

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Thursday, February 12, 2004

Committee Room 1

Transition House Association of Nova Scotia

Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Ms. Marilyn More (Chairman)
Mr. Mark Parent
Mr. William Langille
Mr. Gary Hines
Mr. Jerry Pye
Mr. Gordon Gosse
Mr. Russell MacKinnon
Mr. Stephen McNeil
Mr. Leo Glavine

In Attendance:

Ms. Mora Stevens
Legislative Committee Coordinator

Ms. Diana Whalen
Halifax Clayton Park MLA

WITNESSES

Transition House Association of Nova Scotia

Ms. Lyn Barrett
THANS Co-Chairman and Executive Director of Bryony House

Ms. Shirley Oickle
THANS Co-Chair and Executive Director of Harbour House in Bridgewater

Ms. Bea LeBlanc
Executive Director of Cape Breton Transition House Assn.

Ms. Pamela Harrison
THANS Provincial Co-ordinator

Ms. Elaine Smith
Executive Director of Juniper House in Yarmouth

Ms. Suzanne White
Executive Director of Citizens Against Spousal Abuse in Digby

Ms. Tammy Lee Vautour
Executive Director of Naomi Society in Antigonish

Ms. Rhonda Fraser
Executive Director of Chrysalis House in Kentville

Ms. Starlynn Shars
Third Place Transition House in Truro



HALIFAX, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2004

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

9:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN
Ms. Marilyn More

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I now call the Standing Committee on Community Services to order. Good morning. We are delighted to have a full house this morning and very pleased to have with us representatives from the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia. So we will start with introductions from the table and then we will ask the representatives of the association to introduce themselves. Gordie, would you like to start?

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We are also pleased to have with us today Diana Whalen representing Halifax Clayton Park. Welcome.

Would you each like to introduce yourselves before we start?

MS. LYN BARRETT: Good morning. It's very auspicious for us to be meeting today in the middle of Family Violence Prevention Week. We thank you for the opportunity to come here today. We also thank you for recognizing the importance of transition house shelters, our programming and our services and for the invitation to appear before you to address our funding challenges.

My name is Lyn Barrett. I'm the Executive Director of Bryony House here in Halifax and I am a Co-Chairman of the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia.

MS. SHIRLEY OICKLE: Good morning. My name is Shirley Oickle and I am the Executive Director at Harbour House in Bridgewater. I'm also a Co-Chairman at the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia.

MS. BEA LEBLANC: Good morning. My name is Bea LeBlanc. I am the Executive Director of Cape Breton Transition House Association in Sydney. I am a founding member of the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm just wondering if the other executive directors and Pam could introduce themselves at the mic so that your names are recorded in our transcript.

MS. PAMELA HARRISON: Good morning. I'm Pamela Harrison. I'm the Provincial Coordinator for the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia.

MS. ELAINE SMITH: Elaine Smith, the Executive Director of Juniper House in Yarmouth.

MS. SUZANNE WHITE: Good morning. Suzanne White, Executive Director of Citizens Against Spousal Abuse in Digby.

MS. TAMMY LEE VAUTOUR: Good morning. Tammy Lee Vautour, the Executive Director with Naomi Society in Antigonish.

MS. RHONDA FRASER: Rhonda Fraser, Executive Director of Chrysalis House in Kentville.

MS. STARLYNN SHEARS: Good morning. Starlynn Shears, Third Place Transition House in Truro and I am very new to that position. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. I know many of you have travelled a considerable distance to be with us today and we certainly appreciate that extra effort.

So, would you like to make an opening statement or presentation?

MS. LEBLANC: Yes, I would like to begin with a bit of the background. The Transition House Association, or THANS, is a unified provincial voice for organizations to end violence against women. The 12 THANS member organizations provide direct services to abused women and their children across Nova Scotia.

On budget day, April 4, 2002, the Government of Nova Scotia announced that it would cut nearly \$1 million from the budgets of transition houses, women's centres and men's intervention programs. In response to the budget announcement, member organizations of THANS, Women's Centres CONNECT!, and men's intervention programs formed a coalition to prevent the loss of the programs and services so vital to the safety and well-being of abused women and their children. In response to the overwhelmingly strong support of Nova Scotia communities, the government reinstated the funding cuts temporarily. The proposed family

violence system redesign plan produced by the Department of Community Services recommending drastically altered services and the closures of others was set aside.

In October 2002, the Deputy Minister, Marian Tyson, and senior employees of the Department of Community Services met with the coalition to discuss and establish a process for next steps. The meeting, facilitated by Susan Ashley, was attended by representatives of all coalition organizations and those four chairmen who were able to attend. Although a consensus on how best to proceed was not reached, this meeting emphasized co-operation and mutual respect which was achieved under very difficult circumstances.

In January 2003, the Department of Community Services agreed to and supported the coalition's development and presentation of its own plan for redesign and proposed an end date of July 2003. The coalition report was actually completed ahead of schedule and was presented to the Department of Community Services on May 21, 2003. For THANS, this process served to renew and affirm the already shared commitment to providing the best possible service and support to abused women and their children. It has also strengthened relationships within our community and with other professional agencies and organizations and has enhanced our relationship with the women and children whom we serve.

After eight months of anticipation, we received the Department of Community Services' response to our report on February 3, 2004. Shirley will give an overview of our services.

MS. OICKLE: THANS member organizations provide 24-hour emergency accommodations; 24-hour professionally-staffed crisis lines; emotional support; children's services; individual and group counselling; food, shelter and basic needs; information; referral; advocacy; second-stage housing; and outreach programs. Our THANS member organizations also provide important and ground-breaking research on a multitude of issues directly related to family violence and violence against women and children: grants, workshops, training, advocacy, representation and resources that would otherwise not be available on an individual organization basis; networking communication between and among THANS member organizations, other supporting organizations, and government departments and agencies; maintenance of important links developed by its members at the provincial, regional, national and international levels; a clearing house of information and resources for use by non-profit organizations and the general public.

I believe in your information packets that you have received, you would have had some of the initiatives that we have accomplished over the last while. So what I want to do is highlight a few of our most current initiatives. In 2003, with funding from the Community Mobilization Program, Justice Canada, THANS held its first annual Family Violence Awareness Month, February 2003, with activities, workshops, videos in schools and community events that promoted healthy relationships as a way to prevent family violence.

This initiative allowed THANS to replace some of the programs and services that were previously provided by the Family Violence Prevention Initiative, a provincial program that was cut in the 2000-01 provincial budget.

In 2004, THANS, with the Department of Community Services and the Department of Justice, is one of the direct service providers that are part of the High Risk Case Protocol announced jointly this week by the Departments of Justice and Community Services. The focus of the HRCP is early identification of high-risk domestic violence cases that could lead to lethality. THANS is in discussion with the Justice Learning Centre regarding future training for Justice workers, and will be participating in a workshop at the Justice Learning Centre in Truro on February 25, 2004.

Also in 2004, THANS has reached a partnership agreement with Canadian Crossroads International and the Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse, to provide staff exchanges between Nova Scotia and Swaziland, in order to provide community development in the area of violence prevention, specifically addressing issues of funding support, counselling for women and children, and developing shelter organizations.

Again, in 2004, THANS is working with both the national and regional coordinators of the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System project, referred to as HIFIS. THANS will be hosting a provincial workshop funded by the Securing Community Partnerships Initiative, the centrepiece of the National Homelessness Initiative, in March of this year.

The goal of this workshop is to come to consensus on the implementation of the HIFIS system in all transition house member organizations. This system would provide THANS with a province-wide, comprehensive, data-base system that would allow us to effectively provide non-identifying statistical information to the provincial and federal governments, as required. Equally important, HIFIS will allow us to track the information that THANS has long believed truly reflects the work that we do, and the value of programs and services we provide to our communities. This system, as well as the hardware and technical support required, will be provided at no cost by the federal government.

The Transition House Association of Nova Scotia is a vibrant, multi-faceted organization that continually works towards meeting the needs of the women, children and communities we serve. In the short term, we address the safety and well-being of our clients and support their efforts to make informed choices about next steps. Over the long term, we are committed to providing prevention initiatives, public education, advocacy and input regarding policies and legislation that impact abused women and children.

Our contribution to our community is broader, deeper and far more complex than providing beds for abused women and children. THANS, as individual, autonomous

organizations in our communities, and collectively as a provincial organization, provides multi-faceted, comprehensive programs, services and initiatives that respond not only to the identified needs of our constituents, but also attempts to meet - within our very limited resources - the challenge of changing trends in our field.

Bea LeBlanc will now provide an overview of the recommendations that we outlined in our May 2003 report to the province.

MS. LEBLANC: For organizational and structural recommendations it was recommended that all existing shelters remain open and that sustainable funding is ensured for all organizations. It is also recommended that the volunteer safe house model not be seen as an alternative to the current THANS model, and that the Department of Community Services provide Bryony House with more adequate funding to meet the stated and verified needs of the organization.

It is also recommended that the Housing Division of the Department of Community Services work with the Halifax Transition House Association, to explore the possibility of moving to a more suitable shelter; Third Place and the Department of Community Services resume discussions of the Solution Focus Plan and move toward implementation of the plan; CASA and Juniper House merge; and the Cape Breton Transition House proceed with the acquisition of a more suitable facility.

Recommendations for accessibility. It is recommended that all THANS member organizations address the accessibility for women and children from diverse communities, that all shelters work to achieve accessibility, including ensuring wheelchair access, and the provision of material for the deaf and hard of hearing, and the blind and visually impaired.

It is also recommended that the Department of Community Services work with THANS member organizations to achieve accessibility goals and prepare to assume additional costs through the Shelter Enhancement Program.

Program recommendations. It is recommended that THANS and its member organizations conduct a comprehensive program review to develop a long-term plan for service delivery to abused women and their children in Nova Scotia. THANS will seek external sources of funding. The only immediate expectation of the Department of Community Services, is that the department agree to a reasonable amount of time for developing and completing the program review.

Realistic goals, which will reflect the needs of the communities, regions and the province will be developed and implemented over a five-year period. It is recommended that the planning for the program review commence in 2003 and that the review be conducted in 2004 and 2005, and that outreach and follow-up programs for women and children be strengthened and expanded. Every THANS organization stated the need for more outreach

resources. At present, very few organizations offer consistent outreach services to children, and all state it as a priority.

[9:15 a.m.]

Operational recommendations. It is recommended that THANS member organizations develop a user-friendly method of gathering statistics, which will guarantee accurate documentation of the demographics of women and children who use the services of THANS member organizations and which will more realistically reflect the quantity and the scope of work performed by the organizations; each organization be provided with funding for administrative assistants; THANS member organizations investigate collective purchasing strategies within their regions and provincially; THANS member organizations consider shared-staff training programs; and the Department of Community Services support the continued professional development within THANS member organizations by making training opportunities available to them.

Maximizing coordinated community response. It is recommended that all THANS member organizations work to maximize links within their communities and regions; THANS and the Department of Education explore the development of family violence programs to be included in the curriculum, such programs to be delivered by THANS members and paid for by the Department of Education; the Department of Community Services and the Department of Justice work together with THANS, child welfare agencies and the police, to review and strengthen the existing protocol developed by the Family Violence Subcommittee of the Children and Family Services Act Implementation Committee; and that training be provided for all managers and front-line workers involved with abused women and child welfare. Lyn will now speak to our priority recommendations.

MS. BARRETT: As you will see from the overhead, our first priority was the maintenance of existing shelters, with sustainable funding and a caution against the volunteer safe-house model. Abused women and their children need to be safe and they need to be safe in their own communities, and to ensure that safety, shelters and outreach programs need to have experienced and trained staff.

As we move closer to our own dreams of a truly coordinated community response to family violence, we welcome all new tools. We welcome tools such as the new Domestic Violence Intervention Act, with its emergency protection orders, and the new RCMP domestic violence programs. We regularly use emergency protection orders as a tool to help some of our clients. We were instrumental in helping the Department of Justice develop the regulations for the Act, and we ensured, through our intervention, that custody and access issues were dealt with within the Act. It is still critical, though, that the continuity of our shelter and counselling services, as provided by all THANS member organizations, continue for the safety and well-being of abused women and their children.

I wanted to note that safe houses were used, although infrequently, in the early days of the battered women's movement. They had been largely abandoned throughout Canada and the United States because they could not effectively offer safety for both clients and for safe-house providers, and because they did not and could not provide the comprehensive programming needed by abused women and their children.

Our second priority recommendation involves a provision of more adequate funding for Bryony House. Bryony House here in Halifax serves the Halifax Regional Municipality with its population of over 350,000, 39 per cent, approximately, of the total population of the province, spread out over 5,490-plus square kilometres. We reach from Hubbards on one side, Ecum Secum on the other, up as far as Elmsdale. We have extremely high occupancy, often averaging well over 90 per cent. We have a high number of distress calls every day. We have waiting lists for women and children who may be parked in other shelters, homeless shelters, places of family and friends while they await a bed. We also turn away women and children every day, literally, because we do not have enough beds to accommodate the need.

It was recognized by all the Transition House Association members that more funding needed to be put in place to address the high need in the Halifax area, probably to the tune of about \$170,000 a year, which would allow for additional staffing and a budget for the staff that we now have that we fund-raise to cover. We have a 24-bed shelter, yet from Wednesday through Sunday evenings, we have one person working. Overnight there is one person working. Saturday, during the day, there is one person working. That person has to attend to 24 residents, women and children in high need, high-crisis situations. She has to answer the distress line, make sure whoever comes to the door is screened and either gets in or is kept out, depending on what they're there for, have suicide calls, everything is happening at one time.

It is not unheard of and happens every single day, almost every single hour of the day that there will be three women in distress in the office, crying, sometimes screaming, and the phone is ringing, and it's a call that you can't dismiss with a "hold it, just hold that thought for a moment" while somebody is suicidal. You're trying to assess their medical needs, so we can get them to the nearest hospital. They all have housing crises, plus they're in emotional turmoil. Of course that's when the doorbell always rings.

The third priority refers to a specific recommendation that was created for a merger of Juniper House and CASA, Citizens Against Spousal Abuse, in Digby. That was to more effectively provide services for that whole area of southwestern Nova Scotia. There was also the establishment of a new operational model for Third Place in Truro, a proposal having already been submitted to the Department of Community Services, and support for Cape Breton Transition House to find a more suitable and accessible building. This proposal has, in fact, been made under the National Homelessness Initiative and a response is expected at any time.

The fourth priority recommendation is for a comprehensive program review to assist us in developing long-term planning for service delivery. This is an internal process to be undertaken by the THANS member agencies with external funding. Through this process, we would be setting realistic goals to reflect the real needs of our communities over a five-year period of time. It is anticipated that such a review will assist THANS and the department to more effectively plan for future program efficiency and budget needs.

We've spent much of our time over the past two years attempting to meet the many challenges inherent in the department's original redesign plan. This has left us with little time or resources to execute our original plans for this review process. Obviously it's now February 12, 2004, so our timelines will have to be substantively changed and moved forward. That's something that we expect the department will appreciate as we go through this process.

We want to wind down this presentation a little bit by acknowledging the receipt of the Department of Community Services' response to our report. This response is entitled, *Strengthening Family Violence Services in Nova Scotia: Next Steps*. We received that last week. While our organizations as a whole have had very little time to absorb this response and to confer around it, there are several initial comments that THANS would like to make today.

Number one, in the accompanying letter from Deputy Minister Marian Tyson, one of the first next steps put forward by the department is an invitation to our organization's board chairs to attend the next steps planning session. In October 2002, Ms. Tyson did make a commitment to THANS and our coalition partners that all future meetings and next steps would be entered into consultatively and collectively, and would include staff representation from each association or organization. Our volunteer board chairs have clearly indicated to us that they count on our experience and our comprehensive knowledge of the issues to guide their decision-making process. We will, therefore, be accompanying our board chairs to any and all meetings called by the deputy minister.

Our second concern was around the regional meetings. At that same meeting, in October 2002, the deputy minister had also made a commitment to hold all such consultations and meetings on a provincial rather than regional basis. This echoed a similar commitment made by the former Minister of Community Services, Peter Christie on April 17, 2002. The next steps, indicating that regional departmental staff would be contacting us to set up local meetings does not at all meet those agreements and all the agreements we have made since our first series of coalition meetings with the Department of Community Services. We asked for and expected to have provincial meetings.

Number three, within the department's response there is a conspicuous absence of any mention of two of our THANS member organizations; not only were they not on the mailing list, they were also not included in the list of participants in the process, even though specific recommendations were in fact included regarding these THANS member organizations.

Citizens Against Spousal Abuse, CASA, in Digby, and Naomi Society, in Antigonish, were not mentioned anywhere in the 12-page response from the department. We find this oversight puzzling, as CASA and Naomi are, in fact, the outreach-based programming provided by THANS member organizations. As I noted, they were present throughout all of the discussions, and the coalition report includes recommendations involving each of these organizations as priority recommendations, both separately as well as jointly with two of the shelters.

Our umbrella organization, THANS, also did not warrant any mention in the department's response. This was also very surprising, since the work of all Nova Scotia's shelters is supported by our provincial office and by our coordinator, and our coordinator worked extensively with the department, including the deputy minister, throughout the 2002 and 2003 process. As you will have heard earlier from Shirley Oickle, our collective accomplishments are many and they add value to the work done by our individual agencies and associations. Again, the THANS office itself was the subject of specific recommendations in our report.

More importantly, it was of grave concern to us to note that throughout the department's response to our report several references were made to regionally-based services. Regionalization appeared to us to be the basis of the family violence system redesign plan drafted by the department in March 2002, just prior to the budget cuts in April of that year. Regionalization as such was rejected overwhelmingly and by a virtual single voice in April 2002 by all the communities we serve right across Nova Scotia.

The department's response also stated that transition houses are primarily funded based on the number of beds they have. The insistence of this argument that the viability of transition houses must be measured against average yearly occupancy is very disheartening and discouraging and appears to, yet again, ignore the volume of work we actually do, the comprehensive continuum of support that we provide and offer to abused women and their children.

It is interesting that, although dips in occupancy are the focus of attention, extremely high occupancy tends to be totally ignored. It is interesting to note that in a Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women's 2001 statistical review, which I believe is in your package, they reached the conclusion that the small decline in occupancy rates may largely be the consequence of shelters being open and available to women. Shelters are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week and women often need to access safety 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You do not offer a safety net part-time.

The department has recognized the successes associated with our outreach programs and mentions that in a number of places. But our outreach tends to be successful because shelters exist at the same time and are there. Women may choose to stay in their communities and in their relationships, even, knowing that safety is a call away.

[9:30 a.m.]

MS. OICKLE: The boards, the staff, the executive directors and the users of our services have not been enlightened by the response from the province. It has, frankly, left us with more questions than answers. We are hopeful that a more detailed and comprehensive response to our May report will soon be forthcoming.

THANS members remain steadfast in our work to end violence against women and children and we look to the Government of Nova Scotia to endorse and support that commitment. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I just wonder if someone wants to clarify for the members of the committee before we start the questions, your current funding arrangements. I believe you're funded on a quarterly basis and you don't know from quarter to quarter if that's going to continue?

MS. BARRETT: Actually, we do know. Generally, what happens is, we always know that we will likely have last year's budget as a starting point. It doesn't normally change from year to year. We normally start a budget process in January and February of each year, so that we have it ready for submission to the regional administrators and/or the provincial department before the fiscal year starts.

We normally don't hear or we get the form letter saying it's the same as last year. Well, we have been surprised, I have to say, by a 6 per cent cut, way down the road, after we've spent the money. But normally we hear sometime during the summer or early fall that it's the same as it was the previous year.

We get our cheques quarterly and unless there is a substantive change, up or down, we would normally just expect to get the same quarterly payment. But we do know it, it's just that it's not sustainable in the sense of having a long-term sense that it's always going to be the same. We've had several budget cuts over the years that have come as somewhat of a surprise in the middle of our budget year or towards the end of a budget year.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Russell.

MR. RUSSELL MACKINNON: Madam Chairman, I want to congratulate the representatives here today for the excellent presentation and for the fine work you're doing. It would have been nice to have someone from Autumn House here as well to give us greater insight as to what's happening in that end of the province, but it seems like the government is looking for every opportunity to kind of keep that out of the forefront.

I read this report that was provided by the Department of Community Services and I was focusing on Page 10 of the report with regard to the numbers - I'm sorry, Page 9, I believe

it was - with the trends. The number of women that use transition houses is down from 1,037 to 869 over a 10-year period and days of care provided declined from 28,566 down to 24,464 and the number of children served has declined from 970 down to 547. But my sense is that's a very skewed observation. My question is, if you had not received the funding cut in 2000, I believe was the fiscal year, would those numbers be what they are today or would those numbers be higher? What I'm hearing from the representatives who've made presentations, Madam Chairman, is that they need more funding. My sense is that perhaps the government has manipulated these figures by enacting a funding cut and thereby there's less money, so you can't provide the services; if you don't have the resources then, obviously, these numbers will be down.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I think there are two questions here.

MR. MACKINNON: Yes.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: You can correct me, but I understand that the original cut was put back into their budgets, but their budgets were frozen at the 2001-02 rates.

MR. MACKINNON: Globally, the whole thing was a rollback.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes. But perhaps the issue you're asking is why is the department claiming that the demand for services is lower?

MR. MACKINNON: Yes.

MS. BARRETT: There are a couple of answers as well to a very broad question. Certainly, there was a small decrease or a decrease in occupancy immediately after the initial funding cut of \$897,000 was announced. Many women who were going to come to a shelter told our workers that they decided they better not precipitate an end to their relationship because they didn't know if the shelter was going to be there in the future, especially in the four shelters that were specifically mentioned in the newspapers; for instance, Autumn House, Harbour House, Juniper I think, or whatever. Anyway, those houses immediately experienced a fairly major decline in occupancy and women who were in the houses were saying, I have to get back right now, because I don't know if anybody's going to be able to go to court with me in June or July and they fled back into their relationships quickly because they didn't want to burn bridges that they may not be supported afterwards in recovering.

Pamela Harrison wanted to just maybe speak to the funding issue.

MS. HARRISON: I just wanted to add to what Lyn said with regard to the status of our funding. Part of my job as the provincial coordinator is to attend the budget lockdown or lock-up - or whatever we call it - in April, and look to see what changes have been made in our funding and ask questions of representatives of the Department of Community Services.

At last year's budget lock-up, I looked at the figures, they looked the same as the year before, so I went up to speak to a representative of the Department of Community Services, Jane Fitzgerald, and I asked her, does that in fact mean that the funding has been reinstated in our budget? She said to me, you need to be aware that that funding is reinstated as long as the coalition is still meeting with the department and that process is going forward. It is not guaranteed into the future, it is a temporary reinstatement.

So, I think what I want to say, the point I want to make is, that while we do receive cheques on a quarterly basis, we do not know from quarter to quarter and specifically from year to year, whether or not there are going to be cuts. We are extremely nervous about the funding process that is coming up in the April 2004 budget. We know that the department has presented their budgeting options well in advance of April and before, interestingly enough, they request our budgets from us. So, it's a bit of an awkward situation, it seems to us sometimes that the department has made recommendations in advance of the recommendations they've received from us. I just wanted to make that point.

MS. BARRETT: Also, just to finish the occupancy issue. If you looked at that same trends page, there is the decrease in occupancy rates in your first paragraph but the bottom paragraph is the escalating demand for outreach services. Those are being offered, the shelter part and the outreach services, are offered by the same group. It's the same staff, it's the same association. So what happens is, at times, women knowing that the shelter is there may choose to do that work with the outreach staff, but she knows that the shelter is there, her partner knows that the shelter is there. So you can do as much work as possible within the community without disrupting the whole family, without taking the children away from school, but at the same time everybody is aware that there is a place to go if it escalates beyond the point where it is safe to be in the house.

MS. LEBLANC: I would just like to mention that I truly believe that it's extremely important to offer safe shelter to women and children in or near their communities. For example, if somebody from Arichat needed shelter, they would not come to Sydney, they would need to go to an area that they feel comfortable in, which would be Port Hawkesbury. So it's necessary.

MR. MACKINNON: I believe Bea may have just answered part of the question, because I know with this situation with Autumn House in Amherst, they're saying that if a woman or women with children are in a crisis situation, well they can go to New Glasgow. That's 100 kilometres away. That defies all logic, in my view, given the situation.

With regard to the government's response on Page 10, they make reference to regional plans to address community needs. Focusing on Cape Breton specifically, because recently the Chief of Police for the regional municipality has indicated his concern about the escalation in violence in the home and at the community level, how do you see this plan by the government,

the regional plan, addressing the needs for situations such as what you're facing in Sydney? I know that you could almost double in size and still have a waiting list.

MS. LEBLANC: The increase in numbers that the police have seen, we're certainly feeling it in our shelter. Also, I can tell you, as far as regionally, as a community we are working together in order to look at the problem to see what we can do about it, but we're looking at 35 different agencies and organizations working together. As far as developing shelters for individual areas, I don't see the need for regional plans, as far as that goes.

MR. MACKINNON: The bottom line is you need more money. That's the issue.

MS. LEBLANC: We need more money. In Cape Breton, in the Sydney area, we have two counties that we're responsible for, Victoria County and Cape Breton County. We service most of Cape Breton County. We have no outreach workers in the rural areas right now. We just don't have the money in order to do that. So a lot of abused women and children in our rural areas are not being met with our service.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I have Gordie, Jerry and Stephen on the speaker's list so far. Gordie.

MR. GORDON GOSSE: Good morning, ladies, and thank you for coming. Bea, I'm quite familiar with your work in the Cape Breton area, and the other ladies. I did read the report, the Strengthening Family Violence Services report. The decrease in occupancy rates in transition houses in rural areas, I feel that this is a way for the Community Services Department to regionalize and put them all in one. I feel that's the way this report is reasoned. I think this is why the Community Services Department is doing this. Can you comment on that? Am I right in my opinion of that, that by making this all regionalized, the decline in the rural areas will be factored into the urban areas of the transition houses?

MS. LEBLANC: Again, I have to say that I think it may be a possibility, as far as reducing the type of services to abused women and children. But again I say it is extremely important to offer safe shelter in areas that are either in or close to where that woman is living.

MR. GOSSE: As I read this, I read it in quite detail, and I have to ask - I have quite a number of questions actually. The Department of Community Services mentions pilot projects in the response, can you elaborate on those pilot projects?

MS. OICKLE: This is the first we had heard about the idea of pilot projects. We have no idea what they mean by that. It was not part of the discussions that we had with the province when we were doing the discussions in May, so we have absolutely no idea what they're referring to with regard to pilot projects.

MR. GOSSE: Much of your work could fall all under different departments, such as Justice, Education and Health. To your knowledge has Community Services considered interdepartmental funding for your programming?

MS. LEBLANC: To our knowledge they have not. It may be a viable option for the department. From our perspective, we neither have the time nor the resources to submit multiple funding applications, however, it may be very viable for the Department of Community Services.

MR. GOSSE: What kind of funding process would better enable transition houses to offer existing services? And how do you envision that process working?

[9:45 a.m.]

MS. BARRETT: I will actually answer that one. We talked a lot about the concept of zero-based budgeting, which was an accounting concept from many years ago. You have a set of core services that we agree on are the core services needed for the women and children of Nova Scotia, and you take those core services line by line and on the other side of the page you figure out how much, exactly, it will cost to offer the core services. You total up that page, and that would be your funding package.

That means then that the transition house board of directors and its community volunteers could spend their time and energy fundraising for the extra services that are maybe needed only in one community or that would better serve the clients overall.

MR. GOSSE: Why do you think executive directors of your organizations were not invited to the deputy minister's proposed provincial meeting?

MS. BARRETT: We honestly feel that had to have been an oversight. Certainly our board of directors is considering it as an oversight by the department. The volunteer board of directors would never dream of going to meetings with government officials without us there. Just as ministers need briefing notes, volunteer boards of directors need someone who is working in the field every single day to be able to answer their questions about the services that are being offered, the nuances that are present in conversations where the language itself may not be the same at the staff level that it is at the departmental level.

MR. GOSSE: There's been a lot of . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Perhaps one more question, and then we will save the rest for the second round.

MR. GOSSE: Being as I'm a Cape Breton MLA, I think I will direct this one towards Ms. LeBlanc. There has been a lot of press about increased family violence in Cape Breton.

How does your transition house in Sydney intend to address this issue, given the ongoing funding challenges? Before you answer that question, this is Wednesday's Cape Breton Post, by the way, and a Grade 5 student at Glace Bay Elementary School holds a can that she decorated for donations for transition houses, which will be located at Central Division of the Cape Breton Regional Police Services on Grand Lake Road all week in recognition of Family Violence Prevention Awareness Week in Nova Scotia. I think that with all the government cutbacks and everything else in non-profit organizations that these are the kinds of fundraising that you're forced into.

MS. LEBLANC: Well, I can tell you that for Cape Breton Transition House, certainly we've seen an increase in numbers of women and children reaching out to us. I can also say that the abuse is so much more severe than we've seen in the past. I can tell you that we've had to increase staffing, certainly our program amounts of money have gone up, our administration has gone up. Right now we're looking at a deficit position for our budget. We're quite concerned about the funding aspect of it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Jerry.

MR. JERRY PYE: I want to thank you for coming and making your presentation before the Standing Committee on Community Services today. Transition homes, of course, have long been a contention with the Province of Nova Scotia, how to fund them and how to provide the services for those transition homes across the province. I do know that last year we stood and debated the funding to transition homes after we had recognized that there was some \$900,000 cut from the transition homes' budget in the Department of Community Services.

There was a great deal of debate with respect to whether that money was reinstated or not. I think Pam Harrison is quite correct in making the statement that the money was actually just there and it continued to flow. There was never a reinstatement into that budget line item of that \$900,000. As a result of that the transition committees worked within those dollars. There was talk about a 9.3 per cent increase to the transition homes for wages or salary increases.

This is one of the questions, can I ask you if, in fact, that is correct? But before I finish, I want to also say that we, as a Party, had asked the minister, by way of resolution and by way of questions in the House, to provide stable funding to transition homes across the province. That would at least give transition homes the opportunity to know what kind of dollars they're working with, what kind of programs they would be able to deliver, and how beneficial those programs would be. They could then sit back and evaluate and assess the goodness of one program over another. It also didn't take away from the fact that transition homes, contrary to what people might think, still have to raise 25 per cent of their own money from the community in an area where, in fact, it is extremely difficult to raise money. So, you certainly are working with a restrained budget, providing a service to vulnerable women and children in Nova Scotia.

I want to go on to say, as well, to Lyn with respect to turning away women and children from Bryony House in Halifax, that's most unfortunate because I, sitting here as an MLA, don't know where they go when you turn them away. That's an unfortunate situation and we need to know. I think if people are turned away, we need to know. Because of out-migration in the rural communities and the population increasing in the metro area, the demand and the need for your services primarily because of the pressures placed on families, because of the lack of affordable housing, the lack of environments to allow people to live in a decent way is a very serious issue.

Also with respect to your comment on the issue of providing service in the community. It is very important. As you know, out-migration is happening on Cape Breton Island yet, there is a very real need to deal with the violence that exists because of that in Cape Breton and I will tell you that that exists in rural communities throughout the province as well. Because of that, there is a need to keep those transition homes in the community, so that those people in the community who now have fewer friends, have at least access to a facility that they know that will be able to come to their rescue and provide those kinds of services to them.

So there is a whole host of issues that I have here with respect to that and those are some of them. I know I'm giving you some general comments here but there is also the issue with respect to regional meetings and that, in fact, this is dissecting from your intent to have provincial meetings. Is that a way to divide and conquer, by meeting at regional meetings, trying to win the hearts of some of those individuals over, so that the Department of Community Services can go about with its strengthening report that it says?

I guess, also, the issue with respect to Tearmann House - and I do know that Tearmann House is now under negotiations; I don't know if you can talk about Tearmann House, but Tearmann House is under negotiations. I believe the staff in there are seeking their first collective agreement, I am not sure but they may be, and if, in fact, there is some pressure placed upon them with respect to not knowing the funding and how that's working in order for the board to provide the adequate salaries for those individuals?

So that is a host of questions, Madam Chairman, (Laughter) and I didn't mean to burden the witness panel before me, but I'm telling you that I sincerely have compassion for this area of services by our government and the need for these services, that it warrants your comments and I certainly appreciate anything that you can enlighten me on.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Jerry. I think I pulled out four questions but you're free to comment on anything. I think the first question was around what impact the wage increase had on your organizations.

MS. BARRETT: The 9.3 per cent, first of all, just as background, many years ago, the Department of Community Services and the Human Resources Department sat down and

classified all transition house staff in the Province of Nova Scotia, with an understanding and agreement that staff would be paid at the appropriate level for their experience, qualifications and the type of work they do. What that meant was that staff at the transition houses were classified as TE18, that was the technical piece of their classification and that executive directors were PR11s and those haven't changed. Every time that the NSGEU got an increase in wages, the classification of wages went up and at that time that meant that our staff were being paid for the type of work that they were doing.

Now, that's not all of our staff. We all have staff in the transition houses who are not covered by the Department of Community Services, we are fundraising for those positions on a regular basis, additional outreach staff, at times, administrative assistants, bookkeepers, all of that stuff. So, we normally pay them the same rate that we would pay our workers because of the work that they do, but it is hard for us to pass on wage increases when, in fact, their wages aren't covered.

Three of our associations, the Naomi Society, CASA and the THANS office itself are not classified positions, even though they do the same work that our workers do. They have always been paid on a grant basis, that is substantively lower than that covered by the collective agreements and by the NSGEU contracts.

The problem for us is that when the department said we're going to give you the 9.3 per cent increase for eight staff, which is the approved number of staff, if we have 11 staff on payroll, we were expected by our unions to up the ante for everybody, not just for the major players at the table, at the workplace. We also have casual staff and they're not really covered either. All of us have to cope with that.

So, we got 9.3 per cent for our approved staff. We were unable, in most cases, to pass on that full raise because it had to cover 11 people, not eight, or it had to cover 28 people, not 21. So, we did our best, we worked with our unions, mostly, to find an equitable solution. In some cases, maybe we didn't find such an equitable solution depending on which side of the bargaining table you are on.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I think the next question, what happens when a transition house is full and children and mothers are turned away?

MS. BARRETT: This is something that is Bryony House's reality. In the last fiscal year, we were forced to turn away 67 women and 43 children. We were unable, in many cases, to find alternate accommodation for those women at Adsum House, Berry House or the YWCA, because they were all so full of women who are homeless or had other issues such as addictions or were in trouble with the law, et cetera.

At the same time as we turned those women away, we had 65 women and 59 children parked at other places, waiting for entry into Bryony House. This last month we were in the

same boat. In January 2004, we had 24 women on our waiting list for two weeks and we had to turn away five families, one with four children. We are simply unable to accommodate them. One of those women had a 15 year old boy, which meant that none of the other homeless shelters would even consider her, their cut-off is 12 or 13. I am sorry, a woman coming into Halifax from another province with a 15 year old boy is not about to have him shunted away to a homeless men's shelter such as the Metro Turning Point or Phoenix House. That meant we had to ask a hospital to keep a woman and newborn for two extra nights, because we didn't know what else to do with her and there was nothing else suitable for her. It is something that rips the heart out of people doing this work, to turn away . . .

MR. PYE: Madam Chairman, can I just make a comment? Surely, what you're telling us today is shocking, because I certainly cannot possibly believe that there are individuals out there with no safe places to go. In fact, does that cause them to go back into some of the environments in which they've actually come out of?

[10:00 a.m.]

MS. LEBLANC: For the Cape Breton Transition House, I will just give you an example, at Christmastime we had 20 people in our shelter and we also had a woman and four children who needed to leave their environment immediately. We fund-raise in order to be able to, if we don't have room, put them up maybe at a motel temporarily and then look for another transition house who may have room and transfer them. That woman went to Leaside Transition House but she and her four children did return home because they just did not have the space, and it's difficult when they leave their own area.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The other two questions - and your answers can be as brief or as long as you want - one was around regional meetings and the other was Tearmann House.

MS. BARRETT: We can't speak to Tearmann House specifically. They're in negotiations, they are in conciliation at this time and there is no one here to speak for it.

With respect to Tearmann House and Autumn House, clearly the funding is an issue, as Mr. Pye had referred to, and I would think that would be our answer.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Did you want to comment any more on the regional meetings, which was his last question?

MS. BARRETT: I think we did comment on the whole concept of regional meetings. Early on in 2002, when we first heard about the budget and the redesigned documents, several of us were in meetings with the Department of Justice, planning around regulations for the Domestic Violence Intervention Act and Jane Fitzgerald had addressed us on the redesigned document and ensured us that the minister would release a copy of it to us for analysis. At that time we asked, if this is really a process whereby all the groups providing services in one

region, for instance, the northern region, would be gathered together around a table and the money would be thrown into the centre of the table and then we could just fight to get our piece of that pie. We were assured that that was not going to be the process, but that fear of regionalization and ghettoizing services and making us compete for programming is very real to us.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I now have on the speaker's list Stephen, Leo and then Gordie and Russell for the second time.

MR. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Lyn, you mentioned in your presentation about fundraising. What percentage of your funding is through fundraising, and do you have a dollar figure on what it would take for the province to allow you to just focus on providing the service that you're providing today?

MS. BARRETT: What we need is \$170,000 to provide the core services, to have our outreach funded appropriately, and to have the house staffed appropriately. Right now we fund-raise 75 per cent of our operating costs. Now the funding formula is a bit different but 75 per cent of our actual operating costs is coming from the government and we fund-raise 25 per cent - I think I got that wrong.

MR. MCNEIL: Is that \$170,000 across the province?

MS. BARRETT: No, that would just be for Bryony House.

MR. MCNEIL: Do you have any idea what it would be for across the province?

MS. BARRETT: No, I don't. I have to address this because I have notes now in front of me, as well a side commentary.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I just want to remind you, Lyn, anyone from your association can get up and use the mic and help answer the questions.

MS. BARRETT: I have actually made a mistake with respect to our operating costs.

MR. MCNEIL: Lyn, I'm from a big family so I'm used to having people stand around (Laughter)

MS. BARRETT: Bryony House needs \$170,000 on top of what we get now every year, in order to meet the needs of our community. With respect to across the province, each house has its own budget and its own deficits. A total figure, I don't know if anybody could even put that together. We would certainly be willing to do it.

MR. MCNEIL: I would appreciate that. Also you had mentioned about Bryony House having an occupancy rate of about 90 per cent at times. What is it like across the rest of the province at the other facilities?

MS. OICKLE: Each organization is going to see fluctuations month to month, with regard to occupancy. What I can do is just speak on behalf of Harbour House and I know that our occupancy fluctuates every month. We have had highs of 79 per cent and lows of 20 per cent. I think what we need to do is not look at the number of heads on beds. What we need to look at is the number of women who are accessing our services, not just the women who are actually staying within the shelter. I think that the statistics get skewed, it makes it look like we're not as fully occupied as we need to be with our work.

The need for our services never goes down and I think people need to remember that we need to be there. So if there seems to be a month where things are lower, that doesn't mean there's not a need for the service. It can't be compared to hospital beds, it's just not the same kind of scenario.

MS. LEBLANC: If I may answer that also. I brought along our January statistics and although we admitted 11 families, the majority of our work was entailed with 406 distress calls; we did 43 interviews, that's visits and safety planning person-to-person, they did not stay in the shelter but certainly needed the shelter in order to do that work; we received 119 calls from agencies and organizations looking for information concerning abuse; and for other calls there were 87 other calls, it could even be a lawyer calling for information. The amount of work we do, including the amount of occupancy is quite high and is not reflected in the numbers you see coming into the shelter.

MR. MCNEIL: Thank you.

MS. BARRETT: Actually, Rhonda Fraser from Chrysalis House is going to just add to that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Could I just remind the members, thanks to Mark pointing out, that a lot of the statistics that you're looking for are on Page 2.48 in the binder.

MS. RHONDA FRASER: I just wanted to speak a little bit, in terms of Chrysalis House, around the occupancy issues. I think about the three days leading up to Christmas this past year. We had a family come in Christmas Eve at 8:00 p.m. and that family stayed with us for less than 24 hours, did nothing for our occupancy rate, but had we not been there, had we not been open, what would those ramifications have been? This is at a time of the year that my co-workers speak of, one staff being on, those staff being relief workers who are not included the way they need to be included in those funding formulas that are based on those occupancy rates. Those are the times that are invisible. Those are the times that the occupancy rates do not reflect. Are those families who come that maybe don't stay so long, those women who come

and maybe don't have children with them but require all the resources that we have because of addictions issues, because of mental health issues, they need the staff support to be there in a way that maybe a woman who has five children, who would put those occupancy rates through the roof, she may not require as much service as that one woman who stays a shorter period of time and lowers the occupancy rates.

MR. MCNEIL: You put the reality in the fact that those statistics do not reflect what you are facing daily. We can read those off the page of our handout but, they do not reflect what these women are facing.

MS. OICKLE: That's why we don't want the focus to be the number of people who are actually sleeping in the beds because it's much more than that.

MS. MCNEIL: That was part of my next question if I can, Madam Chairman, just to go on and talk about the outreach programs you were talking about. If I'm hearing you right, that is the part of the equation we need to be focusing on. Some of this work can be done, not at a facility but in the community, in terms of doing outreach programs. What happens to the children who come into your facility after they leave? Is there any follow-up, any work done through those programs? Is that some of the outreach programs you are talking about?

MS. OICKLE: Can I just address that? You said that maybe the focus needs to be on outreach programs. The focus needs to be on the wide variety of programs that we offer, it's not to focus on one to the exclusion of the other, so you have to look at it as a full group of different services that we provide, and not separate and divide because we don't in our work, separate occupancy and is this fitting in here, and things like that. You need to look at it as a full variety of services and to exclude one over another is not of any benefit.

MR. MCNEIL: In my constituency there is the womens' place shelter, they call it the Women's Place. How do the women's centres fit into the program?

MS. BARRETT: Women's centres actually don't fit in, they do not offer specific family violence programming. What they do as part of our community is refer those women and their children to us, so we provide the specific services with respect to shelter, counselling on intimate partner abuse, working with children who have witnessed or experienced living in an abusive situation. What we send them to womens' centres for, on the other hand, is work around job re-entry programming and other types of supports from menopause programs to educational programming. So they offer, again, part of a broad continuum of services to women and children but their piece is not the family violence piece, and that was something that took us almost two years to bring forward, and I think is now acknowledged in the response from the department.

MR. MCNEIL: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I now have Leo, Bill, Mark, Gary, Gordie, Russell and Gerry.

Leo.

MR. GLAVINE: I will try not to be as long as my colleague, Mr. Pye. I wish I had known Mr. Pye when I was teaching Sociology 12, he would have made a great guest speaker. (Interruptions)

Today's presentation is very enlightening but very sobering, indeed, when you talk about the number of women and children who have to be turned away when you are full. What I found, also, that was really hard-hitting, was your description of a day when you have one staff member who is literally looking after a full house, the phone and perhaps somebody, as you literally said, at the door. If you can just describe, perhaps, in a little more detail what is the impact and the human cost inside the house at that point in time?

MS. BARRETT: It's difficult to imagine. I have only been at Bryony House now since January 12th. My first full day as the executive director, I walked into the House, it was freezing, there was no heat, the furnace had gone the night before, unnoticed. So there was no heat, no hot water, we had 27 residents, women and children in the house; three of them, were in distress when I walked in. The worker, one worker, from the overnight shift who had been working since 12 o'clock and this is just after 8:00 o'clock in the morning, is trying to do shift change to pass on the information to the new worker, who is just coming in. They are trying to get the furnace company, Scotia Fuels, to come to fix the furnace, we don't know what's wrong with it. This was that coldest day in Halifax. The dishwasher was broken, we always have a potential of having women with hepatitis A, hepatitis B or hepatitis C and HIV in the house, so a dishwasher is an essential element of our environment.

So we had no heat, we had seven children who had to go to school and who had to leave at 8:30 a.m. So, we have all these mothers and there is no water, because the pipes were actually frozen now; it was -37, I believe, that morning. It was a lovely day and one staff had called in sick for the evening shift and we didn't have relief. The phone was ringing off the hook. Everybody seemed to be in crisis. There were three women in the office when I walked in, two of whom were crying and one who was yelling at another resident because something had been stolen.

If I was a new resident coming into that shelter, I would have turned around and walked away and said, you know, he may put me in the hospital and he may burn my arms twice a month, but boy, at least I know what's coming next.

Unfortunately, apart from the furnace breaking, the rest is normal, is a part of life in the biggest shelter. Because of the volume of clients, our needs are so great, we cannot meet the needs of each person. We have a woman sitting there crying and the counsellor is trying to work with her and answer the phone and eight more residents are coming in for morning

medications. We have to lock them up because of children, so there you're trying to pour your heart out to tell somebody what life has been like, you're at your most vulnerable and there is this parade, "I need my pills, I need my pills", the phone is ringing, and the doorbell is going and the food bank is there. It was quite amazing to me and astounding that we achieve anything and that residents thank us when we finally got housing and they're moving and tell us how important the service was, never ceases to amaze me.

MS. OICKLE: If I can just add. I realize that at Bryony House this is very magnified and amplified but there are a lot of similarities across the province from shelter to shelter, the hecticness, the being able to provide services to a wide variety of different women with very different needs and simultaneously at the same time answer the door, the distress line and deal with the issues that are before you at that moment. So I want to recognize that it's amplified at Bryony but at the same time, there are a lot of similarities across the province.

MS. LEBLANC: We've talked a lot about the women and children who use our services and certainly the impact is there but if I can just say how it relates to the staff. It is not unusual for unionized staff to go without breaks or lunches daily because they just do not have the time and they never complain, they're dedicated and hardworking and have been there for quite some time.

MS. TAMMY LEE VAUTOUR: I would like to add to that if I may. I am Tammy Lee Vautour and I'm with the Naomi Society in Antigonish. I just thought, just to add to your thoughts about what services are given to women if they have nowhere to go and what we do. We're an outreach office. We don't have beds. So, that's the difference between CASA and ourselves with the rest of the transition houses. However, we do the same thing. We do have a lot of the hectic days where have the phones ringing, you're down to one or two staff, you have to accompany a woman to court, you know, crisis call, calls. I mean, I have a caseload where we're seeing almost 50 women a month; open files, you're going to visit but that doesn't stop the calls. In a month your calls for crisis could be over six. If the house is unable to provide that service for them, that's what Naomi does too. We work very closely with Leaside and Tearnann - I'm getting a little nervous here, I guess. There's lots of work that we do and we just really are there to provide the most and the appropriate safety for these women. We work very closely with them. So if a woman is leaving that shelter after maybe we have transported her there, we're doing that one-on-one with her, the safety planning, the court accompaniments, the legal aid appointments, access issues, financing, housing.

The other thing, Naomi has second-stage housing, so we do have a temporary spot where if a woman is in a shelter for six weeks and we have a unit available, we provide that support to her for up to almost a year. So, there are a lot of things that we do, that you can't just say it's a typical day. I just thought that I would like to add that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Bill.

MR. WILLIAM LANGILLE: I've probably observed more first-hand domestic violence than most people in this room. Now, I'll go back into the 1980s when the interagency committees were first formed. The reason the interagency committees were formed was because people working in different departments, the front-line people, did not know who to refer people to. So that is basically why interagency committees were formed. I can remember having to travel 300 kilometres to a transition house and escort the lady there myself, or one of my members. Domestic violence is probably one of the worst kinds of crime in Canada. I was wondering with the police doing zero tolerance on violence right now, has this had an impact with transition houses?

MS. BARRETT: It has increased our workload. Every time the police now recognize violence as being a crime and as being as serious as it actually is, by opening those doors, in fact, what happens is they're more likely to make referrals to transition house services. For instance, I think only four of the 165 or 166 emergency protection orders in this province have been done by police officers, the rest of them have pretty well been done either by the women with our support or by our workers. One of the things that happens is the police know that they take two to five hours to complete and that there needs to be safety planning and intensive counselling sometimes as a part of that process. They make those referrals and within individual communities, our relationship with the police is stronger, I think, than it ever has been.

MR. LANGILLE: It has been my observation, of course, in domestic violence to separate the people, first-hand, and remove them from each other.

In Halifax, I know your workload is extreme and I noticed the amount of people that you say you have turned away. Can you not transfer those people, some of those to Truro and other places rather than turn them away?

MS. BARRETT: We try that. That's always one of our first steps, is first we look at other shelters within Halifax, such as Adsum House or Berry House or the YWCA. Our second stage is to try to get them to another shelter that has beds, that is free, such as maybe Harbour House for some women, Truro or even Chrysalis House, for instance. Often women can't leave their community and they don't want to, they have aging parents that they visit every day at Sunrise Manor, they have children going to school and you don't just pick your children up and go to Truro for two weeks and then hope to come back. They may have jobs and many women work part-time in low-paying jobs but they fought for years to get those jobs. You can't go to the IWK-Grace and say, well, I need to have two weeks off so I can go someplace else and I'll be back in two weeks. Your job will not be there when you come back.

MR. LANGILLE: Just a couple more quick ones. Do you keep records of the number of women that have repeatedly used your facilities?

MS. BARRETT: We all do, yes.

MR. LANGILLE: And what would the percentage be would you say that someone uses? Obviously, the women know where to go now, a lot of them, compared to years ago.

MS. BARRETT: Elaine?

MS. ELAINE SMITH: I'm Elaine Smith, Juniper House in Yarmouth. One of the things that we have done is develop policies, this isn't a problem we see often. It isn't like these women think they can come in to stay and go home and have a honeymoon stage because when he wants her back he promises her everything, right? So there is a theory, though, if you want a fur coat, you go to Juniper House but that doesn't really work, and we don't take people back for those reasons. We also recognize that if we had a policy where women could come back as many times as they liked, we would be enabling them to stay in those situations, so therefore we address that up front.

Any time a woman is in physical danger, we will take her, regardless of how many times she's been there but in the 18 years I have worked at Juniper House, I would say there have only been three or four women who have had multiple stays. So that is not like an avenue where, I just need a few days away from this situation and then I'm going back.

MR. LANGILLE: It is my observation also that afterward, the wife goes back with their husband or partner and this seems to be an evolving situation, that she can't seem to separate from her husband or partner, even though there is violence there. Have you found that?

MS. BARRETT: I think if you read any of the literature, you will see that women may have to leave their partner up to 30 times and there may be a least 30 episodes of violence before she's able to say, this is intolerable. Police can start off by saying, we have zero tolerance, one incident, we start the process. If you are in an intimate relationship and you have love and hope for that relationship, and children whom you care for, sometimes living with that violence that is periodic and sporadic is preferable to going on social assistance, to losing your home, your furnishings, losing your children's affection when they blame you for leaving dad. It is a horrible world out there and you're facing it without the support of the person you fell in love with, it is a big transition.

I know that agencies get tired of working with someone who's taking her time to recognize that there's no support in that relationship and maybe will decide to leave it. It is also at a time when she does leave the relationship that she's most at risk. For a year afterward, her risk factor has escalated through the roof and all the supports have dried up and she's coming out in the parking lot and she's dead. Women know that. They know that their risks increase when the separation actually occurs.

MS. LEBLANC: We often say that women will go back until there is nothing to go back to and there are certain questions that she needs to have answered before she can make that leave, and that question may be, how will I make it on my own? If she's been told over and over again that she's not capable, she needs to be able to understand that she is. Many women will go back because of fear. If they are living with the abuser, they know when his moods are going to go up or down, so they feel safer sometimes in being able to run when it's time to because when they're out on their own they don't have that choice.

MR. LANGILLE: That's a great answer, by the way, from both of you. I have always had a hard time dealing with that because I didn't understand it and I still don't completely understand it, but you have cleared up a few points anyway, and I thank you.

MS. LEBLANC: I'm truly amazed when women are able to make it on their own because when you see what they need to go through, it's amazing that they can make it on their own.

MS. BARRETT: Just in case there was a perception that any one woman would have stayed at a transition house in this province those 30 times that she left, I didn't mean to give that impression. None of us really accommodate women more than maybe twice or even three times in a fiscal year, and that is information that is tracked very closely by the department and our own internal stats because that would mean that they're not learning anything. We actually expect women who come to the shelter to work on the issues for themselves, it's not a free ride. Communal living is not very comfortable at the best of times.

Women generally come to a shelter because they are actively working on alternatives for themselves, for their children and sometimes for their relationship.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The list now reads Mark, Gary, Gordie, Russell, Jerry and Diana.

MR. PARENT: Gary can go ahead of me, that's fine.

MR. GARY HINES: Ladies, thank you for coming in today. It has certainly been insightful for me, particularly the answers that you have just given to my colleague because those are things that are hard to understand, why women keep going back and I suppose in the other instances, there are some men who keep going back as well. It is nice to be able to understand that somewhat. I applaud you on something you mentioned in your initial presentation and that is that you are looking at combining training efforts and some of your purchasing and that kind of thing. I think that is a good step in the right direction. I might add that I would suggest that you also support the Premier's initiative in buying Nova Scotia whenever you can as well but I applaud you on those things and look into other co-operative efforts.

What would the average stay be for people coming into the shelter? I'm asking that question for a reason, because I want to know if internally you get the opportunity, and they stay long enough, you can do group therapy whereby people share their experiences in an organized forum and you do group therapy. Can you tell me?

MS. OICKLE: I know that for Harbour House, there is no distinct average. We can have women who will stay one day or two days and then we will have other women who will stay up to six weeks and sometimes longer because sometimes an extension on their stay will be necessary. We don't have an average because it is just going to change from person to person but if I had to make a stab at a number, at least a couple of weeks.

[10:30 a.m.]

MR. HINES: Thank you. I would like to go to funding. You stated that in, I think it was 2001, that you had a cut in funding. Was it 2001 or 2002?

MS. BARRETT: It was 2002.

MR. HINES: I wonder if you could, for the committee, go back five years and get us the funding because I don't see anywhere in here the indication of increases, decreases or that kind of thing and I do recognize that in the past year there was a \$300,000 portion put in for increase in the wage negotiations and so on. I would just like to have a greater financial picture with an overview of five years so that I can understand where the needs are and where you are going because we don't have any records in this package of what your funding was in 2001 and on up.

MS. HARRISON: I can answer that very generally for you today, Mr. Hines. In the last five years there have been no increases in funding. It's just as simple as that. I can say to you that although that \$895,000 was taken away in the April budget, due to what we consider extremely strong community response that money was reinstated. But you need to understand that although there has been no increase in funding, all of the costs of running a shelter administratively and capital costs have gone up, just as yours have in your life. All of the service fees, all of the utilities, all of the wages, all of the costs. Again, I think the issue of the \$350,000 was addressed in terms of it was given to us based on the number of staff that the department has determined are necessary to run a specific shelter. In one case, that meant they got a 9.3 per cent raise for 21 people when in actual fact it takes 28 people to run the shelter and that means that the volunteer board of directors, of which I was one at one time, had to raise the additional funds to cover the salaries of those staff, all of the salaries.

MR. HINES: Have there been no decreases? After the funding was reinstated, there were no decreases?

MS. HARRISON: No decreases, no.

MR. HINES: Thank you. Just one last question. You stated that your workload is heavier in most situations pre-Christmas, weekends and that kind of thing. Have you worked at rescheduling staff so that you do have more staff availability on weekends?

MS. OICKLE: I didn't take from what was said previously that that indicates that we are busier at Christmas or that we are busier on the weekends.

MR. HINES: I thought that is what you said.

MS. BARRETT: We have all tracked this over and over again. We have changed our staffing schedules daily. As soon as we change it so that we have two staff on Fridays when we have court, Family Court for instance, or on Thursdays when we have Family Court, all of a sudden Mondays turn into total chaos because something else happens. So it never worked. One person, generally, is working and one person is inadequate for all of us. It doesn't matter where we are or what kinds of services we are offering.

MS. LEBLANC: I can tell you that before Christmas this year we were extremely busy but other Christmases, or before Christmas it's not, it's Christmas Day and the day after Christmas that it gets busy. So it is difficult to determine when the busiest times are going to be.

MR. HINES: Thank you and thank you for the great work that you do.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mark.

MR. MARK PARENT: I have a grab bag of questions, some of which have already been answered, so I will probably just comment and try to focus on the questions that haven't yet been answered. I do want to thank you for an excellent presentation and for a very full presentation and I can't help but be a little partisan here and talk about how important Chrysalis House is in the Kentville area and how well respected it is, and through this forum I want to thank them and the staff for what they have done in that area.

You have made it very clear - and I think it needed to be made - that bed occupancy is not the only way that things should be measured but I think that has been made clear. There needs to be a wide variety of different tools to assess the use of the various centres but we do have a problem, as Mr. Pye has noted, with out-migration of the rural areas and how to service those rural areas. For example, I have a letter on my desk from a physician at the Valley Regional Hospital, Chief of Staff, claiming that our government has not supported regionalization of hospitals enough and therefore the regional hospitals such as Valley Regional Hospital can't attract the number of specialists it needs. So you have that problem.

I remember being at a Voluntary Planning session where they showed on a map the population shifts within Nova Scotia and it's quite a problem for both Bryony House and

Chrysalis House, because they come into the centre, in having to cope with increased numbers, and for other centres, because I agree with you, we need to have the services where the people are. It's really not a question you can answer or I can answer, how do we, in a financially, fiscally responsible way, maintain those services, in areas of declining population, that are still necessary. I guess the answer is that the home-based option is really not an option. Could you just elaborate on that a little bit more, that that option that was used earlier on is no longer used across Canada?

MS. BARRETT: Yes, safe homes, there are two problems I think. One is that we talked about the continuum of services needed to support a woman and her family. You do not get that continuum of services in most safe houses. There is no intensive counselling. It is just like a little motel room. You put somebody there but it is impossible to screen totally the safety being provided by the safe-house operator, for a woman and her child. You have a woman and her children who are at their most vulnerable and you are putting them in a place where they are in intimate contact with a family that you don't really know.

On the other hand, we are also not able to screen the clients who are going into somebody's home and we do serve women who have mental health issues and who have addiction issues so I'm not sure if you can even handle the safety issues on either side of that equation. It's a real issue and it is one that lots of places don't use volunteers anymore, sports groups and that, because they found out coaches aren't always the nice people that they seem to be. Well, it's the same for us. How do we know? You might seem like a wonderful human being and you are very supportive to us but I don't know who you really are and that is an issue with the whole safe-house concept, plus then the management of the safe house becomes a full-time job in itself. At the same time, we could be providing counselling services and we are not able to do that.

MR. PARENT: So that is clearly not an adequate response to the shifting population trends but something has to be found, I guess.

MS. OICKLE: If I could just add to that. One of the things that shelters are able to provide is security systems. That is a key thing that is going to help people to be safe. It is not going to ensure always but at least it is another step. Safe houses, if you have someone being housed in your own private residence, you are not going to have the security systems that we have available to us.

MS. BARRETT: And police constantly say it feels like they are going to the jail because they are standing on the doorstep and the shelter staff won't let them in.

MR. PARENT: Well, they won't let me in at Chrysalis House either. Well, they do but I have to identify who I am, and I think that's important.

In terms of the emergency protection orders, I was going to ask you a question but you have talked about that and how that has been a good move by the government, albeit one that does cause you extra work, which is something we need to work at. Wheelchair access is very, very important. How are we coming along in that regard? How many of the transition homes are wheelchair accessible? Do you have a percentage yet?

MS. BARRETT: Pamela, do we know how many transition houses are wheelchair accessible?

MS. HARRISON: I do not have the exact numbers with me, I can get them, but I believe it is under half that have some wheelchair accessibility. I believe it is only two or three of the shelters that actually have full access; in other words, somebody can stay there, there's a bathroom people can access in a wheelchair, that kind of thing. But I do have those statistics in my office and I would be glad to provide you with them.

MR. PARENT: I would love to see them.

MS. BARRETT: I have to say on behalf of Bryony House that we're totally non-wheelchair accessible. We have a 150-year-old building and the hallways are this wide, two people cannot pass in most of our hallways. There is no way you would get a wheelchair into the building and if you did, they would be in the doorway and they wouldn't get out.

MS. OICKLE: I can tell you that at Harbour House, we have a wheelchair ramp. Would that be totally accessible? Absolutely not, we don't have any place within our shelter. If a woman comes in with a wheelchair or has some real mobility difficulties, we are able to provide her with services but that means she sleeps either in the living room or we take over our playroom for her to be able to stay. We don't have full bathroom facilities and it is an issue that we have experienced over the last couple of years. When a woman does come in in a wheelchair, it is a major difficulty and a challenge for us to be able to provide her with the high level of services when it is very difficult for her to even bathe, for her to be able to access all the areas of the shelter; it is majorly problematic.

MR. PARENT: My other question - and you can just cut me off when you want.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Perhaps this will be your last for this round and then we can add your name.

MR. PARENT: Okay, I can come back, because I am fascinated on the Swaziland endeavour. (Laughter)

The issue of getting user-friendly gathering of statistics is so important. The need will never match the funding unless we all sort of change our hearts as a population and begin to work towards a different type of society, so we have to have accurate statistics and you have

identified this in your recommendations and yet I am sure that many of the people who come, the issues of privacy, the issues of fear of that information getting out and making the problem worse, how do you get those user-friendly statistics?

I would love to hear Ms. Fraser enlighten me a little bit more about the invisible occupancy, if it is not over 24 hours it does then go into the occupancy rate or something; I didn't quite get that. If I could have that answer, it would be very helpful.

MS. FRASER: No, it's not if they're not over 24 hours they don't count. The point that I was making was that if one woman, for instance, with no children comes and stays at the house, she's one head on one bed for the number of days that she's there. If a woman with five children comes into the house, that's six heads on six beds for the number of days that she's there. We've talked about two families, so the occupancy is very easily skewed in terms of the real work that's done for those heads on the beds.

MR. PARENT: How about the gathering of statistics, how does one provide privacy and yet get that information that's needed for everyone to help provide the services as best they can?

MS. BARRETT: The statistics themselves are anonymous. It is just information and it is gathered on a monthly basis, basically, so it's not even that it is going to identify a family with seven children, they have been in overall shelter, because that information by itself might be pretty identifying, but when it's put as part of a package of all the numbers, calls you had in the month, crisis calls, the number of crisis visits that happened, all the occupants you see on a daily basis, that is all captured as one number by the end of the day.

MR. PARENT: So we're making good progress on getting that full picture.

MS. BARRETT: Yes, but the problem for us is that it doesn't capture the actual work we do.

MS. LEBLANC: It not only doesn't capture the actual work, it's a real challenge to even look at what statistics are important because what each of us will do is look at what the needs of our communities are and our work usually reflects our own special needs.

MR. PARENT: Thank you, I will come back.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm sorry to have to do this but because we only have 15 minutes left and we do want to leave some time for our presenters to finish up, perhaps we will do a round of short snappers. So I guess what I'm asking for in the second round of questioning is perhaps people could be limited to one question and one response - one answer - and see if we can get everybody on the list. So, Gordie, you're first.

MR. GOSSE: I'm disappointed that I only get one question. I've read that one of your initiatives in the Domestic Violence Intervention Act is the emergency restraining order. When you read the document, it almost seems as though these orders are seen as replacements for some transition house beds, when I looked at it: Research indicates peace bonds are frequently ineffective in preventing spousal violence or murders. Can you comment on any of that?

[10:45 a.m.]

MS. BARRETT: There's lots of research that says restraining orders, peace bonds, emergency protection orders actually increase what they call lethality, which means the risk of serious harm or death. Each peace bond, each emergency protection order requires a substantive amount of time, when a woman best wants that, when it's really useful for her, is actually when she's in a shelter already, so her immediate safety is already addressed for her. Lots of women don't want them at all, it's of no use to you, exclusive possession is a wonderful tool if you live in the countryside and have a house or a car but it's pretty useless if it's Uniacke Square, who cares. So a lot of women don't need it. They will also never meet the classification of being at risk suitable for the Department of Justice, because there is emotional and psychological abuse that never passes Justice's threshold that for them makes it unsafe to be in that home.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Russell.

MR. MACKINNON: Madam Chairman, perhaps at the very end, I wouldn't mind being given an opportunity to put a motion on the floor with regard to funding for transition houses. Possibly, since there are such a large number of the members of the committee that aren't sensitized to this issue as perhaps they should be, maybe the committee should consider holding a public forum, maybe in the Red Room, or somewhere, a one-day forum on family violence to be able to address this issue.

My question, specifically, is a question that I've raised with Bea LeBlanc when I toured the transition house in Sydney several weeks ago. It was with regard to the Internet. I've heard time and time again that there are more and more individuals turning to the Internet to develop relationships. Have you had any analysis on that and is the violence, and the fact that you have such a demand for transition houses, is that maybe another relief valve that individuals have in trying to escape a violent environment?

MS. LEBLANC: We certainly are seeing an increase in the numbers of people who are using the Internet for whatever reasons and I believe that is clear right across the province in all the organizations with THANS.

MS. SMITH: That becomes another issue that we have to deal with as well, because one of the things that is happening is that if she leaves her address book on the computer, he then can put all kinds of personal information and pictures, whatever, he just then sends that

out over the Internet and it makes another abuse that we are having to deal with as far as counselling with women.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Jerry.

MR. PYE: Madam Chairman, I'm going to pass on my question, because I believe that the MLA for Halifax Clayton Park, MLA Whelan has not had the opportunity to pose some questions before the committee and I would certainly appreciate giving her the opportunity, besides, I have to leave at approximately 10:50 a.m. (Laughter) and I've certainly had a number of questions earlier, so it is not a problem.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I just want to explain quickly to the committee the reason I didn't move Diana up was because she was using the second question from Stephen and so that put her in the second round, I wasn't ignoring you Diana. So you are next.

MS. DIANA WHELAN: Thank you and I appreciate your kindness, Jerry, in allowing me to go forward. I did want to make a couple of points and I would ask you to clarify them as long as I am right. But I think something that should be said and go on the record here today is that choosing to go to a transition house is a very big decision. It's not something that any woman would make lightly and that there should be no question in anyone's mind that it is not an easy choice, it's not a solution that people would seek out. So there is a lot of courage that it takes and a lot of the support that the transition houses would provide would be in the phone services and people who are too scared to leave but they need to talk to somebody. I think we have to see it as a continuum, that it's not just a transition house, as you've talked about the heads on the beds, it's all the service that might help people to even maintain their lives in their own homes and possibly get the courage or get organized to make a move. I think that that is not acknowledged enough that the women are in crisis but they're also very courageous to leave their homes.

On the other hand, as sort of a continuum of that, the fact is that the women and people who work in transition homes are highly skilled. I think that point hasn't been made either. We've talked about their salaries or what they are paid, I think that people who work in that environment are doing it largely because they have a vision and a commitment to the community and that the salaries they're paid are far below what they would probably earn if they took those same skills and went to a hospital or somewhere else. So I think we should acknowledge as well that it requires a great deal of sensitivity, skill, and experience and often a lot of training to get to that level. So I would like commend all of you for the work that you're doing and the time and commitment that you have to the people.

In your original report to the government - I'll go to my questions - there were a number of recommendations and you've walked us through those today. Now the response which I had a chance to look at doesn't really address any of your recommendations directly. It says some

nice things about supporting, in general terms, the work you are doing but I'm wondering what your plans are for the next step, to try to get back to addressing the recommendations of your report?

MS. LEBLANC: Wow. I'm not sure, it's a fairly new report and you're right, it didn't answer the hard work that we provided to them. I'm hoping that they will want to meet with us and be able to discuss them further; that's our hope.

MS. WHALEN: So your original recommendations stand, those are the things that would help advance your work and the strength of the system?

MS. LEBLANC: We spent a great amount of time looking at our services and talking about what the needs were, and they're documented in our report.

MS. WHALEN: I know a great deal of work went into gathering those statistics and working together across the province to come up with your emphasis. One of the areas that was clear was Bryony House and again, I am the MLA for Halifax Clayton Park, so I'm concerned about metro. I know that as an organization, across the province there was a recognition that Bryony House needs more help, where the system, itself, is weak, still Bryony House needed that extra. I'm particularly concerned that we get back to funding and maybe more so in Bryony House than even elsewhere. I wonder if you could talk about the need and how it is relative just in Bryony House?

MS. BARRETT: It's fairly easy to talk about it because right now we're back into a somewhat panic mode, we're approaching the end of our fiscal year. Our fundraising efforts were very much affected by Hurricane Juan. Our corporate donations have been going to trees, as opposed to women in need, and I'm not faulting peoples' individual decisions as to what they want to support, but our corporate donations and our individual donations are way down from every past year in Bryony House's history. So we have a substantive shortfall looming right now and less than a month and a half to get there.

We have made the initial phone calls to the department to alert them but haven't had a chance to talk to them. We're trying to sort out precisely where we are and what we have in capital funds to kind of approach our deficit, but we are certainly looking at a substantive deficit that we will not be able to cover just by virtue of cash-flow projections. So we will be going to the department next week to address that, very specifically.

That isn't just us, certainly, it does affect all the houses in the province as well as our outreach-based services. It's just that the other houses recognized and the other services recognized that Bryony House was a priority, so we need that discussion. We also need a discussion on the proposed merger for CASA and Juniper House in Yarmouth. What's happening to the proposal for Third Place? Where do they want to go, and the changes between Naomi and Tearmann House.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Sorry, I'm going to have to stop you there. Mark, you're the last one on the list. Do you have a really quick question?

MR. PARENT: Swaziland, I'm fascinated by Swaziland and what we're doing to help out.

MS. BARRETT: Pamela Harrison is going to speak to Swaziland, SWAGAA.

MS. HARRISON: Last year we were approached by Canadian Crossroads International to have Noni - whose last name I'm not going to try to pronounce at this point in time - from the Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse, come to look at our shelters and to talk to our provincial association about the progress we have made in Nova Scotia over the last 20 years, with regard to violence against women.

Noni came to Nova Scotia last year and went to - I think it was - four shelters: Cape Breton, Autumn House, Kentville, Harbour House, and also spent a day in Halifax at the THANS office looking at policy development legislation, other administrative issues and fundraising challenges that we see.

I have to say it was a wonderful experience for us to be able to sit there and recognize that with all of our challenges today, we still have a huge gift to offer people who don't have the resources we have here in Canada. They asked us if we would form a partnership with Swaziland to provide exchanges of staffing. Some of their staff would come here, some of our staff would go there. Now I have to say, there is no cost to the government, to the transition houses, for this process. We fundraise for that on an individual basis. Canadian Crossroads International provides some of the travel expenses. So this is something that we have committed to on behalf of our staff, our executive directors and our boards because we feel it is really important for us to share our experiences with other countries. We are really excited about this.

MR. PARENT: Well, I agree, I think it's fascinating. It needs to be known wider.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We have about three minutes left so we have about a minute for the motion, a minute for wrap-up and a minute for the rest of our business. So let's be as efficient as possible. Is there a motion?

MR. MACKINNON: Madam Chairman, I move that the Community Services Committee urge the government to provide stable funding to transition houses as requested by our witnesses today.

On the other issue, with regard to the all-day forum on family violence . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Just a minute. (Interruptions) Let's get a seconder.

MR. PYE: I will second the motion.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Is there any discussion? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay. Are there any abstentions?

The motion is carried.

MR. MACKINNON: Quickly, on the all-day forum on family violence, I would suggest that perhaps if some of the key stakeholders such as transition houses, if we were to have a request coming from them to facilitate such a forum, I believe that the committee would be very receptive and respond positively. So I think that is the proper direction. I would recommend it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm really sorry that we have to rush you in your closing statement but is there anything more that you would like to say or add or summarize?

MS. BARRETT: I think just in closing, we just again want to thank you for the opportunity to come and present. You asked insightful questions which give us, I think, some hope that our voices are being heard and that the voices of our clients coming through us are also being heard. Thank you very much.

MS. LEBLANC: I would like to say that it is 23 years this week that Cape Breton Transition House has been in existence. I began working there a week before we opened. I have seen an increase in services that are very much needed and on behalf of abused women and children, I thank you for your interest and dedication to this subject. It is terrifying for them to learn that some of the services may be going downhill instead of up. So thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, thank you all for coming. As you can tell by the questions, we have a lot of respect and admiration and appreciation for the work that you are all doing. It is much needed in this province and we really do appreciate you coming here today and presenting such insightful and heart-rending examples of the kind of day-to-day work that you are dealing with. It's amazing so thank you from the bottom of our hearts. You are doing a tremendous job.

I ask the committee members to stay. We just have one bit of committee business and that's the draft witness list that you have all received a copy of. We are committed to the Department of Community Services, the Affordable Housing Program for March 4th, the Child Welfare System for April 15th but we haven't prioritized the rest of our schedule items.

MR. PARENT: Excuse me, Madam Chairman. I'm finding it hard to hear. So March 4th we have here the Department of Community Services Affordable Housing Program. What was after that?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The Child Welfare System is the next month, April 15th.

MR. PARENT: April is the Child Welfare System (Interruptions) We have it in our book. Sorry about that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm recommending strongly that the next item be the Women's Centres CONNECT! because it is sort of time sensitive in terms of the Spring budget. So we would like to put that on for May.

[11:00 a.m.]

MR. MACKINNON: That's fine.

MR. PARENT: I'm sorry, I can't hear.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, if we could just have quiet for perhaps another two minutes, we can finish our business. So if anyone wants to speak, perhaps they could just step outside the room and if you could stay around for a minute, we would like to say goodbye to you and thank you personally. So just give us another two minutes, thank you.

MR. PARENT: Okay, so Affordable Housing, Child Welfare System and the Women's Centres CONNECT!, which would be centres that parallel these but don't have overnight programs.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: They were part of the tripartite report to the Department of Community Services.

MR. PARENT: Thank you. Sorry, I just couldn't hear.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So we are looking for agreement that the rest of the items on the list are the ones that we agreed to have before us and I'm just suggesting that perhaps Mora could, depending on when they are available, work them into our upcoming schedule, or do you want to prioritize the remaining items?

MR. PARENT: I think three ahead is enough, isn't it? We can keep doing that each meeting.

MR. MACKINNON: With the provision that if we hit a snag with one of them, we can't fill them in, then we will just go to any one of the other ones that are on the list.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, so there is no question that this reflects our discussions from the last couple of meetings. Gordie.

MR. GOSSE: I just thought that the meetings were every second Thursday of the month.

MR. LANGILLE: No.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mora.

MS. MORA STEVENS (Legislative Committee Coordinator): If I may, I'm trying to get it every second Thursday but the deputy minister was not available on those second Thursdays. That was for the Department of Community Services. On both of those, I tried for the second Thursday, with the third Thursday being the fall-back, and that's why I specifically put those dates there because she just cannot make it on those dates. Those were the first available dates that she had.

MR. PARENT: The one in stone is the next date, March 4th, right?

MS. STEVENS: Yes.

MR. PARENT: Then, after that, if there are changes you will . . .

MS. STEVENS: April 15th is actually booked.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: April 15th is confirmed.

MS. STEVENS: Yes, she has confirmed.

MR. PARENT: Okay. So March 4th and April 15th are.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm glad you mentioned that, Gordie, because those are not on our regular meeting dates so you will have to change your book to reflect those dates.

MR. GOSSE: Yes. I have such a long distance to travel.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I know.

MS. STEVENS: The House might be in by then.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay. Could we have a motion to adjourn please?

MR. MACKINNON: I so move.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We stand adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11:03 a.m.]