

ESSAYS FROM THE EAST SIDE: Some people call it a Sling Blade?

By Corrie Clark

If this were a double income household, my children would be pretty well off. But because it's just me, we are considered poor. My younger children's father died just over a year ago, and my oldest is 19, so there's no possibility of other income support.

My 19-year-old is a sweet and loving young woman in her first year at Ryerson University.

Like many other students, she took that extra year of high school to improve her grades and save up some money to go to school.

One of the enabling factors of choosing university over college was the OSAP funding she received in grants and loans.

Grants directly translate to a leg up for our family. Single income families or lower incomes rely on some grant and recreational programs or tax advantages to get by. When those are taken away, the opportunity to get ahead goes with it and sometimes it removes the incentive to want to. The more money I make, the more I pay out and I get right back to where I started.

It's like daycare. Many women don't go back to work because they pay more out to daycare than they make. If daycare were affordable, families would be wealthier with two incomes. High daycare rates keep families poorer. And they are poorer for a lot longer. It's the same with students.

The OSAP grants and loans don't actually cover the full cost of a year of school, but with working hard and saving it becomes manageable to get closer to a dream for low-income young people and their families. Not only the dream of an education and a stronger future, but an opportunity to think about a world without limits.

Cutting away at OSAP for some students and the grace period to pay back the loans, can be frightening to those who have to risk a lot to go in the first place. They may not go to school or it could over extend them in debt.

Further education is incredibly expensive but Canada has one of the highest rates of citizens who are educated. And it should, because 'survival of the fittest' in our future world means education and health care.

Money and power have never saved anyone from disease or stupidity in the long term. Maybe over extending students is what the government really wants? Debt keeps people suppressed and in control.

Debt management firm Hoyes, Michalos & Associates Inc. did a study last year discovering one in seven insolvencies in Canada involved student debt. Take that along with the increasing mortgage debt in this country, and that lower 99% of the population is properly beholden and fear mongered to our leaders and our economy.

Countries are like forests, you need new healthy growth to ensure forests are sustainable for the future?and they grow from the smallest saplings to the top.

Unfortunately, the Ford government's announcement of a 10% tuition cut as a 'gift' to students is a Sling Blade in disguise.

Cutting tuition is leaving institutions without millions of dollars in funding, and those dollars will have to be made up from somewhere. Students choosing to opt out of paying certain fees, could be enabling the institutions to decide what groups get funded therefore controlling the experience of post-secondary culture.

Ford obviously sees no value in funding students, as long with so many services and initiatives that seem necessary to educate and innovate and create a future country.

He can find value in wealthy job appointments to friends as some kind of honour system, but cannot see the pride, investment, critical thinking skills and self esteem of a quality secondary education.

What he might not understand is that post-secondary education is an experience as much as it is an education.

It's often the foundation to find oneself. It grows citizenship. It's part of the lessons of becoming an adult. There's often a first social group or organization for everyone to feel a sense of belonging.

Some groups are more vulnerable, like LGBTQ, religious groups and those with uncommon opinions who might seem problematic are more politically sensitive to fund.

There is now a legitimate fear of losing these groups as well as student union groups who organize benefits for the well-being of students, groups for outliers, or even student newspapers.

It has just been made guilt free for the colleges and universities to choose where to fund and perhaps silence new growth and young voices instead for fight for them.

Ford's plan is not a gift for students. It's just another way for Sling Blade politics to clear out the youthful undergrowth and leave only the wealthy old growth standing guard.