**Income Replacement Policy Pod meeting**

CRWDP – Ontario Cluster

December 5th, 2016

Attended: Rebecca Gewurtz, Pamela Lahey, Dana Corfield, John Stapleton, Norman Helfand, Terence Copes, Emile Toma, Michael Mendelson, Jennifer Laidley, John Rae, Steve Mantis, Wendy Porch

Regrets: Sherri Torjman, Adele Furrie, Joanne ?

Rebecca – Thanks for joining. We’ll look at an overview, why we’re meeting and what we’re hoping to accomplish. We’ll try to mobilize around next steps – actions. We want to take initiatives and come together around 3 priorities. We’ve left it open for us to decide what this could look like and where we want to go from here. In terms of a timeline, we’re thinking of coming together in spring or fall as larger group and then the policy pods can share what we’ve been up to and where things are going. We hope to have something accomplished within 6 months to one year.

**Introductions**:

Rebecca – I’m at McMaster, School of Rehab Science. I am a co-lead with Marcia Rioux for the Ontario cluster of the CRWDP. I’m doing research on benefit systems and disabled workers and how they move through different systems and how employment is pursued while people are using different systems.

Pam – I’m a 3rd year PhD student with social policy analysis experience, currently working on policy change around income support and employment for people with mental illness. My work is very closely related to Rebecca’s.

Dana – I’m a PhD student in Critical Disability Studies at York. My previous work has revolved around disability in the global south, including some policy analysis related to income supplements for families of children with disabilities. In Canada I’ve worked on issues related to indigenous Canadians and disabilities, and I’m here to support the work of the pod and to learn what I can.

Rebecca – Pam, Dana and I, as leads for the pod, our job will be to facilitate the work of the group going forward.

John Rae – I’m a member of the ODSP action coalition, and do work consulting re: injured workers and (other related issue).

Steve Mantis – I’m the chair of the research action committee for the Ontario network of injured workers groups (Thunder Bay and the provincial group). I’ve been looking at long term outcomes for injured workers. I’m also on the executive committee of CRWDP, and have been the community lead on previous initiatives.

John Stapleton – I began working with the Ministry of Community and Social Services 40 years ago. I’ve got 30 years of experience working in social policy within government (including ODSP and other programs). I’ve worked on income security, aspiring work force, and am currently with the Metcalfe Foundation working on papers (topics such as welfarization), now looking at people ageing with disabilities and income supports.

Michael Mendelson – I’m with the Caledon Institute and have been working in the area of social policy since 1973. I worked on the disability tax credit. I’d like to explore basic income supplements. Generally I work on income security program design and delivery.

Terry– I’m Executive Director at the Sudbury Community Legal Clinic, helping people get benefits including ODSP, Canada pension plan disability, workers compensation. 30 years experience with and interest in how disability schemes interact or fail to interact. Currently involved in talks with stakeholders across the country and senior bureaucrats to redesign the CPP disability scheme – these talks are ongoing.

Jennifer – I’m with the income security advocacy centre – a researcher looking at systemic law reform. I’m also involved with the ODSP action coalition committee, direct advocacy with government, and have a focus on the income security side of things.

Emile – I’m a senior scientist and co-director of CRWDP.

Norman – Director of Income Security Modernization with the Ministry of Finance in Ontario. I was director of ODSP for 3 years also, and director for commission for the review of social assistance in Ontario. I was recently involved in the enhancement in Canada Pension Plan. In next year or so, there will be a review of CPP – provincial and federal and I’ll likely be part of that too.

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Rebecaa – Thank-you. I think now we want to identify next steps. We’ve got a lot of great people with lots of knowledge, but we also have limited resources and we don’t want to reinvent the wheel. Our idea is to start by pooling our knowledge, what we already know. So, what you can do to contribute to start is to help gather some resources, let us know what you’re doing and what is going on.

You’ll notice that in the document we sent out we have 3 goals. These were identified as a larger group, based on information and work from first two cluster meetings. The goals are 1) to identify what we know (what innovative policy strategies are out there); 2) to map how to increase policy change (actions we could take, such as research or other efforts – we’ve left it quite open on purpose; 3) take action towards implementation.

 So our first step is pooling what we already know. Some of this info is already on the CRWDP website so we can start populating the excel document with that – and then we’d appreciate it if you could help fill it out some more.

Wendy – I’m interested in exploring episodic disability – on the impact of having episodic disability on trying to engage with these systems, and trying to engage in work.

Rebecca - What do others think of the proposed goals? Do we like them?

Steve – For goal 2 – the integration of benefit programs out there is key. How benefit programs work is an issue beyond employment. Many people will never be employed, and those programs need to provide enough to have roof over your head and food.

Rebecca – Yes, I agree. We need to address income security more broadly, not just as it related to employment.

Terry? – We need to look at what disincentives there are to get employment and get off benefits; what difficulties there are with getting back on for example, if you get off. There are some efforts to remediate these issues, but there are time limits and they are not appropriate for everybody.

Rebecca – If there are rapid reinstatement programs that are working, well, we want to know that, because they are not in all systems/programs. Also if there are things that look great on paper but aren’t working well, we want to know and understand the issues there too.

Jennifer – I agree with Terry? We need to look broadly at income security, that is important. Also need to consider the broader labour market field – opportunities for PWD are pretty limited in that field. A number of things are at work within that field; how it’s regulated, the activities of employers that impact on employability, etc. I wanted to signal that we can’t limit ourselves at looking purely within benefit programs for answers.

R – I hesitate around activities of employers. That might be our connection to the employment capacity pod because we can’t do everything and that seems more like their focus. We are going to come back together as a larger group and we are expecting that there will be overlap and things of interest to each group. The other two existing pods are employer capacity and the right to work. All the pods are inter-related, but we’re only ones focusing on income security. So, that piece needs to be more heart and centre of our work.

Who? – I’m wondering about the third goal – take action. What would that look like?

Rebecca – The policy pods are meant to be action oriented. We want to identify what things will lead to progress and what we could do. Not big changes at this point - small changes that would have an impact. There might be some ripe opportunities. If we can identify where there are opportunities, where we can pass our knowledge around, that’s a place to start. We don’t want to repeat or reinvent the wheel. We want to understand what’s already happening.

Emile – How do we engage? It could be dialogue with policy makers, for example. It would also be interesting to hear what some of those panels are talking about, that could generate ideas and open opportunities.

Rebecca – Things we will do to start, for example: I will edit the goals to get right at what we’re about and to address some of what we’ve been talking about today. Our first steps are pooling what we’re all already doing, what strategies already exist, and then identify what our priorities are. Today Dana sent out links to two spreadsheets. If you could take some time to populate with things you’re already doing and things you’re already aware of, then in New Year, we can identify priorities and areas we want to focus on.

John Rae – I think I need to be added to mailing list. Didn’t get the email with the links.

Rebecca – Will do, and we can always fill in information via email and/or phone for anyone who prefers to do it that way too. Just send us any information or we can connect by phone and take your information. We will get meeting minutes out shortly. We’ll also rewrite our goals and we welcome any comments via email. Is it OK to ask you all to fill out and share your ideas and work?

Jennifer – So to be clear, the idea is to look at what’s already there and this pod is not going to do research, so the idea is to match up ideas?

Rebecca – Yes, and if we identify research gaps, we could also apply for grants to address those. That would be one possible outcome; gathering a strong research team for funding through another grant. We can also identify key opportunities to share what we already know about good programs.

Jennifer – Identifying gaps important. People have been making recommendations for many, many years, but change doesn’t happen from talking alone. Three is a need for political advocacy. I’m wondering where that fits in this pod, if at all?

Rebecca – We are linked to advocacy groups and that can be part of what we’re doing. It depends on who wants to take on the different pieces. The goal is to show that, at end of day, we’ve taken some action (research, sharing, advocacy, enacting policy change). So we could link to advocacy groups, as oppose to inventing a new one. That is my idea, let me know if anyone thinks differently.

Jennifer – Right, there is no point in reinventing wheel. There are already strong advocacy groups. We could work with them.

John Rae – It is true that a lot of advocacy has happened, but there hasn’t been a lot of change. So maybe just linking to existing groups is not enough. We need to do more.

Rebecca – We do need to identify our action plan, our change, and that can include advocacy as well.

Jennifer? – I think that it’s really important for academics to meet with politicians and civil servants. I think that can be really interesting and productive.

Emile- Can we get a list people’s ideas?

Rebecca – Dana, can you explain the google docs sheets?

D – We’ve developed two separate google doc sheets. The first one is for listing existing policy strategies that you’re aware of. There are columns for jurisdiction, policy strategy, and impact/comments. So, if you know of innovative policy strategies that are working (or not), you can list them there. The second one is for gathering information on pod members’ work and interests, as they relate to the questions we’ve proposed for the pod. The questions are listed on the left as a reminder, and there is space in two columns to the right to include your name and any activities you are involved in that relates to those questions. Also, further down there is space to list other activities related to the pod’s focus that are not reflected in the questions we’ve already identified. So, there is one sheet to fill out innovative policy strategies that we’re aware of, and there is another to list your activities and interests.

Rebecca – I’m very aware of time and I know some people need to go. We will start by getting the meeting minutes out and the documents populated. We may need to change the documents a bit and we can do that. And then we can narrow in on what would be a good opportunity to focus on. We’ll decide on key areas we want to see change.