

Opinion

Jobs provide dignity and purpose

By: Jim Bell

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Daniel Crump / Winnipeg Free Press Files

The kiosk at the Pop-Up Winnipeg public toilet provides valuable work-experience opportunities for Siloam Mission clients.

Do you remember your first job — the one you put on the resumé to prove you had at least some experience when applying for a better position later on?

Maybe it was detailing cars in the summer. Or stocking shelves at a grocery store. Or scooping ice cream and pouring coffee.

Do you remember your first paycheque — and what you spent it on?

Maybe you bought a record at the local music store. Or went out for a nice meal. Or maybe you saved it all to make a big purchase.

I remember those things, too.

My first job was a paper route on Dominion Street in Winnipeg's West End. I enjoyed it, especially during the Christmas season when customers were generous with tips.

A few years later, in the summer of 1975, I loaded semi-trailers for a local potato-chip manufacturer.

My favourite part was the ripple chips — and yes, I ate them fresh off the fryer.

Those trailers get hot in the sweltering Manitoba summer, and I earned every penny of the \$2.37 we were getting paid per hour.

I used my first paycheque to buy a 10-speed bike. Unfortunately, it was stolen a short time later.

But what I remember most is how proud I felt that I had a job.

I was gaining experience and getting a cheque. I was learning life lessons that still stick with me today.

It struck me that somebody valued me enough to put me on their team and trust me to work for their business.

I felt the dignity of having a job.

Being employed, no matter how menial or important the job, brings importance to a person's life.

It allows us to contribute positively toward society. It keeps us busy, challenges us to grow and gives us a sense of pride and achievement.

In fact, studies show that working, whether paid or unpaid, is good for our health and well-being.

People who work tend to live happier and healthier lives than those who are unemployed.

And being out of work can have negative health impacts, such as low self-esteem and higher rates of mental-health problems.

Work brings purpose and meaning to our life.

Right now, several men and women of Siloam Mission's employment-readiness program are gaining hands-on work experience at the pop-up toilet downtown.

They're working as attendants for the washrooms, ensuring they are well maintained and clean.

They're also running a kiosk that includes the sale of water and your morning copy of the *Winnipeg Free Press*.

For some of them, it's the first job they've had in a long time.

The one they'll put on the resumé, hoping to find permanent employment somewhere else.

The one that's providing them with the first paycheque they've had in a while, a cheque they might use for much-needed food or housing or clothes.

But beyond the experience and the money, it's a job that provides them with dignity.

A job that shows them they are valued enough to be on a team — that someone trusts them enough to represent their organization.

A job that allows them to contribute positively toward society.

I hope you'll stop by, get a water and offer some encouragement along the way. You'll be adding a lot of meaning to their day if you do.

Jim Bell is the CEO of Siloam Mission.