

PRECARIOUS WORK IN THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION SCARBOROUGH REGIONAL REPORT September 6th, 2016 - Variety Village

On jobs you said

- People in Scarborough are seeing full time jobs being replaced with contract and part-time positions due to “cost-saving measures”. This trend is impacting all areas of work including hospitals, colleges, LCBO, government, etc.
- Governments have not been immune to this trend.
- Given this trend towards hiring more part-time and temporary employees, people are experiencing a lack of stability, access to benefits, and described feeling disposable.
- Public sector cuts and wage freezes have created a strain on public sector employees such as teachers, nurses, contract instructors, etc.
- People are becoming more dependent on “project work” and are moving from contract to contract.
- Given limited work opportunities, young people are moving towards more precarious positions such as retail and hospitality, which often provide low wages and un dependable work hours.
- Given the short term positions available, small businesses cannot create long-term relationships or build trust with employees.
- Attendees reported that when they take longer contracts (1 year+), it removes them from the job market for an extended period of time. This makes it more difficult to find new contracts or positions when they are done with their initial contract and they often need to undergo “job training” to find new opportunities.
- All companies and organizations are not without fault. Even progressive organizations and non-profits are taking advantage of short term work by creating micro-contracts or having non-paid work.
- Young people feel guilty about taking low paying or contract work; this guilt should be placed on employers for providing precarious work.
- There are no protections for workers who are forced to work “under the table” in the service industry. These workers are in even more precarious and exploitative situations.
- **Proposed solutions:**
 - **Improve the federal Labour Code, including but not limited to changes that would empower and support employees to hold their employers accountable; work with the provinces to improve their respective labour standards.**
 - **Federal government must lead by example for the provinces in terms of hiring practices, standards, benefits, etc.**
 - **Need harsher penalties for workplaces and employers found breaking labour laws.**

On temp agencies you said

- Temp agencies are being used by workers as a means of survival. These agencies are dehumanizing employees, exploiting them, and do not provide job stability or benefits, regardless of how long a worker is with an agency.
- By not paying people enough for their work, temp agencies devalue the work that they are being hired to provide.
- We have heard first-hand accounts of companies hiring through temp agencies and paying \$30 an hour, yet the worker is getting only getting \$12 an hour – temp agencies pocket the remainder.
- Temp agencies create legal loopholes for workers who are injured on the job. Current laws state that workers must be injured “on site” for compensation to be considered, but temp workers are never working “on site”.
- Training for employees needs to be seen as a long-term investment and using temp agencies undermines such commitments to invest in workers.
- **Proposed solutions:**
 - **Regulate temp agencies.**
 - **Close loop holes in the Labour Code that allow temp agencies to put workers in precarious situations, with regards to workplace health and safety.**

On education you said

- Provincial funding cuts are negatively impacting the quality of education. These cuts trickle down to institutional department and faculties, eliminate staff and affect courses and programs offered.
- Faculties and departments that are not deemed “profitable” tend to receive less support and have their funding cut first. This reality has led to entire departments and programs being eliminated at post-secondary institutions.
- Students are being pressured to study in these “profitable” streams. Valuable faculties, such as the social science and humanities, are devalued on campuses and amongst the general public.
- Education should not be viewed as what is “profitable”, but rather as a public good. Often programs in social sciences and arts are strong skills-building programs that positively feed back into the community.
- Due to high tuition fees, students are taking on large amounts of debt without obvious job opportunities after graduation. More and more people cannot pay back their debt as a result.
- Tuition fees in Ontario are not affordable for the majority of young people.
- Given these circumstances, young people are discouraged from attending university or college to get the necessary skills training needed to participate in today’s job market.
- Education can help young people to understand that their individual problems are connected to a collective struggle.
- In High schools, money management and planning should be a focus.

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- **Proposed solutions:**
 - **Post-secondary education must be accessible to all Canadians. No piecemeal approaches will do.**

On Structural Barriers you said

- People of colour face significant barriers to accessing stable employment.
- Some workers remove “Scarborough” from their resume and replace it with “Toronto” to avoid being discriminated against and stereotyped by employers.
- Some immigrants chose to return home, due to lack of employment options and opportunities.
- People must view the job market through a gendered lens and how current employment opportunities impact people. Additional factors must be considered, such as the issue of childcare.
- People with less education have access to jobs and job mobility and have difficulty obtaining additional education or training.
- In work environments not overtly friendly to LGBTQ and Trans folks, people may fear coming out to their employer. This fear creates a significant amount of stress in the workplace and creates an environment in which folks will leave if they feel like the atmosphere is hostile. This sentiment is even greater for Trans workers.
- Race and racism play a huge role in accessing well-paying jobs. Systemic discrimination and violence make it increasingly difficult for people of colour to have stable employment.
- Pay day loan centres are beginning to move right across from employment centres and are targeting marginalized communities.
- Attendees reported a lack of support for black workers, including but not limited to access to affordable childcare, lack of accessible education and training opportunities.
- The prison system has a significant impact on communities of colour.
- Pardons do not address the stigma that people face after being in prison. Due to the expensive process of receiving a pardon, many people opt out of even seeking one.
- Community programs like the YMCA can set people up for success, but based on the record low levels of employer investment in training, it seems as if employers are not interested in utilising these training programs.
- Workers have significant barriers to challenging workplace discrimination without jeopardizing current or future employment opportunities.
- People are experiencing gender and sexual discrimination in the workplace. Examples include the hyper-sexualisation of women in the service industry and gay men being told to “man up”.
- **Possible solutions:**
 - **Update the federal Labour Code to protect workers who challenge workplace discrimination and exploitation.**
 - **Significant investment in accessible language training services.**

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On Social Supports and Services you said

- There are not enough supports for young people with disabilities. Once people living with a disability have completed their post-secondary education, they are faced with a lack of support with regards to housing and employment.
- People are relying on the same social services for generations. It is difficult to break the generational cycle.
- Social services are being eroded by the federal government, making it increasingly difficult for young people to make ends meet.
- Most people reported difficulty accessing the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) and receiving payments.
- Multiple career changes have a negative impact on people's ability to accrue pensions and keep health benefits.
- Movements towards freelance and contract work means that workplace benefits are becoming less and less accessible.
- Lack of comprehensive and affordable transit options impact people's ability to take certain jobs or shifts. The length of the commute negatively impacts people's overall well-being.
- Part-time childcare spaces are not available, limiting generally a woman's ability to join the workforce.
- At risk youth in Scarborough are experiencing difficulties, as there is not enough funding for after school programs.
- There are not enough social services available for youth. Scarborough just lost its only youth shelter.
- Advocacy levels are capped for charitable organizations. For organisations doing outreach and work with marginalized and at risk communities, this limits the type of work they can do and their effectiveness to push for systemic change.
- **Proposed solutions:**
 - **Expand current health care system to cover all aspects of health, including dental care, vision care, mental health care, and pharmacare.**
 - **Detaching benefits from employers and having them covered by the federal government. That would make benefits carry over from one job to another, assisting people who work multiple jobs, or contract work.**
 - **Need federal investment and partnership with the provinces and municipalities to ensure adequate investments in public transportation infrastructure.**

On unions you said

- It is a rarity for young people to have benefits and to be unionized.
- Non-unionized folks on university campuses are in extremely precarious positions as they can be fired at any moment.

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- Young people are starting to see that forming a union can be a career limiting move. Most workplaces are opposed to having unionized staff and to the unionization process. Employers are opting for cheaper options, and lower wages are a part of that.
- Attendees felt that many employers think that the current regulations are fine and do not need to be changed or addressed.
- Attendees were concerned that, for employers who don't follow the law, the current employment standards are not enforceable with the structures we have.
- A unionized work environment would address a number of issues regarding unsafe workplaces and unfair employers. The province needs to promote labour laws that encourage unionization.
- People are being hired on contracts for jobs that can and should be full time. Even labour unions are hiring contract employees. This adds to the normalization of precarious work.
- People bring useful skills to positions that could be useful to organizations outside of short-term roles. An example that was shared suggested unions hiring organizers to run a short campaign could be hired full-time and bring their talents to other roles in the union.
- **Proposed solutions:**
 - **Need more unions engaged and working with precarious fields of employment (retail, minimum wage workplaces) to organize a new generation of labour activists.**
 - **Unions need to prioritize engaging young people, recognizing the opportunity of having them involved and engaged within their unions.**