

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**Thursday, May 13, 2004**

**Committee Room 1**

**Women's Centres CONNECT!**

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## **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

[Mr. Stephen McNeil was replaced by Ms. Diana Whalen.]

In Attendance:

Ms. Mora Stevens  
Legislative Committee Coordinator

## **WITNESSES**

Peggy Mahon

Coordinator for Women's Centres CONNECT!

Lucille Harper

Executive Director of Antigonish Women's Resource Centre

Louise Smith-MacDonald

Every Woman's Centre in Sydney

Dianne Crowell

Director of Tri-County Women's Centre, Yarmouth

Rhonda Haines-Richards

Director of Second Story Women's Centre, Bridgewater

Della Longmire

Director of Women's Centre in Cornwallis

Myrene Keating-Owen

Director of Lea Place Women's Centre, Sheet Harbour

Bernadette MacDonald  
Pictou County Women's Centre

Krista Poole  
Executive Director of Central Nova Women's Resource Centre



**HALIFAX, THURSDAY, MAY 13, 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. We are delighted today to have with us so many members from the women's centres in Nova Scotia. I understand that Lucille, Peggy and Louise are going to take the lead but I'm sure Mora has mentioned to you that any of your members can answer questions if they just go up to the standing mic there. Who is going to give the opening remarks?

MS. LUCILLE HARPER: I will.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Lucille, would you like to introduce your members at this time? Actually we should probably go around and introduce ourselves first and then we will come back.

MS. HARPER: I think we should just do a round and everybody can introduce themselves would be a good way to do it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay. We will start with our members and then we will go around the room. Gordie.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MS. PEGGY MAHON: I'm Peggy Mahon, the Coordinator for Women's Centres CONNECT! which is the provincial group.

MS. HARPER: Lucille Harper, Executive Director of the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre.

MS. LOUISE SMITH-MACDONALD: I'm Louise Smith-MacDonald and I'm with the Every Woman's Centre in Sydney.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Should we go down this side?

MS. DIANNE CROWELL: Sure. I'm Dianne Crowell and I'm the Director of the Tri-County Women's Centre in Yarmouth.

MS. RHONDA HAINES-RICHARDS: Rhonda Haines-Richards, Director of Second Story Women's Centre in Bridgewater.

MS. DELLA LONGMIRE: I'm Della Longmire, Director of the Women's Centre in Cornwallis.

MS. MYRENE KEATING-OWEN: Myrene Keating-Owen, Director of the Lea Place Women's Centre in Sheet Harbour.

MS. BERNADETTE MACDONALD: Bernadette MacDonald, Pictou County Women's Centre.

MS. KRISTA POOLE: I'm Krista Poole. I'm the Executive Director of Central Nova Women's Resource Centre.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We are delighted to have you here today and are looking forward to your presentation and having a chance to get more information through our questions. Lucille, would you like to give a brief overview?

MS. HARPER: I would. What I would like to say, first of all, is that we had intended this to be a PowerPoint presentation but since the PowerPoint is down, what I will ask you to do, I think you all have a handout of the different slides so maybe you can refer to those slides as we go through. I've never done a PowerPoint presentation before. This was going to be my first and it's not, so maybe I jinxed it along the way here.

Anyway, I would like to thank the members of the standing committee for inviting us to meet with you today. We are pleased, as women's centres across the province, to have this opportunity to speak with you about the work of women's centres and the challenges we are facing in maintaining services that are critical to the well-being of women and families in our province. You have an outline, and I don't think I'm going to take the time to go through the outline but you can have a quick look at that and that is what we are going to try to cover in the next 10 minutes.

Women's centres provide critically necessary services for women and adolescent girls that are not provided elsewhere and I think that is really a key. Our services are not provided

elsewhere. In fact, more than 15,000 individual women access women's centres annually for direct services and programs alone. Those are individual women, that's not counting women who come in for participating in some of our community development work. That is our service delivery.

So what is a women's centre. A women's centre is a community-based, community-led organization that provides services and programs to women and their children on a wide range of issues and crisis situations. A women's centre is woman-positive and woman-supportive. Women and adolescent girls who come to women's centres come during periods of crisis and transition in their lives. Currently there are eight women's centres across the province that stretch from Sydney to Yarmouth. Most are located in small town centres that service large, rural areas. Women's centres have a long history in the province and, in fact, the Pictou County Women's Centre in New Glasgow was established in 1976 and most of the women's centres in the province are anywhere from 10 to 20 years old. We are very fortunate to have two women's centres that were established in the last four years. There is a need for more women's centres in the province.

So who uses women's centre services? Really, we could generally categorize three groups of women and adolescent girls who use our services. One group would be women with a good set of skills and resources but who require short-term problem-solving support for a particular crisis or issue in their lives; the second group would be women with more complex issues that require more sustained support; and the third group would be women with multiple barriers and limited skills who require ongoing support from our women's centres.

Women and adolescent girls access women's centres through an open-door policy, through multi-issue entry points, and are able to access us with a multi-dimensional approach. This means that women can come to our services on an as-needed basis, which is really critical to understanding how women's centres work and why women's centres are so valuable in our communities. On an as-needed basis prevents the escalation of crises.

Our holistic approach recognizes the interconnection of issues in women's lives and addresses the complexity of women's lives. The multi-dimensional approach that I mentioned is a key strength of our services and programs. It means that what we are able to do is to use multiple strategies and to work at different levels to ensure the immediate crises are met, and at the same time that we are helping women work through barriers and long-term issues, to develop the knowledge and skills they need to prevent the reoccurrence of crises and to get on with independence.

The way we work really is in three different areas: intervention, prevention and community development. Each of these areas informs our action in the other two areas. So when we're talking about intervention we are talking about addressing women's acute or

immediate problems, by providing practical problem-solving support and assistance, which includes crisis intervention, and short- and long-term support that I was talking about.

Our approach is to provide women with full accurate information to inform their support and decision making. Our approach is to empower women as much as possible, to provide them with the skills so that they can take those skills and deal with future crises that come into their lives.

Our prevention work concentrates on the development of individual skills and knowledge, with a focus on identifying the barriers that hold women back. It includes the education and support programs that we do, and again, it prevents more serious issues from arising that require costly solutions. So our prevention work is absolutely critical in not only maintaining women's well-being but preventing that escalation into very costly services which we would all be able to identify.

Community development work. We work with women, with government and with our communities to address the underlying causes of issues that negatively impact women. The strength of our community development work is that we're able to build community capacity to find community-based solutions to the issues. It's a critical part of our work; we don't want to be just a band-aid, we want to address the underlying issues.

Women come to women's centres for issues related to poverty, economic concerns, education and training, workforce re-entry, legal issues, housing, mental and physical health, parenting, relationships, sexuality and sexual violence. We are a multiple issue entry point. We see the connections between all of those issues, we help women deal with that, and that's why women find us so effective and have such trust in our services.

The core services that we provide are direct services which include individual support counselling, crisis intervention, information and referral, and individual advocacy and accompaniment. As well, we do programs; we try to do as much outreach as possible, although we are not adequately staffed in order to be able to do the outreach that is being asked of us; community education; and again, we're involved in numerous community development initiatives and networks. Please ask us about these.

As some of you know, and possibly all of you know, women's centres have been involved extensively in joint-planning initiatives with government over the last five years. Beginning in 1998, after a year and a half planning process to establish secure, multi-department funding for women's centres in 1999-2000, the women's centres/government joint planning committee - which consisted of the women's centres, as well as the Departments of Education, Health, Justice, Community Services and Economic Development - put together a very extensive report that looked at how women's centres intersected with community, the

services we provide, who we serve, et cetera, put this report forward and unfortunately, it was shelved and no action was taken on it.

[9:15 a.m.]

As you all know, in April 2000, the proposed budget cuts or restructuring that was planned for women's centres, transition houses and men's intervention programs threw us, again, into an intensive year-long planning process. Out of that process, in May 2003, Women's Centres CONNECT! submitted this planning report, which I believe you all have a copy of, to the Department of Community Services. We're now in - where are we? - May 2004, one year later.

To date, there has been no improvement in government support for women's centres services, we are still waiting to engage in that discussion. Our funding remains stagnant, our ability to respond to women and children adequately and fully in our community remains hampered. Within this document, which you've probably all read by now, I think you'll find that women's centres are experiencing a significant increase in demand for direct services, programs, outreach, as well as for new women's centres or satellite women's centres. Please ask us about that, as well.

Just to give a summary of our findings, women's centres offer direct services and programs to over 1,250 women a month, or 15,000 a year. In the back of this, on Page 49, there's a one-month breakdown of where we got those statistics, and those statistics, again, are for our direct services and programs only. It is only a portion of the work that we do - it's a significant portion but it's only a portion.

What this means, when we look at this, is that each women's centre currently receives an annual grant of \$100,000 to deliver core services. This breaks down to \$55 per individual woman per year, and when we're understanding what that means, that \$55 per individual woman, we have to understand that many of the women we see, we see as many as six to 20 times a month. So when we multiply that, if we're seeing a woman, particularly a very high-needs woman, over the year, and we're seeing her possibly 10 times a month, we're seeing 120 women a year for \$55 per woman. It's not enough. It's not enough to support the crisis support that we're doing. So it's important to understand what some of these figures mean.

The key challenges facing women's centres are, again, we're experiencing an increasing demand for services and programs, we have inadequate financial resources to meet the current demand for services, and there is a severe toll - and I want to underscore the word severe - on both human and financial resources due to increased demand for services and inadequate financial resources. We feel a bit like we're caught in *Waiting For Godot*, when you think that since 1998, we've been trying to be able to establish adequate funding.



So we have staff who are always holding on the edge. When I talk about staff, I want to say that the issues that women bring to women's centres are multifaceted and require sustained problem-solving support. Therefore, staff are knowledgeable, skilled, competent, highly competent and very committed to the work. This is an exceptional group of women that you find working in women's centres. On top of it, they're working hundreds of unpaid overtime hours. Women's centres are not unionized. Women are putting that in because they see the need and they cannot turn women and their families away at the door.

Women's centres have been unable to provide salary increases or to provide competitive salary levels. We're always in danger of losing our staff. I think that's really key, when we think about the services we're providing.

In closing, I want to recognize that it is our common concern for the economic, social and physical well-being of women and their children that brings us together in this room today. We recognize it's your concern as well as our concern, and we welcome the opportunity to work on this together. Women's centres are about working within our communities to improve the lives of women and their families.

To this end, we provide a core service program and respond to the unique needs of our communities; we provide support at crucial points in women's lives; we deliver meaningful and effective services and programs that provide long-term solutions to complex social problems; we provide coordination of services that make the best use of services available; we develop innovative programs that address issues facing women, which means we're able to meet the needs of women in our local communities as changing social and economic circumstances impact on women and their families. For any of you who come from rural ridings, you know what some of those social and economic impacts are; they're serious. It's women who are charged with holding their families and in many cases their communities together. It's a huge impact on women and that's what we're seeing.

We address issues collaboratively and we have broad support from our communities.

We need to talk about that. So we need to talk about what some of those issues are in rural communities. Poverty is a really large one and how that looks in rural communities is different than how it looks in urban communities. But the final thing that I want to say is that our key recommendation is that there is full support and full funding for women's centres' core services. We need to ensure that we enable the staff complement, as defined by each women's centre, in order to effectively deliver women's centres' core services.

So that's a very brief outline of who we are. It does not give you really any clear idea of who the women are who use our services and we want to give you a better idea of who some of the women are. We want to put a face to these 15,000 women and adolescent girls. So Louise

is going to do that and what she's going to do is take us through a day in the life of the women's centre.

MS. LOUISE SMITH-MACDONALD: And I'm not going to name all 15,000 women so you can relax. I want you to know that we've made up a story on a day in the life of a women's centre based on actual cases that have been presented to all of the women's centres across Nova Scotia. The statistics speak for themselves I think, but I'm going to tell you a story. So you can sit back and relax and listen and possibly you may see a female from your own family involved in one of these stories.

For the average Nova Scotian, the commute to work each morning is relatively predictable as they look towards their day. Most know what will be expected of their time, energy and experience in any eight-hour shift. For an employee of a women's centre such is never the case. Staff must always be on the alert for the unexpected and the needs of women are not always reserved for the confines of a scheduled time frame. When a woman walks through our doors, she's putting her trust in the fact that someone will assist her in making everything all right. Those she has come to see must be ready to move mountains in order to make it so. Lives and futures can depend on it.

On an average day within the walls of a women's centre across Nova Scotia, there is a range of requests for support. This can run from an emergency life-altering situation which requires crisis intervention to something that may seem minute in importance to most people, but to the women who require assistance, is paramount to their well-being. For others it may be an appointment for ongoing long-term support counselling, accompaniment to a court appointment, advocacy related to a health or legal issue, attending a women's centre program on self-esteem, or a peer support group for adolescent girls.

A morning can begin much like a chilly February day when this women's centre staff person arrives to find a young woman, not yet 19 years old, shivering and clutching her meager possessions stuffed into grocery bags, waiting for the door to open. Marie has been referred by the Department of Community Services. She is hoping to find some solution to her efforts to find affordable housing. Despite many attempts to find housing within her budget, she has been unable to do so. The support worker called the local housing authority and several community organizations and managed to arrange short-term housing. The support worker and Marie spent much of the morning discussing a suitable plan of action for finding longer-term housing.

Just as they finished the task, Marie confided that she had been sexually assaulted at a party two weeks previous. She had been reluctant to go to the hospital or the police because she believed that no one would believe her. The support worker offered her information about what she could expect if she went to the police and what supports would be in place for her at the women's centre. Marie made an appointment to return the next week. She would think about whether or not to go to the police. The support worker offered to accompany her and to offer

Marie support through the legal process. Marie left the centre with information about reporting a sexual assault and about the women's centre program for sexual assault survivors that meets weekly at the centre.

About mid-morning a group of women arrive for a housing meeting. They have just formed the affordable housing society supported by a women's centre staff person. Together they are planning an affordable housing project. The women's centre began this community development activity because a number of women were looking for affordable housing. The women participated in an initial housing education program organized by the women's centre and today's discussion, facilitated by women's centre staff, focuses on inviting other community agencies and the municipality to become involved.

Verna, a member of the affordable housing society became involved with the women's centre after she had been referred by a local transition house. She had decided to leave her husband of nine years and live on her own only to find out that her full-time job had been reduced by 50 per cent. On top of trying to establish herself on her own, she was in need of financial assistance of Community Services, something that was not in her original plan. She had to adjust her expectations around what she could afford for an apartment for herself and her children and was not able to cope with the major task ahead of her. When the women's centre support worker contacted the housing authority as well as mental health services, she learned that both had lengthy wait times for service.

Over the last six months, Verna has been meeting with the women's centre support worker on a weekly basis to discuss her progress, setbacks and disappointments. Verna's situation has involved hours of consultation, seven referrals to community agencies, as well as 28 separate calls of inquiry on her behalf. About a month ago, Verna became involved with the affordable housing society and finds terrific support and continues to develop her skills and self-confidence from being involved in that group.

Just after the housing meeting starts, Barbara arrives to meet with the women's centre support worker. She has some good news about being able to have some visiting time with her son, Max. About a year ago, Barbara had arrived at the centre looking for some information about resumé writing. The centre staff provided her with information about the local career resource centre and asked some questions. Then Barbara began to tell her story.

She had been living with her parents and had decided to leave home to make a life for herself and her son. She had a job at a local store; however, no matter how she tried to cut corners, she had not been able to make ends meet on her minimum wage salary. Moving in with her boyfriend, who also had a child of his own, had not proved to be the answer. Back on her own, Barbara had tried to find ways to make a better life for Max. She had begun to play the slot machines and before long she was spending an exorbitant amount of time at it hoping that a big win would change her life for the better.

Then, Barbara found that Max's behaviour had changed and she was having trouble with her parenting. The final crunch came when her child was taken into protective custody and her employer reduced her hours of work. Her best friend told her that she was out of control, that she needed help and suggested she try the women's centre. After hearing her story, the women's centre staff helped Barbara figure out a plan of action. They encouraged her to attend Gamblers Anonymous meetings and connected her with Community Services who placed her on partial assistance. Today, Barbara continues to receive help with her gambling addiction and is working to regain custody of her son. With the ongoing support through the women's centre, she's gaining more control of her life. So today she moves one step forward.

After lunch Jill arrives to meet with the women's centre support worker who is going to accompany Jill to an appointment with the tenancy board. Yesterday Jill arrived at the women's centre in crisis. Her apartment was in dire need of repairs but when she approached the landlord about her complaint, she was served a one-month eviction notice. After learning more about her situation, Jill was assured that she had rights under the law and the women's centre staff set up an appointment with the tenancy board for today. At the meeting, Jill learned that the landlord must give her three months to find a new place to live.

About 1:30 p.m. a group of women arrive for the women's centre self-esteem program. One of the women is Fran who is 67 years old. Her husband left the relationship and she was experiencing great financial hardship due to her small pension. The women's centre staff advised her on possible options for legal action. They helped to fill out the papers for family court, and when the separation agreement became final, assisted her with her divorce kit. They also helped Fran to apply for seniors' housing and to access furnishings. Fran went on to take part in the women's centre-sponsored program aimed at increasing self-confidence and dealing with residual anger towards her ex-spouse and the situation which she found herself after 40 years of marriage and raising a family.

Mid-afternoon Sarah arrived for a short visit. Imagine yourself totally alone in this world. You have no family, they have either passed on or are estranged. You don't have a phone, and no TV. Due to the stigma of living in poverty and having being admitted to the mental health unit on a number of occasions, you are just simply ignored by neighbours and passersby. You don't have the education or skills to find or maintain employment, your ability to interact within a social situation is severely limited. Imagine finding a place where people not only know who you are, but they seem to care how you are doing.

Today Sarah needs to make a phone call to her landlord, related to a leak in her kitchen, and stops to discuss this issue with the women's centre staff. This interaction relieves the isolation that some women find themselves in, often due to circumstances that are beyond their control. It is an important determinant of health for those who are most vulnerable and often isolated from others in their community.

[9:30 a.m.]

About 4:00 p.m. Sheila arrives after her Level 4 academic upgrading literacy class. She wanted to let the women's centre staff know that she was thinking about applying to community college and was looking for assistance. The women's centre staff meet with her to talk about her new plans and provide support to her as she talks about some of the barriers she may have to face if she decides to move with this, such as transportation, enough funds for tuition and for books and supplies. Sheila first came to the centre two years ago after a suicide attempt. She had been referred to the women's centre by the mental health unit of the local hospital.

She was the mother of two teens. Over time, she developed trust in the women's centre staff, who offered support counselling which had a positive impact on the entire family. The women's centre became like a second home to Sheila who visited often. Spurred on by the skills and self-esteem she was gaining, she decided to take part in a pre-employment program offered by the women's centre. Sheila completed the program with ease, and with her new skills she obtained part-time employment at a gardening centre. Unfortunately the work was seasonal, and when laid off, Sheila was not eligible for EI because of working too few hours.

She returned to the women's centre where she was referred to the local literacy program where she is completing Level 4. Now she is planning to go to the community college. For Sheila, it has been a long journey, but one that is leading to a positive future for herself and her family. One of Sheila's daughters participates in the teen support group that meets after school tomorrow. But that's another day in the life of the women's centre.

Many things that most people take for granted in their lives are out of reach to the women who access women's centres. When a woman walks into a women's centre, she wants to feel confident that through the women's centre she will find answers to her questions, support for moving forward in her life and referral to appropriate community agencies when necessary. Women's centres provide a pivotal starting point for women to effectively change their lives for the better.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, that was very powerful and certainly put a face on a lot of the issues that Lucille summarized in her overview. Thank you both very much. On the speakers' list, so far I have Gordie and Jerry, Diana. Gordie, would you like to start?

MR. GORDON GOSSE: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm quite familiar with Every Woman's Centre in Cape Breton. In my previous job as an executive director of a youth centre, I worked very closely with sending a lot of adolescent females over to the centre over a 10-year period. I'm quite familiar with the job that Louise does there, and it's a very difficult job at the best of times. My question for Louise would be, do you attribute the increase in demand and services and programs over the last number of years in Cape Breton - what is a contributing factor to the demand on your services?

MS. LOUISE SMITH-MACDONALD: There are a number of factors. I believe that the profile of women's centres has increased over the last number of years. I think that trust by the community is there, and it takes a long time to establish that. I believe we're in a position where women do expect a lot of us and come to us knowing that somehow or another something is going to be done. I also think that a lot of agencies today, non-profit and government alike are narrowing their mandate. If you're mandated to see or perform a certain service then you don't do any other services. Our mandate is very broad. A woman may come in who needs help with food for that week or something and then you find out that there are many other issues connected, and we're there to help with all of that.

Of course, the economic situation doesn't help any. It has certainly been turbulent in Cape Breton and I know in other areas of Nova Scotia. More and more women are feeling stressed and feeling that they just need some support to help them.

MR. GOSSE: Yes. I'm also familiar when you were listing some of the services. I know there's quite a length of services that you do provide. It's a 24/7 job, I know that, Louise.

Madam Chairman, another question I'd like to ask, how does the way that you're currently funding have an impact on your services and programs?

MS. LOUISE SMITH-MACDONALD: Well, one of the ways it does is we receive a grant each year, and when you receive a grant issued now you never know, you may get it this year and you may not get it next year. It's really difficult to develop any long-term plans. We found certainly over time that when we establish a program we really need to continue it and we found that by doing outside project work where we were able to establish a program, the community then expects it of us.

Without knowing whether that funding is coming, we're not able to plan and it just leaves us in a position of not being able to retain staff and also, of course, the idea that we don't have enough funding I guess. Our women's centre, for example, in Cape Breton is mandated to cover the Island. It's a huge geographical area. We get lots of requests from residents north of Smokey, out in the Mira, and out to Louisbourg and all those areas, New Waterford and Glace Bay and all around. Ideally we would have staff who would be able to perform some outreach, and that just hasn't been available. Unless you live in the urban center there's no transportation so it's just a huge combination of things. Getting back to your question, it makes it difficult to operate when we don't have stable funding.

MS. HARPER: Can I add to that too? We're also at a very stagnant place with our funding, because the thing is when you're working on a grant, there's no increase, so there's no recognition that you're actually providing services to a lot more people. There's no recognition that costs have gone up, that rent has gone up, heating, et cetera, and all of those others, that

all of those costs have come up. So who pays for that by and large, are the staff at the women's centres.

One of the issues we really want to emphasize today is that we get phone calls at our women's centre at six o'clock at night, and they're nearly always answered by somebody. People think we have these extended hours, we don't have extended hours, it's that staff work that kind of overtime. That's where we really see the toll, is on the women who are trying to provide the services because you can't close the door when you know that you're the only service that is going to be able to respond to a woman, you can't close the door, so you provide that service. The staff are doing that largely on unpaid overtime. It's really huge. It's becoming more intensive as we see demographics changing particularly in rural areas.

As you know, Cape Breton has been dealing with this for a long period of time, but also in other rural areas as well as people who are skilled and able-bodied move into urban areas or move out of the province altogether to look for work then what you find is that often women, single moms and women with disabilities and women living in poverty and their families who cannot move are the ones who are left behind. The jobs are disappearing, the infrastructure is disappearing and it becomes increasingly complex, the issues that they're dealing with, as well. So just having a grant, as Louise says, provides us with no stability, no ability to plan, and no ability to be able to respond to the increase in demand for services.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I should have mentioned that during the presentation we were joined by Russell MacKinnon, MLA for Cape Breton West. Jerry.

MR. JERRY PYE: Madam Chairman, it's a pleasure to have the opportunity to have you as witnesses here today. I want to tell you, in my former critic portfolio, that I visited a few women's centres in the Province of Nova Scotia, with the former MLA for Preston and the Status of Women Critic for the Party. We had met at your Every Woman's Centre and had an excellent tour. You have certainly demonstrated to us the programs and services. While we were there, you were actually serving clients as well, so it was quite an experience because we did get the opportunity to see, firsthand, the amount of work that was being done out of your office.

I had the fortunate opportunity, with Maureen MacDonald, who is presently our Critic for the Status of Women, as well, to visit Naomi Centre in Antigonish - the Naomi Society, I should say. It has a facility out of the hospital in Antigonish. We had met with the executive director, and she had informed me of how much she relied upon the Antigonish women's centre - Antigonish Women's Resource Centre I should say - and the Pictou County Women's Centre, with respect to special needs. I don't know if people realize, but people come directly out of hospital to your centres, seeking needs and services and help. It's incredible to actually hear what goes on from other societies who rely upon the women's centres to carry out the services that they can't provide for the community.

Also, I must say, Dianne, I had the visit with you at the Tri-County Women's Centre, and at that particular time in the Tri-County Women's Centre, you had received a grant from the federal government and you were looking for stable funding from the province. A client was in your office, it was 6:15 p.m., I believe, in the evening. We had waited, and you stayed there until 9:30 p.m. with me, telling me about the activities that went on at the Tri-County and how people came from miles away, from fishing villages, to seek help. It was truly amazing, the amount of work that's done out of there.

I can understand why there is such a real need and why your demand has increased, because of the lack of rural economic development and the out-migration of populations to major urban areas. It has placed a burden and, Lucille, you mentioned it quite adequately, that the most vulnerable Nova Scotians, those who are disabled, those who are single parents, those who are aged, those are the people who are left behind and the people whom the women's resource centres have to come to grips with. That, I'm sure, adds to the added burden of what you are faced with, in providing, not only with the existing staff but requiring additional staff to carry on those services and programs that are out there.

We don't see that - or I should say some of us don't see that - because we're in the urban area, and we see this flush coming in on us, but we don't see the consequences of who's left behind, the senior, because she was married to a gentleman prior to 1967 when the Canada Pension came into force, doesn't get the Canada Pension plan, the income supplements. Those people who don't know, who live in those communities, who don't see that happening and who don't have the expertise that you have to bring in to provide them with the additional funding.

You do a tremendous job. I want you to know that. My question is, because of the consequences of what's happening today, because of centralization in economic development - it's not happening in the rural communities, it's centralized in particular areas of the province, primarily the Guysborough-Port Hawkesbury area, the Halifax area, and so on - how are you able to keep staff, if you are at all, and how are you able to bring in new staff with the funding that you presently have in order to meet the demands that you've already indicated are increased?

MS. HARPER: Well, one of the things that I think is a real testament to the women who work in women's centres is their level of commitment. Very often the women are from the communities and are absolutely committed to their communities. So most of us, I would say, by and large have been very fortunate in being able to maintain staff. We're not able to hire new staff. One of the things that you point out so eloquently, Jerry, and you could have written part of this actually, that was very good, but one of the things that you point out is that there really are significant issues and with the loss of infrastructure in the rural communities, with the loss of transportation, with the loss of access, and even the informal transportation system, the need to be doing outreach is even more critical.



[9:45 a.m.]

For example, every single women's centre has had calls to do outreach in various areas. For Antigonish, it's Canso, Guysborough and Sherbrooke and there's a huge need in those areas that would highly benefit the women who are there. But one of the things I want to say is that without public transportation, which there isn't, it relies on informal transportation and what happens, as we lose people from the rural communities, we lose that informal transportation system as well. So somebody who used to be able to catch a ride with someone who was coming into work every day in Antigonish and could kind of organize to come in to see the doctor, or come to a women's centre, or get their groceries, now that person who has moved to outside of Halifax is no longer there to provide that transportation. So the informal transportation system is being impacted as well.

I think Dianne had a really good story about what - can I ask you, Dianne . . .

MS. CROWELL: If I remember the story.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Could I just suggest you go up to the microphone.

MS. HARPER: The story was about the women working in the fishery in a seasonal way, the kind of supports that they were able to provide in the community, and what happened to that particular support they were able to provide.

MS. CROWELL: Sure, yes. In my area of Southwest Nova, we get lots of calls from Shelburne and Digby County as well. What we've seen, and I grew up in the area, I used to own a fish plant. I was in the business for 20 years so I kind of know from where I speak. With free trade and so on, a lot of our fish that is landed in the 200-odd fish plants along Yarmouth and Shelburne County, they just land, they're iced and they're shipped to the States. In a lot of these fish plants the seasonal labour, the cutting, the filleting and so on, the roe cutting for the herring, was done by women. So now that a lot of that groundfish and other fish are moved to the States, or even further, to be processed, or they're just frozen and shipped, those seasonal jobs, the hours have been cut tremendously in those seasonal jobs.

So women would rely on that work. They could go to work, they could get six months of good work. They took unemployment insurance to see their families through the winter. When they did that, and most of the work down my way in fish plants is Spring, Summer and Fall, so it would allow them time in the Winter months, the late Fall, early Spring months, to do volunteer work - to make sure that the elderly people in the community got what they needed, to make sure they weren't snowed in, to supply them with food, to take them to town, to take them to their doctors' appointments, et cetera, but now - my area does not have a downturn in the fisheries. I mean let's not be kidding ourselves. We're probably the richest area in Canada, if not North America, in some aspects of our fisheries, especially lobster and scallops - but now that those women who are not benefiting from the big companies that own

all those licenses cannot get enough hours to get Unemployment Insurance, some of them are having to go on social assistance which burdens Community Services further and they can no longer afford to do that volunteerism, or civic duty if you will, in those communities that the Tri-County Women's Centre services.

So you're losing the opportunity for communities to help others in the community because these women don't have the money for travel, they don't have money for gas. Some of them hardly have money for a phone. They can barely take care of themselves and their children and their families let alone help the neighbour down the street. Of course, in my area as well we have one of the highest growing populations of older people and substantially older women. So you have isolated older women. I'm 48 years old and I live in the small Village of Argyle Head and I'm the youngest adult in that village. All the rest of the people who live around me are 70 and 80 years old, but because I work at a women's centre, I have to work so much overtime I don't get to help them much.

I just want to add to this, you know, what we're talking about here is \$100,000. So I would like you to think about what you make and the work you do and the overtime you do. Most of the women who work at women's centres full-time have a university degree or two. Like Lucille says, we choose to do the work because we love the work. We're rather honoured to do the work. However, you're talking \$100,000. In Yarmouth there are two full-time staff, I'm one of them. This \$100,000 covers our salaries, our overhead, our rent, our materials, our transportation to and from Halifax to visit you good people, and all of those things. When you're talking about that little bit of money for the overall services that we do, it's very little - and we save the government a lot of money.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, very much, Dianne.

MR. PYE: I have just one final question.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: A real quick one, Jerry.

MR. PYE: A real quick one, and yes I want to tell you that I truly appreciate the work that you do for every single person, and you do the educational program as well to get people back to employment. Every single person you take off the welfare roll or off the dependency of government, saves thousands and thousands of dollars a year to government.

My final question to you is, a couple of years ago - I believe when I was the critic - there was a request by the Department of Community Services for the agencies to develop a long-term plan. My question is, have you developed that long-term plan, and has the government responded with respect to that development plan?

MS. HARPER: That request was derailed, certainly in the April 2002 budget. So it threw us into another planning process that is not ostensibly a five-year plan, it is a plan for women's centre services, and that's what you have actually here in this planning report.

Certainly each of the women's centres has its own either three-year or five-year strategic plan that they are following. We're hoping that with a response and an active engagement from the government with women's centres to ensure that we're able to continue to provide and are adequately funded for our services, that that is something that we'll be doing forthwith.

MR. PYE: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Ms. Whalen.

MS. DIANA WHALEN: Madam Chairman, thank you so much for coming in today and it's really something to see how many of the centres are with us today. It shows your commitment to come in and to tell your story and representing those 15,000 women you're helping every year, so I really appreciate that and it's a tremendous opportunity for us to get a sense of it - and thank you so much for the description of the day "in the life of."

I wrote down a lot of the issues that you covered when you were talking about people coming through the door of the women's centre, and it actually is astounding the number of different areas that you touch on - legal, health, housing, mental illness, addictions. There are so many; the list is long. Certainly that highlights the fact that anybody working in a women's centre needs to be very skilled, very able to cope with emergencies and crisis situations and, as you pointed out, your women who are working there are very committed and highly educated as well.

I think it's pretty clear the starting point is we're not looking after that service very well as a province. Having captured \$100,000 - I believe it has been at that level since 1999, am I right? So that is five years at the same level of funding and, if I'm correct in hearing you, the level and complexity of the services is increasing - we have stagnant funding and a great increase in what's required of you. I think our knowledge, particularly the rural situation, it lets us know that there are all of those social pressures increasing in the rural area, largely related to economies and how we're looking after the economy.

As I say, it's hard to know where to begin with all the questions. I had asked a question in the House not long ago, when the budget was being discussed, I asked about what level of funding you would be getting and the Community Services Minister has said, quite happily, that it was stable, you'd be getting \$100,000, and he kind of boasted about the new centre in Yarmouth coming on stream, so I'd like to know a little bit about the Tri-County Women's Centre. My understanding after looking to it, when he made the comment in the House, I thought it was a new centre and thought isn't that good, you have a new centre.

Then I discovered you've been open for some time. I wonder if you could tell me a little bit about how you've come to this being the first year you're getting proper funding - well, at least the same as the other centres?

MS. CROWELL: This was the very first budget we were included in.

MS. WHALEN: Yes, let's put it that way.

MS. CROWELL: I will say that it's a Catch-22 situation for us, because we're extremely honoured to be one of the eight women's centres in the province and to get our core funding of \$100,000, which I've just told you is already not enough. There is absolutely no way we can pay for the extended hours that the staff work there and so on. The centre itself has a strong group of women who have been trying to get it going for about five years. It has taken a tremendous amount of time and energy and effort to be included within Women's Centres CONNECT!, with the other seven women's centres in the province, not because of any lack of support from CONNECT!, that's for sure, they've been extremely supportive.

I, myself, have been sitting at the CONNECT! table three or four years now, mostly, until the last couple of years, on a volunteer basis, just trying to manoeuvre the channels to get appropriate funding from the province. The Department of Community Services requested that we be up and running and offering the same services as other women's centres across the province before they would give us operational funding. So, that sort of answers your question, Diana.

In order to do that, it took us two years to get funding to develop the centre from HRDC. That's because they kept changing their mandate. We would do these huge, mammoth proposals. I wrote most of them, with lots of help from the women around me. We would present them, and, oops, they forgot to tell us that a month or two before that, they had changed their mandate and we couldn't fit under this, we couldn't fit under that. It was the very last time that we met with them and we finally said, just fit us in and they did. They gave us funding for a year.

During that year, we negotiated with our regional director, Phil Warren and Janet Moore from the Western Regional Office to be accepted under DCS for appropriate funding. They said, well, we don't know, you're still developing. So we went and begged, to HRDC, and they gave us another six months. Within those six months, I will say with the great effort and support of the other women's centres across the province, and also, I have to tell you - I'd hoped I would get this opportunity today - the Honourable Richard Hurlburt, who is my MLA in Yarmouth. He's in for his second term. Now his first term, he had five issues on his platform; the third one down was to establish a women's centre in Yarmouth. And he got re-elected, and he's been a great supporter of that. He's certainly promoted that into happening.

Last September, our HRDC funding ran out, and the province, at that time, did step in, and I think it was because it was probably the right thing to do, politically, at the time. We had done everything we possibly could to get established and to get our services recognized.

MS. WHALEN: What I am hearing is that it takes an awful lot of volunteer effort and a tremendous community will to get a new centre started. You had to jump through all those hoops.

MS. CROWELL: Tremendous hoops, and also I will say, for all my colleagues from Women's Centres CONNECT!, it took their time as well. The process meant we had to have a mentor, they had to take time out of their busy schedules to assist us, and also to put the word out there, to their MLAs and to the Department of Community Services and other departments within government, that we needed funding, that the service was so desperately needed in our area. It's needed in Shelburne and Digby, too. We could have the same exact centre in both those counties that we're trying to help serve.

MS. WHALEN: That's right. Well, I commend you for all the hard work you did to pull it together and make it happen. You've made it brief, but I'm sure that was a tremendously exhausting process to have to go through, and, as you say, with many disappointments along the way. What I was aware of is that it had been done more as a community effort than a provincial effort. You had to prove first that the community could pull it together and do it and that the demand was there and you had all the services in place, before it would be recognized.

MS. CROWELL: That's right.

MS. WHALEN: My thought is to get a new women's centre, if the need is there and we know the value of those kinds of centres, that if a needs assessment is done and it's shown that there are services not available to women and referrals and counselling not available, then that should be sufficient. Again, with the huge distances, when I look at the map, you're all by yourself there at the tip of the province. It's a long distance to the other two that are in place in the southern part.

MS. CROWELL: We all serve very large areas, and we overlap in some areas as well.

MS. WHALEN: I think your point about how difficult it is for women to get transportation to come in and see you, means that being in different communities is important.

MS. CROWELL: And having somebody who can do outreach.

MS. WHALEN: I appreciate your story, Dianne, thank you very much, and just knowing more about it. I wanted to ask a little bit, as we were encouraged to do so I would say, about new centres. You have on the Summary of Findings, new women's centres or satellite

centres, saying that there is a demand for that, and that was in your findings. Would you like to speak a little bit about that for us, Lucille, perhaps? I'm interested, there's none in Halifax.

[10:00 a.m.]

MS. HARPER: One of the obvious gaps is Halifax. Through Women's Centres CONNECT! we hear from different communities at different times that are interested in starting women's centres, and I think as Dianne indicated, it's a long and difficult process. It's not just a matter of a community identifying the need, although I really want to reinforce that it does need to be the community that identifies the need. One of the strengths of women's centres is that they are community based and community defined. The community does need to do that.

However, the barriers that are in place, to moving from identifying a need to becoming a women's centre, are huge.

There are a couple of areas, one being Amherst, that have identified the desire to have a women's centre. We did have a women's centre in Port Hawkesbury for a number of years that had to close because of a lack of funding and that was in the late 1980s, I believe, that they closed. We had a women's centre previously in Truro that closed, and now we have another women's centre that has risen again in Truro. The other areas where we need women's centres - there's an obvious need in the western end, there's an obvious need in Cape Breton, there's an obvious need in Amherst, there's an obvious need in Halifax.

Other than that, the requests for women's centres are satellite centres. That makes a lot of sense, because it means that you don't have to recreate the entire infrastructure in order to be able to provide the service in some of the smaller communities. But we do need to be able to provide the staffing. As I said earlier, in Antigonish, the call is for satellite services or outreach services to Guysborough, Canso and Sherbrooke. In Pictou County there are calls for River John - where else in Pictou County? (Interruptions) The Town of Pictou itself, in Truro, there's East Hants, so every single women's centre has areas that are calling for services and need some defined regular outreach service provided there.

But it doesn't mean recreating all of the infrastructures in order to do it. Where we've developed such a level of skill and knowledge, it's not difficult for us to do it if we had the staffing. It requires the will of the province in order for us to be able to make it happen.

MS. WHALEN: So having satellite services would actually probably be a very economical way to extend your services.

MS. HARPER: Very economical.

MS. WHALEN: More so than setting up many new centres.

MS. HARPER: One of the strengths of women's centres, which I said in the presentation, is the prevention of the escalation of crises. When we can deal with a crisis or an issue in the early stages, it prevents it from escalating to the point where we need mental health, whether it's in-patients or out-patients with mental health services. You can just go through all of the other - that's what is so important about us being able to get out there into the communities. When we can't do that, what happens is those issues fester, and escalate, you've got a higher incidence of family breakdowns, you've got a higher incidence of people not being able to maintain themselves in the workplace, et cetera.

MS. WHALEN: I do agree, and I think the comment that was made by the member for Dartmouth North was very important, that when you're able to intervene and help women turn their lives around, you help not just one person, you help all their families, you improve their quality of life, their health indicators when you have a woman who is better educated or with more self-esteem and a sense of control in their lives. I think that's something we need to do as policy-makers, or people who are enacting and supporting programs in the province, is to look at where we get an opportunity to prevent huge costs down the road, if we can help. You're not even counting the emotional suffering that goes with that. I think that's very important. I think I'm going to be cut off.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Hopefully we'll have a second round, as well. I just want to do a little bit of a time check here. I have left, on the speakers' list for a first round of questions, Leo, Russell, Gary, Mark, possibly Bill and myself. Then a couple of people have indicated they would like to speak in a second round, if possible. I just want to check with the committee, we do have some committee business that we didn't finish the last time we met, so I'm thinking we should probably be finished this part of the agenda by about 10:45 a.m., is that agreeable? That will give us 15 minutes to do our housekeeping details. We'll probably give people five, seven, eight minutes, just to make some closing statements. We might have another half-hour of questions. Does that seem reasonable? Okay. Leo, you would be next.

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Madam Chairman, certainly this morning is an opportunity for me, I guess in many ways it's an important learning opportunity, so I'm very pleased to be here and to hear the presentations. I also thank my colleague, the member for Dartmouth North, for his presentation. (Laughter)

Being from an Annapolis Valley riding, again, I'm really fascinated by the geography, by the locations of the centres and, of course, there's nothing through the Annapolis Valley. Does that mean that there are now services that do provide some of the areas that you'd obviously relate to the community through the women's centres? Do you still see a deficiency in the Valley area? I would like you to comment on that, first.

MS. HARPER: Della, do you want to respond to that?

MS. LONGMIRE-CHABAN: I guess I can answer that. We've spent many years in Lawrencetown and now have moved our location to Cornwallis. We do still service the area. Once again, it talks to the outreach that we desperately need. Even though we work with the other organizations in the area, it's a huge catchment area to try to deal with. Of course you know, as well as I do, the transportation difficulties that we're facing in the Valley. One of the things that we have tried to do - we just kind of outgrew our space. We were in Lawrencetown since 1996, I believe, and before that in Bridgetown.

We just totally outgrew the space that we were in, and so we have just located in Cornwallis recently. But we still work in the Berwick area, we have outreach into the Berwick health centre, and also as far up as the Valley for programs. As a matter of fact, today, my crisis support worker is at a health seminar in, I think it's, Wolfville. You go where the need is, but it makes it very difficult. Does that answer your question?

MR. GLAVINE: Yes. Coming out of an education background, I was maybe a little bit surprised to hear about one of your areas, peer support to adolescent girls. Are you really saying that perhaps there is inadequate service within the public education system, or are these young girls who have left, or is it out-of-school time? What is the connect, if you wish, that may or may not be happening in that area?

MS. HARPER: Okay. I don't think it's inadequacies within the education system, I think it's mandate. The education system is not mandated to provide emotional crisis-solving support to girls around issues in their home life and in their outside-of-school life. For example, we have many girls who come to the women's centre who are dealing with relatively complex issues. For some of them it's rooted in family dysfunction, some of them can't live at home for various reasons.

I guess the one that always sends shudders through all of us are adolescent girls between the ages of 16 and 19, who can't live at home, and there's no support through Community Services, they fall into that gap. If they leave school, then they may be eligible for support; if they stay in school, they're not. So it's trying to find housing, it's trying to find some way of providing them with support. Often if we even find a way to put them in independent housing, then they have to deal with a peer group who sees it as a party place, it means that it's difficult for them to be able to establish boundaries, so there are huge areas.

The other areas that we really see a lot with adolescent girls are issues of depression, various kinds of stress, sexual assault or sexual harassment, those kinds of issues that you're dealing with. Other types of harassment, those kinds of issues we see quite a bit. Through the programs that we offer at the women's centre - and this is just one quick aside - we became very aware through one of our programs, we do a program for at-risk girls. It's an after school program, it's girls who are referred by guidance counsellors at the school, by probation services, self-referral, et cetera. They're generally in Grades 9 to 12, who are in that group.



We became very aware of the issue of cutting. I don't know if everyone understands what that means, it's self-cutting. One of the girls brought that forward as an issue and we started to talk about it. It was soon revealed about 80 per cent of the girls in the group either were actively cutting or had been cutting. When we went to mental health and talked about this, they were aware of the issue, had been talking with the schools. It's those kinds of programs that girls are dealing with, deep, deep struggles and can find some support, some ongoing, weekly, emotional support to deal with some of those issues that take some of the pressures off their lives.

Our goal in those programs and our goal with adolescent girls is healthy decision making, teaching healthy decision making and helping them demystify some of the negative coping behaviours that they've adopted in order to just try and deal with their daily lives. I don't know if you want to say more to that, Louise?

MS. LOUISE SMITH-MACDONALD: Yes, very often we're approached by the adolescent girl who is 16 - 19 because she's - I guess what I need to say is we're not a haven, we understand that there are disruptions at home and girls get mad and they come to the centre. But, we're able to, through some problem-solving mechanisms, they see what's going on and it allows them to go back home, it allows them to deal with their Mom easier if that's the problem, that kind of thing. However, there are some issues that just don't go away. We often get calls from guidance counsellors of young women who are in Grade 12, for example, and have two or three months left to graduate and things have become difficult at home - either through disclosure of sexual assault, in which case no one believes them and they're put out of the home and/or things that are just really difficult at home because of addictions and things like that. No one really looks after them. We've had many calls from Community Services - because really, on an individual basis, the caseworkers are very compassionate and they don't know where to go with that - who say I've got this girl, what am I going to do?

We had a call last week of a girl who was living in her car and she was pregnant. It's funny to say she has a car, anyway, such was that she could not go home. So it's not just a matter of finding a place for her, it's a matter of doing programming with her so that somehow or other you're trying to allow her to make healthier choices and better choices for herself. So, it's not a band-aid, it's not saying we can put you up for three months so you can graduate or whatever - it's here's what we're going to do and we're going to keep in constant contact and we're going to work with you and get through this.

MR. GLAVINE: I guess with a lot of other questions, just very quickly, in terms of funding, it's obviously very critical to your work here. To move away from a grant system, have you put in place, at least, some kind of minimal formula if you wish that would be more supportive? Also, do you do other fundraising to assist your work?

MS. HARPER: Each year, each women's centre submits a budget to the Department of Community Services that covers the costs for that year of that women's centre. Those budgets can range anywhere from \$150,000 to \$230,000, depending upon the level of activity of the women's centre, what the need is - and there are other costs. That budget is responded to each year with \$100,000 grants, so, yes, we're very clear about what we need as individual women's centres and have been looking for that.

[10:15 a.m.]

We all do fundraising and I think that you can appreciate the calls on communities now for fundraising activities, so doing fundraising in a community like Antigonish, we're competing with the bulldogs, the Cancer Society and the CACL and all of the other really valuable organizations that help create a vibrant life in the community, but the fundraising dollars are really limited. We, in Antigonish, have looked very seriously over the past number of years at corporate fundraising - it is a dead end for women's centres. If you're a sports team, you might be okay, but as a women's centre the corporate level is not there. So we do fundraising which, of course, is a whole other call on our time but we can't fundraise to support our organizations at the level they need to be supported.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Mr. MacKinnon.

MR. RUSSELL MACKINNON: Madam Chairman, I will try to ask my questions very crisply, and I was unavoidable detained this morning, so that's why I was late.

You indicated in your opening remarks the suggestion that government was narrowing the mandate - I believe that was the terminology used - does that apply to your organization as well?

MS. LOUISE SMITH-MACDONALD: No, it hasn't applied to our organization.

MR. MACKINNON: So you don't feel that there's any stereotyping within government in an effort to restrict the funding allocation?

MS. LOUISE SMITH-MACDONALD: That may be coming. That may be part of the negotiations in the planning process for our planning report. To date, I can't say that it has been suggested to us that we should do anything other than our broad entry point; however, I do think that may raise its head.

MR. MACKINNON: That was my sense. There's a multi-million dollar affordable housing agreement between the federal and provincial governments, somewhere in the vicinity of \$37 million. Given the fact that you service 15,000 women and their families a year, has there been any consultation from the Department of Community Services, with your organization, in terms of addressing some of the homeless issues with your members?

MS. LOUISE SMITH-MACDONALD: Yes, in my particular area there has been.

MR. MACKINNON: Has the department contacted you or have you contacted . . .

MS. LOUISE SMITH-MACDONALD: No, we contacted them. Yes, we've contacted them.

MR. MACKINNON: Have you received any funding for housing issues?

MS. LOUISE SMITH-MACDONALD: We received some funding for a women's shelter that we opened.

MR. MACKINNON: But I'm talking about long-term sustainable housing.

MS. LOUISE SMITH-MACDONALD: No, not in our area it hasn't been.

MR. MACKINNON: Of the eight organizations, have any of the eight . . .

MS. HARPER: There has been no contact with Women's Centres CONNECT! around housing, and I think there needs to be. Certainly in a number of different women's centres affordable housing is a huge issue. In Antigonish - if my colleague was here she could speak to this very articulately - we've been working to establish affordable housing. Now there's a difference between trying to establish affordable housing, and that's in a whole other discussion and I would suggest you bring together to the standing committee a group of people who can speak to that issue, both from an urban and rural perspective, because it's very complex.

The way that money is being ostensibly provided to communities is not meeting the affordable housing need. It is meeting some social housing need, but it's not meeting an affordable housing need in any real way. Some of the barriers that have been put in place for communities that are really committed to trying to establish affordable housing in the community are huge. I really think that the government could take a lead in getting rid of some of those barriers, which would be really helpful.

MR. MACKINNON: I raised that because when you indicated 15,000, I would consider that to be a considerable number of stakeholders that would be party to this. The other issue and, again, I guess I have to put on the record I'm disappointed that the Department of Community Services hasn't taken that initiative because it creates a vacuum and the issue of rural and urban has been raised. The 15,000, how does that compare with the numbers for previous years, let's say if you could give it in five-year increments?

MS. HARPER: Only recently have we really started keeping statistics on individual women. Over the years, what we've done, we've more or less kept a record of women who have contacted the centre for the direct services and the community development work. Only

recently have we broken down into an exact number, or a more exact number, the number of individual women accessing direct services.

So we can't really give you that exactly, but our experience is that it's increasing dramatically. It has increased dramatically over the last five years, but the numbers can be deceiving because although it's 15,000 women, and that has been a significant increase, what has had a greater impact is the complexity of the issues and the difficulty in resolving them. So although it's 15,000 women, which is a huge number, it doesn't really give a sense of the amount of time and energy that goes into trying to come up with solutions, and part of that has to do with the lack of affordable housing and the lack of other services, resources and jobs, et cetera, et cetera.

MR. MACKINNON: Thank you, and I want to congratulate you for your efforts.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Hines.

MR. GARY HINES: Yes, I just have one question and I believe it came out of one of the ladies' comments, or maybe out of Mr. Pye's. In relation to federal funding there was an indication that you were negotiating for federal funding. Do you get federal funding?

MS. HARPER: No.

MR. HINES: And the other questions that I had have been covered by two of the members opposite.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Parent.

MR. MARK PARENT: Thank you for appearing before us and for everyone travelling so far to come. The issue of out-migration and the problem with rural areas and what that does to the economies and to the social network is an incredibly important one. To me, it's frustrating. I remember reading Alvin Toffler's book, *The Third Wave*, some years ago, where he predicted the opposite would happen because of the Internet and the technologies. The possibility is there, but it doesn't seem to have taken place. In fact, the demographic shifts within the province are overshadowed by the demographic shifts within Canada and in about 10 years this province is going to be in severe stress unless we begin to somehow increase the population base through immigration or in-migration.

If we had more time, my question was going to be, besides bandaging the wounds, are there suggestions on what we can do to preserve these rural communities? We don't really have time for that discussion, but I do put it on the record.

MR. MACKINNON: You've had six years.

MR. PARENT: I do want to ask a question about some statistics though because my colleague, the member for Halifax Clayton Park, made a statement which runs counter to Communications Nova Scotia and I just want to find out which is accurate. The Communications Nova Scotia release surrounding the funding for Tri-County which Richard Hurlburt, as you've mentioned, was instrumental in obtaining, mentions that, "The province has supported women's centres since 1994, and in 2001, increased annual funding from \$54,000 to \$100,000 for each centre.", an increase of 100 per cent roughly. Is that true because Ms. Whalen indicated the opposite and I'm just wondering - I'm just reading from the Communications Nova Scotia release.

MS. HARPER: Yes, my understanding is that was the fiscal year 1999-2000 and it is true that there was . . .

MR. PARENT: A 100 per cent increase in the budgets of each women's centre?

MS. HARPER: Yes, that it increased from \$54,000 to \$100,000.

MR. PARENT: To \$100,000, so this information is accurate then, okay.

MS. HARPER: Yes, it's 2001. That's interesting, because my recollection is that it was 1999-2000. I do want to speak to that though.

MR. PARENT: Yes, I just want to get the accurate information on the table because I wasn't sure. I was just reading this and it ran counter to what was being said.

MS. HARPER: That was certainly very welcome, that that increase came through and it certainly enabled us to maintain a certain level of services. That was initiated, actually, by Russell MacLellan just before the fall of that minority government and then it was supported by John Hamm's Government when they came in, and they maintained that promise of the Liberal's to increase the funding.

What is both interesting and somewhat frustrating, I think, for women's centres is that \$100,000 figure was pulled out of a hat. We don't know where that came from. It certainly did not reflect, at all, the recommendations that women's centres were putting forward after going through the year and a half planning process around multi-department funding. It did not reflect the budgets that we had submitted to the Department of Community Services, but it was put in place. It was certainly appreciated, but it was never adequate, so it left us in a difficult position.

I understand why that continues to be brought forward that we had this increase, but what it means, the assumption is, is that the government has done its duty in providing that \$100,000 increase. What's difficult for us is it was never adequate. Women's centres have never asked for an inflated budget, ever. We've always asked for a budget that will allow us to do our

work at a cost at sort of the minimum level. So it's frustrating to have that given back to us when we're trying to talk about our funding situation because . . .

MR. PARENT: Just in the interest of time, I don't mean to be rude, but the Chairman is going to cut me off if I'm not careful here. What was the request then for the budget?

MS. HARPER: I believe at that time it was - we were just trying to talk about that this morning. It's either \$130,000 or \$135,000.

MR. PARENT: Okay, but it is accurate that from in 2001 there was the increase. The other issue that I wanted to raise was in your report you talk about working with the department for accountability structures and measures of accountability. Has that taken place?

MS. HARPER: No, it hasn't, so when we were asked about doing the planning, we're very anxious to engage with the department in doing that next step, which is part of putting that in place, because we want to be able to find ways to - as you know prevention is very difficult to measure. How do you measure prevention? We're very interested in gauging with the Department of Community Services in finding ways to do that, in ways that make sense. We think there's some potential for doing some very innovative work that clearly identifies the importance of the work of women's centres.

Can I just say one other thing though, that is with respect to the question that we weren't really going to talk about, revitalizing rural areas? I think there's an incredible opportunity for the government to be working with women's centres in looking at revitalizing rural communities. What's really missing in a lot of the work that I see is looking clearly at the role women play in those communities, and how we work with some of the informal infrastructure that's really there. Women's centres can do that and we would be pleased to engage with government around those discussions, because they're near and dear to our heart. I think there's some potential there.

MR. PARENT: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mark, can you take over the Chair?

MR. PARENT: Sure.

MS. HARPER: Okay, so the promise for that funding sounds like it came in 1998. Whenever the changeover- whatever that first budget was that was brought down by John Hamm's Government . . .

[10:28 a.m. Mr. Mark Parent took the Chair.]

MR. PYE: It was 1999.

MS. HARPER: Yes, that's what we've been saying, it was 1999.

MR. PYE: It would have been suggested in 1998, but the budget actually came down in 1999.

MS. HARPER: Yes, Russell MacLellan had it in the budget that was defeated.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The honourable member for Dartmouth South-Portland Valley.

[10:30 a.m.]

MS. MARILYN MORE: Mr. Chairman, I realize we don't have a lot of time left, but there are some questions I want to get on the record as well.

First of all, I want to go back to the sort of partial response from the Department of Community Services that I think was sent to you basically in a letter, or whatever, from the minister in January of this year. I notice in there that there seems to be the suggestion that the response is phrased within the provision of family violence programs, and everything I've heard from you today shows this sort of multi-dimensional aspect. I've really been impressed with how this is one of the few services, I think, that's providing services based on the needs of the client. The client doesn't have to fit their needs into these little square boxes that sometimes organizations and government departments feel they're forced to provide. You have all these missing pieces. I'm really very pleased to hear how you are focusing on the needs and helping women of all ages take those small and sometimes large steps forward in changing their lives.

I'm a little concerned about this message that I think I'm reading in this response from the deputy minister. I'm wondering, have you picked that up as well, and what do you think it means? Why are they only focusing on one very narrow aspect of your activity, in terms of responding?

MS. HARPER: That's our question. (Laughter) I think that's a very good question. We do not understand why women's centres were lumped in with transition houses and men's intervention programs in the original restructuring document that was put out in April 2002, but because we were lumped in and because it required a collaborative response, we worked over the year, as a coalition, with transition houses and men's intervention programs to put together a joint response to the government. Part of our joint response was clearly that women's centres are not family violence organizations. Do we work with women who have experienced violence at some point in their lives? Absolutely, we do. Are those the issues on which we focus? No, they are not.

We focus on other issues in women's lives, and we work, as you very rightly point out, with women on whatever issue they bring forward. It's been part of the reason that we produced a separate report, to very clearly underscore the fact that we are separate from transition houses,

that we're not family violence programs, and that we need to be addressed as women's centres and as organizations that provide a separate set of services that are not, again, as I need to emphasize, being provided by any other organizations in this province. I appreciate that question.

MS. MORE: The other question won't be a surprise to you, since I've worked with some of you on community development in the past in support of volunteers. We haven't had much chance this morning to talk about that aspect of your work. I believe it is so important, and I'm just wondering if you could give us a couple of examples of how your community development approach works. It's not easy to understand as the direct service, it's not clear. In terms of medium- and long-term impact on women and community, it's perhaps some of the most significant work that you do. I'm sure you just squeeze it amongst all the other priorities you have, but do you have a couple of examples that might clarify for us some of the importance of that kind of activity?

MS. MAHON: I can answer one of them. I think that Louise was giving an example in her story, of how that works, with the woman who comes in in crisis. You do direct service with her and support her through a number of issues, but one of her critical issues, as we've raised today, is affordable housing. A number of other women come into the centre, and you're finding, pretty soon, that you've got a whole group of women who are telling you that affordable housing is a critical issue in your community. So, one of the things you begin to realize is that there's a big gap in the community.

You bring women together first, and that's the way women's centres work, and start talking to them about what do you think we need in the community to maybe address the issue, and help them to talk about that, and then start bringing in other community agencies to talk about the issues. Often women's centres bring together other community agencies, the Housing Authority, perhaps the municipality, perhaps other organizations that are also starting to realize that affordable housing is an issue, and then you develop an organization, called perhaps an affordable housing organization, which was in one of our stories.

That becomes a community development activity. Now the whole community is engaged in trying to address this issue of affordable housing. It has a number of impacts, short term and long term. The short-term impact is that women who have been in crisis now become engaged in improving their own lives, they are increasing their skills, they are increasing their confidence, they are now out in the community, they're engaged, they're involved where they may not have been before, and it also begins to have medium- and long-term impact, because we are creating a new service in the community that is going to benefit the community.

Over the long term, I guess that's the connection. Then there is another connection back, because those broader community development activities also increase the connections, the collaboration, the coordination in the community, and other organizations now become



more aware of what women's centres are doing, so they are now strengthening that community network, so now they are referring back to the women's centre for the kinds of programs and services that women's centres do. One just continually informs the other and strengthens the community. That is how it works. I hope that answers the question.

MS. MORE: That's a great example. I guess that I would suggest that women's centres are in a unique role because they deal with so many individual issues of being able to actually identify some of the root causes of these problems in the community, and bring in the other community organizations and levels of government that might, because they are more narrowly focused, not see the significance of this and be able to work together on solving some of those problems. Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just a question of our witnesses. The chairman noted that we should start closing remarks at 11:35 a.m. - we do really need to finish at a quarter to the hour. We have two people who want very quick questions. What would you prefer, to have a little more time for closing remarks or to allow our two people to ask the quick questions and keep your closing remarks short?

MS. HARPER: We'll keep them short.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, we will move to Mr. Pye.

[10:38 a.m. Ms. Marilyn More resumed the Chair.]

MR. PYE: I just want to, as a member of the Standing Committee on Community Services, acknowledge the valuable work that the women's centres do across this province in supporting vulnerable female Nova Scotians. I would like to place a motion before the committee, and my motion reads as follows:

That the Government of Nova Scotia recognize women's centres as a vital service by providing stable, adequate funding and sufficient staffing levels to all centres in their community.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

I'm just wondering, before you give your closing remarks, would any of the other executive directors like to make a comment - if something is burning in your mind and you'd like to get it across to us before we finish up, I'd like to give you this opportunity.

MS. BERNADETTE MACDONALD: I'm Bernadette from Pictou County. One thing that wasn't brought up was that women's centres, through our CONNECT! and our association, have very strict criteria around what is a woman's centre. Not just any group in any community can form a women's centre and call themselves a women's centre, they go through a screening through our association, and we have a very high standard, and I wanted that recognized.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Very good. Thank you. Anyone else want to make a comment?

MS. KEATING-OWEN: I'm Myrene from Sheet Harbour. I guess my whole thing is for the understanding, the fact that in our community - and we talked about community filament, that it is essential because of the rural nature of our centres that we work with the community agencies and government within our own communities. Sometimes people take for granted that they work for us. It's an essential thing that we work with these partners, and there is probably never a day that goes by that we are not asked to become one of the leaders, take on a role in our community. We are looked upon in our community as a leading community agency that takes on the issues, because either it doesn't fit their mandate, so they're looking for that person to take that on, and we're asked to sit at the table numerous times, whether it's education, whether it's health, whether it's community education, whether it's a youth action team. We are the people who are asked to come to the table. If you go into my community of Sheet Harbour, I'm there and I'm asked to be there because of how I represent the women and adolescent girls in our community.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Anyone else? I don't know who's going to make some closing comments.

MS. HARPER: I think our closing comments are short, because I think what we've put forward to you today is an overview of the services that we provide, the challenges that we face and, more importantly, the women and girls that we serve in the community. I want to underscore, as Myrene points out, that we really see this as a collaborative effort, and that government is an essential support partner, funder, et cetera, to enable us to provide the services that we do. We welcome opportunities to work together. We see huge potential for improving the lives of women and girls in this province.

Improving the lives of women and girls in this province is one of the most economically sound things we can do. What's frustrating for me, often, is that in coming around tables that are dealing with issues that impact women and girls, we don't see men, we don't see the economic core, and yet what we know is that if we are going to revitalize our communities, our rural communities, if we're going to do sound economic development in our communities, we absolutely have to address the issues that are impacting women and girls, we have to support women and girls, and we have to support the services that are working with them.

I guess that's really what I want to say in closing, and I will pass it along to both Peggy and Louise. Funding women's centres is the most economically sound thing that you do. I think if that can be heard around the halls of government, then it may be a way of not only maintaining our services, but it's a way of improving the health and well-being of our entire province.

[10:45 a.m.]

MS. LOUISE SMITH-MACDONALD: It's always wonderful following Lucille. (Laughter) I would really like to thank you, actually, Jerry and Russell, for seconding that nice, wonderful motion for us, and the rest of you for supporting it. It's certainly something that we feel is key to the health of women in this province. If we can do the kind of preventative work that we've been able to do to date on the little bit of money that we have to do it, I'll tell you it's a grand investment and one that's going to save you money over the long run. I do appreciate the fact that you've taken the time to allow us to come before your committee. I know that you're very busy and there are many topics going on in Nova Scotia today. It's been an experience for us, and it's been a pleasant experience. So thank you very much.

MS. MAHON: I guess I just want to, on behalf of all the women's centres, as the coordinator, thank you for having us today. It's been very important, extremely important for us to have this opportunity to not only present some of the critical issues that are facing women's centres today, but to help you to understand some of the complexity of what we're dealing with in our communities and the vital services that women's centres provide.

When you reflect on what happened here today and particularly I think on the stories that Louise put forward, in our little report which I know you have in your binders, there is a reflection in that report on what women's centres contribute to the overall health of their community and what the negative impacts would be if there were cuts in funding to women's centres. Of course, we were concerned when we wrote this report that the government was considering funding cuts to women's centres in Nova Scotia. Also, we are concerned that without adequate funding now for the outreach programs that we talked about and for the increase in crisis intervention services, increase in demand that we're experiencing for our services, there will be further negative impacts on the health of the communities.

We encourage the government to continue to invest in women's centres. It is a sound investment. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We want to thank you very much for coming. I think it's an indication of the passion and commitment you have to these women and your communities that all eight of you are here today, including Peggy, representing Women's Centres CONNECT! Some of you have travelled a long distance and I want you to know that we really appreciate your involvement and your support of your colleagues here this morning.

In addition, we truly value the work that you're doing in your communities and we want you to take home to your boards, your staff, your volunteers and your community friends our sincere thanks for the incredible work that you are doing. We truly value it and you can be sure that we will be sending this motion on to the Minister of Community Services with our full support. Thank you again very, very much for all you're doing.

You have a choice - if you want to leave and wait outside, we'd love to see you before you go, but we have about 15 minutes of business left and so you have a choice of staying or just congregating outside. There may be some media questions, I don't know, so you might want to take advantage of the opportunity to go talk to them.

MS. WHALEN: On that letter that you said you'd send that motion forward, could you also send that to the Minister responsible for the Status of Women?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Certainly. Excellent point.

MS. WHALEN: I think that should be sent to her as well. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So we'll continue on with our agenda which is on the second page. First are the two letters from the Minister of Community Services that we started to talk about last time. I think they were received April 5<sup>th</sup>, I'm not sure when they were sent. The first one is a comment from the minister regarding the first motion that we sent on behalf of the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia, basically reiterating the amount of money that they received from the budget and talking about the increase for salary and staff wages of the year before. Are there any comments or discussion?

MR. MACKINNON: One small, maybe a technical point, but I notice where the minister has lumped both organizations together. It would be interesting to see what the breakdown is for transition houses - whether there has been an increase. The representatives who came seemed to indicate no, but the minister included men's intervention programs. That may speak to the increase. Our request was for information, if I recall, for transition houses.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: It's my understanding that some of the staff in transition houses did receive an increase, but not all of the staff. The department only recognizes certain staff members, and those transition houses that have outreach programs, those staff were not included under the staff increases. That's what led to the problems you remember at Autumn House, where that board chose I think not to give the staff their increase because they couldn't apply it to all staff within that particular facility. Anyhow, it's more just for your information, but that's the letter.

MR. PYE: Madam Chairman, I think that we should just file the letter because the second last paragraph indicates quite appropriately that the government does not intend to make

any radical change this year in the budget process with respect to those facilities. So I would agree that we file.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So do we have agreement that we'll file that letter? Okay. The second letter is regarding his concern that we were a little - how shall I put it? - that we did not respect his deputy when she was here talking about an affordable housing program.

MR. PARENT: I think it's important, Madam Chairman, that we treat all our witnesses with respect, and I don't think we need to do anything more than receive the letter. But I think we need to reaffirm our commitment to treat our witnesses with respect whether they're civil servants or whether they're members of women's centres, whatever.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I would agree with that, but I'm not sure I can remember any times when the deputy wasn't treated with respect.

MR. PARENT: Well, that's obviously the minister's feeling in talking to his deputy. He's simply reaffirming that issue. I just say we file the letter, as we filed the previous letter.

MR. MACKINNON: Madam Chairman, quite frankly I find this letter disrespectful and condescending. The deputy minister - and I may be out of order in suggesting this - but I see her fingerprints all over this letter, quite frankly. She is in charge of this department and the questions that were asked of her were very important questions. She was treated with the same respect as any and every other witness, and to send this letter is denoting an air of paternalistic observance by the department, particularly the minister and the deputy minister, and I believe we should send a letter back to the department indicating that we appreciate the letter, but we would also expect that witnesses who come also respect the opinions of members of the committee.

MR. PYE: Madam Chairman, I tend to concur with the honourable member for Cape Breton West, simply because it's the second level in rank, the minister and the deputy minister afford the same opportunities in the bureaucracy of government. There's very little distinguishable difference with respect to the administrative capacity of each, and when the deputy minister comes before this standing committee, or any bureaucrat of government, they have the right to tell the committee if they feel that they have infringed or impugned upon the integrity by way of questioning them or their department, and I think that we should have been forewarned by the deputy minister on that day.

Not only should we have been forewarned, but the minister in his letter should have indicated, and specifically pointed out here, where he felt that there was in fact an action carried on by this committee that normally would not have been carried on with witnesses before it. I think that that needs to be spelled out.

I'm between two minds. I tend to agree with Mr. Parent that we don't want to make this a big issue and that we can file it. I don't think it needs to go that far but, on the other hand, I think that there needs to be some sort of a message - it's the first time I sat on the fence by the way and it's uncomfortable - that needs to go back to the government department because if, in fact, this is a prerequisite for how we conduct business within this committee, then it might be carried on by other departments. I don't think we want to do that and I don't think on that given day that I recall, at any time, when any committee member was out of line, or any committee member did not respect the office of the minister.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I wonder if I could make a suggestion? What about the possibility of me meeting with the minister and just pursuing this a little bit, to see if we can resolve it, sort of colleague to colleague? Would that be okay? (Interruptions)

MR. MACKINNON: Bear in mind, Madam Chairman, very quickly on that point, what the minister is doing is calling into question your judgment as chairman of this committee.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Oh, I'm very aware of that.

MR. MACKINNON: I find that quite offensive. I want to put on the record that you have been very fair-minded, and you don't allow for any inappropriate comments or disruptions to the process. The inference from the minister, by extension, the deputy minister, is that this has been orchestrated to beat up on public servants. I think maybe they just don't like the questions, and they're going a little too far. Anyway, that's my own personal opinion.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I have Gary and then Mark.

MR. HINES: I think what we have to look at is in terms of the witnesses who come before us, as well as the members here, that there's a human aspect to it and strong feelings sometimes get expressed. I guess, that being said, our witnesses are human, and if they felt that there was - I won't use the word abuse - maybe something inappropriate, I don't think it was a reflection on your duty as a chairman, I think it was the way that they took the comments and that the comments were an expression of strong feelings. I think it's important you weigh that balance, that there were strong feelings expressed and they may have tweaked our guests or witnesses at that particular time.

I remember that day there were two presentations that were, in my mind, somewhat emphatic and emotional. I appreciate that, but I also appreciate the fact that the others are human as well. I think we have to look at the human side of it when we're dealing with witnesses, as opposed to making it a big issue. I'm like Mark, I would say that we file it and you talk to the minister.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mark, then Gordie.

MR. PARENT: I think your suggestion is good, but I fail to read what the honourable member for Cape Breton East is reading into this. It's my hope that the proceedings . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: West.

MR. PARENT: West. I keep getting him mixed up - I wonder why. It's my hope that the proceedings will remain respectful. He's not saying they weren't, he's just encouraging us to remain respectful in the midst of passionate feelings. I see nothing wrong with that. I think we need to remind ourselves, from time to time, in the House and in all places to remain respectful of each other. He's not saying we didn't, he's saying we'll remain - if you read the grammar.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Just the fact that he wrote the letter raised some questions in my mind, whether . . .

MR. PARENT: I think as a chairman, you have the perfect right and duty to speak to him and ask him what he's specifically concerned about.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We don't want to use up all our time on this, we still have a couple more issues. Gordie and Leo, quickly please, if you could.

MR. GOSSE: I've been respectful of everybody I've seen or come in contact with since I've been elected as an MLA of this Assembly. (Interruptions) I have been. I have been very respectful, and I take that very seriously. When I get a letter saying this - and sometimes emotions do run high, because we are dealing with - as with the situation of transition houses - people's lives, you're talking about the lives of people. People have lost their lives in issues at transition houses and violent abuse. I think you do get emotional.

I know that this committee and everybody on this committee has been respectful of every witness or everybody who has come here. I enjoy being on this committee, and I hope that we do keep it that way.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Leo.

MR. GLAVINE: I just felt the need to go on the record here. I think the atmosphere here, with some very challenging topics, has gone along very well. I commend the chairman for that. I do want to say that there's more in here between the paragraphs. I feel it should be addressed. These are accountability sessions, let's never forget that. These are important accountability sessions, and when a deputy minister or their department arrive here, we have every right, not to get up and browbeat and stamp and stomp, but we can ask tough, strong questions. Otherwise, if this is just a little society, why put in two hours here? I don't agree with that, that we're a big, happy family atmosphere all the time. We have to ask tough questions.

[11:00 a.m.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I have to say I do agree with you, Leo, that I think I hold a higher level of accountability and expectations for paid civil servants in terms of being able to answer questions - more so than perhaps some of the community organization representatives.

Shall we leave it then that I'll sit down with the minister and we'll talk about this? Just quickly, can we go onto the title of a meeting because I don't want this to go over another committee meeting. I guess I'm a little concerned about being under attack for this because I didn't actually bring it up in estimates, but I found in the 2003-04 business report of the Department of Community Services, in a letter in that report signed by the deputy minister, she refers to the fact that there has been declining numbers of foster parents in Nova Scotia since the 1960s and this is a concern for the department.

So for her to sit there at that last meeting and tell us we're creating a crisis out of nothing, I feel that the title of the meeting, Crisis in Foster Care, I think it was called, or Foster Care Crisis was very appropriate in view of what we had heard from the Federation of Foster Parents and what we had heard from the Children's Aid Society of Halifax. So I'm just putting that on the table before anyone comments. I don't feel there was any problem with the title of that particular meeting.

MR. PARENT: I raised the issue with you, Madam Chairman, because I do think the title should be, as this title was Women's Centres CONNECT!, the Foster Care Parents should be simply that title and not any attempt to try to prejudge any issue that comes before us. That's traditionally what titles of the meetings are, so I just want to put that on the record. I don't want to make a big issue of it, but I think historically if you look at titles, we've had Women's Centres in Nova Scotia, Foster Care in Nova Scotia, whatever. Those are what the titles usually are and that was the issue that I was trying to raise.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Any other comments on that one? Russell?

MR. MACKINNON: Briefly, on that, I agree with the title to the topic. I don't think, unlike some, I would want to be considered to be an apologist for a real issue that doesn't want to be recognized.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: But if people feel that - I mean, I think that was the only title that anyone had any trouble with. We could formalize this and take it to this subcommittee or a representative from each of the caucuses.

MS. MORA STEVENS (Legislative Committee Coordinator): If I may, titles of meetings appear for the next month as you see when you see the next meeting dates. So if any member has a problem, it might be, at this meeting you would look at the next ones just to make sure, because the notice only goes out a week before whereas this is a month before.



MR. PYE: I think that's sage advice and I think it's important to recognize. If there's any question with respect to the title, you have a month in advance to identify any questions with respect to title.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Just two quick things - June 10<sup>th</sup> we have Mrs. X who because her child is in care of the Minister of Community Services, we've been advised for a number of different reasons to refer to her as Mrs. X. She would like to appear with the Sackville Support Group for Parents of Acting Out Youth before the committee.

MS. STEVENS: That had been approved.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Is that in camera?

MR. MACKINNON: They can make it in camera.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: No, we've had the discussion, I just need a reminder of what we've decided.

MS. STEVENS: It was decided that we would let her decide and she is fine with it being public. The only problem is it needs to be Ms. X or Mrs. X in how she is referred to. Any of the other parents, if it could possibly identify the youth in question, the Hansard transcript would have to use letters or numbers or whatever so as not to be able to identify. The parent cannot give up the right of the child to have privacy. That would be the only issue.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So those individual stories are only presented to highlight some of the broader issues that the committee would be interested in.

MR. MACKINNON: Madam Chairman, I think under the circumstances it may be advisable to get some legal counsel on this so as not to get members of the committee . . .

MS. STEVENS: We have received counsel from Gordon Hebb on that. It started initially through a letter from Community Services identifying the problem. Gordon did rule on that and that was his ruling on that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We've had a request, the letter before you from the Community Action on Homelessness, to present before the committee.

MR. PYE: Madam Chairman, I so move that we allow them the opportunity to present before the standing committee, particularly after today's meeting.

MR. MACKINNON: I'll certainly second that motion. I think Angela Bishop and her organization have been doing a great job. They've been really proactive in the last year that I've become familiar with the issue. I think it would be very productive to have them.

MR. PARENT: Can I just go back to the previous issue? I think we need to be very careful, if it's an open meeting the press will be here, names have a way of slipping out. We have to inform the press that if a name does slip out that they're not to print it.

MS. STEVENS: They're very good at that from what I understand from Community Services.

MR. PARENT: As long as we let them know on the record, I think that we can . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We'll make a statement at the beginning of the meeting. That's a very good point.

I just would like some indication, we're having the All-Day Forum on Family Violence. There are a number of different community organizations presenting there. I think you've all received a copy of the initial schedule. Can I have some indication how many people plan to attend that just for my own information? It's June 24<sup>th</sup> in the Red Room, all day. Gordie are you going to be able to come down for that or do you know?

MR. GOSSE: I'm hoping so.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We would really encourage all the committee members to be there and any of the rest of your caucus. Perhaps I could ask you to each inform your caucus that this is going on and that they're more than welcome to join in.

MR. GOSSE: Is that a committee trip?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I assume it would be a committee trip, yes.

MR. PYE: Madam Chairman, I just want to go back to the letter from the Community Action on Homelessness. If we're going to schedule then we also have to consider the Summer recess or the Summer break. It's unfortunate that their request has come rather late because the timing is appropriate when the RFP, the request for proposals will be coming back to the Ministry of Housing. Nonetheless, I think that if, in fact, we're recessing for the Summer, taking a Summer break, then this should be the first item on the agenda in the Fall session.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, and in September, as well, we'll have to look at further topics, but we can do that later on.

MR. PYE: Okay.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: A motion for adjournment.

MR. MACKINNON: I so move.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We are adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11:09 a.m.]