

The Committee has found it an invaluable experience, in the process of re-examining attitudes towards the aged and elderly, to have an opportunity simply to listen to older Canadians. In addition to their comments on individual issues, they have shared with the Committee general observations such as the following:

“In Canada, we are ambivalent about the value of our elderly, we are ambivalent about seeing the senior years as part of a normal life cycle — about whether our elderly deserve a reasonable quality of life .... The rate to the caregiver [in government-contracted foster homes], to the proprietor, is presently less than \$1 an hour per resident for 24-hour care, seven days a week. I find this a poignant reminder of what we seem to find our elderly are worth” (20:7-8).

“As old people, we are getting a little tired of being told we are a burden on society, that we are going to continue to be a burden on society, and eventually such a burden that society will not be able to deal with us. I do not think that is true. The great majority of old people are still self-sustaining. They are consumers. They are contributing to the current economy” (18:16).

“A common opening remark from a senior was and still is — I need something inspiring to get up and go to in the morning. Something concrete to do each day” (Senior Citizens Job Bureau, Brief, p. 1).

“Another false assumption is that older workers are incapable of mastering new techniques. That is rubbish, absolute rubbish, speaking as an older person” (17:51).

Witnesses appearing before the Committee, including those with specific expertise in fields relating to aging and the elderly, were unanimous in condemning the view that aging is automatically associated with declining powers and increasing helplessness. Their condemnation, it should be noted, was not based on convictions that such associations provide a rationale for age discrimination, although this was recognized, but was based instead on a growing body of research which demonstrates that such associations are simply incorrect.

Current empirical research findings were succinctly reviewed by Dr. Ellen M. Gee of the Department of Sociology at Simon Fraser University.