

▼ POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Optimism lies within our youth

When I was a young adult in the 1980s, many of my peers were disgruntled about the lack of jobs, the Reagan and Thatcher governments in the U.S. and Britain respectively, and the economy.

Some of these people were students who were sheltered from the job market—but worried about graduation. Others were working at low paying jobs with little security, while some were on income assistance.

It wasn't a great time. Things started to change in the mid-1990s and now many of these people have gainful employment and secure futures.

But what happens when these low times continue for too long.

Currently in Great Britain, the number of young people either not employed or not in school is 935,000.

One in five young people eligible to work are jobless.

This group is so large that they are now referred to as NEETs—Not in education, employment or training.

So how did this happen to a First World country, which has been considered a major economic power for the last 300 years, if not longer.

Economic historians cite the inability of the British labour force to transition its workers from the manufacturing sector to the information economy.

In others words, as manufacturing declined and workers were displaced, there was no place for them to go.

This began to hap-



SCHOOLS IN

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pen close to 30 years ago, which means that many of the current NEETs come from families where their parents might not have worked for some time.

This in turn legitimizes a family culture whereby living off social assistance is considered the norm as opposed to the exception.

Children raised in communities where high unemployment exists, where there is little eco-

nomic activity combined with overall despair, may find it very difficult to rise above this culture and move forward.

They need to shift the mindset of these disillusioned youth and give them the ability to believe in a future that includes further education, gainful employment and, most importantly, a life beyond the day-to-day drudgery of living on social assistance.

Luckily Canada has not experienced the same high level of unemployment with our young adults.

Our labour force has a history of migrating to where there is work. Since Confederation families have migrated west, while others have moved east to find full-time employment.

Through the years Canadian society has increased its support for

post-secondary education where today over 50 per cent of Canadians hold at least one higher education credential.

My nephew graduated from high school this past June.

He has a good part-time job but finds it difficult to find full-time employment.

He talks about his future and for now has time to research his options.

We should be grateful that Canadian youth on average are optimistic and realize they can accomplish what they set out to do.

It is within this optimism that the future of Canada lies.

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To deal with this issue the British government is launching a campaign called Backing Young Britain which will have government and business working together to create jobs for young people.

They are also looking at providing more appren-