, Aboriginal labour market participation is far weaker than that of the non-Aboriginal population. As noted, the reasons are complex and labour market participation is but one indicator of the continued oppression and exclusion of Aboriginal People. Nonetheless, access and retention of employment that pays well and provides opportunity for advancement can contribute significantly to improved social and economic well-being.

III. IMPROVING LABOUR MARKET PARTICIPATION – THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF A LABOUR MARKET INTERMEDIARY

If there is one thing that governments, the business community, Aboriginal and civil society groups seem to agree on, it is that improving labour market outcomes for Aboriginal people is an important priority. It should be emphasized that the majority of Aboriginal people will access education and employment without great difficulty—highly educated and skilled Aboriginal people are in very high demand. However, as illustrated in the data tables provided, there is a significant minority and growing number of Aboriginal people who continue to be excluded from labour market participation. The impact is far reaching. There are many Aboriginal people with a host of barriers impeding them from reaching their full potential. For these individuals and their families, and in light of the fact that the Aboriginal population is quickly growing, improving labour market outcomes will require that we rethink existing interventions with a focus on Aboriginal people who have weak labour market attachments and employers seeking to hire them.

In the past 10 years, two research studies have been conducted through the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) – Manitoba Research Alliance (MRA) in collaboration with community based organizations (Silver, and Loewen 2005; Silvius, and MacKinnon 2012). This research supports the case for a labour market intermediary (LMI) that is specially designed to meet the needs of multi-barriered Aboriginal people and the employers who hire them.

Autor (2009) describes labour market intermediaries as “entities or institutions that interpose themselves between workers and firms to facilitate, inform or regulate how workers are matched to firms, how work is accomplished and how conflicts are resolved.” The breadth and depth of services provided by labour market intermediaries varies from the very minimal to comprehensive in scope. Labour market

intermediaries can be particularly helpful for individuals with weak labour force attachment and limited networks.

Comprehensive labour market intermediaries not only serve to match employers with workers, but they provide continued and consistent supports to ensure successful transition. This can be particularly important for individuals who have had little or no previous workplace attachment. Successful models in the US demonstrate that LMIs are most effective when they integrate on-the-job training and supports for both employers and prospective employees (Harrison, and Weiss 1998; Silver, and Loewen 2005).

In the case of Aboriginal people, a LMI can serve the purpose of working with local training organizations and employers to:

1. Ensure that trainees are getting the skills necessary to meet labour market demand
2. Match employers with Aboriginal employees
3. Assist in easing the transition to work by providing ongoing supports with an emphasis on cultural reclamation for program participants and cultural competence training for employers
4. Track employment and income outcomes
5. Assess labour market need into the future
6. Work with training organizations to adapt programming to meet labour market needs

IV. UNDERSTANDING CHALLENGES, NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

An Aboriginal LMI can provide a unique role in response to the challenges identified by the business community and also in response to what Aboriginal people tell us when asked about their experiences finding meaningful employment and opportunities for advancement in their workplaces (MacKinnon n.d.). In a recent report titled *Understanding the Value, Challenges, and Opportunities of Engaging Metis, Inuit, and First Nation Workers* published by the Conference Board of Canada, authors Howard, Edge, and Watt (2012) report on findings from employer surveys that showed challenges in two key areas— attracting and hiring Aboriginal workers and work performance and retention. With regard to attracting Aboriginal workers, survey respondents noted challenges including low skill levels; lack of work experience; reluctance to relocate; language or cultural issues; and inability to communicate. Regarding work performance and retention, survey respondents noted absenteeism, productivity or performance

issues; quality of work issues and substance abuse issues as particularly challenging.

There exist many research studies looking at these and other challenges in an attempt to understand the root causes of Aboriginal exclusion from the labour market. Most notable is the evidence of a long history of misguided colonial policies designed to assimilate indigenous people by stripping them of their identity and culture (Hamilton, and Sinclair 1991; TRC 2012). Added to this is the reality that the colonial context continues and racism is pervasive and systemic. The effects have been, and continue to be, deeply damaging for generations of Aboriginal families for whom education and good jobs remain far out of reach.

V. EDUCATION OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

The importance of education and training as a means of ending the cycle of poverty is broadly understood and there have been a growing number of opportunities available to Aboriginal people in Manitoba. Census 2006 shows that one-third (33%) of Aboriginal adults aged 25 to 54 had less than a high school education compared to nearly 13% of the non-Aboriginal population, a difference of 20 percentage points (Statistics Canada 2006a; Statistics Canada 2006b).

It is true that education levels for the Aboriginal population have improved, however they continue to lag far behind that of the non-Aboriginal population. As shown in Table 3, the percentage of Aboriginal Canadians not completing high school continues to be very high. According to the 2006 census, 34% of survey respondents between 25 and 64 years who identified as Aboriginal reported having not obtained a high school certificate. Comparatively, 15% of the non-Aboriginal population of respondents in this demographic reported not having a high school certificate. The 2011 NHS shows some improvement with 28.9% “Aboriginal identity” respondents reporting having not obtained a high school certificate compared with 12.1% of the non-Aboriginal population. Fully 64.7% of all adults between 25 and 64 years had completed some form of post-secondary education in 2011, compared with 48.4% of Aboriginals. This too has improved. The number of Aboriginal people with a degree continues to increase with 6% in 2001, 8% in 2006 and 9.8% in 2011, of Aboriginal people reporting having a university degree. However, the Aboriginal population lags behind the non-Aboriginal population in general and

Manitoba fares worse than Canada when looking at high school certification of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

One notable observation is that the number of Aboriginal people in Manitoba with a university degree is keeping pace with the national rate of Aboriginal people with degrees (Table 3). The relatively positive increase in university attainment could in part be attributed to Manitoba’s Post-Secondary ACCESS Programs, which provide academic and other supports to Aboriginal and multi-barriered students.

Table 3: Highest Level of Education Age 25-64

	Total Population Less than high school	Total Population High school certificate or equivalent	Total Population With University Degree	Aboriginal Less than high school	Aboriginal High school certificate or equivalent	Aboriginal With University Degree
Canada	15 %	24 %	23 %	34 %	21 %	8 %
Manitoba	20 %	25 %	19 %	40 %	12 %	8 %

Source: (Authors calculations from Statistics Canada 2006a; Statistics Canada 2006b)

However, the importance of ongoing systematic transitional supports for employee and employer pre- and post-employment continues to be disregarded if not completely ignored. Supports to ease transition are minimal at best because training organizations, although well aware of the need for transitional supports, are not adequately funded to provide them and therefore do so as an ‘aside’ and on a very short term basis. This has resulted in continued challenges for employers and Aboriginal trainees.

In Winnipeg there are many organizations providing training opportunities for Aboriginal people wanting to enter the labour market. While they are making great strides, in most cases their job technically ends when training is complete. This creates a critical gap in service for at least three important reasons. First, many of the individuals who

participate in training have had no previous attachment to the labour market. For these individuals, the adjustment to work life can be extremely difficult. Related to this is a second challenge that is often not considered—employers are often not prepared for this type of worker. As described by the executive director of a local Aboriginal training program, employers expect workers to be “job ready”. Not only do they expect workers to be trained, most employers will assume that the individuals they hire will have had some experience with work and will have a sense of what the ‘culture’ of the typical workplace is like. But this is not the reality for many Aboriginal jobseekers. Many have returned to receive training as adults wishing to enter the labour market, but have had minimal, or no experience with paid employment. These individuals have much to learn beyond the job-training phase. Third, there continues to be a cultural divide between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and racism remains prevalent in many workplaces. This is a problem in its own right, but one that makes it especially difficult for Aboriginal workers first entering the labour market. Many simply give up and walk away from their jobs.

To better address the gap between training and employment for Aboriginal people who have been excluded from the labour market, researchers, employers and community based training and other service providers have proposed an Urban Aboriginal LMI that could be a comprehensive point of service connecting employers with individuals who have had difficulty finding and keeping good jobs by providing a full range of supports (Silvius, and MacKinnon 2012). The LMI would continue to support both employer and employee through the transition from unemployment to work. Establishing a LMI for Aboriginal people seeking employment, and employers seeking to hire Aboriginal workers, could help to address some of the complex issues identified by prospective employers and Aboriginal workers.

VI. FEATURES OF A LABOUR MARKET INTERMEDIARY

As noted, the Conference Board of Canada survey of employers identified specific challenges related to both recruiting and retaining Aboriginal employees. The question that remained in their report was what to do. A labour market intermediary designed to serve employers and Aboriginal jobseekers is one solution in response to their concerns while also recognizing and responding to the challenges of Aboriginal jobseekers.

The LMI proposed herewith is essentially a one-stop shop that connects employers with training programs and individuals who have had difficulty finding and keeping good jobs. It provides the full range of supports that are necessary for successful attachment to the labour market beyond the training stage. It also provides jobseekers with a window to various training and employment possibilities so that they can make choices that align with their interests as well as labour market demands. The model proposed is different from services that currently exist, because it is comprehensive, long-term focused, community-based, community-driven and directed by a consortium of training agencies and other stakeholders with an understanding of the specific needs of Aboriginal jobseekers. These features are centrally important to the LMI model proposed.

Establishing a LMI for Aboriginal people seeking employment and employers seeking to hire Aboriginal workers, could help to address some of the complex issues identified by prospective employers and Aboriginal workers. Similar models have worked well with marginalized groups in other jurisdictions. For example, the Centre for Employment and Training (CET) in California works closely with marginalized workers and employers and has been shown to be a success. A 2004 report titled *Grow Faster Together, or Grow Slowly Apart* (Elwood 2004) provides other examples of success in the U.S.A.

A 2005 study by Loewen and Silver showed that LMIs are most successful when they collaborate with community-based organizations (CBOs) and other education and training institutions working with marginalized people; connect job seekers with jobs that pay a living wage, and include benefits and opportunities for advancement; provide comprehensive and ongoing supports for individuals and employers to ensure successful workplace transition; and include the full involvement of unions in organized workplaces.

Given the under-representation of Aboriginal people in the labour market and the ongoing challenges described above, it makes sense to develop a labour market intermediary that focuses on the specific needs of Aboriginal workers and the employers seeking to hire them. While the majority of Aboriginal people successfully find employment without the need of a LMI, community based organizations have found that many of the trainees graduate with little or no employment history and continue to experience many obstacles. This makes finding work and successfully transitioning into work once they are hired, far more complicated.

Loewen and Silver also found that employers often have unrealistic expectations of individuals who often have had no previous attachment to the labour market. The disconnect between employers and Aboriginal employees is evident in the aforementioned 2012 Conference Board Report. While employers have valid concerns that should be taken seriously, survey responses also showed that many employers continue to hold stereotypes and misinformation about the Aboriginal people that they hire. Many employers and their non-Aboriginal employees typically have very minimal knowledge of the obstacles many Aboriginal workers have had to overcome. For example, employers surveyed described challenges including absenteeism, productivity or performance issues, inadequate skills levels for the workplace (e.g., literacy, technical and leadership), quality-of-work issues; and substance abuse issues (Howard, Edge & Watt 2012). Yet there is no discussion in the report about ‘why’ some Aboriginal people continue to struggle with these challenges and what employers might do to support them.

While employers certainly have the right to expect employees to abide by workplace policies, it would be beneficial for them to understand the historical and contemporary socio-economic and political context that continues to marginalize Aboriginal people. There is a tendency for the non-Aboriginal population to dismiss the impact of colonization, believing that Aboriginal people should “get over it” and ‘move-on’. However, the continued disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people suggests that this ‘strategy’ has not worked. As most recently demonstrated through the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, the damaging effects of colonization are very real and cannot be ignored. However, survey results and analysis of findings reflected in the Conference Board’s suggests that employers continue to view the problem as that of individual Aboriginal workers. Employers surveyed seem to be oblivious to the damaging intergenerational effects of colonialism and somewhat naively expect Aboriginal employees to have escaped colonialism unharmed—fully assimilated.

Failing to recognize the complex reality for many Aboriginal workers and resistance to respond differently than we have in the past will serve only to perpetuate the ‘problem’. An Aboriginal LMI mandated to work with both employers and employees could play an important educational and supportive role for those employers interested in better understanding the challenges they have identified,

so as to strengthen relationships, improve workplace experiences and employment outcomes for Aboriginal employees.

VII. SMALL, SAFE, HOLISTIC PROGRAMS

When considering a LMI that would best address the transition to employment for multi-barriered Aboriginal people, it is useful to turn to the research examining the experience and outcomes for those who have made a successful transition. Research has shown that the most effective programs for multi-barriered job seekers offer:

holistic approaches that address all the barriers to work and raise aspiration and confidence; they offer an individualized approach, flexible support with a personal adviser; they provide continuing support once the individual has moved into a job; they involve partnership working between the agencies delivering the different elements with a seamless service and ‘no wrong door’; employers are actively engaged in opening up job opportunities, work placements and skills support; and early support is available (Green and Husluck 2009 as cited in Newman 2011:98).

Aboriginal people who have returned to school as adults are more likely to succeed in environments that take a holistic approach to education and training (MacKinnon n.d.; Silver 2013) and it follows that a comprehensive, holistic labour market intermediary would have similar effects. Ideally this means small programs where students or trainees build trusting relationships with program staff, and they have program staff available to assist them with accessing supports such as housing, income supports, childcare and counselling.

An extremely important feature is the integration of healing and cultural reclamation. The legacy of colonization runs deep and the effects cannot be overstated. Generations of Aboriginal people are paying a painful price as a result of government policies including those which gave us the residential school system – a means by which children were removed from their families and placed in state and church run schools aimed at “kill[ing] the Indian from the child” (TRC 2012) – and the Sixties Scoop – the practice of removing children from their families and placing them in homes with non-Aboriginal families. While these practices have been abolished, the effects remain. Further, colonial social relationships and systemic racism persist and many Aboriginal people continue to be oppressed and marginalized.

Aboriginal students and trainees speak to the need to “heal the spirit first” and this begins with an understanding of the history of colonization and its continued effects (MacKinnon n.d.). Integrating “decolonizing pedagogy” into the education and training experience is

fundamental. As stated by one Aboriginal woman who returned to school as an adult to obtain her high school certification followed by a university degree, both obtained through small community based programs built from a decolonizing philosophy, the impact is “huge”.

[without it] there is a piece missing. You can take lots of different training and go out there and get a job and you can earn money and you do this and that, but you know- you're still ashamed of being an Indian. I had the benefit of experiencing something different, and if I had not, I would not be talking about this.

For 44 years I walked around with my head up my ass because I'm supposed to be all those terrible things and I'm not all those terrible things. I come from tribes of people that were amazing. But I never knew" (Mackinnon n.d.:232).

For those Aboriginal people who are fortunate enough to participate in education and training that integrates decolonizing pedagogy, the transition from training to employment is easier. However many Aboriginal people seeking employment have not benefitted from this experience and even those who do are faced with racism when they enter the labour market. A labour market intermediary would need to take this into consideration by integrating a 'healing the spirit first' approach to programming.

Silvius and MacKinnon (2012) recommend a model that builds from earlier research as well as consultations held in 2011 with Manitoba employers and community based organizations familiar with the challenges many Aboriginal people face. The following builds on this further, recommending an Aboriginal LMI with the following core features.

A. A Community-Based Model that Builds on the Long Established Relationships between Community based Organizations and the Aboriginal People who use their Services

There are a number of community-based organizations providing an array of services to Aboriginal people and they know what the challenges are and how best to respond. These organizations have developed trusting relationships with the community and it is essential that a LMI for Aboriginal people be an extension of these organizations, guided by them to fill the gap that has been identified. This does not mean that other stakeholders should be excluded nor does it mean that government should not have a role. What it does mean however, is that

a LMI, by its very nature, cannot be government driven – it needs to take a fundamentally different approach than that is currently available.

The work of an LMI does not begin when training ends. As noted earlier, trusting relationships have been identified as particularly important for Aboriginal people who have returned to school as adults and this holds true for those who are entering the labour market for the first time. Developing trusting relationships with LMI ‘counsellors’ ideally begins while jobseekers are in the training stage. Similarly, LMI counsellors will have established relationships with employers so that they will understand the employers needs and the culture of the workplace as well as the needs and ambitions of the jobseekers they seek to place.

B. Cultural Reclamation Must be Fully Integrated

The devastating effects of colonial policies such as residential schools and the sixties scoop have been well documented. As noted earlier, decolonization and cultural reclamation are critically important for Aboriginal people for whom these policies have led to “a lack of self confidence, fear of action, and a tendency to believe that the ravages and pain of colonization are somehow deserved” (Daes 2000 as cited in Hart 2010:117). One graduate of a training program that integrated decolonizing pedagogy into their program spoke to the importance of understanding the root causes of her difficulties. She spoke of the confidence she gained as a result of the supportive environment she studied in. She said: “I always thought I was stupid, but now I know that I am smart!” (Mackinnon n.d.).

It follows then that a LMI that integrates cultural reclamation for jobseekers in addition to providing education and awareness of the effects of colonization for employers is a critical component. The good news is that a LMI does not have to reinvent the proverbial wheel. There are community-based programs that have successfully integrated decolonizing pedagogy and cultural reclamation into their programming. These organizations should be called upon, and adequately funded, to share their expertise with jobseekers through the LMI.

C. Simplify Relationships between Employers and Participating CBOs

The current situation is such that employers seeking Aboriginal workers are attempting to reach out to community based training initiatives and other CBOs to recruit Aboriginal workers. Larger companies often hire human resource staff—Aboriginal Liaison is a typical job title—solely tasked with the job of finding Aboriginal employees. For their part, community-based training organizations are constantly doing their own outreach, seeking employers to hire their graduates. Not only is this an inefficient model for employers, it places an unnecessary burden on training organizations that is also beyond their expertise and mandate. A LMI is a much more efficient model because it brings employers and prospective employees together through a single entity staffed by human resource and other staff who have the expertise to not only help match employers with employees, but to also provide the transitional supports required. This makes it easier for employers to find Aboriginal employees as they do not need to reach out to the many employment development programs—all programs would potentially connect through the LMI. In the past, government employment centres have played a somewhat similar limited role but one that is far more limited and not specific to the unique challenges of Aboriginal jobseekers.

D. Simplify Relationships between Government and CBOs including the Tracking of Outcomes

Another important role for a LMI could be the continued evaluation of projects and institutionalization of knowledge so that the long-term impact of equity training and hiring is better understood. This is something that has been missing. This is in part because projects are understandably focused on evaluating their own outcomes and have less interest in the broader public policy implications of the targeted training and employment approach.

As the main funder of training organizations, it is understandable that

governments want to know what the outcomes of training are. However, training organizations are rarely able to report on employment outcomes beyond that what they know at the point of program completion. They can report on how many trainees have completed the program and they can report on whether they have found

work upon completion. However, they do not have the expertise and resources to track the long-term employment, social and economic outcomes of their trainees. This is critically important information to have if we are to understand what works best and plan for the future.

Some CBOs argue that they could better track outcomes if provided sufficient resources. While this may be true, it is unlikely that funding will be available for all training organizations to perform this function. Others argue that governments should be tracking outcomes however a LMI might be better placed to do this because of their direct relationships with CBOs and jobseekers. Longitudinal research and evaluation is resource intensive and it would be far more efficient to develop this expertise within one central organization.

E. Employ Personnel Dedicated to Supporting Employers and Employees and Coordinating the Multiple Referrals and Services that Any One Individual May Require

The lives of many Aboriginal people who have had weak labour market attachment are often complicated. Part of the transition to work challenge is establishing family stability. Accessing and retaining the various services required so that employees are able to attend work as scheduled is critical to successful transition. It is not uncommon for individuals to lose their jobs because of missed work due to a lack of childcare, housing instability, family issues and other challenges. An important role of the LMI would be to ensure that jobseekers have all the necessary resources in place, thereby minimizing absenteeism due to family and other crises.

F. Establish a Governance Structure including Representatives from Employer Groups, Labour, Education and training programs, Aboriginal Community Based organizations and Relevant Government Departments

As noted earlier, an Aboriginal LMI should be community based. It is also advised that a governance structure include representation from all pertinent stakeholders to ensure that the services provided are meeting the needs of employers and jobseekers while also ensuring that

the LMI does not duplicate services but rather extends beyond services that currently exist. Details of what this governance structure would look like and what organizations should be represented would need to be negotiated by all stakeholders. Establishing a LMI governance structure is likely to be a challenging task. All Aboriginal groups (First Nations, Metis, Inuit and Urban Aboriginal) will need to be represented and politics will need to be put aside. It will be important to establish terms of reference that stipulate the non-partisan, non-political nature of the LMI as this is sure to be a complicating factor.

Long Term Planning and Guidelines for Future Economic Development

A labour market intermediary guided by Aboriginal community-based organizations, employers, labour and government could play an important role in establishing guidelines for state supported economic development projects.

There are many examples of such projects that have integrated targeted training and employment and many more examples of projects that could do so. Recent examples of major projects in Manitoba include the Red River Flood Way, The MTS Centre, Manitoba Hydro, northern hydro development projects, The Canadian Human Rights Museum to name a few. Some have integrated equity training and hiring and others have not. In the case of large-scale capital projects such as these, a LMI could help with challenges that result in part because of the time limited, project specific nature of projects and the incredible amount of time it takes to get projects up and running. There is also a significant cost in setting up entities to support the employment and training objectives of large-scale projects and in the case of smaller scale initiatives there is limited capacity to broker between employers and trainers. Even when targeted training and hiring has been established, implementation has often been slow to 'gel' because institutional knowledge and experience is lacking. In spite of what has likely been learned, each new project seems to start from scratch (MacKinnon n.d.). The result has been frustration for employers and jobseekers. A permanent LMI would have the ability to develop long-term relationships with key stakeholders as well as an institutional knowledge of what works. It would eliminate the steep learning curve that is recreated each time a new large-scale development project emerges. Past mistakes are often repeated as key stakeholders and project employees repeat the practice of learning to negotiate their roles and relationships with prospective employers. For this reason, a

permanent LMI would be far more cost efficient, and effective for all parties.

Dedicated Multi-year core Funding

Even the best of models will not be effective unless adequately resourced. Previous federal/provincial labour market agreements were sufficiently flexible that the provincial government would have been able, if they so choose, to commit to fully funding a LMI. However things have become more complicated with the introduction of the *Canada Jobs Grant*. While not the only challenge, finding adequate funding for a LMI is perhaps the biggest challenge and recent changes in federal policy with the introduction of the *Canada Jobs Grant* are likely to make provincial funding of a LMI more difficult. Provincial governments were unanimous in their discontent with the proposed program when it was first announced, however the Province of Manitoba has recently signed on to an amended agreement. Details of how the *Canada Jobs Grant* will work continue to be sorted out, however the basis of the *Canada Jobs Grant* is the cost sharing of training between the federal, provincial governments and employers. The federal government will contribute to projects, only where a private sector financial commitment is made. It is required that training be job specific leading to private sector employment.

While the strong opposition from provincial governments suggests that the *Canada Jobs Grant* was not well thought through, in the case of a LMI, it might be possible for the Manitoba government, private sector stakeholders, training organizations and other stakeholders to negotiate the use of *Canada Jobs Grant* resources to fund an Aboriginal LMI.

VIII. OTHER CONCLUSIONS

In spite of what we have learned about the potential for labour market intermediaries to address the serious gaps that training organizations, job seekers, employers and other stakeholders have identified, we have yet to see this model emerge in Manitoba. In addition to funding, there are other challenges that will need to be addressed. One such challenge is where to situate a LMI. Among those organizations that agree in principle with the LMI model, there is not consensus on where it should be situated—geographically and institutionally—and how it would be governed.

Some existing organizations believe that they are well placed to provide the services of a LMI if they were properly funded to do so. Other community based training organizations are not completely convinced of the LMI model and believe that all community-based training organizations should be provided with sufficient funds to deliver the kinds of transitional services suggested for a LMI. The absence of consensus poses a serious problem. Although the evidence shows that the model proposed could be cost effective, efficient and beneficial to all concerned, and in particular for Aboriginal jobseekers, it won't work unless Aboriginal community-based organizations and other stakeholders agree on where it should be located and how it should be governed. While there is an argument to be made for an Aboriginal LMI in the North and elsewhere in the province, a LMI situated in Winnipeg seems to be the place to start because it is the major urban centre in the province with the greatest number and diversity of opportunities. As noted, a model that brings together all of the key stakeholders, including training organizations, service providers, employers, governments and labour will provide the best service to trainees and employers is highly recommended.

Since there is no obvious and agreed upon existing home for a LMI, it is most likely that a new entity will need to be created, bringing together all of the pertinent stakeholders as equal partners. It is very possible that there will never be consensus from all of the stakeholders on the 'where' and the 'how'. Given its mandate regarding training and employment, the provincial government, if serious about its commitment to innovation in connecting Aboriginal people with good jobs, will need to show leadership and bring stakeholders together to create a community-based labour market intermediary that makes best sense for employers and jobseekers.

Further to the issue of funding, a LMI would need to be sufficiently resourced to provide the kind of comprehensive, holistic programming to adequately respond to the needs of employers and jobseekers. The fiscal challenges facing the provincial government are very real and it would be difficult for a LMI to be fully funded by the Province. As suggested, there might be potential for the new *Canada Jobs Grant* to be used as a source of revenue. Funding might also be leveraged through the private sector and crown corporations as they could benefit directly from the services of a LMI, leading to an efficient and cost effective solution to their hiring and retention challenges. However, the Provincial government will need to take the lead role. Premier Selinger has recently demonstrated a serious commitment to employment,

establishing the new *Jobs and the Economy* department. This provides a new opportunity for the Province to develop innovative solutions toward Aboriginal social and economic inclusion and the LMI is one idea worthy of serious consideration.

It should also be noted that the provincial government appears to have integrated some features of the LMI approach into a government centred model that currently focuses on their relationship with industry sector councils and through the establishment of Manitoba Jobs and Skills Development Centres. However, this approach runs contrary to the holistic approach of the LMI model proposed, which brings all stakeholders to the table with an emphasis on fully understanding and responding to the deeply rooted challenges facing many Aboriginal workers as a starting point toward sustainable transition into the labour market. Community-based organizations and others working with marginalized Aboriginal jobseekers seem to agree that current practice has serious limitations and moves too far from what the research shows to be most effective. It isn't clear why the provincial government continues to resist the LMI model proposed. While we can only speculate, it may be that establishing an LMI that is community driven, led and controlled would mean that government would lose too much control. They may have concerns about whether the community has the capacity to deliver and they may want to avoid the politics that may arise as various stakeholders compete to lead the LMI. While it is likely true—establishing an Aboriginal LMI will come with some growing pains—this government has not shied away from controversial policy decisions in the past and given the importance of Aboriginal people to the Manitoba's labour market, this could be an important legacy.

IX. CONCLUSION

An Aboriginal focused LMI would integrate the same concepts that we know work best for Aboriginal people who have dropped out of school and returned as adults—small, safe and centred on trusting relationships (Silver, Klyne & Simard 2006; MacKinnon 2011).

Establishing a permanent LMI could provide the mechanism needed for the development of long-term relationships between employer, training organizations and jobseekers through a single entity focused solely on making the employment relationship work for both employer and employee. It would provide graduates of training programs with a resource to help them find work; and it could provide individuals exploring both work and training opportunities with a central place to

go to direct them to their various employment and training options. It could also provide cultural sensitivity training for employers and cultural reclamation programming for Aboriginal job/training seekers by linking with existing organizations that have developed expertise in this area.

A LMI could help connect Aboriginal graduates of training programs with well-informed employers willing to go the extra mile. For those uncertain about whether or not they want to pursue employment or further education and training, a LMI can support individuals as they explore their various options. It cannot be overstated that a central feature of a LMI is that it is community based. It is different from typical government employment search programs because its mandate is far more comprehensive in scope. A central feature includes its ability to continue to support individuals, training organizations and employers over the long-term – an important feature that does not currently exist.

The idea of an Aboriginal LMI increasingly makes sense as the Aboriginal population grows and employers begin to recognize Aboriginal people as an important source of labour. If the recent discussion generated through the Manitoba Business Council and that reflected in the aforementioned Conference Board of Canada report are any indication, there are likely to be several broad-minded employers who will see the virtues of an Aboriginal LMI in Manitoba.

There seems to be a growing number of employers who understand the longer-term benefits of creating workplaces that are more understanding and accepting of cultural and experiential differences. An Aboriginal LMI working closely with the existing network of community-based training organizations, post-secondary institutions, labour unions and employers, could provide an important additional support bridging the divide between supply and demand. It could also respond to the Conference Board's call for a simplification of points of contact between employers and Aboriginal organizations (Howard, Edge & Watt 2012)

The continued low level of Aboriginal participation in the labour market and the over representation of Aboriginal people among those with low-education, low-wages with few opportunities for advancement suggests that we are failing to meet the needs of many Aboriginal people. We must therefore find new policy and program responses to better assist Aboriginal people transition into employment that provides a path to better social and economic outcomes.

Labour market intermediaries have been successful for marginalized workers and employers in other jurisdictions. An intermediary focused on supporting Manitoba's most excluded demographic is a cost efficient solution that simply makes sense.

X. REFERENCES

- Alfred, Taiaiake. 2009. *Peace, power, righteousness: An Indigenous manifesto*. Second Edition. Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- 2005. *Wasáse: Indigenous pathways of action and freedom*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Autor, David H. ed. 2009. *Studies of Labour Market Intermediation*. National Bureau of Economic Research. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Brownell, M.D., N.P. Roos, L. MacWilliam, L. Leclair, O. Ekuma, and R. Fransoo. 2010. “Academic and social outcomes for high-risk youths in Manitoba.” *Canadian Journal of Education* 33 (4): 804-836.
- Cunningham, M., and G. MacDonald. 2012. *Housing as a platform for improving education outcomes among low-income children*. Urban Institute.
- Elwood, D. 2004. *Grow Faster Together, or Grow Slowly Apart*. Washington: The Aspen Institute.
- Fernandez, L., S. MacKinnon, and J. Silver. 2010. *Social Determinants of Health in Manitoba*. Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba.
- Hamilton, A.C., and C.M. Sinclair. 1991. *Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba*. Winnipeg: Province of Manitoba.
- Hart, M. 2010. Colonization, Social Exclusion and Indigenous Health. In *The Social Determinants of Health in Manitoba*, edited by Fernandez, L., S. MacKinnon, and J. Silver. Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba.
- Harrison, B., and M. Weiss. 1998. *Workforce Development Networks: Community-Based Organizations and Regional Alliances*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications.
- Howard, A., J. Edge, and D. Watt. 2012. *Understanding the Value, Challenges, and Opportunities of Engaging Metis, Inuit and First Nations Workers*. The Conference Board of Canada.

Lang, K. 2007. *Poverty and Discrimination*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Macdonald, D., and D. Wilson. 2013. *Poverty or Prosperity: Indigenous Children in Canada*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba.

MacKinnon, S. (in press) *Decolonizing Employment: Aboriginal Inclusion in Canada's labour Market* Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press: Forthcoming.

Mendelson, M., and N. Zon. 2013. *The Training Wheels Are Off: A Closer Look at the Canada Job Grant*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy.

Mitic, W., and M. Rimer. 2002. "Child & Youth Care Forum." 31 (6) December.

Newman, I. 2011. "Work as a Route out of Poverty: A Critical Evaluation of the UK Welfare to Work Policy." *Policy Studies* 32 (2): 91-108.

Silver, J. ed. 2013. *Moving Forward Giving Back: Transformative Aboriginal Adult Education*. Winnipeg: Fernwood.

Silver, J., D. Klyne, and F. Simard. 2006. "The Tools You Need to Discover Who you Are: Aboriginal Learners in Selected Adult Learning Centres in Manitoba." In *Their Own Voices, Building Urban Aboriginal Communities*, edited by Jim Silver. Halifax: Fernwood.

Silver, J., and G. Loewen. 2005. *Moving Low-Income People in Winnipeg's Inner City Into Good Jobs: Evidence on What Works Best*. Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba.

Silvius, R., and S. MacKinnon. 2012. *Making Employment Work: connecting Multi-Barriered Manitobans to Good Jobs*. Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba.

Statistics Canada. 2006a. "Census 2006 Community Profiles." Online Catalogue no. 92-591-XWE.

— 2006b. “Aboriginal Population Profile.” Online Catalogue no. 92-594-XWE.

— 2011a. National Housing Survey (NHS). Data Table 99-012-X2011039. Labour Force Status (8), Highest Certificate, Diploma or Degree (15), Aboriginal Identity (8), Age Groups (13B) and Sex (3) for the Population Aged 15 Years and Over, in Private Households of Canada, Provinces, Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations, 2011 National Household Survey.

— 2011b. National Housing Survey (NHS). Data Table 99-014-X2011032. Selected Demographic, Income and Sociocultural Characteristics (109), Income Statistics in 2010 (3) and Income Sources (16) for the Population Aged 15 Years and Over in Private Households of Canada, Provinces, Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations, 2011 National Household Survey.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). Accessed September 30, 2014 at <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=39>.

