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Submission to the Special Advisors for the Changing Workplaces Review 2015

Poverty Free Thunder Bay is a coalition of concerned individuals, groups and organizations which advocates for change at the local, provincial and national level to eliminate poverty and its impact on our community. We are involved in campaigns for affordable housing and for significant increases in rates for Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Assistance Program and minimum wage.

My name is Sara Williamson. I am vice-chair of Poverty Free Thunder Bay. We are pleased that the Changing Workplace Review has come to Thunder Bay to hear deputations from stakeholders in Northwestern Ontario. Although we received an invitation to make a deputation to CWR, a number of other community organizations involved in helping build the bridges between workers and good jobs were unaware of this opportunity. The Workforce Planning Board, the employment services, literacy organizations and Aboriginal organizations are sources of information on the most common and the worst workplace situations where the Labour Relations Act or the Employment Standards Act were inadequate in protecting workers. What can be done so that you can glean their knowledge?

Poverty Free Thunder Bay is part of the Fight for \$15 and Fairness Campaign. We endorse the recommendations in “Still Working On The Edge” by the Workers Action Centre and in the Ontario Federation of Labour submission to Changing Workplaces Review. Two important results of making these recommended changes will be balance in people’s lives and higher incomes.

In this submission we offer a few statistical markers and the experiences of some precarious workers. Research on this aspect of the Northwestern Ontario economy is sparse.

Part-time employment is one indicator for which some Statistics Canada data for Northwestern Ontario is available. As of 2014, there were 22,700 part-time employees in Northwestern Ontario, which is slightly below its historical average. Part-time employment has slowly increased since 2011 by 1,000 employees. Part-time employment as a proportion of total employment and the total labour

force in the region grew from the late 80s until the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and has stayed largely steady ever since. As of 2014, part-time employment made up roughly 21 percent of the total labour force and 23 percent of total jobs in the region. In 2014, part-time employment in Ontario and Canada made up roughly 19.5 percent of total employment, while in Northwestern Ontario it made up 23.7 percent. If we assume the proportion of Northwestern Ontario workers in part-time who want full time jobs is the same proportion of part-time workers as Ontario, then there are 7,300 part-time workers or one third who prefer full time work. <sup>1</sup>

However this is just a partial indicator of precarity. As one document (soon to be published) observes, “one must consider other indicators which contribute to uncertainty in the job market, such as, job permanency, self-employment, underemployment, layoff rates and job finding rates. In addition, there are likely large discrepancies between the level of job uncertainty when breaking down the regions’ labour market by demographics, industries and occupations.”<sup>2</sup>

In Thunder Bay and District in 2014, the Low Income Measure was approximately \$21,000 per year for a single person (using the 2011 LIM after-tax calculation, adjusted for inflation). Minimum Wage at \$11/hour is \$20,020 for full-time work. A living wage in Thunder Bay is \$30,030 annually and \$16.50/hr before-tax. A living wage intends to assess the wage necessary for living a fulfilling and healthy lifestyle. <sup>3</sup>

There is a close link between economic development and human capital. One of the measures for human capital is education level. In the Northwestern Ontario labour force 22% have not attained high school graduation, and 26% attained only high school.<sup>4</sup> People without high school graduation are most likely to be in precarious work. With employment stability, they can move ahead in plans for further education and training

Three occupation groups with many low wage precarious jobs are retail sales, hospitality and accommodation, and services. Thunder Bay’s retail sales have been growing from 2002 to 2013, for a total increase of 31.3%. This is reflected in retail sales being at the top of the five Thunder Bay industries with the most employees. The top five are Retail Sales 7,200; Construction 4,000; Food & Beverage Services 3,800; Hospitals 3,700; and Primary & secondary schools 3,500.<sup>5</sup> When we slice the statistics another way, the service sector represents 83% of Thunder Bay’s total employment.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Document to be published shortly

<sup>2</sup> Document to be published shortly

<sup>3</sup> Thunder Bay and District Poverty Reduction Strategy Annual Update 2015 [www.lspc.ca](http://www.lspc.ca)

<sup>4</sup> It’s what you know (and where you can go) [www.northernpolicy.ca](http://www.northernpolicy.ca)

<sup>5</sup> Thunder Bay Economic Activity Index Report (2014-11) [www.thunderbayventures.ca](http://www.thunderbayventures.ca)

North of Superior Workforce Planning Board 2014-2015 EmployerOne Survey Results notes *“When it comes to the distribution of hires by employment type the proportion of jobs that are permanent full-time among the new hires is lower than their share in the existing workforce (54% versus 67%). That difference is made up among temporary part-time hires, whose proportion of all hires is 19% compared to 8% in the present workforce. That suggests that among the new hires there is a larger share of more precarious employment.”*<sup>6</sup> Too many jobs are neither permanent nor full time and often lower paid.

It is a similar story in Thunder Bay as it is elsewhere in the province for precarious workers. They are living on the edge. Many go to the food bank regularly. Inadequate wages and benefits exacerbate mental and physical health problems. Children’s lives are restricted. There is little time to participate in community activities. Precarious low wage jobs are heavily represented by women (many single mothers), Aboriginal people, recent immigrants and young people.

It is an uncomfortable irony that there are staff in non-profit organizations who are precariously employed earning below the poverty line while providing services to others in deep poverty.

In preparation for this presentation we spoke to many precarious workers and here are some of the issues that they experience.

### **Stories**

**A Licensed Restaurant server** who only earns \$9.50 hour starting this October. “Many customers don’t tip not realizing don’t even get \$11.25/hr. Loves her work but ...”

In licensed liquor establishments, there are days and shifts when business is slow. Some have a client base who are low on cash towards the end of the month. These factors can reduce the liquor servers average hourly earnings to below even the \$11.25 minimum wage that servers in fast-food places get. In 2014 Liquor servers enthusiastically signed the petition to raise minimum wage to \$14 an hour. Sadly, they are still near the back of the bus.

### **Recommendation from Poverty Free Thunder Bay**

- regular minimum wage for ALL workers
- \$15 minimum wage
- encourage employers to champion a living wage

**Worker at a local fast food call centre:** We (about 35 employees) actually never got breaks at all. When we would ask for permission, we were told “We don’t allow breaks here.” And we weren’t allowed to eat. No breaks or food for 10 hour shift. The manager also went through our bags to make sure we didn’t have our phones and she forced us to add her to Facebook. She once told me when I

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<sup>6</sup>Thunder Bay District 2014-15 EmployerOne Survey Final report North of Superior Workforce Planning Board [www.nswpb.ca](http://www.nswpb.ca)

took over someone's shift for them that I would have to ask the person if I could get their pay cheque." This worker and others just shut up until they could find another job. A colleague filed a law suit after leaving and also filed a complaint with the Ministry of labour.

### **Recommendation from Poverty Free Thunder Bay**

- support workers in making employment standards claims including anti-reprisal protection and timely response
- increase the risk of detection and cost and enforcement of ESA violations
- make it easy to unionize
- establish regulations for respecting worker's privacy

**Lakehead University sessional and contract lecturers** (the ones without their photo on their department's web site). One former sessional lecturer with a PhD told me that she is working as a Personal Service Worker because it provides a more stable income for fewer hours compared to the 60 hour weeks of preparation, teaching and grading during the 4 month contracts with the university.

### **Recommendation from Poverty Free Thunder Bay**

- no differential treatment in pay, benefits and working conditions for workers who are doing the same work but are classified differently, such as part-time, contract, temporary or casual
- require employers to convert casual and part-time jobs into full time jobs.

**Contract worker** for employer with less than 50 employees was off work sick for several weeks without pay. Only remedy was to work extra hours at straight time to make up for lost time. This while still recovering from illness.

### **Recommendations from Poverty Free Thunder Bay**

- paid sick leave;
- no exemption from Employment Standards for employers with less than 50 employees

**Social Service Worker** (after a workplace injury took retraining to be a counsellor but only casual front-line work with client care and homemaking duties at an institution was available)

"I am a casual on call worker here. The work is physically & mentally stressful. I am exhausted, sore after three months. I won't be doing full time shifts - too hard on my neck and back. I get \$16.00 an hour. I think we should be paid more in this type of job. Working on call is stressful. **Shift work** even more stressful (affects your sleep, job performance ). You don't get enough sleep. My parent is in a long term home now. Until now I had to fit caring for my parent into my 24 hour day.

I work all 3 shifts on call. Lucky to have scheduled shifts. I work 1-5 shifts a week. I try not to mix days, evening or midnights. The thing that is different from

perm part time is that they have more benefits and do the same work schedule every week For people that work overtime in a 24 hour day, like I do, I think they would be taken advantage of. We don't get paid over time because we worked less than the 40 hour week. People who don't have a permanent full time or part time job suffer with no benefits. They get hit hard when they take sick leave because they don't get paid. I can't take sick leave, or mental health day. If I am sick I have no pay. I am just looking into if I reinjure myself what I can do and how they, human resources, would calculate my time even though I am casual but I am working almost full time hours. I am just looking into what benefits I have access to. Through the wellness program at St. Joe's (hospital) I can get counselling for stress. The thing that bothers me the most is violence in the work place from clients/residents. We get threats, verbal abuse, some staff are physically assaulted and I think we can't sue if we get injured from this. I am looking for a new casual, part time job. I think that people who have a disability like I do work extra hard trying to keep a job, and full time jobs are hard to find in Thunder Bay in some areas. My choice is work and try not to hurt yourself or live in Poverty.

### **Recommendations from Poverty Free Thunder Bay**

- predictable schedules for all workers;
- overtime pay for additional hours in that day's shift;
- paid sick leave;
- same wage and benefit package as those in permanent jobs;

### **Homecare Personal Service Worker (PSW)**

An agency told a PSW that his client was planning to go to camp (the cottage) that week if the weather is good. The PSW wanted to take his girlfriend for a trip out of town. So on Sunday he checked with the agency to see what was happening. The agency said that the client hadn't called for a PSW visit. So, Monday, the PSW and his girlfriend were headed out of town when he got a phone call that he was needed for a one hour home visit.

The majority of PSW jobs are part-time. To get 30 hours or more in a week, the workers are forced to work for more than one agency. Thus, when another PSW calls in sick, their work buddy can't take on the emergency shift. Too often the result is a missed visit to a home care client. At one agency, workers work seven days a week, with an average of about four hours a day. Because the hours are so minimal, if a worker gets called to another job for more hours, they call in sick to their regular job in order to earn enough money to get by.

### **Recommendations from Poverty Free Thunder Bay**

- work schedules two weeks in advance
- require employers to offer available hours of work to those working less than full time before a new worker performing similar work is hired
- require employers to preferentially consider current part-time and casual employees before hiring additional part time or full time workers
- require that the minimum shift per day be three hours

### **Cleaning Service Worker**

Women working in building cleaning jobs observed that these are not entry level jobs. They are dead end jobs – no health or pension benefits, no raise and no promotion. It is physically hard work that should be recognized with adequate pay. Over the years, cleaners working multiple part-time jobs reported suffering a lot of wear and tear on their bodies. Because the employer has no health plan, their minimum wage must cover the costs of orthotics and weekly chiropractor sessions. It is difficult finding a place to rent when the landlord learns that the rent would be coming from a mother working part-time jobs. In 2012, one woman and her child lost her apartment and all their possessions in the horrific East End sewage flood. While homeless, she had to continue to go to work. She could not afford to take time off work to cope with the disaster.

A young man, who worked in cleaning, said that it is good work but it is hard and he felt his work should be worth more. A minimum wage of \$14 per hour (in 2014) would give him confidence in himself. He would feel like a valued citizen and contributor to society.

Single mothers said if minimum wage was \$14 per hour (in 2014)

- They could spend more time with their children if they didn't have to work so many hours to cover family expenses.
- They could buy more nutritious fresh food for their growing children. "The teenagers go through milk so quickly. It is a bottomless pit."
- Take a vacation by Greyhound bus to a campground.
- Take school courses to upgrade skills for a better job.

### **Recommendations from Poverty Free Thunder Bay**

- require employers to convert casual and part-time jobs into full time jobs.
- paid sick leave, vacation leave and personal emergency leave
- \$15 minimum wage indexed to inflation

There are so many hard working people trying to make a decent life for themselves and their families. They are doing everything they can to stretch their puny pay cheques. They compromise their health. They and their children lose precious time together. Their children feel they are less favoured than their peers. It is outrageous that workers are being paid poverty wages and have to work so many hours that they can not have a normal personal and community life.

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