

CIF FEATURE STORY: Preparing for Retirement

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FEATURE STORY: *Preparing for Retirement, SARCAN Recycling*

SARCAN employs just over 730 full-time, part-time and casual employees. Roughly two-thirds of SARCAN employees either experience a disability or have transitioned from social assistance. “67% of our workforce is currently over 50. So we anticipate that in the next 10 years, over 100 employees will either retire or leave SARCAN due to medical issues that make them unable to work,” shared Amy McNeil, Executive Director of SARC. “Many of our employees make a career working at SARCAN, which means they will also retire from SARCAN. Some people look forward to this stage in their life, while others experience a sense of loss and report feeling unprepared for retirement. Images in the media often falsely portray what retirement actually feels like for many people. The retirement reality for many does not include sandy beaches and new-found freedom.”

“It is medically proven that many people experiencing a disability age more quickly and differently, which impacts their ability to work safely or physically continue working. Retirement for some of our employees is not necessarily when they have chosen to stop working, but when their body won’t allow them to continue. We know that some employees and their families are concerned about early retirement, due to the impacts on finances and care resources,” highlighted McNeil.

Some SARCAN employees have limited support systems, or may experience communication barriers that impact their ability to connect to supports and advocate for themselves. “We are concerned that once they are no longer working, some employees could become isolated and financially vulnerable, which will have impacts on their wellbeing and that of the wider community,” emphasized Anna Hopkins, Project Coordinator.

The *Preparing for Retirement* project intends to address these challenges and opportunities by developing resources, supports, processes, and tools to help employees feel confident, prepared, and connected as they transition to retirement.

“A key part of the project has been working directly with employees who are currently navigating a transition to retirement or in some cases, long-term disability,” illustrated Hopkins. “This has given us a much more detailed understanding of the different scenarios employees might be facing and the types of supports that are available or required. It was important for us to start the project by hearing from employees directly to ensure we understood their priorities, which was a great way to introduce the project and get conversations started about retirement, pension and benefits, and career planning. We engaged employees across the province through a survey with questions about their perceptions of retirement, career and learning goals, understanding of pension and benefits, and related topics. Over a three month period, 58% of employees participated! The survey helped us prioritize a set of initial actions, to better understand differing levels of knowledge and interests, and to challenge some previously held assumptions.”

“Based on the learning topics identified as high-priority by employees, we launched a learning series this fall. We are hosting 10 workshops called ‘Tab Talks’ under the themes of *Focusing on your Financial Future* and *Brushing up on Benefits*, with presenters ranging from our Pension Plan provider to Service Canada, to the Ministry of Social Service, Credit Counselling Canada, and beyond. The talks are open to all employees and are offered online and in-person in Regina and Saskatoon,” described Hopkins.

Currently, the project is working across five main areas, including research and learning; external relationship-building; training and resource development; individual mentoring; and internal process mapping. “Because this is a brand new project, we are still in the thick of learning and developing strategies and resources,” Hopkins shared. “So far we have seen an increase in the number of employees talking openly about retirement, asking for help, and participating in learning opportunities. We had 142 employees attend our first Tab Talk. As the project evolves, we will check in with employees to see how their confidence and understanding has shifted. We hope to see significant improvements in feelings of preparedness and support.”

