

Zoom invitation - SCFEA Committee Meeting, June 30, 2020 - Culture and Heritage Sector Public Hearings

Introduction

My name is Emad Hussain and I am the President of the Regent Park Islamic Resource Centre. The Resource Centre's goal is to establish a culturally services and programs for the Regent Park community and foster diversity through unity and embracing inclusion.

COVID-19 is the toughest crisis we have faced in generations. Ontario's residents see COVID-19's affect Ontario's economy, their families, and their everyday life. Today I will discuss how the government should action specific issues COVID-19 has exposed namely:

- 1. Home and Long-Term Care**
- 2. Economic Support and Universal Basic Income**
- 3. Student Employment Opportunities**
- 4. Capacity Building**

1. Home and Long term Care

In Regent Park, family orientated care — by which I mean keeping family members at home with family rather than sending them to long term care facilities, is the first choice for those connected to the Regent Park Islamic Resource Centre. Keeping families whole under the same roof should be considered a high priority. This allows elderly parents to continue cooking and eating food and dishes that connect them to their community, culture, and heritage. This could help reduce depression and isolation. Furthermore, according to Home Care Ontario, the average per-diem cost for an Ontario patient receiving care in a hospital bed is \$842/day, \$126/day for a long-term care bed, \$42/day for care at home. That makes home care the most cost effective. Perhaps we could explore financially subsidizing families to take care of their elders in a way that is similar to the Canada Child Benefit. The more we connect our elders to their culture and communities, the easier the aging process will be for everyone.

Similarly related, more subsidized part-time PSWs will expand (), scheduling options for people who do shift work, and who may be afraid of leaving their loved ones alone during the day. A workforce training and retention strategy is needed. The Government should try and recruit enough people who speak

common languages in Regent Park (Arabic, Somali, Bengali, etc.) to help clients communicate their care needs.

Regent Park needs more community space for large community events, prayer space — and now, physical distancing. If the province wanted to build a new long-term care facility that could provide culturally appropriate care to elders in Regent Park and that had prayer space, it could be popular and create opportunities for youth in Regent Park to practice their artistic skills while engaging seniors and recipients of long term care.

2. Economic Support and Universal Basic Income

COVID-19 has hit all aspects of Canadian society and business. The impact on the tourism and service industry with the cancellation of physical business conferences, conventions has reduced tourism in Canada. What are we going to do about the taxi & uber drivers, hotel staff, flight attendants, store workers, the small and community based business owners and their employees when facing losses of more than 60% in business activity? This crisis is in many ways a continuation of the earning and inequality gap.

We suggest “Universal Basic Income” (UBI) like CERB for households, and especially to help meet the needs of low income households. Having a UBI will contribute to removing the anxiety and scarcity mindset plaguing our workers post pandemic and give them a sense of financial ease. A UBI could also empower family members who want to stay home and take care of their elders to do so

3. Student Employment Opportunities:

Students and young people are and will be hurting from the sudden lack of economic opportunities. Youth unemployment stands at 30% (according to Trading Economics) and for students returning in the fall, nearly 40% (according to Huffington Post) are out of work. Given that minorities have faced higher unemployment rates, these youth unemployment figures are likely significantly higher for youth who are visible minorities. These statistics are concerning since it means an entire generation of young people that will be idle and an unproductive unit of society, will not be able to develop the experience and skills that are vital for successful careers, have lower than normal incomes and less savings, and for those graduating it means entering a bleak job market where long term underemployment is a likely prospect.

Many students in the community including my son are actively seeking a job and one for his co-op work term. He enjoyed working since it gave him confidence, purpose, enhanced his individual and collaborative skills, and a sense of pride in what he is doing. That feeling should not be taken away from the students of this generation. What may be suggested is incentivizing and

supporting local employers who do hire students through subsidies and other means. Public works projects such as beautification, and creating or improving infrastructure should be considered for youth employment. Pairing this issue with the new need for community and economic self-reliance, utilizing local labor for farm instead of migrants, decoupling needs from other regions and bringing it to the province or even to a community level where students can not only gain job experience but perhaps even play an entrepreneurial role in establishing new firms.

4. Capacity Building

Now I will talk about another pressing issue – Capacity of Building of the small Non-profit Organizations. It was always a big issue but now during this pandemic time, it is a real threat to the existence of the small non-profit organizations. As per Chandler and Scott Kennedy (2015) Organization Capacity building is what is needed to bring a not for profit to the next level of operational, programmatic, financial, or organizational maturity.

It is a chicken and egg situation, which came first? Organizations provide a valuable service to communities with their limited resources. Non-profits and small organizations are reducing work hours and programming during COVID. This is the reducing the long term capacity of organizations that do cultural and heritage work. Culture and heritage helps mental health, promotes tourism, and leads to the sharing between cultures that drives innovation. Culture and heritage organizations like the Regent Park Islamic Resource Centre now need the government to help protect capacity in our entire sector.

Conclusion

Public investment will boost not only individual income but increase economic activity and even create a pro-business environment. But it mustn't be done so that puts multinational companies first. It must be done so in a way that is for Ontarians. It must be Pro Ontarian.

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