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# Live-in Caregivers in Fort McMurray: a Socioeconomic Footprint

## Report Overview



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# About The Report

*Live-in Caregivers in Fort McMurray: a Socioeconomic Footprint* looks at live-in caregivers (foreign nationals living in Canadian homes and employed to provide child or adult care) in the context of the oil sands region of northern Alberta. The report illuminates the importance of paid caregivers to the ability of the local workforce to keep up with the demands of employment and family, and examines caregivers' work experiences, life plans, and views on Canada's immigration policies.

Findings from a survey conducted in 2014 are supplemented with qualitative interviews to show that foreign workers in the caregiving stream offer availability, flexibility, and cost savings for families working within the intensive environment of the (usually) booming Fort McMurray economy. At the same time, the report demonstrates that:

- they do so at great personal and financial costs, and
- it is the delimited conditions of their employment that make them such “ideal” caregivers.

After reviewing changes to the caregiving stream announced in November 2014, the report concludes that people working as caregivers under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program deserve better, given what they contribute, but also that they deserve better conditions in which to make those contributions.

# Why are Live-in Caregivers a “Solution”?

## Work-Life Challenges for Families in the Oil Sands Region

### Long hours and rotational shifts

Residents of Fort McMurray work the longest hours in the country. Residents working 50 hours or more account for 32 percent of the population, against only 17 percent at the national level. Workers are also often on rotational shift work, which can entail working nights, weekends, and holidays.

### Limited time for daily life

Long and variable working hours combine with high mobility and turnover to contribute to both social opportunities and social stresses, including shortages of time for volunteering, leisure, family, and daily care activities.

### High cost of living, including child care

The cost of living in Fort McMurray is well known, with housing costs being the highest in Alberta and among the highest in Canada. The availability and cost of child care services in Fort McMurray are also significant obstacles for young families. Licensed child care facilities are among the most expensive in the province, costing from \$1300 to more than \$2000 per month. In addition, licensed child care services outside of standard work hours are extremely limited.

**Confronted with an intense and variable work regime and an environment marked by the high cost and limited availability of child care services, many families turn to live-in caregivers to care for their children.**

For more details, see [Section Three](#) of the report.

# How are Live-in Caregivers a “Solution”?

## Savings and Opportunities for Families in the Oil Sands Region

### Availability

Live-in caregivers’ long work hours mirror and exceed those of their employers. On a weekly basis, live-in caregivers work 53.7 hours on average, compared to an average of 45.5 hours a week among the full-time working population of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. Live-in caregivers tend to work longer hours when one or both of their employers works out at site.

### Flexibility

The irregularity of live-in caregivers’ work schedules matches that of their employers. Fifty-four percent of the sample investigated is contacted outside of regular work hours on an occasional or frequent basis, and 53 percent reports sometimes working on weekends. In both cases the percentages increase when one or both employers works in the oil sands industry.

### Direct child care savings

Parents who have two pre-school children save on average \$6,970 a year by employing a live-in caregiver (rather than using a licensed out-of-home facility), and these savings go up substantially for each additional child. Of the live-in caregivers surveyed, 82 percent care for two or more children.

### Scope of Work Duties

The live-in caregiver’s scope of care and duties is much broader and more flexible than that provided by out-of-home child care providers. Twenty-five percent of those surveyed are also responsible for household maintenance and for care of adult employers – activities explicitly outside of the scope of the LCP policy.

**Live-in caregivers save money for their employers and allow them to live in the region, work in the oil sands economy, and access the highest wages in the country, but these contributions come at a high personal cost for live-in caregivers themselves.**

For more details, see [Section Five](#) of the report.

# The Cost of Coming to Work in Canada as a Live-in Caregiver

## Agents and recruiters

Seventy-seven percent of the live-in caregivers used an employment agency or recruiter and spent on average \$3,779 for this service alone.

## Other fees

Live-in caregivers generally invest more to come and work in Canada than their employers do to hire them. Seventy percent of the sample surveyed invested between \$4,000 and \$8,999 overall to make the move to work in Canada, while their employers most likely spent just \$3,000 (LMIA processing fee + airfare).

## A difficult but worthwhile path

The Live-in Caregiver Program (dissolved in November 2014) has been a reliable but challenging avenue to settling in Canada. Ninety-three percent of the live-in caregivers interviewed in this survey had already applied or were planning to apply for permanent residence in Canada. However, the conditions of work in the caregiving stream, including weak monitoring and regulation, make them vulnerable to employer abuses and workplace violations.

**Live-in caregivers in Fort McMurray have sacrificed substantial financial savings and long years without their own spouses and children to work for families in the oil sands region. The opportunity to immigrate is what keeps them going.**

For more details, see [Section Four](#) of the report.

# Fort McMurray Live-in Caregivers Face Many Challenges

## Unpaid overtime

Twenty percent of the live-in caregivers surveyed report that they are not paid or are only occasionally paid for their overtime hours. They work 10.4 overtime hours a week on average.

## Underpayment

Underpayment is one serious outcome. Among the respondents, 18 percent reported receiving less than the Alberta prevailing gross hourly wage (\$10.19, the 2013/2014 prevailing wage, used as threshold).

## Illegal or bad working conditions

Illegal or bad working conditions was the second most important reason for changing employers while working in Canada (Fort McMurray).

**The flexibility and availability of live-in caregivers, although welcomed by employers, spells precariousness and vulnerability for this occupation and social group.**

For more details, see [Section Six](#) of the report.

# Challenges Faced by Live-in Caregivers Continue Despite Reforms to the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP) Announced in November 2014

## End of the “live-in” requirement

The radical restructuring of the LCP includes an end to the “live-in” requirement of the program. This is a welcome but minimal improvement, given the range of employment conditions that have straightjacketed live-in caregivers. Those already in Canada can now move out but do so at the risk of having to apply for permanent residence under the quotas of one of the newly created “caring classes.”

## Permanent residence no longer guaranteed

Reforms to the LCP bring caregiving work into alignment with the generic principles of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP). Caregivers who enter the country under a Labour Market Impact Assessment issued after November 30, 2014 will no longer automatically be entitled to permanent residence upon meeting the program’s requirements (a right that made Canada’s LCP unique globally). Now, the permanent residence applications of caregivers in both “caring classes” will be subject to calculated market conditions and needs (e.g., adjustment of supply and demand and wage levels).

## Workplace violations, weak monitoring

The restructuring of the LCP does not address problems related to workplace violations and employer abuse, including a history of weak monitoring of the program. In addition, caregivers’ status in Canada is still bound to employers, which elevates the risk of workplace violations going unreported and makes monitoring of the program difficult.

**Overall, such an alignment with the TFWP represents a downgrading in the conditions of foreign nationals who are already in Canada providing caregiving services.**

For more details, see [Section Two](#) of the report.

# Who are the Fort McMurray Live-in Caregivers? profile of survey participants

## Gender, country of origin, and age

The majority of the live-in caregivers surveyed are female (88 percent), Filipinas (88 percent), and between 25 and 44 years of age (82 percent)

## Educational background

Live-in caregivers in Fort McMurray are also a qualified social group. Ninety-six percent of survey respondents have some kind of post-secondary education. The educational qualifications of live-in caregivers in our Fort McMurray sample are higher than those currently found in the program as a whole, and higher than those found in the Fort McMurray population generally.

## Impressions of Fort Mc Murray

Live-in caregivers in Fort McMurray find cold weather, limited social activities, homesickness, and cultural adjustment to be key challenges. Like much of the local population, they see Fort McMurray as simultaneously ripe with economic costs and opportunities.

For more details, see [Section One](#) of the report.



# How were the Data Collected?

This report is based on:

## Survey

A survey conducted with 56 temporary foreign workers living and working in dwelling units in and around Fort McMurray under the Live-in Caregiver Program; and

## Interviews

qualitative information from individual interviews and informal focus groups with live-in caregivers conducted between 2008 and 2014.

The survey (online) was designed and delivered in partnership with the Fort McMurray Nanny Network in summer 2014 in response to concerns about the well-being of live-in caregivers amid a rapidly changing policy environment. The survey is estimated to have captured approximately 10 percent of the Fort McMurray live-in caregiver population.

For more details, see [Section One](#) of the report.

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