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The Community Intermediaries Research Project

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Abstract

The Community Intermediaries Research Project (CIRP) investigated the social challenges and needs addressed by Canadian non-profit community-based organizations, the social and community contexts in which they operate, and the information and services they provide to citizens. These organizations are described as community intermediaries because they act as links between various levels of government and citizens. The CIRP research team used a case-study, mixed methods approach. This paper presents an overview of the results of the CIRP study and includes a discussion of institutional knowledge and memory.

Introduction

This study examined a class of community organizations known as "community intermediaries" in their role as providers of services to community members through intermediation with government agencies or other organizations.[1] Community intermediaries typically design, host and manage programs for community members that are sponsored by external organizations, typically government agencies or private foundations. In many cases, intermediaries are involved in holistic ways in the lives of clients, not only providing services for them within their organizations, but also helping them with external, life-critical matters, such as locating housing or helping to enroll them in programs that are managed by other agencies.

Community organizations play invaluable roles as intermediaries and, in general, in their regions, cities, and neighbourhoods. Many fulfill critical needs of specific constituencies such as senior citizens or people with disabilities. The use of information and communication technologies (ICT) is integrated to various extents in this sector as it is in most others.

The purpose of the Community Intermediaries Research Project (CIRP) was to examine the roles that ICT play in the work of these organizations. The study examined: the provisioning of learning, health and wellness, and employment services; the effects of program management policies; technical and economic sustainability issues; and information needs, uses, and seeking behaviours.

This paper presents selected results from the study and examines issues of institutional memory and knowledge sharing. A comprehensive report on the results of the CIRP is given in Community Intermediaries in the Knowledge Society (CIRP, 2006).

Methodologies

This study was conducted at four community organizations across Canada. They are referred to anonymously here as: (1) job placement organization, (2) skills and training organization, (3) community development and employment resources organization, and (4) health and wellness centre. The characteristics of each community are given in an appendix to this paper.

The CIRP employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Separate paper survey instruments were designed for clients and staff. A representative sample was chosen for the client survey, reflecting their income levels, gender, ages and language spoken. Each survey instrument was administered across all organizations. Most were administered in person during site visits. In some cases, the respondents were not accessible during site visits and, thus, it was necessary to have surveys submitted by mail. The response rate from the completed client surveys was 45 per cent of 514 attempted surveys. Individual interviews and focus groups were also conducted with a subset of clients and staff at each site. Audio recordings of each of these sessions were made, transcribed, and analyzed using qualitative data analysis software.

In addition, a new problem solving method called information environment mapping (IEM) was developed for this project (McIver, 2006) to characterize information sources and information seeking

[1]The Community Intermediaries Research Project was conducted through a partnership between the National Research Council Canada and the University of New Brunswick, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, and Health Canada.

strategies employed by community intermediary staff. This methodology was adapted from the cognitive walkthroughs heuristic human-computer interface evaluation technique (Wharton, Bradford, Jeffries & Franzke, 1992). The goals of this part of the research were to understand: (1) the types and sources of information that community intermediary staff use in their jobs, (2) how staff access those sources, and (3) what unique problems exist for staff in accessing information. These three facets define a community intermediary staff person's information environment.

Each IEM was performed through an interview process. Respondents in this study were presented with hypothetical scenarios in which they were asked to assist a client in solving a problem. A unique scenario was developed for each community intermediary organization visited during the project and were based specifically on the services they provided for their clients. Audio recordings of each IEM session were made, transcribed, and analyzed using qualitative data analysis software. A total of 40 IEMs were performed across the four sites: nine at the health and wellness centre; seventeen at the job placement organization; eight at the skills and training organization; and six at the community development and employment resources organization. Each site was analysed separately. The output – or "mapping" -- is a qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts using as a framework a taxonomy of information types, access methods, and influences and constraints on access to information. This taxonomy is an adaptation of the taxonomies developed by McReadie and Rice (1999a & 1999b).

Related Work

The CIRP sought to perform a broad examination of ICT-related issues facing community intermediaries in Canada using case-studies combined with quantitative and qualitative methods. The means by which community organizations use ICT to fulfill the act of intermediation for their clients have been investigated in Canada from a variety of focused perspectives and also in other national contexts.

Canadian studies of service provision by community, voluntary and non-profit organizations have also been performed. Hall, Andrukow, Barr, Brock, de Wit, and Embuldeniya (2003) studied ways in which organizations in these sectors can build capacity. A related study by Hall, de Wit, Lasby, McIver, Philanthropy, and Evers (2004) extended this work by identifying factors that predict an organization's

ability to fulfill its goals. Industry Canada performed a similar assessment in a joint table initiative on the voluntary sector (2002). Its outputs extended this research further by developing strategies to respond to the factors preventing fulfillment of an organization's mission. Ludgate and Surman (2004) examined how the work of voluntary organizations is structured around the use of ICT and made recommendations for improving it.

The use of ICT in community organizations, in particular the Internet, was examined in the Irish context by Trench and O'Donnell (1997). Their research – which was early with respect to other work presented here -- found that community organizations were able to pursue their missions without the use of ICT. Further, community organizations were found to search for and guard information they deemed useful rather than share it with other organizations.

A series of studies on the digital divides in Canada at the national, individual (Reddick & Boucher, 2000; Reddick, Saravanamuttoo, & White, 2004) and community levels (Rideout & Reddick, 2005; Rideout, 2003) provide detailed, longitudinal analysis on issues related to access, the use of ICT, the importance of a diversity of content to meet users' needs, the need for a multi-channel approach to information and service delivery, and the important role played by community organizations in meeting the information and service needs of the public. The CIRP was designed as a deepening and extension of the individual and community-levels of analysis of this research. It addressed gaps in knowledge due to community-level digital divides, and the critical roles played by not-for-profit community organizations in addressing the challenges and opportunities for information and service delivery to the public.

Information environment mapping (IEM) is a method developed for the CIRP to characterize the information sources, information-seeking behaviours, and unique problems in using information faced by community intermediary staff. The IEM methodology was not intended as a replacement or alternative for existing conceptualizations of information and information seeking. It is seen as a data gathering and analysis methodology that can be applied to any number of such conceptualizations. These include *information grounds* (Fisher née Pettigrew, 1998, 1999), *information poverty* (Haywood 1995; Schiller 1996), *information use environments* (Agada 1999; Metoyer-Duran 1991), and *insider/outsider models* (Chatman 1996). The CIRP chose to apply the IEM methodology within the framework of cross disciplinary conceptualizations of information, access to information and constraints on access to information developed by McReadie and Rice (1999a & 1999b). This framework was

extended by the CIRP to capture more recent access technologies and to represent intermediation processes. These extensions are elaborated on in *Community Intermediaries in the Knowledge Society* (CIRP, 2006).

The IEM was adapted from the cognitive walkthrough (CW) methodology by Wharton, Bradford, Jeffries and Franzke., which was designed as a low cost usability evaluation method for human-computer interfaces. CWs are one of several inspection evaluation methods for user interface mock-ups or early prototypes. The other class of inspection methods is heuristic evaluation (Redish, Bias, Bailey, Molich, Dumas, & Spool, 2002). The goals of the IEM methodology differ somewhat from those of the CW methodology. Like the CW methodology, the IEM approach attempts to create a setting where researchers can observe respondents solving a real world problem. Unlike the CW method, however, no sequence of correct actions for solving the scenario is assumed when constructing an IEM. The goal for this new methodology is to observe the unique perspectives and problem solving approaches of each respondent.

Information Environments

Staff at all of the community intermediary organizations showed that they have comprehensive views of their information environments. They have been creative and adaptive to influences and constraints in accessing information that they need to help their clients. Priority has been given by staff to finding and using the best means possible to help clients.

People within a given domain often find creative solutions to everyday problems, the uniqueness of which they may take for granted. Their solutions may not be obvious to those outside of the domain. Information environment mappings sought to capture these unique solutions and insights.

Part of the IEM analysis examined information in the context of each organization along several dimensions. It examined how information is represented, how information is exchanged, and what influences and constraints exist on exchanging information. Selected findings are presented here.

Representations of information

A variety of representations of information were observed to be in use across the community intermediaries. Web content was a major format in this category, as was expected. However, some non-electronic forms of information remain vitally important and arguably more important than Web content and e-mail.

Oral communication – transmitted using electronic ICT or otherwise – was seen as a vital mode of information exchange by most staff members. Staff across all organizations indicated that interpersonal exchanges were critical to finding current information of importance to clients. Many staff members indicated that they prefer to use oral communications to engage with clients and to make initial contacts with external organizations. This mode of communication, especially face-to-face, was cited as being critical for making accurate assessments of a client's condition. Oral communication was seen as more appropriate and more effective for exchanging information with clients. In some cases, the needs are specific to the domain of the program.

> I find that my job works best in person, word of mouth, with sharing knowledge hands-on as you're doing things. I'm not certain that technology is going to ever change that. My information is largely horticultural and what's not horticultural is based on a conservation basis and again the best way to teach it is not through a book but by example and by practice. You can tell a person, you can write a person, you email a person and say your compost should be the consistency of a rung out sponge, that doesn't mean anything until somebody puts their hand in it and squeezes it and knows how it feels, they have no idea (Community Development and Employment Resources Organization, Respondent 3).

Thus, ICT that support this mode of communication have the potential to increase social inclusion and cohesion. One staff member explained as follows:

> We want to give the opportunity for the employer to voice a concern and email is often a method that people use when there are concerns and they don't want to talk about something either face-to-face or over the telephone. What often happens then is communication would break down. So it is clearly better to have a face-to-face or a telephone call when there is a concern. Email is often used as a cop out. When people want to say something that they don't want to say to somebody face-to-face (Job Placement Organization, Respondent 8).

Face-to-face communication is sometimes the only option for exchanging information with clients because some lack telephones. This has created a transitive constraint on staff members who must go out into the field to communicate with clients in their homes. Their own lack of communication technology has been seen as a risk by some staff because it prevents them from contacting the organization during sometimes dangerous field visits. One staff member explained as follows:

> I'm working with ... in the poverty. It's just that in case of emergency there's nothing I can really do when I'm there. And just to call a cab, for example, if I have to leave quickly or whatever. I have a pager. This is in case that an emergency happens here and I'm away. But it's like ... and on the opposite there's nothing (Health and Wellness Centre, Respondent 2).

Printed representations of information were also observed to be vitally important within community intermediaries. Each organization identified a small number of printed sources of knowledge that play

central roles in the services they provide. In three of the organizations this was a collection of information that identified local community resources related to the services offered by their own organizations. These guides were used to help clients find help in various areas, including social services, housing, jobs, and health care. The fourth organization identified a national funding sources guide. Only one of these sources offered the alternative of on-line access. One type of guide was offered as a downloadable file. In all cases, these sources of information were fee-based, which presents added pressures to financial constraints faced by community intermediaries.

Means of exchanging information

Information used by community intermediaries can also be characterized by the processes employed to exchange it. Some processes are the result of law. Federal law requires these organizations to obtain consent to access a client's personal information and to act on their behalf with that information. This is treated by some organizations as integral to their new client intake process. Service offerings can depend highly on obtaining this consent since these organizations act as intermediaries between their clients and other entities. Other legally or policy-mandated consent processes cited were for involuntary interventions on a clients behalf and for obtaining various types of certifications for clients.

As expected, most forms of technology are used by the community intermediary organizations to access information, with advanced telephone services, mobile telephony, advanced software applications (e.g. statistical analysis and accounting), e-mail, and Web services being the most prevalent. The use of other electronic ICT was observed in various subsets of the community intermediaries. This included Web-based collaboration tools, text messaging, video recordings, video conferencing, and TTY-based text messaging for the hearing impaired.

Social and other realities have often added complexity to accessing information by staff. A critical category of complex access methods are those where “ICT divides” exist between staff members and clients, which are often due to combinations of low income and homelessness. One staff member explained as follows:

> We also serve people who are homeless that wouldn't have a shelter address that sleep outside. We still serve them. If they state to us that in fact they are a resident of [our city], on the streets of [the city], we'll serve them (Job Placement Centre, Respondent 2).

In these situations, physical sites combined with free communications services, such as Web-mail accounts and public telecentres, are required for staff to reach clients. Staff sometimes have ultimately

had to make physical visits or use postal communications because some of their clients do not have telephones or lack stable places of residence. A physical site, such as a homeless shelter, may provide a temporary address to which staff can send postal mail. One staff member gave an example of this type of situation:

> [We attempt to communicate] by phone but even then sometimes they don't always have a phone and if they don't have a phone then they probably don't have Internet. That is pretty difficult so usually you have to hope that they will stop by. Or if you have their address then you can send a letter say hi, how are doing, kind of thing. We need you to come in for this, that (Job Placement Centre, Respondent 7).

Linguistic barriers present another area of complexity. Accesses in this context involve not just the use of translated information from single static sources, like printed guides. What is often involved in environments where information sources in a minority language are not sufficient is a painstaking translation and integration of information written in multiple languages – usually English and French in the context of CIRP -- from multiple sources.

Another category of complex information access methods involves the legal and organizational barriers between the partner organizations of a community intermediary. Staff members at one community intermediary have been required to carry out legal processes to gain access to information across organizational boundaries or use alternative sources of information.

Constraints and influences on exchanging information

The major technical constraints on the exchange of information that were cited by staff across all of the community intermediaries included: outdated and unreliable ICT infrastructure, insufficient technical support, insufficient user training for both staff and clients, clients lacking personal communications services, and insufficient Internet bandwidth. Staff also cited the lack of mobile telephony and inability to connect to their organization from outside (e.g. home) as other hindrances to serving clients and carrying out other duties.

Geographic constraints were also found to greatly influence the use of ICT in community intermediaries. One organization has been serving several geographically disparate communities to which travel is not always safe (e.g. due to heavy snow falls). To work effectively across its region, this organization has creatively integrated video conferencing, e-mail, and Web-based chat room facilities into its meeting processes.

Accessibility for clients who are physically disabled has not been adequately addressed in three of the four organizations. A staff member at one of the organizations acknowledged this:

> I don't even know if there is an elevator in this building, I don't think that there is. I think it is just an accessibility issue for them. Like if anyone was disabled they wouldn't be able to come into the building to use the services here ... (Community Development and Employment Resources Organization, Respondent 2).

Affective constraints and influences – those that speak to attitudes or judgements – on exchanging information and on ICT were also prominent across the community intermediaries. While most staff seemed at least moderately comfortable with ICT, several staff members cited explicit distrust or beliefs in the inefficacy of technology. One staff member expressed this general view as follows:

> I don't like machines. ... They, like in the office people use it to talk to each other, it creates an impersonal connection. People hide behind them instead of sitting at the table and having a staff meeting once a week and talking, like reporting and talking about common issues in the community work we are doing (Community Development and Employment Resources Organization, Respondent 6).

> I still don't trust the machine, don't trust the machine. I still use a fountain pen at home by the way (Community Development and Employment Resources Organization, Respondent 3).

Some communication modalities were judged in terms of their effectiveness and appropriateness in helping clients. There was, for example, an impatience expressed by some staff with using e-mail, even if they use it regularly. It was seen variously as a means of communication that allows avoidance or obfuscation as well as being a mode that is unprofessional. One staff member explained as follows:

> Sometimes you get people that are very emotional about something at the point when they are stopping by. Although I would much rather deal with somebody that is having an upsetting or an angry experience in person than deal with it over the phone. Again you can't put it into an emotional context as well when somebody is over the phone. It may be something that you can defuse or get a better explanation of in person (Community Development and Employment Resources Organization, Respondent 3).

Socio-economic constraints on exchanging information figured prominently at most of the sites. As discussed above, many clients do not have stable addresses, which makes it potentially difficult for staff to communicate with them. Many clients use mobile telephones for this reason; however, sometimes social influences on clients have come into conflict with economic realities, as one staff member explained:

> It always amazed me, it seems like everybody has a cell phone ... I think there were two reasons for that. ... I think a lot of people see cell phones as being a status symbol, if you have got a cell phone you are somebody. We have a lot of people here who upgrade their cell phones fairly regularly to have the newest, fanciest, flashiest cell phone that they can possibly get their hands on. ... I think is also due to the fact that a lot of them can't get landlines because their phones have been cut off for not paying their bills. So a lot of them get a cell phone and then they purchase one of these pay as you go plans, where you purchase a bank of hours. ... a number of people said, well I have used up by hours for the month so I am inaccessible for the next two weeks because I have no more time. (Job Placement Organization, Respondent 14)

Free Web-based e-mail accounts were also cited as partial solutions to communicating with clients who lacked stable addresses as they allowed messages to be left for them and retrieved later from a public telecentre, possibly one run by a community intermediary.

Cross-cutting Issues

The CIRP identified a range of issues that are orthogonal to the various perspectives given by staff of their information environments. These include issues of sustainability and funding for community intermediaries, language issues, and reorganizations within sponsoring agencies.

Funding issues

The community intermediaries that were studied often face significant financial pressures. In general, it was found that these organizations have not received sufficient funding to sustain staffing, programs, ICT infrastructure and technical support. These organizations have generally combined "core" governmental funding with project-specific grants, and cost recovery charges for services they have provided.

Some community organizations in Canada are eligible to receive what is termed "core funding," which is a relatively stable type of financial support. It has typically been derived from part of a government budget. The health and wellness centre, for example, has received substantial core funding from its provincial health department. Three of the community intermediaries were found not to receive significant blocks of core funding. Though core funding has been seen as ideal by community intermediaries in the study, it has been reduced or eliminated across different levels and areas of government within Canada.

Restrictions on how grant money can be used has posed significant problems for community intermediaries in supporting ICT infrastructure and its corresponding technical support requirements. Many grants do not allow expenditures on: hardware or software purchases or upgrades, technical support training and end-user training, and Internet access services.

The ICT-related impacts of these funding constraints on institutional knowledge are significant. In most cases, the community intermediaries studied had inadequate levels of technical support and high turnover rates for those they were able to hire. Most of the organizations studied depended on a small number of technical support staff, which resulted in bottlenecks for service. The people in these positions have not been afforded opportunities to improve their ICT skills and knowledge, which would, in turn, enable these organizations to improve their administration and service offerings.

Many clients of community intermediaries have also been impeded in their use of ICT, partly for economic reasons as discussed above. Basic telephony is not affordable to some. Clients may also experience homelessness. Various means have been used by clients and staff to achieve communication as a result of these constraints. A significant proportion of clients in some communities have mobile telephones, according to staff. At one organization, however, staff indicated that significant numbers of their clients exhaust their pre-paid service before they have money to replenish it.

Staff develop creative workarounds to economic constraints. One organization simply uses side walk signs written in chalk for part of its advertising strategy. Several organizations assist clients in obtaining Web mail accounts at their own computer centres to improve their reachability.

Language Issues

English and French are the official languages of Canada as articulated in its Official Languages Act (1988). The scope of the Act combined with provincial laws is focused on federal institutions. Provincial law has established French as the official language in Quebec and both English and French as the official languages in New Brunswick. Language minority communities exist throughout Canada, including not only the official languages, but the languages of aboriginal peoples as well a growing number other non-official languages due to a widening diversity of immigrants.

Linguistic barriers between speakers of the official languages of Canada have presented a significant cognitive constraint on one of the communities studied in the CIRP. These barriers were the impetus for the development of its special programs and resources within a minority language in their geographic area. ICT have been used in this context to maintain a specialized database of community resources that are accessible in the minority language.

One other organization cited the potential for linguistic barriers -- in their role as community intermediaries -- given an increase in the diversity of language groups. Staff at this organization were cognizant of resources available to assist clients who require interpretation or translation should the need arise.

Change within sponsoring organizations

Frequent changes in external sponsoring organizations pose barriers to information seeking, among other problems. Reorganizations in an external organization sometimes requires that the files of a community intermediary's clients be transferred to new entities within the restructured bureaucracy. Such processes can make client files temporarily inaccessible and cause delays. The problem was explained by a staff member as follows:

> ... Of course there is always restructuring, there is constantly restructuring within like [Government Agency] for instance. ... I know a process that we did two weeks ago now has already changed ... they are like, no, 'well I can't give you that now because it is done differently.' ... So like in the cases of getting files transferred from one office to another, sometimes that can be a little frustrating because there are some offices where we may wait up to a week to get a file transferred. Whereas the process itself only really takes five minutes. ... What we can get from other offices done in a matter of an hour or so, sometimes takes several weeks to get from certain offices ... [There are] some offices who require client consents ... before they release any information, others don't ... so you adapt and you learn what one office wants compared to the other and you make your changes accordingly (Skills and Training Organization, Respondent 8).

Discussion: Community Intermediaries As Knowledge Focal Points

The information environment mapping in CIRP shows that community intermediaries exist and function much like Star and Griesemer's (1989) notions of boundary objects. In this respect, they provide both repositories and channels – or standardized forms in Star and Griesemer's terminology -- for knowledge. They function in these capacities for communities that would otherwise be highly knowledge-deficient. This includes deficiencies in job and job-seeking skills, health care knowledge, and information about urban development. These repository and channel functions are both multidirectional and critical for populations that lead marginal existences, largely without access to personal telephone services, much less advanced ICT like the Internet.

In their repository function, these organizations maintain knowledge from and about their communities. This includes intimate and qualitative knowledge of their demographics and, most importantly, their

current needs for employment, education, housing, and health care. This type of information is also of critical importance to governments and other entities in informing their policy making and development of effective programs. Community intermediaries also maintain knowledge on behalf of their community members, including information about government programs and procedures, training and employment skills information, and general community resources. The knowledge domains are specialized to the mission and focus of the organization.

In their channel function, community intermediaries play a critical role in exchanging information between their community members and external entities, most importantly program sponsors in government and the private sector, health care providers, potential employers, and educational institutions. Community intermediaries are ideally situated to perform this function. Their intimate knowledge of their community enables them to be more effective than other types of entities in reaching people with critical information. Literacy levels were shown to be relatively low in some of these communities and in some cases, such as the health and wellness organization, community intermediaries help to bridge language barriers faced by community members in the exchange of information.

Institutional knowledge regarding the operation and maintenance of ICT within the community intermediaries studied was largely dependent on one or a few staff members. This knowledge can often be relatively stagnant due to the lack of continuous training opportunities, as cited above. Operational practices did not seem to support the development of consistent maintenance procedures or other technical knowledge that would be durable in the face of the high turnover rates in technical support staff positions. Knowledge of ICT infrastructure has, therefore, not been durable in these organizations. One mitigating factor seemed to be a reliance on common software platforms, such as Microsoft Windows and Office. This allowed staff to access collective sources of technical knowledge via the Web or from other staff members.

Staff who are involved in the overall administration of these organizations tended to emphasize the use of ICT more often in the contexts of accessing and managing information. This was the case for discussions of current situations in their organizations and when contemplating potential uses of existing technologies or imagining new types of ICT.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Many of the activities in which staff engage to seek and use information on behalf of clients involves the use of social networks. Staff consult personal contacts. Clients may be encouraged by community intermediary organizations to share information amongst themselves. These networks can potentially be strengthened through the use of the emerging social networking technologies based on Web services. Such services allow people to locate useful information and contacts more efficiently. They can also provide sophisticated analyzes that would otherwise be intractable for an individual or even an organization. The usefulness of social networking tools to support specific community intermediary domains, such as services for seniors or the homeless, must be considered.

Community intermediaries need systems that improve upon the ways in which they interface and exchange information with the governmental organizations that sponsor programs they offer to their clients. Solutions must support: secure on-line transaction processing for the filing of official forms by community intermediaries; distributed access to and dynamic tracking of information submitted by community intermediaries, including client files; and, the coordination and update of procedures across organizational boundaries. All requirements proposed here have an integral requirement that privacy and security of client data be preserved. Maintaining privacy is a major concern of clients and staff in these organizations. It is also a legal requirement.

The National Research Council of Canada Institute for Information Technology is completing a technological assessment based upon the CIRP data. The assessment is examining social networking, client resource management, and other technological areas where innovative ICT might better support the missions of community intermediaries and address issues discussed here.

Acknowledgments

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Appendices

The characteristics of the communities served by each of the community intermediaries studied in the CIRP are discussed here.

Health and wellness centre

The mission of the health and wellness centre is to provide improved access to health and social services to a minority-language group in its province. Services include a full range of health and social services, from elder care to youth and family services. The formation of specific partnerships allows the provision of services such as seniors' day activities, frozen meals and wellness clinics. The minority language population of the community where the centre is located comprises 2 per cent of the total population. There is a rough parity for income distribution among the minority and majority language population. Approximately 40 per cent of both populaces earn less than $12,000 per year, while roughly 33 per cent of the minority language speakers and 28 per cent of the majority language speakers earn more than $30,000 per year. Fifty two per cent of the minority language population are female and forty eight per cent are males. The median age for community residents is 40. The median age for females is 41.7 years and 39 years for males. The divergence in population size between men and women increases with age, with more females than males surviving into the 67-74, 75-84 and 85 and over age ranges. Twice as many minority language speakers are likely to have a university degree, while slightly more of the minority language group are likely to have graduated from high school then the majority language group. The majority language speakers are more likely to have less than a grade nine education then the minority language group.

Job placement organization

The mission of the job placement organization is to provide support to persons with mental illness and other disabilities. Toward that end, it provides clients with employment and educational programmes, as well venues for social interaction. The greater community has a population of 774, 072, and of this approximately 10 per cent of individuals aged between 15 and 64 have disabilities (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2005) compared to the provincial disability rate of 13.5 per cent. The portion of the community population, aged between 15 and 64, who have activity limitations is 13 per cent. In 2004 there were 15, 216 individuals who were receiving provincial disability support. Individuals who receive these benefits, who are residing in group homes or domiciliary hostels, receive $112 per month for a personal needs allowance. The poverty rate of individuals with disabilities in the community is greater than 24 per cent (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2005).

Skills and training organization

The mission of the skills and training organization is to provide training and skills for people by creating a link between adult education and employment as part of a community-driven social and economic strategic plan to support regional development. The employment rate in the region according to the 2001 census was 58.6%. The leading occupational categories were the sales and service sectors, accounting for 23.1% of jobs held, and positions relating to trades, transport and equipment operation, accounting for 21.8% of jobs held. Jobs relating to processing, manufacturing and utilities accounted for 13.4% of the region's workforce, while 11.7% of the working population held positions related to primary industries.

A large portion, 41.6%, of residents in the region have less than a high school education, while residents with a high school diploma and either some post-secondary education, or a trade diploma, follow respectively at 19.4% and 19.2%. Residents with a college diploma numbered 10.8%, while 8.5% of the populace possessed a university degree. With respect to requirements for social assistance, 1,970 "families", a category that also includes unattached individuals, and 69% of who were in the prime labour force age category, required some form of social assistance from the federal and provincial governments. With respect to specific transfers, 37.2% of total transfers for the region were federal Goods and Services Tax credits in 2003, an initiative that is aimed at lower and moderate-income families. The second most popular programme was Employment Insurance, with 27.2% of transfers. The second most important transfer for women was the Child Tax Benefit, which accounted for 13.2% of total transfers (Kitchen, 2004).

Community development and employment resources organization

The mission of the community development and employment resources organization is to foster resident participation and direction of the neighbourhood's revitalization. Additionally, the corporation seeks to support the creation of a stable, healthy and safe neighbourhood that is "diverse, welcoming, vibrant, clean and self reliant."

The total population of the neighbourhood is 5,045, of which there are 2,570 males and 2,460 females. Ten percent of the neighbourhood population is made up of those persons identifying themselves as Métis origin and 16.8% as North American Indian origin.[1] The majority of the population are between the ages of 20-40 years. Only a minority of the population is under the age of 20 years. The majority of the population is single (66.3%); few residents were married and separated, and 3 times as many of these were divorced. Only 10% of the population is living as married or common-law couples. The two-person family is the most common size of census family (65.5%) and 18.9% of the population of census families is a three-person family. The average number of persons per census families is 2.6, while the average number of children in the home is one. The most common form of family structure is the female lone-parent family (33.8%), with higher prevalence rates than married couples with and without children. This type of family is also the one with the lowest income. The median family income for residents is $23,290 (compared to the provincial median income of $54,724. Family incomes categorized by family type offer more detail. The median income for married couple families is $32,245; $25,545 for common law couple families; $23,218 for male lone parent families; and only $13,168 for female lone parent families. The incidence of low income by Statistics Canada standards can be categorized for economic families, private households, and unattached individuals. For this neighbourhood, 54.5% of the population of economic families is considered low income, 64.6% of private households are considered low income, and 70% of unattached individuals are considered low income.

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[1]The Métis are a Canadian ethnic community. According to the Métis National Council, Métis is the designation of a "distinct aboriginal people" in Canada who "emerged out of the relations of Indian women and European men" which resulted in "the gradual establishment of distinct Métis communities, outside of Indian and European cultures and settlements." See < http://www.metisnation.ca/ >.

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