

OPINION



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Editorial

We need solutions, not blame, to youth job 'crisis'

ISSUE: Young people can't find quality jobs and are facing huge debt, uncertain future.

In our hyperbolic age, it's not uncommon for every quibble, no matter how minor, to be described as a crisis.

Yet, there likely isn't a better label to affix to the plight of today's young people.

Ontario's unemployment rate for workers of all ages is 7.5 per cent, whereas 16 per cent of this province's young people can't find work. That's above even the 13.7-per-cent national youth unemployment rate.

More troubling still is a report from a recent meeting hosted by several prominent unions indicates many of those young people who have landed a job have done so by taking low-wage positions with no benefits and little, if any, job security. About 25 per cent of young workers in Canada are under-employed and an estimated one third of university and college graduates, many of whom are laden with student debt, are mired in low-skilled positions.

It's been said children are our future. If that's true, the future looks pretty bleak.

To improve conditions, the submission from young workers who gathered last week called for the province to link infrastructure spending to job creation, expand the youth jobs strategy, raise the minimum wage for everyone to \$14 per hour (eliminating a lower student minimum wage), slash tuition by 30 per cent over the next three years and do away with unpaid internships that have become a reality for many.

The threat here is tangible and Ontario Federation of Labour president Sid Ryan isn't exaggerating when he says this could be the first generation in recent history to fare worse than its parents and grandparents. Are we prepared to accept that?

Even affluent York Region isn't immune. Several young people the York Region Media Group spoke to reported feeling squeezed and data from the 2011 National Household Survey, the

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most up-to-date figures available, show the unemployment rate for young people 15 to 24 is 20 per cent compared to 5 per cent for workers 25 to 64.

Humber College economics professor and international studies teacher at Toronto's York University Tyler Shipley notes that not only are many youth unemployed, but many more are under-employed, in unpaid internships, employed on a contract basis and/or working for low wages in precarious positions.

And while much has been made of the youth unemployment rate, little has been done to tackle the under-employment side of the equation, he said, which should be viewed as a troubling fact.

Mr. Shipley points to unions as the best chance for young people to reverse the erosion of wages and working conditions seen since the 1980s.

Making the labour movement relevant once again could boost the fortunes of young workers, but it's hard to say it would alleviate all of their woes. That said, young people need to take a more active role in this fight if not by organizing their workplaces than certainly by getting more involved in the political process and ending the long-standing trend of youth disengagement witnessed in recent elections.

The important thing is that this discussion needs to start happening in a serious way, without devolving into the "blame game". We, as a society, need to take ownership of this problem and start looking for constructive and creative ways to solve it.

Today's young people literally can't afford to wait.

The fact is, the kids aren't alright.

BOTTOM LINE: We need to stop the blame and find solid solution to real problem.

LETTER OF THE WEEK

Move library, use leisure centre for sports-only complex

Re: Library complex to transform into 'lifestyle centre', Feb. 27

I attended the "Skeleton In the Park" presentation on the leisure centre/library expansion Feb. 20.

Members of the public patiently listened to what I thought was a negative presentation by the architects who seemed very green. Obviously, they had been given very little information and cost guidelines to work with by town staff.

We heard the project could cost in excess of \$30 million. Did council approve this kind of figure? Need over greed. A lot of information and research is required before a late April presentation.

The library could move to a new building of up to three levels requiring approximately \$8.3 million in development charges.

I now believe the library should build its own building. This current building should be made a leisure/sports complex. Build a much needed swimming pool to provincial standards with bleachers so we can have

competitive swim events in Stouffville. We heard from the floor that improvements are needed to the current facility, including its change rooms.

We heard a gymnasium and multi-purpose rooms could be added to the complex. I agree, this makes sense. Costs for expanding the parking were not available.

As for the library space being converted for the 55 Plus Club, it seemed to shock the 10 members present. This is not what they want, I heard. A comment to me was "we've been shafted again, Dave". Maybe members could have been informed of the town's plans before being announced at this meeting. I think they left disappointed.

Thirty people attended the meeting, plus staff. It was disappointing a representative from our local media was not present. Residents need to be informed of the details of this much needed project that could even reach \$40 million.

Hopefully, the turnout for the next meeting will have a much larger representation of residents.

DAVID PROBERT
WHITCHURCH-STOUFFVILLE

Community embraces differences at multicultural events

Re: Black History Month events still needed: Stouffville organizer, Jan.30.

I would like to personally thank all of you for your recent contributions to Stouffville's First Black History Month Event Feb. 22 at the Lebovic Centre for Arts and Entertainment - Nineteen on the Park..

This event could not have been a success without the help of major players collaborating on this event and working towards a shared vision.

I would like to thank; the various media that helped us get exposure to the general public, the talented performers and those who solicited and recommended them, Pastor Laird for his prayers, my master of ceremonies Christopher Alexander, Chief Administrative Officer of the Scotia Bank Caribbean Carnival Toronto, keynote speakers; Rosemary Sadlier, President of Ontario Black History Society and Doreen Alexander, President of Sickle Cells Awareness Group of Ontario, Lillie Johnson, founder of the Sickle Cells Association, Councillor

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Check out our Black History event photo gallery at yorkregion.com

bit.ly/1hMIZF7

Phil Bannon, Anastasia Delyon, Ms Black Beauty Canada and all the other volunteers who donated their time to provide me with help and support.

The event was a resounding success and I appreciate your gift of time, energy and enthusiastic support.

A heartfelt thank you to all the attendees who took time from their busy schedules to share in the event, build awareness and foster diversity and inclusion.

Events like this will show that we are more alike than we are different, but our differences are to be embraced for a richer and healthier community.

CLAUDETTE ZABSONRE
STOUFFVILLE'S BLACK HISTORY MONTH
EVENT COMMITTEE

This is debatable

WEIGH IN ON THE DISCUSSION ... e-mail your comments to jmason@yrmg.com