

OSAP- Episode 6 - Dive 2 - Why student aid is important in levelling the playing field

Sheldon Levy: I tell the story of when I was president of Ryerson, I used to go back to my old high school, which was, now it's your secondary school, and it's in the Keele-Wilson area, and I used to go back as principal for the day. And as principal for the day, I would go around to classes and I would ask the question, so how many are you going to university? How many are going to college? High school, this one in communities that are not well-off, and it was too often, I would not see any hands go up. And then I would ask the second question of why. And the question of affordability came about. And what I began to learn was that you can have all of the public policy, you can have all of the words, you have all of the website, you can have all of that, but you are not communicating to the young people that needed it most. The accountant father that is in Rosedale might have got it but not these communities. And things like debt, these were words that had the connotation of how do I ever pay it off. And so what I began to pick up very, very clearly was that even though you had OSAP and you had very, I'd call it liberal and generous policies, unless they were communicated in a way people can understand them on the ground they were not going to register with those in the most need. And as a result, what was happening was that those that were the poorest were disqualifying themselves as eligible for university, or their parents were, based upon a financial need. So my hypothesis always was, well before I became deputy, was that it was critically important that those in the poorest communities understood that post-secondary education was accessible. And the only way you make them understand it is to simplify it by saying it's free. If you said there's a loan, there's a grant and there was three asterisks that said, "Oh by the way, if you won the Ontario lotto you're going to have to pay." And way, way too much of our public policy is based upon the 1/100 of 1% that will somehow take advantage of clarity for the 99.99%. And so clarity of public policy for its intentions was hugely important. And as a result, when I came in to become Deputy Minister it happened to be the issue on the table when I came in. This was not me bringing it to the government. It was there when I arrived but on a general sense, financial aid for students in need is not only hugely important, it is the fairness of the system that doesn't perpetuate generations of entitlement.