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**AN INTERNSHIP REPORT INCLUDING AN EVALUATION OF THE  
STUDENT WORK AND SERVICE PROGRAM AT  
MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY**

by

**Jennifer M. Browne**

**An Internship Report submitted to the School of Graduate  
Studies in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education**

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## ABSTRACT

This report describes a twelve week internship at The Centre for Career Development at Memorial University of Newfoundland. The following chapters will describe the goals and objectives of the internship, relate the measures that were taken to achieve the desired outcomes and describe a qualitative research study on the current Student Work and Service Program (Memorial University component). Chapter One provides an overview of activities that provided the intern with valuable insight into the field of career development. The remaining chapters explore low-income student parents' experiences on post secondary campuses with Chapter Two highlighting current literature on this student population, as well as a history of the Student Work and Service Program and how it has evolved to its current condition. Chapter Three describes a qualitative research study on the Student Work and Service Program (SWASP) that was conducted by the Intern. This research explored the feelings of seven participants in SWASP and attempted to determine if it was achieving its original goals and objectives. Finally, Chapter Four provides a conclusion on the topic, as well as recommendations for the program and further research.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Rationale for Choice of Internship**

In partial fulfilment of the degree of Master of Education, Post Secondary with a concentration in Student Services, the researcher decided to complete an internship at Memorial University of Newfoundland's Centre for Career Development. Participating in an internship provided the researcher with practical experience and an opportunity to apply the theoretical aspects of study in the field of Student Affairs and Services. This site was chosen due in part to personal interest in the area of career development and an interest in how such centres meet the needs of a diverse student population. An opportunity to visit career development centres both on and off campus provided the researcher with a variety of experiences in the field. Centres visited included the Counseling Centre, the Centre for Career Development, the Co-operative Education Services Centre, all located at Memorial University of Newfoundland, the Brother T. I. Murphy Centre, the local YM/YWCA, and the Career Information Resource Centre at Human Resources Development Canada in St. John's, Newfoundland. The researcher's background in this area is limited, therefore, participating in an internship allowed the researcher to acquire and practice the necessary skills required to work in the career development field.

### The Internship Setting

This internship took place over a twelve-week period from September 8, 1998 to November 27, 1998 at the Centre for Career Development at Memorial University of Newfoundland, one of many areas under the umbrella of Student Development, a division of Student Affairs and Services at Memorial. The Centre for Career Development provides a number of services for students at Memorial, as well as potential employers, graduating students and alumni. These services aid students in developing their career related skills and prepare them to make the successful transition from school to work. This setting was chosen because it would provide the researcher with an opportunity to work with students one on one and in group settings, and with potential employers. The researcher would have the opportunity to observe the running of a successful career development centre and work as part of a team in providing these services.

To enhance the experience the internship setting was expanded to the local community and included the researcher visiting other career development centres in the area. These visits were for specific lengths of time agreed upon by the contact person at each centre and by the field supervisor. They ranged from one to three day visits and allowed the researcher to get acquainted with the unique areas and services each centre provided.

### Description of Anticipated Internship Experiences

The main goal of this internship was to provide the researcher with an opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to work in a setting that provides career development for individuals. The internship provided an opportunity to enhance the researcher's professional and personal development. A range of activities were expected during this experience, and specific goals and objectives were set before the start of the internship. These were as follows:

#### Goals and Objectives of Internship

1. Gain knowledge and experience in the field of career development;
2. Develop an understanding of the duties involved in running an effective Career Development Centre;
3. Observe and participate in various projects, both ongoing and in development at the Centre for Career Development;
4. Work with students, both individually and in groups, to get a greater understanding of their career development needs;
5. Increase knowledge of labour market trends and learn how these trends are determined;
6. Increase knowledge of strategies used to attract employers to Memorial's campus;
7. Increase knowledge of strategies applied to attract students to participate in and utilize the services and programs available at the Centre for Career Development;

8. Increase knowledge of grant and proposal writing for both internal and external funding;
9. Learn how technology (Internet) is used in this field and participate in the upkeep of the Centre for Career Development's web site;
10. Increase knowledge of resume writing, interview skills and job hunting skills;
11. Visit other career development centres in the community and compare the services provided and the different groups that use each one;
12. Increase knowledge of budgeting and budgeting strategies;
13. Participate in ongoing evaluations of existing programs offered by the Centre for Career Development;
14. Participate in team meetings;
15. Complete a research component which will involve an evaluation of the Student Work and Service Program at Memorial University;
16. Develop a career portfolio;
17. Further develop leadership skills;
18. Become more aware of the theories of career development, issues of school to work transition and accessibility of career services to non-traditional students.

#### Description of Actual Internship Experiences

In order to reach the intended goals and objectives, the researcher became involved in numerous activities within the internship setting which allowed the

achievement of the previously mentioned goals and objectives. The next section explains how these goals were attained:

1. To observe and participate in various projects, both ongoing and in development at the Centre for Career Development.

To accomplish this goal the researcher became actively involved in projects that were ongoing at the centre. For example, the researcher answered student inquiries and aided in the successful running of programs such as the Student Work and Service Program, Memorial University Undergraduate Career Experience Program (MUCEP) and the Graduate Student Work Experience Program (GradSWEP).

2. Work with students, both individually and in groups to get a greater understanding of their career development needs.

To accomplish this goal the researcher answered student inquiries at the general office at the Centre for Career Development. By listening to students' questions and comments over the twelve-week internship, the researcher became more aware of their concerns and issues in the area of career development. Many of these inquiries included questions regarding recruitment on campus, resume assistance and questions on the various services the centre provides.

3. Increase knowledge of recruitment activities on campus.

The researcher was actively involved with arranging recruitment on campus and posting employment opportunities at the Centre for Career Development.

4. Increase knowledge of grant and proposal writing for funding.

The researcher was responsible for writing a detailed funding proposal for a high-tech Centre for Career Development at Memorial University. The experience provided the researcher with an opportunity to learn the required components of a proposal and the amount of time and effort that goes into such an endeavor.

5. Learn how technology is used in the field and at the Centre for Career Development.

The researcher met with the Web Master for the Centre for Career Development and was provided with an overview of how the various employment positions are posted on the web site and how information on the centre and other relevant items are made available on the web. The researcher learned the importance of this resource as the Centre for Career Development's web site has had over ten thousand visits since June 1998.

6. Increase knowledge of resume writing and job hunting skills.

The researcher examined the many resource materials provided by the Centre for students and staff. This introduced the researcher to the many ways of writing a resume, tips for job hunting and advice for preparing for interviews. The researcher also attended a fifty-minute presentation on resume writing that was provided by a graduate student working at the Centre. All of these experiences provided the researcher with the required knowledge and confidence to critique resumes for students looking for assistance.

7. Increase knowledge of budgeting and budgeting strategies.

While the researcher was not actively involved in the budgeting of resources

available for the Centre, the site supervisor and staff answered all questions asked and aided the researcher's knowledge of keeping a balanced budget.

8. Participate in ongoing evaluations of services provided.

The researcher was involved in keeping statistics on the number of students visiting the Centre and the reasons for their visits. By tracking the services availed of by students, the staff's awareness of student needs increases and also keeps track of the numbers availing of the services provided. Such statistics are useful in ensuring that these services continue to exist on campus

The researcher was also involved in evaluating the existing Student Work and Service Program (SWASP) at Memorial University. This experience increased the researcher's skills in the area of qualitative research and explored the effects this program is having on its participants.

9. Participate in team meetings.

The researcher participated in and contributed to the staff meetings that took place frequently over the twelve-week period. This experience allowed the researcher to stay abreast of the activities and interests of the other staff members. It also provided an opportunity for the researcher and staff to ask questions and voice ideas or concerns about upcoming or past events at the Centre.

10. Become more aware of the various theories of career development.

The researcher was fortunate to be involved in a course offered at Memorial University throughout the length of the internship. This Education course, titled *Career*

*Development and Guidance Throughout the Lifespan*, was taught by Dr. Mildred Cahill and covered the many theories that have evolved over the decades on career development. The researcher was introduced to a variety of views from theorists such as Super, Holland, Jung and many more. As well, the researcher was introduced to a number of career development programs that are successfully operating in Canada. The course also provided the opportunity to examine career development in a variety of populations and age groups. Overall, the readings and assignments, coinciding with the work experience, provided the researcher with an opportunity to examine the use of theory and its application in the field.

11. Complete a research component on the SWASP program.

The researcher conducted a qualitative evaluation on the existing Student Work and Service Program at Memorial University and Sir Wilfred Grenfell College. This activity will be examined in detail throughout Chapters Two and Three.

12. Visit other Career Development Centres in the community and examine the services and clientele of each.

The researcher visited a number of sites, both on campus and around the community, that provide services in the area of career development.

#### *YMCA-YWCA Community and Employment Services*

The YMCA-YWCA Community and Employment Services in St. John's, Newfoundland was the first site visit. This group offers information and guidance to individuals of all ages and to employers who are interested in recruiting or increasing staff



development. The four main services they provide include assessment, career planning, job search skills and labour market information. They also provide a number of community and employment programs for interested individuals. The director, Ms. Karen Youden-Walsh supervised the researcher over a two-day period. During the visit, the researcher attended a presentation by Ms. Youden Walsh and Mr. Gary Ryan, director of the YMCA-YWCA Enterprise Centre, which gave a detailed overview of the centre and services provided.

The researcher also attended a luncheon in honor of a guest visiting from Cuba. This experience allowed the researcher to become aware of the partnerships that exist throughout the world in a number of areas.

On final day at the YWCA, the researcher spent a considerable amount of time with a group of young people currently participating in a mentoring program with federal government employees. This experience allowed the researcher to talk to participants and hear their career development concerns and discuss what they were doing to address these issues.

#### *Human Resources Development Canada*

The researcher visited the HRDC's Career Information Resource Centre in St. John's, Newfoundland. This visit was for the duration of one afternoon. During this time the researcher examined the numerous materials and resources available to the general public. Examining texts in the area of resume writing and job search skills was very useful. The computers and software programs provided were also explored. An

examination of assessment tests available on the computers was completed and the researcher completed an assessment on her career goals. This visit increased the researcher's awareness greatly on the multitude of resources available at this site.

### *The Brother T. I. Murphy Centre*

The Brother T. I. Murphy Centre is located in St. John's, Newfoundland and provides education and career development services to individuals who no longer want to participate in the regular school system, for a variety of reasons. This centre provides an alternative site to complete a high school diploma.

The placement at the Brother T. I. Murphy Centre took place over a number of short visits. The researcher met with Mr. Tim Thorne, Mr. Sheldon Pollett and Ms. Anne Whelan. Mr. Thorne explained the direction of the centre, its services and client group and how they meet the needs of this individuals.

The researcher also worked with Mr. Pollett and Ms. Whelan on an ongoing project at the centre. This project, *Experience Ireland*, involved a number of young people traveling to Ireland to work for a six-month period. The aim of this program is to provide these young people with employment experience in the areas of tourism and information technology. It is hoped that upon their return to Newfoundland their experience will aid them in finding a job in those fields. The researcher was involved in planning a weekend get together for those chosen to participate, including a number of learning activities planned to prepare them for the experience. The researcher was responsible for writing a case study to be used as a learning activity during the training

weekend (See Appendix A). This experience allowed the researcher to become more aware that career development can occur in a variety of creative and challenging forms.

*Cooperative Education Services Centre*

The researcher visited the Cooperative Education Services Centre at Memorial University of Newfoundland for a one-day period. This centre provides services to programs that have co-op or work-term placements as part of their requirements. Under the supervision of Ms. Christine Webb, manager of the centre, the researcher was introduced to the resources and activities there. The information available for students on companies and recruiters was vast and helpful for the researcher. As well, it allowed the researcher to become more aware of the recruitment activities taking place on campus.

The researcher also attended a luncheon with Ms. Webb for the Mount Pearl Chamber of Commerce and met a number of local business people. Such an activity showed the importance of meeting with the employers in the local community and creating and maintaining a positive relationship with these individuals.

*The Counseling Centre at Memorial University of Newfoundland*

The researcher met with Dr. George Hurley, Director of the Counseling Centre at Memorial University to discuss how the centre responds to the career development needs of students who request assistance. This meeting increased the researcher's knowledge of the services provided by the Counseling Centre and how they address the career concerns of individuals. Dr. Hurley explained to the researcher the steps a student is taken through in order to aid their career development, involving a combination of talking to the student

and using trait-factor tests. This conversation allowed the researcher to become more aware of the techniques used by the Counseling Centre on campus and further increased knowledge in the use of theory.

All of these experiences further increased the researcher's knowledge on the services offered throughout the community and the university campus and have provided information that will be used to better serve individuals in the area of career development in the future.

13. Further develop leadership skills.

There were a number of activities and experiences that aided the researcher in further developing leadership skills. Throughout the internship the researcher was involved in a number of activities that required strong organizational and leadership skills. The researcher was responsible for organizing and planning a number of special events, such as, planning and preparing for visiting lecturers from both Canada and the United States. The researcher was also involved in organizing an awards presentation to representatives from both the provincial and federal governments. Working with students and delegating responsibility provided an opportunity to exhibit effective leadership qualities.

### Supervision

The researcher worked under the supervision of Dr. Wayne Ludlow, Professor of Education and Dean of Students Affairs and Services at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Mr. Robert Shea, Manager of the Centre for Career Development at Memorial University of Newfoundland was the on-site supervisor of the researcher. Mr. Shea has completed a Masters degree in Educational Administration at Memorial University and is currently working on a Ph.D. in Higher Education at the University of British Columbia.

### Method of Self Evaluation

There were two main ways the researcher evaluated the internship experience. The first of these evaluation tools involved writing in a personal journal once a week about experiences in the setting. This activity allowed the researcher to reflect on the activities undertaken in the setting and to examine what was gained from these experiences.

The researcher also frequently examined the list of goals and objectives developed prior to the start of the internship. Reflecting on this list allowed the researcher to determine what had been accomplished and what still remained. This constant reflection encouraged the researcher to remain focused on the intended objectives of the internship.

### Organization of Internship Report

Chapter 2 is an overview of the existing Student Work and Service Program (SWASP) at Memorial University. This will cover the history of the program, the target population, the details of the program and its goals and objectives. A literature review will also examine the target population of this program and other programs that target this group of students.

Chapter 3 is a report of the participants' perceptions of, and feelings, towards their participation in SWASP, as well as the methodology of the study, the results and discussion.

Finally, Chapter 4 will discuss the changing role of Student Affairs in serving this student population and will provide recommendations for SWASP, Memorial University and its partners in this program.

## **Chapter 2: The Student Work and Service Program and Supporting Literature**

### **Introduction**

There is a great deal of literature endorsing the need for support services on all post-secondary campuses to meet the needs of diverse student populations. One such distinct and growing group of students is the adult learner, many of whom are also parents. Adult learners differ in a number of areas including age, roles and responsibilities, reasons for attaining a post-secondary education and previous experiences (Whitt, 1994). Therefore, when developing programs to ease their transition into the academic environment, it is essential that faculty and staff be aware of the needs that must be addressed for these students to succeed. This paper will examine one specific group of adult learners, low-income student parents. Literature on this student population will be discussed and the need for support services, particularly in the area of career development will be examined. An examination of the Student Work and Service Program (SWASP) at Memorial University of Newfoundland will be described and portrayed as an example of one program that attempts to aid single and low income parents in overcoming some of the barriers that exist on today's campuses.

### **Supporting Literature**

The idea that adults' lives are filled with transitions is predominant throughout the literature (Breese & O'Toole, 1994; Grey & Herr, 1998; Herr & Cramer, 1998). The successful transition into post-secondary education and then into the workforce depends

on a number of complex factors, as well as the characteristics of the individuals (Tobin, 1997). For a single mother or low-income parent the factors affecting their success are more diverse and complex than for the typical 18-24 year old student with no dependents.

An increasing number of students, including low-income single parents, have expressed that their reason for taking part in further education is to find adequate employment. Students, especially those with the responsibility of children, want to find jobs that will allow them to live comfortably and provide for their families. Adult learners are generally more directed and realistic in their career and educational endeavors due in part to their greater life experiences and increased personal responsibilities, such as children (Gianakos, 1996). Due to their experiences and responsibilities, there is a growing trend that students are focusing on the economic side of education (Anisef & Axelrod, 1993). Astin (1993) reports that there is a larger emphasis on careerism in today's students in than previous generations, and therefore, it makes sense that graduating students, especially those with dependents, want to be prepared for the current workforce and have a relatively smooth transition into their new roles. However, before post-secondary institutions can aid this population they must attract them to the academic community and break down the barriers that discourage these individuals from accessing further education.

There is a great deal of literature establishing the idea that single mothers and low-income parents become entrapped in poverty. Though they crave a better life for



themselves and their children, a number of barriers exist that prevent them from breaking away from a life of poverty and financial dependence. It has been noted that single mothers make up the majority of women living below the poverty line (McLanahan & Booth, 1989; Taylor, Forristall, Power, Ryan, Burford, Parsons & Pennell, 1995). A large portion of these poverty-stricken, female-headed households are receiving social assistance or working in low paying jobs to support their families (McLanahan & Booth, 1989; Sandfort & Hill, 1996; Taylor et al., 1995). Over 60 percent of low-income families in Canada are made up of women and children living on their own, with Newfoundland and Labrador having the highest percentage of low-income families in Canada (Taylor et. al., 1995). According to Statistics Canada (1993) the number of single parent families in Canada has more than doubled over twenty years, with 1,000,000 in 1991 as compared to 478,000 in 1971. More recently, Statistics Canada (1996) has released findings from the 1996 census and reports the number of lone-parent families is continuing to grow and has reached 1,137,510. It is interesting to note that of these lone-parent families, 945,235 are reported to be female-headed (Statistics Canada, 1996).

Such statistics further substantiate the fact that post-secondary institutions have to be more accommodating to this rapidly growing population. One of the most popular ways to escape the life of poverty is recognized as education (Taylor et. al., 1995). However, there are numerous barriers, both within and outside of educational institutions, that discourage low-income parents from going back to school (Rice, 1991). These barriers are frequently mentioned in the literature and include such things as the increasing

cost of education, transportation, daycare and lack of social supports (Taylor, et. Al., 1995). However, Sandfort and Hill (1996) report that studies have repeatedly shown that education leads to greater opportunities for later self-sufficiency. How then do we provide an opportunity for these individuals to access education and become independent, contributing individuals to society? One way is to provide a learning environment that is both supportive and accommodating to the needs and concerns of these potential students.

Once low-income parents have made the decision to go back to school it is essential that institutions provide the necessary supports and services that will allow these students to achieve their educational goals and successfully make the transition from school to work. Post-secondary institutions have a responsibility to their clients to provide them with the necessary skills to go out into the community, find adequate employment and contribute to society. Not finding adequate employment upon completion is stressful for any student, however, for the student supporting a family it can be even more traumatic. The thought of paying back high student loans while providing for a family may be a disincentive to further education, and can cause some parents to panic and return to support services that they worked so hard to break away from. Such a concern must be addressed by post secondary institutions if low-income parents are to consider making the choice to further their education.

### The Student Work and Service Program (Memorial University Component)

Post-secondary institutions are facing greater challenges than ever before. A more diverse student population demands that institutions and their administration take into account the unique concerns and needs of different groups of students (El-Khawas, 1996; Jacoby, 1993; Rameriz, 1993). Single and low-income student parents are one such group becoming more predominant on post secondary campuses; therefore, programs must be introduced to encourage these students to further their education and complete it once started. The institutions must become aware of the barriers that exist for these students and work to alleviate them to increase the accessibility of education for this population. It should be noted that a literature review on the subject of programs to aid single and low-income parents in their quest for further education revealed limited information. There is substantial information and research on adult learners and meeting their needs (Arp, Holmberg & Littrell, 1986; Breese & O'Toole, 1994; Heppner & Olson, 1982; Hetherington & Hudson, 1981; Rice, 1991; Robitschek, 1997; Whitt, 1994). However, very little has been written on existing programs and research that attempt to address the needs of this specific group of adult learners.

A search of existing literature did provide an example of a program at Monroe Community College (MCC) in Rochester, New York that was attempting to meet the needs of low-income students ("Welfare to Work," 1998). This program is through a partnership between MCC and the Monroe County Department of Social Services (MCDSS). The college meets with clients and provides a "one-stop system for career

development and employment” (“Welfare to Work”, 1998, p. 5). The program allows these individuals to study and work on campus while taking into account the various needs of the students. This program acknowledges that students receiving financial assistance from the government may have low self-esteem and require the guidance of those in the institution to help them recognize their full potential and achieve desired goals (“Welfare to Work,” 1998).

At Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) a program was also developed to aid low income and single parents, after many years of lobbying the Federal and Provincial Governments. It began with an attempt to identify the barriers that existed for these students in a meeting that took place in April 1997. Representatives from Student Parents at MUN (SPAM) and Students Older Than Average (SOTA) came together with the Office of Student Affairs and Services to discuss the effects of rising debt loads and examine ways to remove such barriers (Winter, 1998). The result was a recommendation to take an existing government program known as the Student Work and Service Program (SWASP) and gear it towards a specific target group of students attending Memorial University of Newfoundland and the public college, the College of the North Atlantic. The main target groups were student parents on social assistance and low-income student parents. It was observed that these students generally take longer to finish their chosen programs, due to various responsibilities, and, as a result, face greater debt loads upon completion. One of the main goals of the program was to reduce the debt loads incurred. Since its conception, the program has been adapted to include other student populations,

such as students with disabilities and all Memorial students during the summer months, however, the focus remains to aid the main target group throughout the year (Winter, 1998).

While education is recognized as one way of moving away from financial dependence, it alone may not be enough. The objectives and rationale for this program include:

1. Providing low-income student parents with career related experience. This is achieved by providing students with employment on campus in positions related to their area of study. In addition, it is hoped that these positions will encourage relationships to build between students and faculty members.

2. Providing a variety of personal and professional development workshops to participating students (Winter, 1998). The literature supports such objectives and acknowledges that the successful change from being a student to being an employee depends on a variety of factors. Students who have effectively made the transition credit it to “pre-entry job market preparation” (Mason, 1985, p.50). This pre-entry market preparation may include a variety of activities or tasks students partake in, such as career workshops on resume writing, interview skills, job search strategies, awareness of labour market trends and participation in employment and career counseling. Those students who are prepared to enter the workforce will find greater success than those who do not have the necessary skills for job searching. The Student Work and Service Program (SWASP) at Memorial University of Newfoundland has incorporated this preparation into

the program so that the low income and single parent population will have the necessary skills to make the successful transition into the world of work.

SWASP encourages participants to meet both individually with the coordinator and as a group to discuss and explore a variety of career related issues. These sessions generally include resume-writing skills, job search strategies, interview skills, and any other career-related issues the participants wish to discuss. It is hoped that such preparation will prepare the participants to successfully make the transition from school to work.

3. Developing effective partnerships between the target student population, the various departments within Memorial University and the different levels of government. By having the participants from this target population involved in partnerships with the various policy makers in the post secondary institution and the different levels of government, it is hoped that they will influence and aid in the development of policies that affect individuals in this population (Winter, 1998).

4. Provide financial assistance in the form of tuition credits to full-time students (Winter, 1998). Student debt is a major concern for all students in post secondary education. However, it has been noted that it generally takes students in this population longer to finish their programs due to increased responsibilities and time constraints. Therefore, it is hoped that the tuition credits will alleviate some of the financial stress faced by these individuals and reduce the amount owing upon completion of their programs.

These objectives were identified through consultation with student representatives from the target groups by developing an adaptation of the existing SWASP to meet their specific needs. The programs objectives are designed to ease the transition into post secondary education and, upon completion, ease the transition into the workforce (Winter, 1998).

A number of program options were developed to allow SWASP to be accessible to as many students as possible. The options are provided in Table 1.

**Table 1: SWASP Options available to Low Income Student Parents**

<b>Option</b>	<b>Placement Specifics</b>	<b>Benefit</b>	<b>Target Group</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>8 weeks for 280 hours</b>	<b>\$1400 tuition credit \$400 cash stipend</b>	<b>Low income student parents returning to post secondary education</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>15 weeks for 150 hours</b>	<b>\$1000 tuition voucher</b>	<b>Low income student parents presently attending post secondary education</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>2 consecutive 8 week placements for 560 hours</b>	<b>\$2800 tuition voucher \$800 cash stipend</b>	<b>Low income student parents who need an extended period away from study for career development reasons</b>

This program has been in effect since May 1997 and has been administered through the Centre for Career Development at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Evaluation of this program thus far has included a questionnaire and informal interviews, however, no formal evaluation of the program has been conducted. An in-depth evaluation of the program would be beneficial to ensure the goals of the program are

being met and the target population is benefiting from its existence. The following chapter describes a qualitative evaluation of the Memorial component of the SWASP Program.



### **Chapter 3: A Qualitative Evaluation of The Student Work and Service Program**

#### **Introduction**

Student Services personnel are facing greater challenges than ever before. The student population is becoming more diverse and, as a result, the needs of students are changing and increasing. One such population of students with unique concerns is single parents receiving social assistance and low income student parents. These students have a variety of concerns, which must be addressed. As stated in the previous chapter, the Student Work and Service Program was adapted to meet the needs of this main target group of students. The objectives and rationale for such a program included providing low-income student parents with career related experience, providing a variety of professional and personal development workshops to participating students, developing effective partnerships among the target student population, the various departments within Memorial University and the different levels of government, and providing a tuition credit to students to alleviate some of the financial strain associated with post-secondary education.

#### **Rationale for the Research**

The Student Work and Service Program has been operating since May 1997, and administered through the Centre for Career Development at Memorial University.

Evaluation of the program thus far has included a questionnaire and informal interviews,

however, no formal evaluation of the program has been conducted. As a component of the internship the researcher evaluated the SWASP program currently in place to determine if it is meeting the needs of the target population. It was hoped that the research would result in determining the program's strengths and weaknesses and aid in the development of a stronger and more effective program. The results would also be used to ensure that funding continues for the program from the contributing areas of government and would increase the accountability to the various stakeholders.

To summarize, the researcher explored the feelings and experiences of single and low income parents who are involved in the SWASP Program. The researcher investigated their reasons for participating in the program and the perceived outcomes of their involvement, as well as the program/s effects on students career, personal and professional development.

### Research Question

The main question guiding this study is: How do students feel about their involvement in the Student Work and Service Program, and is it meeting the goals and objectives that were originally developed? In order to find answers to this, a variety of more "concrete" questions were used (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p.37). These questions concentrated on certain areas, including personal information, career development, professional development, personal development and their feelings on the

SWASP Program (See Appendix B for interview questions). This information provided a profile of those who participated and feedback on the program.

### Questions

The main data collection technique applied in this study was in-depth informal interviews with the participants. “Since the purpose of the study is to uncover and describe the participants’ perspectives on events” interviewing was thought to be the most effective method of data collection (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p.81). As stated previously, SWASP has five main objectives. These include providing a tuition credit to aid students financially; providing career related experience; aiding a specific group of disadvantaged students; providing personal and professional development opportunities for these students; and building effective partnerships between Memorial University and the various levels of government (Winter, 1998). All of these objectives are to aid in achieving the main goal of SWASP, to reduce the barriers that exist at Memorial University for this student population.

To determine if the program was achieving its objectives and goals, questions were developed to examine if the students were positively affected in the areas previously mentioned. The questions were grouped under the categories of Personal Information and Demographics, The SWASP Program, Career Development, Personal Development and Professional Development. By asking questions related to these headings the effectiveness

of the program could be broken down to examine specific objectives and assess their individual effectiveness.

### Method

Since the goal was to explore the feelings of students involved in SWASP, a qualitative approach was chosen. Qualitative research provided the researcher with the opportunity to explore detailed descriptions of students' experiences. This has become a more widely used tool in Student Affairs and Services, with numerous articles written to support its use (Kuh & Andreas, 1991; MacKay & Schuh, 1991; Whitt, 1991). Student Affairs "can discover valuable information by watching and talking to students" (Kuh & Andreas, 1991, p.403), therefore, the researcher chose this approach to collect rich, descriptive data.

All potential participants were sent a letter explaining the purpose of the study and asking permission to tape record the interviews (See Appendix C). Two follow up letters were also sent out to those who did not respond to the original invitation (See Appendix D). All interviews took place on the student's campus at prearranged times that were convenient for them. Confidentiality was assured, and all participants were informed they would have the opportunity to view the final draft upon request. Feedback from the participants will be encouraged to ensure the validity of the findings. All data collected will be destroyed one year after the completion of the study.

### Sample

Criterion-based sampling was used to identify the participants. All participants were single parents receiving social assistance or parents with low-incomes. They were all students participating in the SWASP Program. The sample group of students was determined at the beginning of the Fall 1998 semester from the list of students who signed up to participate in the program. The final number of participants was twenty-nine. Random sampling was used to achieve the sample from the total population. A total of nineteen students were invited to participate in the study while seven students agreed to be interviewed.

### Limitations

The limitations that exist in this study must be acknowledged. First, this sample is very small and therefore may not be generalized to the entire target population. The sample consisted of seven participants, which is only 24% of the total participating students and 37% of the sampled population. Therefore, in order to ensure the reliability of the findings, further research should be completed.

The study uses only one type of data collection, therefore, triangulation is not present. By using other forms of data collection the findings would have greater reliability, however, due to the nature of this report only one interview was deemed essential.

The data also relies entirely on self reports and is therefore very subjective. The researcher had no way of ensuring the validity of the responses. It must be noted that the

researcher does not claim the results to be generalized to this entire student population, but rather examines the effects of one program at one university to ensure the program is positively affecting the lives of the students involved.

It should also be noted that this evaluation may not reflect the experiences of participants involved with similar programs available in the community and at other post-secondary institutions in the province, but rather represents only the Memorial University SWASP component; therefore, the results cannot be generalized to include similar programs without further research being conducted.

### Results

Upon completion of the interviews the data was coded and examined. Common themes were identified from the responses and were supported by the participants responses. The analysis of the data was inductive in nature in that the researcher discovered themes by constantly comparing the responses of the participants. This approach is recognized as “theory generation through discovery” and is known as “grounded theory” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p.19). As previously stated, the questions were grouped into categories to concentrate on specific areas that coincided with the goals and objectives of SWASP. The first group of questions involved personal information and demographics. These questions provided us with a profile of the participants in the study and a sample of this population of students.

*Personal Information and Demographics*

The participants ranged in age from 21 to 38 years of age, and the average was 29.6 years.

Table 2

Age of Participants (N=7)

Age	Number of Students	Percentage
21	1	14.3
23	1	14.3
26	1	14.3
30	1	14.3
34	1	14.3
35	1	14.3
38	1	14.3

Of the participants involved, 85.7% were female and 14.3% were male. When asked their current status, 43% reported they were partners in parenthood, 43% were single parents, and 14% were divorced parents.

Table 3

Current Marital Status (N=7)

Status	Number of Students	Percentage
Single Parent	3	43
Divorced Parent	1	14
Partner in Parenthood	3	43

The number of children in these households was reported as 42.9% of participants having one child, 42.9% with two children and 14.3% with three or more.

Table 4

Number of Children (N=7)

Number of Children	Number of Students	Percentage
One	3	42.9
Two	3	42.9
Three or more	1	14.3

Of this sample group 42.9% of the participants attended Sir Wilfred Grenfell College in Corner Brook while the remaining 57.1% were attending Memorial University of Newfoundland's St. John's campus. When asked why they chose their particular



institution 57.1% reported they were interested in a particular program offered at the institution. The remaining 42.9% chose the institution based on its location.

Table 5

Choice of Institution (N=7)

Institution	Number of Students	Percentage
Memorial University, St. John's Campus	4	57.1
Sir Wilfred Grenfell College	3	42.9

Table 6

Why Students Chose a Particular Institution (N=7)

Reasons given for Choice Of Institution	Number of Students	Percentage
Interested in a Program Offered by the Institution	4	57.1
Location of Institution	3	42.9

The researcher was interested to know the students' educational experiences prior to attending their present institutions. Of this group, 28.6% had a high school background, 57.1% reported some type of post-secondary training, such as secretarial courses, and 14.3% reported a university background before beginning their present program of study.

Table 7

Previous Educational Experience Prior to Current Program of Study (N=7)

<b>Educational Background</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
High School	2	28.6
College Experience	4	57.1
University Experience	1	14.3

When asked if they had any special needs that could affect their academic and employment success, 71.4% reported no such special needs while 28.6% did report medical conditions.

It was important to understand from where these students receive financial support to provide for both their education and families. When asked their sources of income, 71.4% reported student aid, 57.1% indicated government support from social assistance, 14.3% reported help from family and 14.3% reported child support payments. Of those receiving student aid, 80.0% claimed it did not meet their needs, while 20.0% reported that it “barely” met them.

Table 8

Sources of Income While Attending University (N=7)

Source of Income	Number of Students	Percentage
Financial Aid	5	71.4
Social Assistance	4	57.1
Family/Friends	1	14.3
Child Support	1	14.3

When asked to identify some of the barriers to post-secondary education, 71.4% identified the biggest barrier as financial. Other barriers identified included a lack of support services, child care concerns, the course workloads and the lack of flexibility on campus for students with children. When asked what could be done to eliminate the existing barriers, many suggestions were made. It was suggested by 42.8% of the sample that various policies be re-examined concerning financial and student aid issues. An increase in support services on campus was suggested by 28.6% of the participants, while another 28.6% suggested that greater flexibility with courses would break down some of the barriers that exist on campus.

*Student Work and Service Program*

The next group of questions concentrated on examining SWASP. When questioned on the objectives of the program, 71.4% of the total sample recognized the financial contribution as one of the main objectives. A large number, 71.4% of the

sample, also acknowledged the career related experience as very important. A small percentage, 14.3% acknowledged the professional and personal development provided by SWASP. All participants felt the program was meeting the objectives they had mentioned.

Table 9

Objectives of SWASP (N=7)

Objectives	Number of Students	Percentage
Financial	5	71.4
Career Related Experience	5	71.4
Professional & Personal Development	1	14.3

When asked how they had learned of the program, 57.1% reported hearing about it through friends, 28.6% were involved in the single parent organization at Memorial and were informed of the program through this group, while 14.3% discovered the program through presentations given on campus.

Table 10

How Participants Learned about SWASP (N=7)

Where Participants Learned of the Program	Number of Students	Percentage
Friends/Acquaintances	4	57.1
Involvement in Single Parents at MUN (SPAM)	2	28.6
Presentations	1	14.3

The participants reported their main reasons for getting involved in SWASP were to lessen the financial burden associated with post secondary education and to gain valuable work experience. Of the sample, 42.9% cited the combination of experience and financial assistance as their main incentive to get involved. Another 42.9% reported that the main incentive to get involved was the financial benefits, while 14.3% reported they got involved because it provided them with an opportunity to further their education that did not exist before.

Table 11

**Main Incentives for Getting Involved in the SWASP Program (N=7)**

<b>Main Incentives</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Financial	3	42.9
Financial and Experience	3	42.9
Provided an Opportunity to Attend University	1	14.3

The participants had several expectations of their participation in this program. These included, 71.4% reporting they expected to gain valuable experience that would enhance their opportunities for acquiring meaningful employment or entering graduate school upon completion. A smaller percentage, 14.3%, acknowledged the expectation of making valuable contacts, and an additional 14.3% expected the program to lessen the financial burden on their families.

Table 12

**Expectations of the Program (N=7)**

<b>Expectations</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Gain Valuable Work Experience	5	71.4
To Make Valuable Contacts	1	14.3
Lessen Financial Burden	1	14.3

When asked if they had positive feelings towards participating in the program 100% responded yes. All participants reported positive experiences with their work and felt the program was worthwhile. When asked about negative feelings associated with the program, all of the participants, 100%, reported having no negative feelings towards their involvement in the program. However, 57.1% did offer suggestions they felt would improve the program. These suggestions will be reported and examined in the discussion section of this report.

In the area of career development, participants were asked about their involvement with workshops provided by the coordinator of SWASP. It was learned that 71.4% did not attend these sessions. When asked why they did not get involved, all the participants attending Sir Wilfred Grenfell College in Corner Brook reported the sessions were not offered at their institution. These participants made up 60% of those who reported not attending the sessions. Of those remaining, 20% explained they were unaware of their existence, and 20% had a conflict between courses and the timing of the sessions. However, 26.6% of the sample did report attending and described them as very beneficial.

### *Career Development*

When asked if they felt the program had aided in their career development, 100% of the sample felt it was having a positive effect. The participants reported it had affected them in a number of areas. All of the group, 100%, reported it had increased their skills and experience; 42.9% claimed it had increased their self confidence to go on to future

endeavors; and while 28.6% also mentioned the contacts they had made while working, which would be useful in the future.

Table 13

Effects on Career Development (N=7)

Effects	Number of Students	Percentage
Increase in Skills and Experience	7	100
Increase in Self Confidence	3	42.9
Increase Number of Contacts in the Field	2	28.6

*Personal Development*

In order to determine if the participants felt SWASP was aiding in their personal and professional development it was important to determine how they defined these two terms. Personal development was defined in a number of ways. However, all definitions had a similar theme, which involved an increase in self-awareness and improving oneself. All of the participants in this study, 100%, reported SWASP had and was still having a positive affect on their personal development. Over half of the sample, 57.1%, noted the increase they felt in their self-confidence. Others, 14.3%, mentioned the program provided the opportunity to learn about oneself. An additional 14.3% acknowledged the



opportunity to experience new things, while 14.3% commented they hoped to make a better life for their family.

Table 14

Effects on Personal Development (N=7)

Positive Effects	Number of Students	Percentage
Increase in Self Confidence	4	57.1
Opportunity to Learn about Oneself	1	14.3
Opportunity to Experience New Things	1	14.3
Hope for a Better Life	1	14.3

The following definitions by two participants represent the views of the entire sample on personal development:

Student 6

I think it is just what you make of yourself. Everything you do in your life adds to being you and so each new thing you do adds to your personal development.

Student 4

The betterment of oneself. Whether it be physical or mental. In a way its education.

### *Professional Development*

Professional development was also defined in a number of different ways. Many felt it was similar to personal development but was a little more career focused. The following definition encompasses the thoughts expressed by those in the study:

Student 4

I don't know if you can separate professional and personal development so clearly as that. I think you can't have one without the other. I think that if my personal development is not being examined and explored and improved upon, then it makes it hard for any professional development to take place.

The majority of the participants, 85.7%, did find SWASP had aided in their professional development, with a number of them, 33.3%, expressing it had opened up new opportunities and 66.7% reporting it had allowed them to gain new skills and experiences that would be valuable in their chosen fields.

Table 15

#### Effects on Professional Development (N=6)

Positive Effects	Number of Students	Percentage
Increase in Skills and Experience	4	66.6
Provided New Opportunities	2	33.3

The participants were asked if they had anything they wanted to add before completing the interview. All of the participants, 100%, reiterated the positive aspects of SWASP and hoped it would continue and become a permanent program on both the St. John's and Corner Brook campuses of Memorial University of Newfoundland.

### Discussion

The purpose of the evaluation was to ensure that the objectives and goals of the Student Work and Service Program at Memorial University were met. This section will discuss the results that have been presented and will use the participants' own words to describe how the program has impacted on their educational endeavours and their lives.

It is apparent from the results that overall SWASP is benefitting its target population. A number of the participants acknowledged that the program is providing the opportunity for them to increase their chances of obtaining employment or going on to graduate school. Some of the comments to support this include:

Student 1

Some of the work I have been doing is really helpful in preparing for grad school. It has opened up new doors for me. It has offered me new opportunities in terms of grad school and where I am going to go in my future.

Student 4

I don't think, despite my experiences in classes and things like that, I don't think I would have the same skill level if I didn't have the work experience. I learned skills concerning technology, people interactions, um... and confidence. I think that's the big one because if you are struggling to reach a goal and it is taking a long time and you are not sure about it, doing something like the SWASP gives you the "yeah, I just did that job and I did a good job of it and I can do another one now."

#### Student 5

I guess I can say this, I would do this for free now because it is incredible. It has given me confidence, my marks have come up. I want to teach at the university level and I am a writer, an amateur writer. I have been published a couple of times in the newspaper and it has all come from this experience. Every bit of it has come from this experience. So it has just been incredible and it has taught me more than any of the courses that I've done.

Such quotes suggest that the program is meeting one of its objectives: to provide low income student parents with valuable career related experience and ease their transition into the work force. However, it should be noted that a number of participants hope their SWASP experiences will also lead to further educational opportunities, such as graduate school.

It was apparent from the interviews that the participants want to make a better life for themselves and their families. They recognize education as a way to achieve this goal and increase their standard of living. Those receiving assistance from the government acknowledged they do not want to live their lives or raise their children on “the system.” They also want to be role models for their children and to set a good example. This program has provided an opportunity for these individuals to re-enter the post secondary setting and start the journey to a life of independence. As two participants stated:

**Student 3**

I can't put into words what the chance to get to come back to school has done for me. It gives me hope to get out of this continuous circle of social services, social services that nobody wants to be on. At least I don't know very many people who do. It is great even if it is just a stepping stone because I know after this degree I probably won't be guaranteed a job but it offers a chance. It is a stepping stone.

**Student 5**

That's one of the things you know, that this is the way to do it. That the system isn't perfect but this is the way to get where you want to go in life. You don't sit back and wait for 6-49 because its not going to happen.

It is apparent from such powerful words that the program is benefitting this target population of social assistance recipients and low income parents. It is providing the

opportunity for these individuals to make a better life for themselves and break away from a life of dependence. Unfortunately, the effects SWASP has had on the families of these individuals may never be known. The long term benefits, financially, mentally and emotionally, will be difficult to determine, however, one can assume from the comments of the participants that it is also having a positive effect on the families.

While the program is providing students with valuable work experience, it has also been an important source of income for participants. The \$1000.00 tuition voucher earned provides these individuals with an opportunity to reduce their student debt. This leaves the student requiring less financial aid for the semester or allows them to have extra money to buy books, provide for their families or take care of day-to-day living expenses. Some of the comments on the financial contribution SWASP has made and continues to make include:

Student 3

Only for SWASP I don't know if I would be here because I put myself through every semester on one of those.

Student 4

I think that it (debt reduction) is absolutely essential. Um... I was able to graduate with two degrees and my debt is about \$30,000-\$35,000. Most people coming out will probably have about double.

These students recognize, however, that this aspect, while very important, is only one of many goals in this program.

Another goal of the Student Work and Service Program is the personal and professional development that was anticipated to occur while involved in the program. All the participants recognized the contribution SWASP had made to these areas. One recurrent theme included the building of self confidence both personally and professionally. Many of these participants acknowledge they have had little confidence in themselves and their abilities throughout their lives. However, repeatedly throughout the interviews many of these students describe how their self confidence has increased as a result of participating in this program.

#### Student 3

Yeah, it has given me great experience in the lab and some confidence because the more experience you get things don't seem quite so hard or distant, like it is in your grasp. I think it helped even just meeting other people, getting out into the workforce. It builds confidence in every area.

All of the participants felt the program had aided them in the area of Career Development, which, as previously mentioned, is also a goal of the program. Though a small number have been involved in the Career Development workshops, they all felt the work experiences themselves had been positive and beneficial.

#### Student 4

With respect to the workshops I have attended in the past I have found them beneficial. We did a workshop, oh my goodness it was

so fun. It wasn't just sitting there falling asleep, it was fun. It was great work and participation in self-discovery and exploring, you know, what your strengths and weaknesses were, what you could work on and so forth.

Some participants acknowledged the networking and development of interpersonal skills.

Student 1

Through my SWASP work I have made an incredible amount of community contacts so it is going to be a big help.

Others have noted it is a great opportunity to get a better understanding of a certain field to ensure they will enjoy working in the area.

Student 6

I think it gives student parents and low income families a chance to work and get experience and see if they like certain areas, or they can find out they don't like a certain area.

The Student Work and Service Program is effectively meeting another of its original objectives: to develop effective partnerships among the target population, the various departments within Memorial University and the different levels of government. First, effective partnerships have developed between several departments at the St. John's campus and Sir Wilfred Grenfell College and the Department of Student Affairs and Services on both campuses. Such partnerships increase awareness of the issues affecting



students and the role of Student Affairs on campus. These partnerships have also helped the students feel as though they are members of a community and belong on campus.

The lines of communication are also greater between the University and the contributing members of government. The coordinator of the program provides information and feedback on the program regularly to the government representatives connected to this program. Again, this open line of communication continues to inform government on the issues facing this student population and work together to reduce the barriers that exist.

There are many other areas that are positively affected by the existence of SWASP. Increased retention of students, for instance, is a positive outcome of this program. SWASP, supports Astin's (1993) Theory of Involvement. This theory, in simple terms, explains that students who get involved are more likely to finish their education and report greater satisfaction with their educational experience. SWASP is an example of a program that encourages students to get involved on campus, as well as providing part time work at the institution. Therefore, this program may be having a positive effect on the retention of these students. Some have acknowledged that they would not be attending school if not for SWASP.

#### Student 4

I think that SWASP plays a really important role for new students.

I mean an essential role because if a new student knows about

SWASP and accesses it and decides to try it, I think nine chances

out of ten they are going to stay at school.

While the preceding paragraphs accentuate the positive side of SWASP, suggestions were made by over half of the participants on changes that would improve the program. The researcher found the students very reluctant to discuss the negative aspects of the program. When suggestions were provided, the participants were quick to reinforce the fact that the program was worthwhile and effective. When asked directly if there were any negative aspects to the program a common response was as follows:

Student 4

I don't know if I would call it a negative feeling as such. I think maybe what I would call it is a recognition through my experience that there are still some things that need to be ironed out.

Some of these suggestions were beyond the realm of this program, such as the student aid issue. A number of participants suggested that certain policies be examined, such as the ten semester cap on receiving student aid. Many of the students voiced their concern by pointing out the majority of single and low-income parents do not take full course loads each semester. As one student explained:

Student 2

Well I think that this concept of being able to finish a four year undergraduate degree in a minimum of five years should be examined. They say it takes ten semesters for an undergrad but I believe that student parents should be given exception. I know

I was longer. Basically a couple of semesters I took four or five courses but mostly I stuck with three. It is really difficult, I feel, as a single parent to take five courses. It is hard for someone without children.

While this concern is not directly with the Student Work and Service Program itself, it distressed a number of participants and surfaced repeatedly throughout the interviews.

Other suggestions that were made to improve the existing SWASP program included setting up a single parent support group at Sir Wilfred Grenfell College similar to the Single Parents at MUN (SPAM) group on the St. John's campus. Students felt such a group would offer an opportunity to meet peers and support each other throughout their studies. As one student stated:

Student 3

If you have time it would be nice to talk to other single parents when you are in school, maybe help each other out with regards to exam time, helping take care of the children or something.

Astin (1996) notes that the three most powerful forms of involvement include "academic involvement, involvement with faculty and involvement with student peer groups" (p. 126). Therefore, by developing groups that encourage peer interaction students would be more likely to complete their education and have a more enjoyable

learning experience. Students at Memorial University's campus who are involved in SPAM acknowledge the positive impact it has had on their education. For example:

Student 5

If it wasn't for SPAM, if it wasn't for meeting that one student in that first year class that walked up to me and said you know this group, I think I would have ran. I would have been too overwhelmed and scared.

Such statements support the development of student parent groups on any post secondary campus, including Sir Wilfred Grenfell College.

The career development workshops that exist on Memorial's campus are not a component of the SWASP Program at Sir Wilfred Grenfell College campus. This is due to the location of the SWASP coordinator. The coordinator of SWASP is located on the St. John's campus and is responsible for developing and facilitating these workshops for SWASP participants. Due to the geographical location of the two campuses and the cost of travel, the coordinator only periodically visits the Sir Wilfred Grenfell campus. In this case, the coordinator works closely with the Student Affairs Officer on the Corner Brook campus to ensure that proper placements are established for students participating in the program. The coordinator receives all required documents and ensures students receive their tuition voucher. During the interviews, participants from Sir Wilfred Grenfell campus expressed an interest in career development workshops and suggested they be introduced on their campus. This could be arranged by planning a workshop during one

of the coordinators visits or by recruiting the Student Affairs Officer at the campus to facilitate such an event.

Another suggestion given by some of the participants was to ensure the placements were set up as early in the semester as possible. Some of the participants expressed concern that being placed later in the semester caused greater workloads towards the end of the term. As one student stated:

Student 2

I had a little trouble getting into the system this semester. It was not really trouble, it just took a long time to get everything up and running. Perhaps it could get going earlier in the semester so it would be easier for students to get their hours worked in early in the semester. That way it would avoid students having a lot of hours to work towards the end of the semester when everything starts to pile on.

A suggestion would be to start looking for placements the semester before they are to begin. This will ensure their start date will coincide with the beginning of the school semester and allow students to work at a comfortable pace.

One participant suggested providing some type of support for SWASP students that are graduating. The transition from school to work can be traumatic for all students, however, for those with children to support it can be especially frightening. There may not be a job arranged upon graduation therefore there may be a period of unemployment and little or no income. One student also acknowledged the cost associated with looking

for employment, for example, the cost of bond paper for resumes, transportation to interviews, travel expenses, increased telephone bills and appropriate clothes for interviews. While each may appear small in significance, they are of great concern to a single parent trying to provide for a family with little or no income. The following describes a graduating SWASP participant and her struggle while looking for adequate employment.

#### Student 4

It was like a shock to my system. I was like, oh my goodness, I need money to get a job. For example, the fact that resumes and cover letters need to be done on proper paper. I felt terrible because I had to pass out resumes and letters on just regular paper and not the appropriate bond paper because I didn't have the funds to deal with that. There are other issues, moving money and how much is rent? If I move with my children I have to plan. I can't just hop on a plane and go. I don't feel comfortable going to an interview if I don't have appropriate clothing but I have to feed my children and that comes first. So I feel like I have done everything I can to get where I am supposed to be, however the reality is setting in and there are all these barriers and it is going to take me a while to get passed them.

One of the suggestions this individual proposed was that a be grant provided for graduating students, which they would receive upon completion of their program. This would be used for the necessary materials required for job hunting. She suggests:

**Student 4**

There should be, in the last year of a student's studies, something set up. Maybe some sort of grant that would get held back from you for when you... you don't have to actually graduate and that way then you have a small amount of money that is going to launch you into being able to get a job.

Such suggestions and changes can have a major impact on the student's transition from school to work.

Another suggestion made by some of the participants included increasing awareness of the program to professors, the campus and the local community. Such awareness would allow the program to become more widely known among students and the campus population and in turn generate more interest from potential participants and faculty. The professors would also be more clear on their role in the program and avoid any confusion between them and the students. As one student suggested:

**Student 5**

One of the things that I think would improve the program is that there should be some clarification. There are all kinds of instructions for us but when I went to work for my professor I had to had to tell

her about the program. I mean even a letter giving them the basics about what it is for, the hours or whatever.

This suggestion was noted soon after the program began and has in fact been implemented. The SWASP coordinator does talk with the professor involved, provides literature on the program and their role in it and periodically visits the work site. This has led to less confusion and more effective placements for participating students.

Finally, one suggestion that was offered repeatedly was to increase the money involved. The majority of the students would like to see the tuition voucher increased to include more money directly paid on tuition or go towards vouchers redeemable at the campus bookstores for required texts. As one participant noted:

Student 7

Currently it is meeting some of the obligations in the financial aspect of it but I think a little bit of extra funding and increase what each student could get would be a big benefit. I mean tuition goes up and up and up and our incomes stay the same.

From the variety of responses on this topic students continuously emphasized that any additional funding, no matter how small, would be greatly appreciated.

### Conclusion

While there were limitations to the preceding study, the researcher felt the findings of the study did provide an overview on the effectiveness of the existing Student Work



and Service Program (Memorial University component). The participants in this study repeatedly emphasized the worth of the program and acknowledged it was building bridges for single and low income students to attend university. The researcher was pleased to note the many suggestions that were put forth by the participants, which will aid in the improvement of the program for future participants and ensure that it continues to meet the needs of this target student population.

## **Chapter 4: Conclusion and Recommendations**

The preceding chapters have provided an in-depth look at an internship experience and a qualitative research study on the Student Work and Service Program. These experiences have provided the researcher with valuable insight in the area of career development, and an increased awareness of the impact these services can have on all members of the campus population, especially single and low-income student parents. The changing student population has placed new pressures and demands on colleges and universities, leaving many of them scrambling to adjust and change, not only physical surroundings, but also attitudes and perceptions that were once the norm.

Memorial University of Newfoundland and the Office of Student Affairs and Services have been quick to acknowledge the issues and concerns of a changing student body on its campuses. Cooperation between various departments, student groups and government have produced programs, such as SWASP, that attempt to meet the needs of a specific population of students and provide an opportunity to eradicate some of the barriers that exist.

While the program is beneficial and meeting its goals and objectives, there are a number of recommendations presented that would further develop the program and alleviate some of the concerns voiced by the participants.

### *Recommendations*

1. Programs, such as SWASP, can have powerful positive effects on participating individuals, however, to ensure they are positively impacting the target group

regular evaluations of the program should be in place. A questionnaire should be developed and distributed at the end of each term and placement. Students would be asked questions similar to those posed in this study, which would provide feedback at least three times a year and determine strengths and weaknesses of the program. Focus groups could also be arranged that would provide valuable feedback and increase the reliability of the findings.

2. Career development workshops should take place regularly throughout the term and be promoted through a variety of avenues including, placing posters in the offices of the Single Parents at MUN (SPAM) and Students Older Than Average (SOTA); and contact through telephone and E-mail. Attendance of at least one workshop per semester should be encouraged to all participants. These workshops were well received by those that have attended them in the past, not only due to the skills they learned, but also for the chance to meet other participants and discuss their placements.
3. Career development workshops should also be introduced at the Sir Wilfred Grenfell campus in Corner Brook. There are no such workshops presently in place, therefore, it is recommended that the SWASP budget allow the coordinator to travel to the campus once each semester to meet with participants and facilitate career development workshops. If funding does not allow such an arrangement, the coordinator should meet with Student Affairs Officers in Corner Brook, provide them with the necessary materials and ask their assistance in the matter.

4. Awareness of the program to first year single and low-income student parents should be increased. This should be done by increasing awareness among teachers and guidance counselors in the school system, financial assistance officers and other groups who may regularly come into contact with this target group. These individuals, in turn, can promote the program to those clients interested in attending university to further their education. It can also be promoted on campus during orientation and in the campus newspaper.
5. Increase awareness of the program throughout both campuses. This will encourage more faculty and staff involvement and provide a greater variety of placements for participants. Contacts will be made throughout the year and will begin as early in the semester as possible. This will lead to greater satisfaction for both the student and the employer.
6. An examination of recent changes to student aid policies should also be undertaken. It has been shown in a number of studies, including this one, that student parents generally take longer to finish their education due to increased responsibilities. It is therefore, unrealistic to place specific time constraints and pressure on these students to complete their education in an amount of time that is sometimes difficult for even traditional aged students with no dependants. Such policies should be re-examined and amended so they do not discriminate against certain groups of students.

7. The tuition voucher should be indexed to reflect increases in tuition. Students acknowledged that any financial increase would be appreciated and further reduce the debt load upon completion.
8. An option should be available to participants to choose between receiving the \$1000.00 tuition voucher or a \$750.00 tuition voucher and \$250.00 in stipends. The stipend could be used for other expenses, such as the cost of school supplies and text books.
9. Some type of support should be available for graduating participants who are seeking employment. A small portion of the funding should be allocated for materials, such as bond paper for resumes and emergency transportation money for interviews. While such funds may never be used, they would be available to the SWASP coordinator to give out to participating students when deemed necessary.
10. A portion of the budget should be allocated for marketing of the program. Such funding would be used to develop awareness campaigns on campus and in the local community. Greater awareness would lead to larger numbers of the target group receiving the benefits of this program.
11. The number of hours participants work per semester should be reduced from 250 to 200. Student parents have limited time available to them due to increased responsibilities at home, therefore, by reducing the number of hours students would have more time to allocate to their families and studies. When averaged out the amount earned per hour would go from \$4.00 to \$5.00.

12. The university should provide scholarship opportunities for this target population, with at least one such scholarship available on each of Memorial's campuses.
13. The university should promote the Student Work and Service Program to other post secondary institutions, both nationally and internationally, as an exemplary program that is reducing the barriers that exist for this target group of students.

#### *Recommendations for Further Research*

1. The researcher would recommend the replication of this study to ensure the reliability of the findings. A larger sample and the use of additional forms of data gathering would provide additional evidence that the program is meeting the goals and objectives outlined in Chapter two.
2. Follow-up research should be completed on past participants of SWASP that have graduated to explore the long term effects of the program and determine if it had any impact on their future employment.
3. An evaluation should be conducted on the community component of SWASP that is available for all students during the summer months. A comparison could then be completed to determine if those students participating in the community component were also finding the program effective in the same areas as those participating at Memorial.

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**Appendix A**

## Case Study

### **The Participant**

Tommy is twenty-two years old and from a small community on the west coast of Newfoundland. He has been chosen to participate in an internship in Dublin, Ireland. A job has been arranged for him at a very popular hotel in the city where he will work from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm each day and gain valuable experience in the area of tourism. Some of his duties will include helping individuals check in and out of the Hotel, answering visitors' many enquiries about the city and what they can do while in town. Tommy is very excited about his trip to Ireland and experiencing a new culture. He hopes that his experience will help him recognize the potential tourism opportunities that exist in his own community and maybe someday lead to developing his own employment possibilities.

### **The Internship**

Tommy and seven other participants arrive in Dublin and quickly settle in what will be their home for the next six months. Tommy and another participant, Todd, are staying with a local family who reside close to their places of employment. Tommy heads off for his first day on the job and meets his new boss and coworkers. They all seem very nice and welcome Tommy into the group. One young man in particular, named Ben, is very friendly and invites Tommy to join him and a few friends that evening at a nearby pub. Tommy is delighted with his workplace and thinks, "This is going to be the best six months."

### **The Situation**

That evening Tommy drops by his home to let Todd know where he is going. He asks him to join them but Todd already has plans with some of the other internship participants. Tommy heads out with his new friends to the pub. The night starts out great. Tommy has met four of Ben's friends from Dublin. The pub has great food and lots of great Irish beer, like Guinness, Smithwicks, Kilkenny and many more. Tommy's favourite is the Guinness, and, as the night progresses, he consumes a large amount. One member of the group suggests they leave the pub and keep the party going at her place. Everyone agrees that this is a wonderful plan, and they board a taxi, stop at a liquor store on the way and proceed to the girl's apartment. Once there the party resumes. Tommy is feeling great and he thinks the girl who owns the apartment is flirting with him. "This is too good to be true," Tommy thinks, "a great job, great friends, and maybe even a girlfriend."

Soon Tommy isn't feeling so well. He begins to think that drinking all that Guinness was not such a great idea. He is also feeling very tired. He has no money left on him to get a cab. He goes to Ben and tries to tell him he wants to go home but Ben only laughs and reminds him that no one can hold their drink like the Irish. Tommy has had enough, he figures Ben will tell him when he is leaving. He feels sick and tired so he crashes in the bedroom and passes out.

### **The Next Day**

Tommy awakes slowly the next morning with the sun blaring in his eyes. He is trying to figure out why his head feels like fifty pounds when the whole night comes rushing back to him. "I cannot have been here all night, can I? Where is Ben? What time is it? Am I late for work? Are Todd and the family I am staying with worried about me? Where exactly am I anyway?" Tommy painfully throws his head back on the pillow and hopes he will soon wake up from this nightmare. However, when he notices a clock on the nightstand that reads 8:45 am, he realizes the nightmare has just begun.

### **Guiding Questions**

1. What are some of the issues to be addresses in this case?
2. How will Tommy explain this to his new boss? The family he is staying with? The other participants of the program?
3. As a facilitator of this program, how would you deal with Tommy?
4. If you were Tommy, how would you expect to be dealt with?
5. Are there any, or should there be any, guidelines in place to deal with participants who act irresponsible?
6. What are some of the possible ways of dealing with this situation?
7. What are the consequences of these solutions?
8. What is your decision?

(Ennis-Smith, 1998, p. 3)

### **Generic Problem Solving Model**

1. Determine significant problem(s).
2. Gather all relevant information.
3. Assess the facts of the case.
4. Devise as many alternative solutions as possible.
5. Select the best solution and apply it.
6. Evaluate and readjust as necessary.

(Ennis-Smith, 1998, p.3)

**Appendix B**

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**Personal Information and Demographics:**

1. How old are you?
2. What is your current status? Are you a:
  - single parent
  - widowed parent
  - divorced parent
  - partner in parenthood
3. How many dependents do you have and what are their ages?  
 Number of dependents \_\_\_\_\_  
 Age(s) \_\_\_\_\_
4. What institution are you currently attending?
5. What motivated you to attend this institution?
6. Please describe your educational background?
7. Do you have any special needs that may hinder your employability or your academic achievement? (Disclosure is strictly voluntary.)
8. Do you rely on student aid? If yes, does the maximum loan awarded meet your needs?
9. In addition to SWASP do you have any other form of income? If yes please indicate the source(s)?
10. How many courses are you doing this semester?
11. Do you feel there are barriers for single parent and low income students attending post secondary institutions? If yes, please identify?
12. What else can be done to address the barriers that exist for student parents attending post secondary institutions?

**SWASP:**

13. What do you think are the goals and objectives of the SWASP Program?
  - i) Does the program meet any of these goals?
  - ii) If yes, which ones?
14. How did you learn about the SWASP Program?

15. What was your incentive to get involved in the SWASP Program?
16. What do you expect to gain from participating in the SWASP Program?
17. What positive feelings, if any, do you have towards participating in the SWASP Program?
18. What negative feelings, if any, do you have towards participating in the SWASP Program?

**Career Development:**

19. Have you attended the career development workshops provided for SWASP participants?
  - i) If yes, how did you find them?
  - ii) If no, why did you not attend?
20. Do you feel the SWASP program has aided in your career development? If so, how?

**Personal Development:**

21. How do you define personal development?
  - i) Do you feel the SWASP Program has had an effect on your personal development? If so, how?

**Professional Development:**

22. How do you define professional development?
  - i) Do you feel the SWASP Program has had an effect on your professional development? If so, how?
23. Is there anything else you would like to add?

**Appendix C**

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Dear Student,

My name is Jennifer Browne and I am a candidate for the degree of Master of Post Secondary Education with a specialization in Student Services at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

I am presently undertaking a research project with the Centre for Career Development under the guidance of Dr. Wayne Ludlow, Professor of Education and Dean of Student Affairs and Services at Memorial University and Mr. Rob Shea, Manager of the Centre for Career Development.

The purpose of this research is to assess and evaluate the Student Work and Service Program (SWASP) that currently exists. I wish to focus on the target student group, single parents on social assistance and low income parents, that this program was defined for to ensure that it is meeting the intended goals and objectives. I wish to get your perspective on your involvement in this program so weaknesses and strengths may be identified and changes made, if need be, to improve the program.

Your participation will consist of one interview, approximately 30 minutes, at your convenience. Interviews will be tape recorded and all tapes will be destroyed one year after completion of the report. Please note that participation is completely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and/or refrain from answering whatever questions you prefer. The information gathered will be strictly confidential and no individuals will be identified. This study has received the approval of the Faculty of Education Ethics Review Committee. You will have an opportunity to view the final draft upon request.

If you wish to participate in this study please sign below and return it to me at the time of interview. To set up an interview time or if you have any questions or concerns please contact me at 747 1031(H) or 737 2033(W). If at any time you wish to speak with a resource person not associated with the study, please contact the Associate Dean of Graduate Programs and Research at 737 3402.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Browne, B.A.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby give consent to participate in this study and participate in one interview. I understand that participation is entirely voluntary and permission may be withdrawn at any time. I also understand that all information is strictly confidential and no individuals will be identified.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

**Appendix D**

February 10, 1999

Dear student,

My name is Jennifer Browne and I am a candidate for the degree of Master of Post-Secondary Education with a specialization in Student Services at Memorial University of Newfoundland

I am presently undertaking a research project with the Centre for Career Development under the guidance of Dr. Wayne Ludlow, Professor of Education and Dean of Student Affairs and Services and Mr. Rob Shea, Manager of the Centre for Career Development.

You may recall receiving an invitation to participate in this research during the Fall semester. For those of you that did respond it was greatly appreciated. For those that did not it is not to late. Your participation would be of great assistance and ensure the results are both accurate and reliable.

Please take the time to read the enclosed copy of the original invitation. If you can find the time in your schedule I would appreciate your help in this area.

Sincerely,

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Jennifer Browne, B.A.